

Three Histories of Liberalism: Hobhouse, Berlin, and Rawls
A study of liberalism, the liberal tradition, and their historical
development

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Abstract

Liberalism has a history. Not only does it have a history, it has a history of that history being rewritten, reshaped, and recounted. The thesis explores this 'second-order' history—the history of the history of liberalism, for want of a better phrase—and examines some of the different ways in which liberalism has been understood as a tradition and as an historical phenomenon. More precisely, the thesis is an examination of three histories of liberalism; liberalism according to L. T. Hobhouse, Isaiah Berlin, and John Rawls respectively. All three figures made their defences of liberalism at particular moments and in the face of particular crises during the long twentieth century. All three of those defences were predicated upon different conceptions of liberalism as a historical phenomenon and a living tradition, which attempted to either reconcile or accommodate the inherent conceptual tensions and divided lineages within liberalism, and distinguish it from its ideological rivals. These different conceptions of the liberal tradition were also, I argue, forms of 'practical' pasts where the past was framed in relation to the present and one context was written over from another. By examining these 'practical' pasts in their own contexts and alongside one another, we can see the changes in the meaning of liberalism as a historical phenomenon and the emergence of the stories that have come to seem essential to liberalism's self-image as the modern tradition *par excellence*. This development of the liberal tradition, I argue, has been essential to ways in which liberalism was understood in the twentieth century, and by examining the former, we can better grasp the latter and the multiplicity of meanings that have at different times been attributed to it.

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'The sun descending in the west,

The evening star does shine,

The birds are silent in their nest,

And I must seek for mine'

- William Blake

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'If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?'

- Percy Shelley

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08/01/2022

Author's Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

Three Histories of Liberalism: Hobhouse, Berlin, and Rawls

1. Introduction: Liberalism and the History of the History of Liberalism

Introduction

Liberalism has a history. Not only does it have a history, it has a history of that history being rewritten, reshaped, and recounted. Various accounts of liberalism and its history may or may not also make reference to 'the liberal tradition' in their accounts of liberalism as a historical phenomenon. The large body of historiography devoted to liberalism, its history, and the liberal tradition that has accumulated over the last century or more is disparate and self-divided; as is the language of our discussions on liberalism, its history, and the liberal tradition. Two and possibly only two things are commonly agreed upon: liberalism has attained an unrivalled status as a tradition and the term itself is an ambiguous one. These two claims can often seem to pull in opposing directions for thinking about liberalism as a historical phenomenon.

At some level, every one of us knows what liberalism is. It is a ubiquitous term in the lexicons of political theorists, pundits, and social scientists. The textbooks often suggest that liberalism has been 'the most powerful ideological force shaping the western political tradition', even as they differ about what an ideology or a tradition is.¹ Some have suggested that its roots stretch

¹ Andrew Heywood, *Political Ideologies: an introduction*, 6th ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017 [1992]), 26. Assessments vary in scope and appraisal, but liberalism is often given some kind of primacy as an intellectual tradition or 'ideology': Andrew Vincent identifies liberalism as 'the most complex and intricate' of ideologies, having 'permeated so deeply into the cultural life of the West', *Modern Political Ideologies* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 22; Michael Freeden's *Ideologies and Political Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) characterises liberalism as the 'pre-eminent' and 'dominant ideology' of modern politics; John Hoffman and Paul Graham consider liberalism 'the world's dominant ideology', *An Introduction to Political Theory*, 2nd ed. (Oxon: Routledge, 2013), 174. Richard Bellamy identifies liberalism as a 'meta-ideology' in view of the pervasive sense that in some fashion 'we are all liberals now'—on this account it is due more to its 'theoretical and political bankruptcy' than any intellectual vitality, *Liberalism and Modern Society* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 2. Cf. James Alexander, 'The Major Ideologies of Liberalism, Socialism, and Conservatism', *Political Studies* 63, no.5 (2015): 980-994.

back to the ancient world and that liberalism is as old as European civilisation itself.² As an idea, project, movement, ideology, tradition—call it what you will—liberalism has seemingly performed a pivotal role in carving out the institutions under which we live and in calibrating our expectations about what they ought to do for us and ought not do. It is a prism through which we interpret our shared political experience and it remains a commanding and occasionally even inspiring expression of some central political values and social aspirations. The stories that we have inherited about liberalism, and the stories we tell about it, give its emergence and effects a providential significance that continue to shape our action, language, and world-view; they tell us who we have been, who we are, and who we might yet become.³ But it is by no means clear that we all mean the same thing by the term or that we are even considering the same historical developments. Far from it. More often than not, our meanings and the stories that we tell can appear sharply opposed to one another.

Whilst some have depicted liberalism as 'a site of the modern, an object of desire, even the telos of history', others have suggested it 'represents an unfolding nightmare, signifying either the vicious logic of capitalism or a squalid descent into moral relativism'.⁴ It is 'morally lax and hedonistic, if not racist, sexist, and imperialist', yet at the same time said to be 'responsible for all that is best about us—our ideas of fairness, social justice, freedom, and equality'.⁵ The situation verges on paradox, where 'even its most savage critics[...] are fundamentally

² Lord Acton, for example, suggested that it was the Stoics who had 'emancipated mankind from its subjugation to despotic rule' and 'led the way to freedom', bridging 'the chasm that separates the ancient from the Christian state', J. E. E. Dalberg-Acton, *The History of Freedom and Other Essays* (London: 1907), 24. William A. Orton considered liberalism to be 'firm rooted in the Christian ethos', though cited Aristotle as liberalism's 'godfather', *The Liberal Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1945), 2-3. Bertrand Russell once suggested that 'when Athenians, in the time of Pericles, became commercial, the Athenians became liberal', *Philosophy and Politics* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1947), 21. Friedrich Hayek included Cicero, Tacitus, Pericles, and Thucydides as the forefathers to a 'basic individualism' of 'Western civilization', *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944), 12-3. John Gray, as a more recent example, suggests that liberalism has its roots in the Sophists, Protagoras and Gorgias, Democritus the atomist, and Pericles, *Liberalism*, 2nd ed. (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1995), 5.

³ Its reign as supreme ideology has not only extended over the ideas of the past and present, but at one point seemed to claim the future too: 'there is now no ideology with pretensions to universality that is in a position to challenge liberal democracy', Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1992), 45. Whether it will retain that supremacy for the twenty-first century is uncertain. None other than Vladimir Putin, not normally known primarily for his activities as a political theorist, has recently suggested that liberalism has 'become obsolete' and 'outlived its purpose', Lionel Barber et al. 'Vladimir Putin says liberalism has 'become obsolete'', *Financial Times*, June 28th (2019) [<https://www.ft.com/content/670039ec-98f3-11e9-9573-ee5cbb98ed36>].

⁴ Duncan Bell, 'What is Liberalism?', *Political Theory* 42, no.6 (2014): 683. Compare Herbert Marcuse, 'The Struggle Against Liberalism in the Totalitarian Views of the State' in *Negations; essays in critical theory* (London: Allen Lane 1968), 1-30 & Leo Strauss, 'Relativism' in *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, ed. Thomas L. Pangle (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 13-26.

⁵ Helena Rosenblatt, *The Lost History of Liberalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 1.

undecided as to whether they have come to destroy liberalism or to fulfil it'.⁶ As a descriptor for states and institutions, liberalism seems to get in to contradictory territory as soon as the historical practices of those states and institutions come under even the loosest scrutiny.⁷ Likewise for the practised values and activities of the different political actors and movements that have claimed the title and its virtues for themselves.⁸ In short, it is unclear then whether liberalism is something to be revered or to be reviled; to be lamented in virtue of its failures and failings or to be celebrated for its successes; to be affirmed in defiance of existential threats to liberal values or to be cast aside as dead-weight. Judith Shklar once noted how 'overuse and overextension have rendered it so amorphous that it can now serve as an all purpose word, whether of abuse or praise'.⁹ John Dunn agreed that it was a word used with an 'extreme imprecision of reference' while writing a chapter about it.¹⁰ Any attempt to stabilise its sense and reference can be countered by a proliferation of alternatives and exemptions, opening the door to a labyrinth of liberalisms.

It is easy to get lost in the labyrinth—as I did in early iterations of this thesis. One need only consider the tendency to prefix the internal rivalries and divisions that have been identified within liberalism—new, modern, classical, economic, neo, ordo, political, identity—in ways that can obscure as much as they can illuminate to illustrate this point.¹¹ Or to take another

⁶ John Dunn, *Western Political Theory in the Face of the Future* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 28.

⁷ See Dominic Losurdo, *Liberalism: A Counter-History*, trans. G. Elliott. (London: Verso, 2014). Cf. Rogers M. Smith, 'Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal, and Hartz: The Multiple Traditions of America', *The American Political Review of Science* 87, no.3 (1993): 549-566; Mark E. Button, 'American Liberalism from Colonialism to Civil War and Beyond' in *The Cambridge Companion to Liberalism*, ed. Steven Wall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 21-41; & Charles Mills, *Black Rights / White Wrongs; the Critique of Racial Liberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). See also Bell, 'What is Liberalism?', 692.

⁸ Compare Jonah Goldberg, *Liberal Fascism: The Secret History of the American Left from Mussolini to the Politics of Meaning* (New York: Doubleday, 2007) & Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

⁹ Judith Shklar, 'The Liberalism of Fear' in *Political Thought and Political Thinkers*, ed. Stanley Hoffman (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998). Shklar proposed the following definition: 'liberalism has only one overriding aim: to secure the political conditions that are necessary for the exercise of personal freedom', 3.

¹⁰ Dunn, *Western Political Theory*, 29. Dunn proposed the following themes: 'political rationalism, hostility to autocracy, cultural distaste for conservatism and for tradition in general, tolerance', and 'the most elusive' category, 'individualism', *Western Political Theory*, 32.

¹¹ The following is by no means an exhaustive list and is an illustrative summary of liberalisms: for 'new' liberalism, see Michael Freedman, *The New Liberalism; an ideology of social reform* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978) & Avital Simhony and David Weinstein, *The New Liberalism: Reconciling Liberty and Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); for 'modern' liberalism, see Leo Strauss, *Liberalism: Ancient and Modern* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1968) & Alan Ryan, *The Making of Modern Liberalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); for 'classical' liberalism, see Ludwig von Mises, *Liberalism: the classical tradition* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2005); for 'economic' liberalism, see William Dyer Grampp, *Economic Liberalism Vol.1: The Beginnings* (New York: Random House, 1965); for

example, the strange bedfellows that have each claimed the liberal mantle for themselves or that have had it bestowed upon them. Indeed, 'most who identify themselves as socialists, conservatives, social democrats, republicans, greens, feminists, and anarchists, have been ideologically incorporated, whether they like it or not'.¹² This perpetual motion has been a feature of liberalism at least since the late-nineteenth century.¹³ Over the course of the twentieth century, as we shall see, a whole host of historical figures and political and social movements have been caught within its capacious net. One commentator from the mid-twentieth century was 'disturbed' at how 'liberalism' was used for everything from 'classical economics to the Soviet interpretation of Communism'.¹⁴ Michael Oakeshott pointed out how even National Socialism asserted 'complete liberty of creed and conscience'—even if it followed up that assertion with 'provisions which make that liberty unrecognizable'.¹⁵ It is therefore unsurprising to find William Orton's *The Liberal Tradition* (1945) lamenting on how 'a great tradition[...] is all but lost in a fog of careless words and empty phrases'.¹⁶

That fog has not cleared and if anything has continued to gather around the term. Those more optimistic about the forecast, such as Michael Freeden as one example, suggest that 'in the

'neo' liberalism, see Daniel Stedman Jones, *Masters of the Universe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012) & Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, *Inventing the Future* (London: Verso, 2015); for 'ordo' liberalism, see Josef Hein and Christian Joerges, 'Introduction' to *Ordoliberalism, Law, and the Rule of Economics* (Oxford: Hart, 2017) & Werner Bonefeld, *The Strong State and the Free Economy* (London: Rowan & Littlefield, 2017); for 'political' liberalism, see John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), esp.3-15; for 'identity' liberalism, see Mark Lilla, *The Once and Future Liberal* (London: Hurst & Company, 2017). Duncan Bell has recently referred to the 'surrealist' liberalism of J. G. Ballard, 'J. G. Ballard's Surrealist Liberalism', *Political Theory* 48, no.6 (2021): 934-967. On the typology of liberalisms and for 'aristocratic' liberalism, see Alan S. Kahan, *Aristocratic Liberalism: The Social and Political Thought of Jacob Burckhardt, John Stuart Mill, and Alexis de Tocqueville* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 1-5.

¹² Bell, 'What is Liberalism?', 689.

¹³ James Fitzjames Stephen suggested in 1862 that 'even those who tried to affix a reproachful meaning to it[...] often stigmatized the views which they denounced as being infested with spurious liberalism, or as falsely claiming the title of liberal', 'Liberalism', *Cornhill Magazine*, January (1862) [<http://fitzjames-stephen.blogspot.com/2016/08/liberalism.html>].

¹⁴ Boyd A. Martin, 'Liberalism', *The Western Political Quarterly* 1, no.3 (1948): 295-7. Cf. Werner Bonefeld, 'Free Economy and the Strong State: some notes on the state', *Capital & Class* 34, no.1 (2010): 15-24. See also Gerald F. Gaus, 'Bosanquet's communitarian defense of economic individualism: a lesson in the complexities of political theory', *The New Liberalism: Reconciling Liberty and Community*, eds. Avital Simhony, and David Weinstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 137-158.

¹⁵ Michael Oakeshott, *The Social and Political Doctrines of Contemporary Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939), xxii. See also Edmund Fawcett, *Liberalism; the life of an idea* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014): 'just about every modern rival to liberalism has claimed to stand somehow on the side of liberty', 2.

¹⁶ William A. Orton, *The Liberal Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1945), 1. See also Alan Bullock and Maurice Shock, 'Introduction' to *The Liberal Tradition: From Fox to Keynes* (London: Adam & Charles Blade, 1956): 'At first sight, the most striking thing about the Liberal tradition is its intellectual incoherence', xix.

short run' there is a 'unique core' that holds the tradition together.¹⁷ Duncan Bell concedes, with some understatement, that such a 'core' meaning of liberalism has certainly been elusive.¹⁸ The divergence between these two views is indicative of the two claims about the historiography dedicated to liberalism, its history, and the liberal tradition that I mentioned above; that liberalism is a determinate *something* with a definite status and that it is ambiguous and contested. When demonstrating the latter of the two claims, it is common to not only doubt the coherence of liberalism as a tradition and historical phenomenon—perhaps confirming Nietzsche's often cited dictum that '[...] only something which has no history can be defined'¹⁹—but to suggest further that there may not even be a single liberal tradition as one consequence of the consistently contested meanings of 'liberalism'. It is subsequently tempting to suggest instead that there are many liberalisms and multiple traditions. These liberalisms are often said to each display contingent 'family resemblances'—what Wittgenstein himself, to whom this way of speaking is owed and often cited, construed as 'a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing'.²⁰ The two claims that I have outlined suggest that liberalism is both one and many, singular and plural. The historiography dedicated to liberalism, its history, and the liberal tradition has often been caught between the two of them.

¹⁷ Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, 90.

¹⁸ Bell, 'What is Liberalism?', 684.

¹⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996 [1887]), 57 [GM II {13}]. Like many other concepts that play their parts in human action, it has featured in 'variable configurations of powers, functions, structures, and beliefs', and as is often the case when concepts attempt to capture the flux of human phenomena, the result is 'historically accumulated constellations of rather heterogeneous elements', Raymond Geuss, *History and Illusion in Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 7-8. Geuss suggests that 'the fact that liberalism has a long and variable history does not mean one cannot pick out certain figures and movements as being of greater continuing importance for understanding it than others are'. Geuss proposes the following list: 'some version of a principle of toleration'; 'a striking predilection for the voluntary as a basis for as many human social relations as possible'; 'individualism' and 'autonomy' in one's capacity to choose; and a 'persistent suspicion of absolute, excessive, unlimited, or discretionary power', 72-3.

²⁰ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte (Chichester: Wiley & Blackwell, 2009), 36 [66-7]. As Wittgenstein continues, the position we find ourselves in when attempting to define our concepts, is of attempting to draw a sharply defined picture which corresponds to a blurred one, an apparently futile exercise given that the 'degree to which the sharp picture *can* resemble the blurred one depends on the degree to which the latter lacks sharpness', 40-1 [76-7]. See also W. B. Gallie, 'Essentially Contested Concepts', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* New Series 56 (1955-1956): 167-198; Michael Freeden, *Liberalism Divided* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 4-6; & *Ideologies and Political Theory*, 75-91, 139-144. To dwell too heavily on whether there is, in the final analysis, a 'core' meaning is 'only playing with a word'; 'one might as well say, 'there is something that runs through the whole thread—namely, the continuous overlapping of these fibres'', Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 37 [67].

This thesis explores the history of liberalism. More exactly, it explores the history of the history of liberalism. It does so because, to anticipate, I have come to think that this is the best way, and perhaps the only way, to understand the history of liberalism and liberalism itself without falling into confusion about the historical character of liberalism. Liberalism has been re-used, re-interpreted, and has been, across time and space, the bearer of multiple meanings. These multiple meanings have also been retrospectively gathered, shaped, reshaped, and reinterpreted to form a long standing intellectual tradition that has been recounted in various ways and at different times; and it has often been the case that liberalism's history has been written in its own preferred self-image.²¹ There are subsequently at least two possible objects of study and two features of liberalism's historical character. On the one hand, there is liberalism *qua* historical phenomenon; on the other, there is liberalism's relationship to its own history, liberalism *qua* liberal tradition. The purpose of the thesis is to explore this 'second-order' history—the history of the history of liberalism for want of a better phrase— and it examines some of the different ways in which liberalism has been understood as a tradition and as an historical phenomenon. As the thesis argues, the relationship that liberalism has to its own history is itself an historical phenomenon and an essential feature of liberalism *qua* historical phenomenon.

Many years ago, Eric Voegelin observed that 'for methodological reasons' it was difficult to write, or even to write about, the history of liberalism, for 'we stand before the question of whether there is even such a thing as liberalism as a clearly definable subject and whether this subject, should it not be definable, can have a history'.²² Other writers before Voegelin had noted the difficulty.²³ Other writers have noted it since.²⁴ Voegelin himself illustrated the difficulty by briefly comparing four histories of liberalism of various sorts from the 1920s, 1930s, and 1950s.²⁵ The first assumed that liberalism was an easily definable, self-contained phenomenon. The second assumed that it could not be defined except in the context of its

²¹ To borrow Alasdair MacIntyre's phrase, *Against the Self-Images of the Age* (London: Duckworth, 1971).

²² Eric Voegelin, 'Liberalism and its History', trans. Mary Algozin and Keith Algozin, *The Review of Politics* 34, no. 4 (1974): 504-520, 504.

²³ For instance, Hans Rosenberg, 'Theologischer Rationalismus und vormärzlicher Vulgärliberalismus', *Historische Zeitschrift* 141, no. 3 (1930): 497-541, inspiring e.g. Alan S. Kahan, *Aristocratic Liberalism: The Social and Political Thought of Jacob Burckhardt, John Stuart Mill, and Alexis de Tocqueville* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

²⁴ A recent example being Bell, 'What is Liberalism?'

²⁵ Respectively Guido de Ruggiero, *Storia Del Liberalismo Europeo* (Bari: Giuseppe Laterza & Figli, 1925); Franz Schnabel, *Deutsche Geschichte im neunzehnten Jahrhundert* (Freiburg: Herder, 1934); Joseph Lecler, *Histoire de la tolérance au siècle de la Réforme* (2 vols., Paris: Aubier, 1955), & Friedrich Heer, *Die Dritte Kraft. Der europäische Humanismus zwischen den Fronten des konfessionellen Zeitalters* (Frankfurt: S. Fischer, 1959).

confrontation with other phenomena of the nineteenth century—'reaction, restoration, conservatism, socialism, etc'. The third assumed that it originated in the sixteenth century as opposed to the nineteenth century, in reaction to the experience of the wars of religion. The fourth identified a self-conscious tradition of enlightened secular politics running from Erasmus to the present day, of which liberalism was one particular phase. Voegelin concluded that the 'picture of liberalism changes because liberalism itself changes in the process of history. And it changes because it is not a body of timelessly valid scientific propositions about political reality, but rather a series of political opinions and attitudes which have their optimal truth in the situation which motivates them, and are then overtaken by history and required to do justice to new situations'.²⁶ The aim of the thesis is to pursue Voegelin's insight and its implications at greater length, via a close study of three histories of liberalism offered in three different situations over the course of the twentieth century by three different writers: L. T. Hobhouse, Isaiah Berlin, and John Rawls.

I. A False Start

In earlier drafts of the thesis, I tied myself in knots wrestling with the 'methodological difficulty' Voegelin identified. I wanted to argue that liberalism was a clearly definable subject *and* a subject with a history, and to establish these two points before showing how the three writers named above had made distinctive contributions to that history. At the same time, I wanted to register the difficulty of making this argument at the outset, by acknowledging that, as soon as we begin to speak about that subject, we risk speaking of at least three rather different things at once.

In the first place, liberalism is 'a word'; but it is also, second, 'an idea or assemblage of ideas that one word has come to evoke'; and it is also, third, a name for the intellectual ground that supports '[a] range of state forms and subordinate institutions that claim the word as their title and presume the idea it invokes to license their authority'. If the last of these notions is a little more strained than the first two—it being more natural to speak of 'democratic' institutions, today, than 'liberal' ones under the compound term 'liberal democracy'—the wider point holds. Each of these items is a possible subject of study. Each is different. Each has its own history. And yet, these histories impact upon and become entwined with one another due to the relationship in which they stand to one another. No single element in this trinity—not the

²⁶ Voegelin, 'Liberalism and its History', 5.

word, not the assemblage of ideas, and not the institutional and cultural forms that travel under the banner of the word—can be fully understood in isolation from the others and no one of them 'can offer a privileged vantage point from which to survey and comprehend the whole'.²⁷

To bring home the depth of the difficulty, I felt that it was necessary to emphasise, again from the beginning, that every potential vantage point, privileged or not, was inherently unstable. That is to say, the problem isn't simply one of working out where to stand to survey the whole; it is that wherever you try to stand, the ground is constantly shifting beneath your feet. Suppose you try to privilege the word 'liberalism'. Immediately you face the problem that it is a word used both commonly and equivocally.²⁸ A number of complications follow on from this. For one thing, it is a word used *in* political discourse and a word used to talk *about* political discourse; for another, it is a word that has been used in numerous ways historically and continues to be so used in both our everyday speech and in the technical idioms of social and political science; and again, it is used not only descriptively but evaluatively, by self-described liberals to present themselves in a flattering light and by their critics to cast them in an unflattering light.²⁹ What is more, the oppositions implied by these different uses are not symmetrical opposites, for they each intersect with one another at oblique angles.

The situation is one in which each use of the word differs from those that oppose it, without there being one single authoritative use that can be brought into play to trump its rivals. As R. G. Collingwood once observed, attempts to define terms in common use invariably run up against a seemingly vicious circularity: 'no one can even try to define a term until he has settled in his own mind a definite usage of it [but] no one can define a term in common use until he has satisfied himself that his personal usage of it harmonizes with the common usage'.³⁰ A private definition carries no authority over the ordinary use or uses of the term and cannot show how our preferred definition stands in relation to other private definitions. All we can say, with Humpty-Dumpty, is that when we use the word it means just what we choose it to mean.³¹ In consequence, the status of the resulting definition is always ambiguous: is it a reportive or

²⁷ See John Dunn, *Breaking Democracy's Spell* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 8.

²⁸ See R. G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938), 1.

²⁹ See John G. Gunnell, 'The Archaeology of American Liberalism', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 6, no.2 (2001): 125-145.

³⁰ Collingwood, *The Principles of Art*, 2.

³¹ It is worth giving Humpty-Dumpty's peroration in full: 'When I use a word,' Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less'. 'The question is,' said Alice, 'whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.' 'The question is,' said Humpty Dumpty, 'which is to be master—that's all'. Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass, and What Alice Found There* (London: Penguin, 2009 [1871]), 186.

lexical definition, designed to capture existing uses of a term now and around here? Or is it a stipulative definition, designed to prescribe one single correct meaning and use all the time and everywhere? Is it some combination of the two? Or is it, instead or in addition, a persuasive definition designed to commend the definiendum to a certain constituency of opinion? In short, even before we come to the content of any claim to the effect—to borrow Voegelin’s example—that liberalism is ‘a body of[...] propositions about political reality’, it is already very unclear what is being claimed about that particular ‘body of[...] propositions’ and to what purpose. And that is before we come to the issue of whether it makes any sense to speak of ‘timelessly valid scientific propositions’ about political reality.

Speaking in that way, I also wanted to say, does not make much sense, because political reality is forever changing and so too is the language we use to describe and appraise it. I tried to capture this point initially by highlighting my own Nietzschean sympathies, while at the same time noting the tendency even among scholars who openly doubted that definition was possible to offer their own definitions anyway.³² I now think it would have been better to draw attention to the fact that this way of speaking encourages us to assume that there are two distinct and contingently related domains: one that Voegelin, for the purposes of his argument, terms ‘political reality’ and another of the language that we then apply in an attempt to delineate its character. The ideal situation, on this picture, is one in which political language is the perfect mirror of political reality.³³ On further reflection, however, this picture cannot be right. It must be a mistake to portray the relationship between language and political reality as a purely external one: it is true that political reality, however we construe it, helps to bestow meaning upon our political vocabulary. But it is equally true that our political vocabulary helps to constitute the character of that reality.³⁴ Politics is, *inter alia*, a linguistically constituted activity.³⁵

This brings me to yet another point I originally felt it necessary to make before embarking upon my three histories, namely that the concepts constitutive of political beliefs and

³² James Alexander, ‘The Major Ideologies of Liberalism, Socialism, and Conservatism’, 993n.1.

³³ See Quentin Skinner, ‘Language and Political Change’, in *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, ed. Terence Ball, James Farr and Russell L. Hanson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 6-23, 20.

³⁴ Skinner, ‘Language and Political Change’, 22.

³⁵ See the literature adduced in James Farr, ‘Understanding Conceptual Change Politically’, in *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, 24-49.

behaviour have historically mutable meanings: they change and are changed as political reality changes, and they change political reality as they change.³⁶

My aim in making that point was, in part, to shift the focus of discussion from the word to the concept. The relationship between words and concepts is a close and complex one and I do not propose to tie myself in knots all over again investigating it here. There are, no doubt, relatively straightforward instances in which possessing a concept is equivalent to knowing the meaning of a word, but it does not seem to be a necessary condition of having a concept that I understand the correct application of a corresponding term. Quentin Skinner provides a helpful example: he asks whether Milton thought it important that a poet should display a high degree of originality and answers in the affirmative. But, as he points out, one could never have arrived at this conclusion by examining Milton's use of the word 'originality', for the very good reason that 'the word did not enter the language until a century or more after his death'.³⁷ For similar reasons it seemed important to reckon with the fact that the word 'liberal' and its cognates did not enter the vocabulary of European politics until at least a century after what most people nowadays think of as liberalism became an important force in political thought and action.³⁸ The word lagged behind the idea, if you will: which may itself be a sign that liberalism did not begin as a self-conscious political doctrine or movement. For as Skinner goes on to say, 'the surest sign that a group or society has entered into the conscious possession of a new concept is that a corresponding vocabulary will be developed[...] which can then be used to pick out and discuss the concept with consistency'.³⁹

In earlier drafts, I complicated this Skinnerian point further with two insights owed to Michael Oakeshott. The first was that such vocabularies are always and necessarily riddled with ambiguity. As Oakeshott noted, language is complex and self-divided and it is 'difficult to find a single word that is not double-tongued or a single conception which is not double-edged'. Ambiguity is everywhere because 'ambiguity, properly speaking, is a confusion of meanings and is a characteristic of language'. The appropriate reaction, he went on, was not 'to denounce the treachery of language, or to resolve or otherwise remove the ambiguity, but to understand it'. In other words, it was a mistake to attempt to restore or recreate simplicity in

³⁶ See the editors' introduction to *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, cited above.

³⁷ Skinner, 'Language and Political Change', 7-8.

³⁸ See Terence Ball and Richard Dagger, 'The "L-Word": A Short History of Liberalism', *The Political Science Teacher* 3, no. 1 (1990): 1-6, 2 & Daniel B. Klein, 'The Origin of 'Liberalism'', *The Atlantic*, February 13 (2014) [<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/02/the-origin-of-liberalism/283780/>].

³⁹ Skinner, 'Language and Political Change', 8. See also Geuss' suggestion that liberalism was 'born backwards', *History and Illusion*, 71.

our language, because simplicity was an imposition onto language which applied, and could be sustained, only within the narrow confines of artificially limited worlds of reference. The task, so to speak, was not to reduce language to order through the rectification of names, and to construe consistency as everyone using the same word in the same way, but to become comfortable with ambiguity and to enjoy the practical benefits it afforded ‘without allowing it to generate intellectual confusion’.⁴⁰ What Oakeshott appeared to me to be saying was that even if the words we use, like ‘liberalism’ are replete with ambiguity, it need not follow that our thinking about concepts like liberalism has to replicate that confusion.⁴¹ This was Oakeshott’s second insight: defining concepts isn’t the same as defining words. A good definition of a concept will be one which acknowledges the multiplicity of meanings it has borne and continues to bear rather than imposing a single meaning upon it.

All this seemed to fit well with, and to reinforce, the thought that the meaning of concepts changes over time and that, in order to trace the changing meanings of the concept of liberalism from Hobhouse to Berlin to Rawls, I needed to establish, as a preliminary, how the meaning of the concept had evolved to the point at which Hobhouse took up his pen to write about it and its history. It also seemed to support a further thought I was attempting to convey: that, notwithstanding these changes, liberalism could be said to have an essence, even if it was an essence that had emerged contingently out of history. Without being explicit about the fact that I was doing so—perhaps it would be better to say ‘without realising I was doing so’—I was, in effect, arbitrarily privileging the concept over the word and trying to use it as the vantage point from which to consider the evolution of liberalism and the liberal tradition from Hobhouse to Rawls.

That was a mistake for several reasons. Having said that it was impossible to disentangle the concept from the word and the accumulation of institutions, values, and behaviours associated with it, in an earlier draft of the thesis I spent a whole chapter endeavouring to do just that. I

⁴⁰ Michael Oakeshott, *The Politics of Faith and the Politics of Scepticism*, ed. Timothy Fuller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 12-18, 26, 130. Oakeshott himself explored some of this terrain in a series of lectures in 1958. It should be noted, however, that the term ‘liberalism’ scarcely features there and is not a category used by Oakeshott to organise his own thinking or that of others. See *Morality and Politics in Modern Europe*, ed. Shirley Robin Letwin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993). For an attempt to depict Oakeshott as a liberal theorist, see Paul Franco, ‘Michael Oakeshott as a Liberal Theorist’, *Political Theory* 18, no.3 (1990): 411-436.

⁴¹ Michael Oakeshott, ‘The Concept of a Philosophical Jurisprudence’ in *The Concept of a Philosophical Jurisprudence*, ed. Luke O’Sullivan (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2007), 162, 171-2. James Alexander singles this out as one of—if not *the*—most important, though often neglected, contributions to political thought made by Oakeshott. See James Alexander, ‘The State is the Attempt to Strip Metaphor Out of Politics’ in *Michael Oakeshott on Authority, Governance, and State*, ed. Eric Kos (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2019), 11-44.

belied my own claim that the concept was constantly changing by writing about it as if it was constructed out of a relatively fixed set of ‘building blocks’; I purported to explain the emergence of those building blocks in time by outlining competing uses of the word ‘liberal’; and I prefaced the chapter with an account of ‘the liberal tradition’ as the historical conveyance of certain received notions and practices, as opposed to the conveyance of particular conceptual contents (which would at least have been consistent with my privileging the concept) or of agreed ways of using a particular language and vocabulary (which would at least have been consistent with my surveilling the changing uses of the word ‘liberalism’). The result was confusing, to put it mildly; but working through the sources and causes of that confusion has, I hope, allowed me to see where I went wrong, to pre-empt some potential misunderstandings of my purposes in the thesis, and to better identify why so much of the existing scholarly literature on liberalism and its history takes the forms it does and gets bogged down in the issues it does. It has also enabled me to frame and present my argument more effectively, as a history of the history of liberalism, through which the dynamic relationship between word, idea, concept, vocabulary, tradition, history, and action is brought into sharper focus.

Making ‘the concept’ the pivot on which the argument of the thesis turned obscured what was really of interest to me about the three histories I wanted to discuss, namely the peculiar character of those histories, the wider purposes of their authors in presenting them in the terms they did, the different contexts out of which they issued, and the implications of all these matters for understanding liberalism historically as a tradition of thought and action. It did so because I was insufficiently clear that if possessing a concept is sometimes but not always equivalent to knowing the meaning of a word, it also involves ‘behaving or being able to behave in certain ways in certain circumstances’, such that ‘to alter concepts, whether by modifying existing concepts or by making new concepts available or by destroying old ones, is to alter behaviour’.⁴² At the same time, I did not make enough of the point that language is the vehicle by which concepts pass through time to form traditions⁴³ or the associated point that a

⁴² Alasdair MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 2-3.

⁴³ A point developed at length in the writings of J. G. A. Pocock in particular, where recurrent uses of the same words in similar though modified senses over the course of the centuries provide markers of continuity and change in Anglophone thinkers’ perceptions of politics and time. See e.g. *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), and *Barbarism and Religion, Volume 2: Narratives of Civil Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); compare ‘The History of Political Thought: A Methodological Enquiry’, in *Philosophy, Politics and Society: Second Series*, ed. Peter Laslett and W. G. Runciman (Oxford: Basil Blackwell), 183–202, and ‘Time, Institutions, and Action: An Essay on Traditions

tradition of thought is and ought to be understood as both a tradition of notions *and* a tradition of practices. In my view, both points need to be kept in mind to grasp the full implications of Voegelin's insight that liberalism is 'a series of political opinions and attitudes which have their optimal truth in the situation which motivates them, and are then overtaken by history and required to do justice to new situations'. Once these implications are grasped, it becomes more obvious why I am arguing that approaching liberalism as a subject via a succession of histories of liberalism is an especially illuminating and fruitful way of making sense of it and of them. Let me say more about how I arrived at this position, by way of preface to the fuller introduction I will provide to the method adopted and the argument being advanced in the thesis.

II. A New Beginning

Liberalism had a beginning. It entered the European stage in the aftermath of the French Revolution and the reflections upon that event which swept across Europe during the nineteenth century. By the end of that century the word 'liberal' was firmly entrenched in political discourse the Anglophone world over. Like 'liberty', the word 'liberal' derives from the Latin *liber*, meaning free. Prior to the nineteenth century, it was commonly used to mean bountiful, generous, or tolerant and free from prejudice—a noble attitude befitting a gentleman, much as a 'liberal education' was meant to prepare a young gentleman for life.⁴⁴ In the eighteenth century, Adam Smith and the historian William Robertson both spoke of a 'liberal system' of free trade, as well as 'liberal' ideas and sentiments that challenged 'illiberalism' and mercantilism.⁴⁵ Through an extension of its common use—and this is an important point, to which I will return in section V below—'liberal' became a label applied to

and their Understanding', in *Politics and Experience: Essays Presented to Michael Oakeshott*, ed. Preston King and B. C. Parekh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 209-38.

⁴⁴ Compare Ball and Dagger, 'The "L-Word"'; Rosenblatt, *The Lost History of Liberalism*; & James Alexander, 'A Conjectural History of Liberalism', *Cosmos + Taxis* 8, nos. 10 and 11 (2020): 2-17, esp. 9-10.

⁴⁵ See Daniel B. Klein, 'The Origin of 'Liberalism'', *The Atlantic*, February 13 (2014)

[<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/02/the-origin-of-liberalism/283780/>]. Smith in particular defended a 'liberal system of free exportation and free importation', Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of The Wealth of Nations*, ed. R. H. Campbell, A. S. Skinner, & W. B. Todd (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976 [1776]), 538. For the relationship of Smith's liberal system to liberalism, see Stephen Darwall, 'Sympathetic Liberalism: Recent Work on Adam Smith', *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 28, no.2 (1999): 139-164; Edward J. Harpham, 'Liberalism, Civic Humanism, and the Case of Adam Smith', *American Political Science Review* 78, no.3 (1984): 764-774; Jack Russell Weinstein, 'Conclusion: A Smithian Liberalism', in *Adam Smith's Pluralism: Rationality, Education, and the Moral Sentiments* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 264-70; & Duncan Kelly, *The Propriety of Liberty: Persons, Passions, and Judgement in Modern Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

those who sought a more tolerant and free society, a society whose members were at liberty to pursue their own ideas and interests with as little interference as possible during the nineteenth century.

This first happened in Spain when a faction of the Spanish *Cortes* of 1812 that favoured constitutionalism called itself the *Liberales*. Likewise in the German context: the term 'liberal' denoted originally the genteel and responsible moral individual 'who thought and acted in accordance with the natural progress of history and reason' but was later deployed in debates over constitutional unification and its implications.⁴⁶ The entry on 'liberalism' in the *Staats-Lexikon* of 1834, written by Paul Pfizer, stated that true 'liberals' wanted constitutional and representative government, which was willed by providence, in contradistinction to the 'ultra-liberals' who were accused of inciting senseless and violent revolution that undermined the benefits of liberty.⁴⁷ In the French context, the likes of Marquis de Lafayette, Madame de Staël, and Benjamin Constant referred to the ideas, moral sentiments, and perhaps most importantly, constitutions that fostered the achievements of the French Revolution while curbing its excesses as 'liberal'.⁴⁸ Similarly, Alexis de Tocqueville would later reflect on the 'liberal spirit of the Revolution' and the possibility, though by no means guarantee, of a 'liberal Republic' in distinction to an 'oppressive Republic'.⁴⁹ The term spread quickly throughout Europe to Great Britain too, where the party hitherto known as the Whigs evolved by the 1840s into the Liberal Party.

According to James Fitzjames Stephen, the word 'liberal' was 'brought conspicuously before Englishmen' by the short-lived periodical of Lord Byron, Percy Shelley, and Leigh Hunt: *The Liberal* (1822).⁵⁰ In his preface to the first published volume, Hunt suggested that they were

⁴⁶ See Jörn Leonhard, 'From European Liberalism to the Languages of Liberalism: The Semantics of *Liberalism* in European Comparison', *Redescriptions* 8, no.1 (2004): 33-5, 44. See also James J. Sheehan, 'Liberalism and Society in Germany, 1815-48', *The Journal of Modern History* 45, no.4 (1973): 583-604.

⁴⁷ See Rosenblatt, *The Lost History of Liberalism*, 78-9, 98-9 & Georg Iggers, *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1983), 99-100.

⁴⁸ See Rosenblatt, *Lost History of Liberalism*, 41-2, 52, 66.

⁴⁹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the Revolution*, trans. John Bonner (New York: 1856), 18 & 'Forward to the Twelfth Edition [1848]' of *Democracy in America*, Vol.II, ed. Eduardo Nolla and trans. James T. Schleifer (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2012 [1835, 1840]), 1373-1375. For Tocqueville's relationship to liberalism, see J. Salwyn Schapiro, 'Alexis de Tocqueville, Pioneer of Democratic Liberalism in France', *Politics Quarterly* 57, no.4 (1942): 545-563; Roger C. Boesche, 'The Strange Liberalism of Alexis de Tocqueville', *History of Political Thought* 2, no.3 (1981): 495-524; George Armstrong Kelly, *The Humane Comedy: Constant, Tocqueville, and French Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); & Kahan, *Aristocratic Liberalism*.

⁵⁰ Stephen, 'Liberalism'. See D. M. Craig, 'The Origins of 'Liberalism' in Britain: the case of *The Liberal*', *Historical Research* 85, no.229 (2012): 469-487 & Daisy Hay, 'Liberals, *Liberales*, and *The Liberal*',

‘advocates of every species of liberal knowledge’, seeking the ‘mind of man exhibiting powers of its own, and at the same time, helping to carry on the best interests of human nature’. Their critics, on the other hand, and as Hunt had anticipated, swiftly drew attention to Lord Byron’s wider proclivities and activities, and accused the liberals of cutting up ‘religion, morals, and everything that is legitimate’.⁵¹ Similar sentiments were expressed about the *Liberales* in a British context by conservative voices who decried them as radicals and republicans—Lord Castlereagh referred to the *Liberales* as ‘a perfectly jacobinical party in point of principle’—and it was in the first place as a term of abuse that the Whigs were called ‘liberals’ by the Tories, to associate their policies with foreign and therefore disreputable ideals and principles.⁵²

These facts once led J. C. D. Clark to suggest that ‘to attempt to write the history of liberalism before the 1820s [was], in point of method, akin to attempting to write the history of the eighteenth-century motor car’.⁵³ Yet, despite Clark’s strictures, most accounts of liberalism blithely proceed on the assumption that there is no real difficulty involved in speaking of liberals and liberalism existing before the expressions ‘liberal’ and ‘liberalism’ came into the language in the relevant senses. Why might this be?

The simplest explanation of this otherwise curious phenomenon has already been noted: that it is being assumed that, as with Milton and originality, the concept pre-existed the word. I proceeded on the basis of something like this assumption myself in earlier versions of the thesis, but I now think that the simple explanation is question-begging in at least two significant respects. For one thing, what Clark was suggesting was that it was the ‘concept of liberalism’, not merely the word, that came into existence only at the end of the 1810s, and, more pointedly, that it was nonsensical to argue that this concept existed, or had been anticipated, in earlier concepts which subsequently evolved into liberalism simpliciter. This was the point of his ruling analogy: there may have been forms of transport prior to the

European Romantic Review 19, no.4 (2008): 307-20. See also Jonathan David Gross, *Byron: The Erotic Liberal* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001).

⁵¹ Leigh Hunt, ‘Preface’ to Percy Shelley, George Byron, and Leigh Hunt, *The Liberal: Verse and Prose from the South* (London: 1822).

⁵² See Kathryn Chittick, *The Language of Whiggism: Liberty and Patriotism, 1802-1830* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 148. A more sympathetic view, from Robert Peel in 1820, recognised a shifting tone in public opinion, with ‘liberal’ becoming a marker of the growing urge for political reform. See Leonhard, ‘From European Liberalism to the Languages of Liberalism’, 26-27.

⁵³ J. C. D. Clark, *Revolution and Rebellion: State and Society in England in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 102. Compare J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 578-9: ‘the term [‘liberalism’] was not used in the eighteenth century, where the adjective ‘liberal’ did not bear its modern meaning and though elements were present which would in due course be assembled[...] there was no system of doctrine corresponding to its later use’. See also ‘The Myth of John Locke and the Obsession with Liberalism’ in J. G. A. Pocock & Richard Ashcraft, *John Locke* (Clark Library Lectures, 1980), 1-24.

nineteenth century 'that performed many of the functions that the motor car later performed, the sedan chair among them. Yet to explain the sedan chair as if it were an early version of the motor car' was, among other things, an egregious failure of scholarly method.⁵⁴ It was similarly inept and anachronistic, Clark intimated, to talk about liberalism or the history of liberalism before the early decades of the nineteenth century.⁵⁵

There is a second sense in which this explanation is question-begging. Suppose we accept, *pace* Clark, that there *was* a concept or congeries of concepts that performed the same function as liberalism before the word 'liberalism' entered the lexicon. This invites us to accept in turn, what Skinner argues, that concepts are not simply propositions with meanings attached to them but are, rather, tools that perform different functions.⁵⁶ Let that be so: it is still not clear how a historian could write a history of the use or uses of that concept in argument without having taken a position on the identity of the concept in question, without having charted continuities and shifts in the meanings carried by the concept, as distinguished from the names or words for it. As Richter notes, it does not help here to say that meaning is identical with use. 'For how [he asks] could the historian distinguish any concept deployed in an argument from other concepts nearly synonymous or easily confused with it?'⁵⁷ This was the puzzle to which I kept returning, which produced the convolutions of earlier drafts of the thesis. I wrote about the 'building blocks' of liberalism and of 'proto-liberalism' because I couldn't see how to talk about the history of liberalism as a concept without first discussing how it was initially conceptualised. I felt that I needed to establish what it was as a concept before I could begin to chart the ways in which its meaning had changed over time and continued to be contested.

That was all because I wanted to argue that liberalism was one thing, one 'clearly definable subject', albeit a subject defined by internal complexity, variation, and conflict. This is not to suggest that all talk of 'building blocks' or 'proto-liberalisms' would be entirely fruitless or unintelligible for any and all accounts of liberalism or that an account of the historian's ability to draw connections and patterns between the uses of nearly synonymous concepts could not

⁵⁴ Clark, *Revolution and Rebellion*, 102.

⁵⁵ See, for example, Annabel M. Patterson, *Early Modern Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁵⁶ Quentin Skinner, 'Reply to my Critics', in *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and his Critics*, ed. James Tully (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 231-88, invoking Wittgenstein at 283.

⁵⁷ Melvin Richter, 'Reconstructing the History of Political Languages: Pocock, Skinner, and the Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe', *History and Theory* 29, no. 1 (1990): 38-70, 62. Consider the difficulty of distinguishing the concept of the sedan chair not from that of the motor car but from those of the litter or the palanquin.

be developed.⁵⁸ What I want to suggest is that this initial line of thinking ended up hindering and obscuring my central argument. My initial aim was to validate the argument that liberalism was one 'clearly definable subject' by demonstrating that the three histories of liberalism with which I was concerned, those of Hobhouse, Berlin and Rawls, were all histories of that one same thing, notwithstanding the differences between them and notwithstanding the fact that in and through the writing of those histories the thing itself was changed. The argument became very muddled, in part because complexity, variation, and conflict can be difficult to convey in a simple manner; in part because I showed just *how* difficult it can be; and in part because I didn't register or explain the modal shifts involved in moving from discussion of the way in which liberalism is defined and debated in the existing scholarly literature; to discussion of the emergence of the concept of liberalism; to discussion of the evolution of the concept; to discussion of three particular attempts to write, or re-write, the history of liberalism, none of which were, in any case, explicitly formulated as histories of a concept.

This last fact alone ought to have given me pause for thought: was approaching the history of liberalism as the history of a concept the best way to proceed? And if not, as an historian of political thought how should I have proceeded? In answering this question, and thereby, I hope, making my own approach clearer, it will be helpful to turn once again to Quentin Skinner.

III. The Skinnerian Approach to the History of Political Thought

Skinner has spent the last 50 years arguing that historians of political thought, if they are to produce history proper, need to be what he calls historians of ideologies. At first glance, therefore, his approach seems to be ideally suited to liberalism as a subject, since as I noted above, the textbooks tell us that liberalism is the 'dominant ideology' of modern politics, 'the most powerful ideological force shaping the western political tradition', 'the most complex and intricate' of all ideologies, having 'permeated so deeply into the cultural life of the West' that any alternative to it, if there is an alternative, must answer in some way to its terms.⁵⁹ In the textbooks, it should be said, 'Ideology' is a contested and sometimes loaded term. In Skinner's hands, it is meant to be a neutral term, referring to 'relevant linguistic commonplaces' shared by many writers and uniting many texts: '[vocabularies], principles, assumptions, criteria for

⁵⁸ See Alan S. Kahan, 'Appendix: Methodology' in *Tocqueville, Democracy, and Religion: Checks and Balances for Democratic Souls* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 213-224, esp.220-3.

⁵⁹ See footnote 1.

testing claims to knowledge, problems, conceptual distinctions, and so on'.⁶⁰ His claim is that uncovering the linguistic and political conventions that govern the reigning ideologies in any given society is the historian's primary task. This is because these conventions are the key to recovering what it was that a particular author was doing in writing what he or she did rather than something else. They are key because, for Skinner, the meaning of every utterance, spoken or written, 'must be understood as an action performed in order to achieve the agent's intentions'. This technique of analysis, or method, allows the historian to determine the extent to which authors accept, reject, subvert or challenge prevailing linguistic and political conventions.⁶¹

Explanations of the meaning of a text by the author's action within a set of conventions are said by Skinner to have three decisive advantages over other modes of interpreting texts and the history of political thought more generally. First, they provide the author's intentions within their historical context and so offer a history of political thought 'with a genuinely historical character'.⁶² Second, they redescribe each linguistic action in terms of its ideological point, and in doing so avoid any suggestion that such actions are somehow determined or caused by the context out of which they issued, a suggestion that to Skinner's mind rests on a 'fundamental mistake about the nature of the relations between action and circumstance'.⁶³ Third, they allow historians to understand the originality or conventionality of a particular linguistic action or text in a way that is not open to those who focus their attention on general concepts such as 'liberty, equality, justice, progress' or what have you that appear and reappear throughout history in many different theories of social and political life in many different settings, or those who study 'great' texts in isolation from their context, or those who construe context without reference to linguistic conventions. In studying ideologies, historians have to establish their conventions, which they do by scrutinizing the half-forgotten figures whose commonplaces are sometimes reproduced and sometimes challenged by the 'major' or 'canonical' writers.⁶⁴ Until these conventions have been identified, it is impossible to

⁶⁰ See James Tully, 'The pen is a mighty sword' in *Meaning and Context*, 8-9, and compare Richter, 'Reconstructing the History of Political Languages', 60.

⁶¹ See the editor's introduction to *Meaning and Context*, and the helpful paraphrase provided in Richter, 'Reconstructing the History of Political Languages', 59-60, with the quoted material at 60.

⁶² Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (2 vols., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), I. xi.

⁶³ Quentin Skinner, 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas', *History and Theory* 8, no. 1 (1969), 3-53, 42.

⁶⁴ See Quentin Skinner et al, 'What is Intellectual History?', *History Today* 35, no. 10 (1985), 46-54, 50-52; Richter, 'Reconstructing the History of Political Languages', 60.

distinguish what was possible for *this* writer at *this* time in *this* situation from what is possible *tout court*.⁶⁵

The problem with a focus on concepts, according to Skinner, is that it tends to produce ‘a history almost bereft of recognizable agents, a history in which we find Reason itself overcoming Custom, Progress confronting the Great Chain of Being’; but his main doubt about this method is that ‘in focusing on ideas rather than their uses in argument, it has seemed insensitive to the strongly contrasting ways in which a given concept can be put to work by different writers in different historical periods’. The problem with a focus on canonical texts is that analyzing the propositions and arguments contained in those texts yields no explanation of what their authors were doing in presenting those propositions and arguments. The ‘obvious danger’ with both approaches, he concludes, is ‘anachronism’: ‘Neither seems capable of recovering the precise historical identity of a given text’.⁶⁶ In an early and much cited statement of his own approach, ‘Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas’, Skinner discussed the tendency of these two rival approaches to converge and to compound one another’s failings in what he called ‘the mythology of prolepsis’.⁶⁷

The mythology of prolepsis is Skinner’s name for the type of discussion in which there is assumed to be a ‘necessary symmetry between the significance an observer may justifiably claim to find in a given statement[...] and the meaning of that action itself’—in which, that is, the importance of a particular action or a particular thinker for some present purpose or other is treated as equivalent to its historical meaning. The authors of such discussions may believe themselves to be engaged in the business of historical description, but they are fooling themselves and fooling their readers: no account of that sort could ever be a genuinely historical account of what was intended by that thinker in performing that action. To take one example Skinner adduces: it might be tempting to assert that with Petrarch’s ascent of Mount Ventoux ‘the age of the Renaissance began’; but there could have been on Petrarch’s part ‘no intention “to open the Renaissance”’ because to have given such a description of his own intentions required concepts that were only available at a later time.⁶⁸ Likewise the suggestion that Locke was a founder of liberalism, and the (still) routine description of his political theory

⁶⁵ See Timothy Stanton, ‘Logic, Language, and Legitimation in the History of Ideas: A Brief View and Survey of Bevir and Skinner’, *Intellectual History Review* 21, no. 1 (2011), 71-84, 76.

⁶⁶ Skinner, ‘What is Intellectual History?’, 51

⁶⁷ Quentin Skinner, ‘Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas’, *History and Theory* 8, no.1 (1969): 22.

⁶⁸ See Skinner, ‘Meaning and Understanding’, 28: ‘no agent can eventually be said to have meant or done something which he could never be brought to accept as a correct description of what he had meant or done’.

as 'liberal' derived from the anachronistic imputation to Locke of purposes he could not have formulated; for 'Locke can scarcely have intended to contribute to a school of political philosophy which[...] it was his great achievement to make possible'. Such suggestions only served 'to turn a remark about Locke's significance which might be true into a remark about the content of his works which could not be true'.⁶⁹

In later work, Skinner doubled down on these criticisms. To focus either on concepts or on texts in isolation from context would inevitably produce similarly unilluminating and underwhelming results because 'neither [approach is] sufficiently interested in the deep truth that concepts [are] tools[...]. It follows that to understand a particular concept and the text in which it occurs, we not only need to recognise the meanings of the terms used to express it; we also need to know who is wielding the concept in question, and with what argumentative purposes in mind'.⁷⁰ In other words, the morphology of concepts needs to be treated in tandem with questions of agency and explanation.⁷¹ For this reason, Skinner was moved to state that 'in spite of the long continuities that have undoubtedly marked our inherent patterns of thought, I remain unrepentant in my belief that there can be no histories of concepts; there can only be histories of their uses in argument'.⁷² Such statements seem to put the very notion of the history of liberalism *qua* the history of a concept into bad odour, and to intimate that, so far from providing an ideal object of historical study of the Skinnerian kind, the study of 'liberalism' provides a salutary example of what not to do and of the ease with which apparently historical exegesis can lapse into mythology: utterances that are identified as 'liberal', texts which are interpreted as pioneering examples of liberal theorising, but which eventuate prior to the entry of the word 'liberalism' in its recognisably 'modern' sense into the vocabulary of politics, are actions which have to 'await the future to await [their] meaning', which is patently absurd.⁷³ So much, you might say, for my attempts to discuss the history of liberalism as the history of a concept.

And yet, when we turn to Skinner's seminal historical work, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, which is meant to provide an example of his method in action, we find the surprising claim that its principal purpose is to explain 'the process by which the modern concept of the State came to be formed', a process in which the basis of government migrated

⁶⁹ Skinner, 'Meaning and Understanding', 22-24.

⁷⁰ Skinner, 'What is Intellectual History?', 51

⁷¹ See Richter, 'Reconstructing the History of Political Languages', 64.

⁷² Skinner, 'Reply to my Critics', 283.

⁷³ Skinner, 'Meaning and Understanding', 24.

from the status and power of the ruler to the impersonal power of the state.⁷⁴ Likewise his 1989 essay, 'The State', while it draws with enviable erudition and skill on any number of relatively unknown figures, is concerned largely with such major thinkers as Marsilius, Machiavelli, Bodin, Bossuet, Hobbes and Locke, and with characterising and tracing the interactions between contending traditions of thought, especially republicanism and absolutism. As Richter asks, to what extent, then, 'is Skinner's account a history of the uses in argument of the concept of the state? For the most part he supplies the context of argument by placing individual theorists either in the republican or absolutist category, rather than tracing the concept as used in the language of struggles among contending groups, movements, or power-holders. And there is a strongly teleological or Whig assumption of an historical development towards the absolutist state justified by Hobbes, or towards Max Weber's definition of the modern state'.⁷⁵

My purpose in raising Richter's question is not to twit Skinner for failing to practice what he has preached. It is rather to make the point that even if Skinner is right to say that every political utterance is designed to solve a circumstantial problem, to justify an action performed or projected, or to rebut the claim that it is somehow improper or illegitimate, and that to understand it historically calls for an understanding, as comprehensive and exact as it can be, of the situation to which it was addressed and the circumstances in which that situation came to be, or came to seem to be, problematical, such utterances, as Oakeshott once admonished Skinner, do not necessarily comprise the whole of political thought.⁷⁶ Neither, as Oakeshott likewise observed, is historical understanding the only valid mode of understanding. It would be very strange to suggest, for example, that this was the understanding that the thinkers in whom Skinner was interested had of one another's writings.⁷⁷ And Skinner himself explicitly announces a modal shift in the conclusion to the second volume of *Foundations*, as he turns to the word 'State' in terms of which the newly acquired concept of the state was subsequently articulated and discussed. Skinner describes this turn as one 'from history to historical semantics',⁷⁸ marking a difference between the enterprise of tracing the diverse streams of thought that converged in the concept and that of tracing competing uses of a new term in the

⁷⁴ Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, I. ix.

⁷⁵ Richter, 'Reconstructing the History of Political Languages', 64.

⁷⁶ Michael Oakeshott, 'The Foundations of Modern Political Thought', *Historical Journal* 23, no. 2 (1980), 449-453, 450.

⁷⁷ Oakeshott, 'The Foundations...', 450.

⁷⁸ Skinner, *Foundations*, I, x.

political vocabulary of the modern world. Yet both enterprises are embraced in the one 'history of political theory'.⁷⁹

I now think I should have started in a different place, in the space opened up by Skinner's distinction between the intention a given text embodies and its subsequent significance. For the history of liberalism is, not least, the history of certain texts rising to prominence and laying claim to significance and to the attention of posterity through the agency of later thinkers who were for their own reasons keen to conscript them to their own present purposes. This 'reception history' plays an important part in the development of concepts over time and the shifts in meaning and understanding they evince and elicit. Skinner's 'contextualist' approach allows us to tell another, but still just one, part of the story. It is important to tell the story of how concepts came to be created, but it is no less urgent to consider 'how certain texts became authoritative in the history of political discourse, how the canon of great texts came to be established'; the 'changing reputations of past writers and the changing meanings of past texts'; and the very variety of interpretations 'given the longer a text's life, the greater the difference is likely to be to be between subsequent readerships and the intended, initial, and implied readership' over time and space. This is a crucial consideration not only for the purposes of an historical enquiry into something like 'liberalism' but also for the self-awareness of the historian; for 'whether they are aware of the fact or not, [historians and indeed political thinkers] are themselves heirs to traditions of textual interpretation, blatant misreadings, and creative reworking'.⁸⁰ What I am arguing is that to understand the formation and development of liberalism, it is necessary to come to grips with its transformation into a 'tradition' over time via a consideration of shifts in meaning that the concept has undergone during a historical process of interpreting and re-interpreting ideas, events, texts, and thinkers that appear, disappear, and reappear as vital ingredients of that tradition.

None of this is incompatible with some of Skinner's wider reflections on conceptual continuity and change over the *longue duree* but it cannot be managed solely in the terms of contextualism narrowly construed.⁸¹ Skinner admits as much in his own practice even if it is supposed that he is committed to denying it in theory. His many critics have delighted in

⁷⁹ Skinner, *Foundations*, I, xi. I probably had this example somewhere in the back of my mind when I decided I needed to define the concept of liberalism before turning to the ways in which the meaning of the word in terms of which it was discussed was contested.

⁸⁰ Martyn P. Thompson, 'Reception Theory and the Interpretation of Historical Meaning', *History and Theory* 32, no. 3 (1993): 248-272, 269, 272.

⁸¹ See Quentin Skinner, 'Retrospect: Studying rhetoric and conceptual change', in *Visions of Politics, Vol. 1: Regarding Method* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002), 175-87.

noticing that it seems to involve an approach that is at odds with the one he formally espouses⁸²—but I am not so sure. Political thinkers live in intellectual traditions as well as personal situations. They live also in particular political societies with involved histories and complicated commitments of their own and not only their own utterances, but also the utterances of their predecessors have a force and a meaning in *that* setting that is specific to time and place and carries a particular historical meaning. At the same time, they can be and are understood in other ways besides historically; they are a living part of the present, and may just as well be construed in its terms (whatever they happen to be) as being construed as historical statements. Like it or not, the inflections of the present are always present to some degree even in the most austere, or methodologically rigorous, account of the past. Richter’s detection of the ‘Whig’ tendencies in Skinner’s history is instructive in the connection, for reasons I shall say more about in the next section, because they help to clarify the approach I have adopted in the thesis and my reasons for adopting it.

IV. Whig History, Traditions, and ‘-Isms’

In their ‘Short History of Liberalism’, Terence Ball and Richard Dagger make the passing observation that the ‘self-proclaimed liberals’ of the early nineteenth century were eager to claim ‘descent from prominent political and intellectual figures—Locke, Montesquieu, and Voltaire, for example—and movements such as the Protestant Reformation and the Glorious Revolution of 1688’. They did this ‘partly in order to gain credibility and support, a tactic common to political actors of all persuasions, and partly to understand the bases of their own beliefs’. This meant [Ball and Dagger continue] ‘that anyone who had spoken for individual liberty and against the various constraints on that liberty had some claim to being a liberal, even if he or she could not have used the word in self-description. This meant, in particular, that the original liberals were the people who reacted against two of the characteristic features of medieval society in Europe: religious conformity and ascribed status’.⁸³

This observation needs further comment and elaboration. As Ball and Dagger intimate, political thinkers have always looked back to their predecessors, often in a highly selective manner, to find corroboration for their own positions. The history of political thought in this respect provides a rich source of instances of Borges’s aphorism that ‘all writers create their

⁸² See, for example, K. R. Minogue, ‘Method in Intellectual History: Quentin Skinner’s Foundations’, *Philosophy* 56, no. 218 (1991): 533-552.

⁸³ Ball and Dagger, ‘The “L-Word”: A Short History of Liberalism’, 2.

precursors'. Sometimes past writers are retrospectively conscripted into a more systematic pattern of thought which is intended to issue in or justify political action—what the textbooks tend to call an ideology but which, to avoid potential confusion with Skinner's use of that term, I will call an '-ism'. These two phenomena are distinct, but they are obviously connected: in creating their own precursors, political thinkers place themselves with others in an intellectual tradition, a tradition that is united by a common doctrine or values or a distinctive mentality of which they are, or take themselves to be, the continuators. In turn that doctrine, those values, that manner of thinking implies, or can be taken to imply, a particular mode of political expression that aims to produce certain consequences in practice. Likewise, such consequences as occur can be attributed to (or blamed upon) the '-ism' that aimed to produce them. In this way, an abstraction from a past that is more complicated than abstraction admits may be used to ratify or commend a style of politics in the present that is presented as the consequence of a tradition of thinking stretching back into the past, freighted with the authority of the great names of history. The past and the present are kept in alliance, so to speak, by the fact that the past is conveniently and tidily disposed for some set of present purposes.

This phenomenon has itself been a subject of historical scholarship at least since Herbert Butterfield first anointed it the 'whig interpretation of history'⁸⁴ and—in what he would later call 'the misguided austerity of youth'⁸⁵—attempted to drive it out of historical practice. R. G. Collingwood echoed Butterfield in decrying 'scissors and paste' history,⁸⁶ in which the past is studied with reference to the present and a search for origins is conducted in terms that preselect only those facts that give support to a preferred thesis and eliminate other facts equally important to the total picture.

As Butterfield explained, the whig method of approach was 'closely connected with the question of the abridgement of history; for both the method and the kind of history that results from it would be impossible if the facts were told in all their fullness'. The key assumption, or theory, lurking behind the whig interpretation was that the past was studied for the sake of the present, and its effect 'is to provide us with a handy rule of thumb by which we can easily discover what was important in the past, for the simple reason that, by definition, we mean what is important "from our point of view"'.⁸⁷ In the first instance, 'our

⁸⁴ Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1931).

⁸⁵ Herbert Butterfield, *The Englishman and his History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1944), 3.

⁸⁶ R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1946), 257.

⁸⁷ Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation*, 24.

point of view' meant that of Englishmen: Butterfield referred principally to an interpretation of British history, prevalent in Whig, that is to say, liberal political and intellectual circles in the mid-nineteenth century, which stressed the growth of liberty, parliamentary rule and religious toleration since the constitutional struggles of the seventeenth century. However in the book it already had a wider sense and reference, 'the whig interpretation' describing a certain way of understanding political and religious developments in Europe since the Reformation: accordingly, the interpretation of Martin Luther was one of his key examples.⁸⁸

It is striking to recall, in this connection, that one of the very first books written about liberalism as a self-conscious movement gave Luther a starring role. Wilhelm Krug, Immanuel Kant's successor as Chair of Logic and Metaphysics at the University of Königsberg, argued in his *Historical Depiction of Liberalism* of 1823 that Luther was filter through which flowed Christian and Germanic ideas of freedom that found political expression subsequently in the English Whigs. This political movement was necessary for the development of institutions, required by God, for human salvation and the realisation of our duties to one another, as a movement of the natural progress in reason and history in which individuals came to be liberated and understand their relationship to one another and their own individuality with regard to the movement of reason and history.⁸⁹ Crudely, in breaking with the Pope and the orthodoxies of his day, Luther had made possible both 'liberalism' and the 'liberal' politics of England.

It may not, therefore, be a coincidence that Luther was chosen by Butterfield in part because he helped to illuminate one of the most typical features of the whig historian, namely his predilection for quests for origins. In tracing the achievement of religious liberty back to Luther, thinking him 'the first man who talked about it', the whig historian commits a grievous error. 'We are the victims of our own phraseology', Butterfield wrote, 'if we think that we mean very much when we say that religious liberty "can be traced back to" some person or other. And if we assert that "but for Luther" this liberty would never have come down to us as it did come[...] we are using a trick in text-book terminology which has become the whig historian's sleight-of-hand[...]'

It is meaningless [Butterfield continued] to trace liberty along a line which goes back to Luther merely because Luther at one time and in a world of different connotations put

⁸⁸ See Adrian Wilson and T. G. Ashplant, 'Whig History and Present-Centred History', *Historical Journal* 31, no. 1 (1988). 1-16, 2.

⁸⁹ Wilhelm T. Krug, *Geschichtlicher Darstellung de Liberalismus* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1823). See Rosenblatt, *The Lost History of Liberalism*, 78-9.

forward some principles of freedom, from which as a matter of fact he shrank when he saw some of the consequences we see in them. It is not by a line but by a labyrinthine piece of network that one would have to make the diagram of the course by which religious liberty has come down to us, for this liberty comes by devious tracks and is born of strange conjectures, it represents purposes marred perhaps more than purposes achieved, and it owes more than we can tell to many agencies that had little to do with either religion or liberty⁹⁰

So also, I am tempted to say, with liberalism; and the more so as we move from the word to the idea to the institutional and cultural regime.

What Butterfield subsequently came to realise, however, as his comment about the misguided austerity of youth acknowledged, was that this 'wrong history', as he termed it, had its place. It could be 'put[...] to practical use'; as indeed it had been in England, where the 'Whig interpretation' had enabled the English to come to terms with their past, unlike the French, who had revolted against theirs in 1789. Oakeshott developed this insight further by distinguishing between the historical past and the practical past. The historical past is a past considered on its own terms. The practical past is a past that is considered in relation to the present.⁹¹ Oakeshott considered this to be an important philosophical distinction that clarified the historicity of historical enterprises while making room for enterprises of a different character. In making the distinction, Oakeshott was not suggesting that the historian could only and should only be consciously concerned with the 'historical' past at any given moment in any given enquiry. His suggestion, rather, was that there was a logic that determined and distinguished historical enquiry from other modes of understanding, and which differentiated the historical past from other kinds of past, most notably the 'practical' past. The important thing was to notice the distinction and to understand its implications. What I have come to realise, in writing this thesis, is that the problem with which I was wrestling, the problem to which Voegelin's remarks adverted, might be put as follows: how do you write a 'right history' of a 'wrong history', when the practical past is forever attempting to invade, or take the place, of the historical past?

⁹⁰ Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation*, 43-45.

⁹¹ Oakeshott first made this distinction in *Experience and its Modes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933), e.g. 102-105, and later developed it in a series of lectures published as *On History and Other Essays* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), in particular 'Present, Future, and Past'. For a defence of Oakeshott's distinction, see Martyn P. Thompson, *Michael Oakeshott and the Cambridge School of Political Thought* (London: Routledge, 2019), ch. 3. For a critical perspective, see Jonas Ahlskog, 'Michael Oakeshott and Hayden White on the practical and the historical past', *Journal of Theory and Practice* 20, no. 3 (2016): 375-394.

Liberalism, like other '-isms', has a peculiarly whiggish relationship to its own history, in that its history is continually being written and rewritten to fit with some current idea or other of what it is. It cannot therefore be treated as a relatively precise and determinate concept buried beneath shifting layers of surface accretion, waiting to be excavated by the intellectual historian; or rather, it can be treated like that, but treating it in those terms one inevitably opens oneself up to the objection that liberalism meant something different or something other than that, because it is always possible to appeal to one's own idea of what it is, or to some other idea of it carried down to the present in someone's conception of the liberal tradition. Conversely, the vaguer and more generalised the concept becomes, or rather, as soon as it is treated as a composite exhibit rather than a single agent's conception, it is open to the historian *qua* historian to object that its meaning was much narrower and more determinate than the baggy collection of disparate notions on offer in what might be called the political theorist's history of political theory.

One benefit of laying out the problem in these terms is that it helps to explain why the large body of historiography devoted to liberalism and its history that has accumulated over the last century or more is so disparate and self-divided. The liberal tradition is created and sustained by 'wrong history', such that 'each and every attempt to isolate what may be deemed to be the essence of liberalism results in the arbitrary rejection of the ideas of writers both claiming to be, and widely recognised as, liberals'.⁹² The arbitrariness is inevitable because when it comes to the liberal tradition, there is no privileged vantage point: we always start from 'our point of view'.

This may be what Duncan Bell was thinking when he wrote that liberalism simply is the various things that people have said that it is: 'the liberal tradition is constituted by the sum of the arguments that have been classified as liberal, and recognised as such by other self-proclaimed liberals, across time and space'.⁹³ The liberal tradition, on Bell's account, is a container of the various meanings of the term 'liberalism' that to varying extents display what we might call contingent 'family resemblances', no more and no less. There can only be a comprehensive mapping of the uses of the term 'liberalism', sensitive to the idiosyncrasies of place and time, and the 'tradition' is the grand sum of those meanings that have been collected, contained, and displayed within its borders. The question for a historian then becomes, why were these

⁹² D. J. Manning, *Liberalism* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1976), 139. This point is explored further with regard to stipulative definitions and canonical approaches to liberalism in Bell, 'What is Liberalism?' 686-688.

⁹³ Bell 'What is Liberalism?', 688-90. See also Freedman, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, 55-60, 91-5.

arguments made in the way they were, at the time they were, in the place they were, and why were they received in the way that they were? To understand the development of the liberalism requires not only studying the different meanings of 'liberalism' that might be contained within a tradition, but the very meanings of 'tradition' itself and the different ways in which that tradition has been understood and expressed in the stories told of liberalism's emergence and significance. I am therefore not only concerned with the changes in 'liberalism' and the reception of texts and ideas as part of the liberal tradition, but also *how* liberalism's history has been written and rewritten, and the different kinds of engagements that were made in writing those histories, and the different kinds of 'practical' pasts that have been evoked in those attempts. These are the questions I address in my history of the three histories of liberalism—by Hobhouse, Berlin, and Rawls—that comprise the central body of the thesis. But before explaining briefly why I start where I start, I want to recap the results of my reflections to this point.

I noted in section III that Skinner makes a distinction between history and historical semantics. In this section I have discussed Butterfield's conceptions of 'right' and 'wrong' history and Oakeshott's distinction between the historical past and the practical past. What I want to claim is that understanding liberalism as a historical phenomenon requires reconstructing the historical past on its own terms, whereas understanding liberalism as a tradition means reckoning with the practical, present-orientated past, with the many and various stories told about liberalism's origins and significance. Such stories are 'the means by which we venture into history, and place our selves, and our endeavours, in time', and they illuminate the ways in which we understand tradition, where we stand in relation to it, and the presuppositions behind its meaning, value, and authority; but they are, for all that, 'wrong' history.⁹⁴ 'Wrong' history, however, has its uses; one of which is to allow the constant refurbishment of tradition: its revision, its renewal. As historians, we may balk at the imprecision and looseness of speech involved, but as political theorists, or maybe as liberals, or maybe even as citizens of liberal societies, such looseness is an indispensable means of our coming to terms with our own past and of avoiding the kind of radical breaks in thought that the French Revolution in practice represented for Butterfield. This brings me to my reasons for beginning with Hobhouse and at the same time brings me back to a point noted in section II, about the way in which the meaning of liberalism broadened and changed during the nineteenth century.

⁹⁴ See James Alexander, 'Three Rival Versions of Tradition (Arendt, Oakeshott, MacIntyre)', *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 6, no.1 (2012): 20-43, 25. See also Timothy Stanton, 'John Locke and the Fable of Liberalism', *The Historical Journal* 61, no.3 (2018): 597-622, esp. 597-601, & Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (London: Duckworth 1981), 204-225.

V. Modern Liberalism and the Liberal Tradition

Alan S. Kahan once deployed the phrase ‘aristocratic liberalism’⁹⁵ to indicate, in the words of one reviewer of his writings, ‘the elitist proclivities of some key nineteenth-century liberal theorists’.⁹⁶ Kahan explored the same theme in later work in the wider realm of political culture, showing that ‘over the course of the nineteenth century, liberals in Britain, France and Europe were fighting a rear-guard battle to keep democracy out of politics. By the end of the nineteenth-century, they—and liberalism—had failed’. This leads Kahan to conclude that in the new world of democracy, ‘as a language of politics, [liberalism] was dead’,⁹⁷ that ‘liberalism was replaced by democracy’,⁹⁸ and that ‘the “New Liberalism” that arose after 1885 adopted democratic rhetoric and was liberal in name only’.⁹⁹ The reviewer, Michael Freeden, the author of a monograph on the New Liberalism¹⁰⁰, was indignant: Liberalism, he countered, was ‘no fixed thing’.¹⁰¹ So far from dying, it had been ‘stunningly successful in outgrowing its earlier discourse. In launching the language of welfarism in the early twentieth century, liberalism appealed to its older themes of community, integration, tolerance, reason and expertise, but set them in contexts in which they underwent a dramatic renaissance.’ ‘How [Freeden wondered] could ‘a serious scholar maintain’ the alternative positions?’¹⁰² An answer is that Kahan was writing as an historian, whereas Freeden was helping himself to the kind of practically-orientated history in which the ‘later evolution’ of liberalism is written over its historical meaning and in which it is unclear whether an attempt is being made to explain that tradition or to participate in its internal development.

A line of argument that complements Kahan’s has been articulated recently by Helena Rosenblatt and, more briefly, by David Craig. Rosenblatt argues that there was a liberal

⁹⁵ Kahan, *Aristocratic Liberalism*

⁹⁶ Michael Freeden, reviewing Alan S. Kahan, *Liberalism in the Nineteenth Century: The Political Culture of Limited Suffrage* (Palgrave Macmillan: Houndmills, 2003), *History of Political Thought* 26, no. 1 (2005), 160-2.

⁹⁷ Kahan, *Liberalism in the Nineteenth Century*, 191

⁹⁸ Kahan, *Liberalism in the Nineteenth Century*, 139

⁹⁹ Kahan, *Liberalism in the Nineteenth Century*, 140

¹⁰⁰ Freeden, *The New Liberalism*

¹⁰¹ Freeden writes elsewhere that liberalism is a ‘well established theory and tradition, yet an inexact concept’. See ‘Liberalism’ in *The Routledge Companion to Social and Political Philosophy*, eds. Gerald F. Gaus & Fred D’Agostino (New York: Routledge, 2013), 231-242. See also the same writer’s ‘Liberalism’ in *The Continuum of Encyclopaedia of British Philosophy*, ed. A. C. Grayling, Andrew Pyle, and Naomi Goulder (London: Thoemmes Continuum, 2016), 1877-9. I would suggest the opposite: liberalism can be conceptually clear but it is an inexact theory and tradition.

¹⁰² Freeden, review of Kahan, 161-2.

tradition with its roots in the ancient world, long before the term 'liberalism' came to find widespread use, but a tradition associated with ideas of liberality rather than liberty: 'by the mid-seventeenth century Europeans had been calling liberality a necessary virtue for more than two thousand years. If ever there was a liberal tradition this was it'.¹⁰³ The 1792 edition of Samuel Johnson's *A Dictionary of the English Language* defined 'liberal' as 'not mean; not low in birth', 'becoming a gentleman', and 'munificent; generous; bountiful'.¹⁰⁴ To be 'liberal' was to demonstrate in one's character and conduct 'the virtues of a citizen, showing devotion to the common good, and respecting the importance of mutual connectedness'. Rather than liberty *per se* being held in the highest regard, liberality was given pride of place within broader accounts of the virtuous character and moral fortitude that was required of the free citizen. Whilst there was significant disagreement over the nature of virtue and civility, and the education needed to achieve such goals, humanistic disciplines and an education in moral values broadly came to be thought of as cultivating a 'liberal' attitude in young men that enabled them to live a flourishing and honourable life.¹⁰⁵ This original liberal tradition, Rosenblatt argues, was eclipsed by a different liberal tradition animated by the extended conception of 'liberal' outlined in section II, and elaborated in the passage cited from Ball and Dagger at the beginning of section IV. Craig argued, rather as Kahan intimated about later developments around the 'New Liberalism', that there was no relation between the old meaning of liberal and the new meaning, or at least a sufficient hiatus to make any suggestion of a continuous tradition objectionable.¹⁰⁶ But as James Alexander astutely noticed, this is 'not something that can be historically established: it is [...] a matter of philosophical preference'; the whiggish preference, like Freedom's, for seeing continuity rather than change and for treating the new tradition as a continuation of the old.

This 'new' tradition defines liberalism in opposition to every inherited order and to religious conformity. By the middle decades of the twentieth-century, there was growing agreement that its core doctrines, 'that individuals have rights and that one of the government's most

¹⁰³ Rosenblatt, *The Lost History of Liberalism*, 19.

¹⁰⁴ Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, 10th ed. (London: 1792).

¹⁰⁵ Rosenblatt, *The Lost History of Liberalism*, 8-18. Aristotle, for example, lists liberality among the virtues, *Nicomachian Ethics*, trans. David Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 60-4 [1119b21-1122a17]. See also Marcus Tullius Cicero, *On Duties*, ed. M. T. Griffin and E. M. Atkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Michel de Montaigne, *Essays*, trans. J. M. Cohen (London: Penguin, 1958); & John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* in *The Works of John Locke*, vol.8 (London: 1824), all of which, in their differing ways, make reference to the liberal arts, a liberal education, and the virtue of liberality.

¹⁰⁶ See Craig, 'The Origins of 'Liberalism' in Britain', and the discussion of Rosenblatt and Craig by Alexander in 'A Conjectural History of Liberalism', 8-10, esp. 9.

fundamental jobs is to protect those rights', are 'rooted in the philosophy of[...] Locke'.¹⁰⁷ Again, and as for Ball and Dagger, the tolerant attitude of the magistrate that Locke recommends in *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, is evidence of his 'proto-liberal' credentials and of his role in originating or popularising a new, modern kind of liberty which prioritised the liberty of conscience, even the liberty to disbelieve, and posited the liberty of individuals more broadly as its foundational assumption—this despite Locke denying toleration to atheists and Catholics and emphasising our dependence upon our Creator for all that we were and all that we did.¹⁰⁸

The 'new' tradition has often required 'early Enlightenment thinkers to appear, however inexplicitly, as pioneering proto-liberals'.¹⁰⁹ Locke's predecessor Thomas Hobbes has also been sometimes singled out and refashioned along similar lines.¹¹⁰ Others have preferred to single out Roger Williams¹¹¹ or Baruch Spinoza¹¹², with particular regard to the liberty of conscience; others have suggested the Levellers¹¹³ as the true defenders of the natural rights of man in contradistinction to hierarchical orders. It has been hard for liberalism to escape the gravitational pull of Locke, however, perhaps because he has so often seemed a reassuringly

¹⁰⁷ Bryan Garsten, 'A Challenge, Not an Epitaph: A Response to Patrick Deenen', *Commonweal*, December 3rd, 2018 [<https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/challenge-not-epitaph>]. See also, Richard J. Arneson, 'Locke and the Liberal Tradition' in *A Companion to Locke*, ed. Matthew Stuart (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 528-545. Cf. Timothy Stanton, 'John Locke and the Fable of Liberalism', *The Historical Journal* 61, no.3 (2018): 597-622.

¹⁰⁸ See John Dunn, *The Political Thought of John Locke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969); Jeremy Waldron, *God, Locke, and Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); & Timothy Stanton, 'Christian foundations; or some loose stones? Toleration and the philosophy of Locke's politics', *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 14, no.3 (2011): 323-347.

¹⁰⁹ Jon Parkin, 'Preface: Rethinking Toleration via Natural Law' in *Proceedings of the British Academy Vol.186: Natural Law and Toleration in the Early Enlightenment*, ed. Jon Parkin and Timothy Stanton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), x. See also Stanton, 'John Locke and the Fable of Liberalism'.

¹¹⁰ See Leo Strauss, 'On the Spirit of Hobbes' Political Philosophy', *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 4, no.14 (1950): 405-431; Lucien Jaume, 'Hobbes and the Philosophical Sources of Liberalism' in *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*, ed. T. Sorell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 199-216; & Noel Malcolm, 'Thomas Hobbes: Liberal illiberal', *Journal of the British Academy* 4 (2016): 113-136. Cf. Quentin Skinner, *Hobbes and Republican Liberty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

¹¹¹ See Timothy L. Hall, *Separating Church and State: Roger Williams and Religious Liberty* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1998) & Martha Nussbaum, *Liberty of Conscience: in defense of America's Tradition of Religious Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 2008).

¹¹² See Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 258-274. Cf. Susan James, *Spinoza on Philosophy, Religion, and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹¹³ See C. B. MacPherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 137-159. Ralph Raico, in his review of Anthony Arblaster's *The Rise and Decline of Western Liberalism*, suggested that it was with the Levellers that liberalism 'makes its debut on the stage of history', *Reason Papers* no.14 (1989): 163. Arblaster's own story starts with the Renaissance, *The Rise and Decline of Western Liberalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), 95.

modest and moderate figure.¹¹⁴ The differences between the various versions of the story are softened by the tendency, common among contemporary writers, to turn Locke into a simulacrum of either Immanuel Kant or J. S. Mill, so that the casting of Locke in a central role does not really alter the fundamental point being made.¹¹⁵ Whether we prefer to have Kant¹¹⁶ or Mill¹¹⁷ in the starring role in place of Locke, we follow out the same general course and arrive at the same end-point: liberalism as the rejection of the inherited order, the apotheosis of Enlightenment, and the constitutive political ideal of modernity in its defence of individuals' rights and their capacity to choose.

This very whiggish story was given short shrift by T. S. Eliot for one, who recognised that historically speaking it got everything backwards. For Eliot, '[liberalism] is something which tends to release energy rather than accumulate it, to relax, rather than to fortify. It is a movement not so much defined by its end, as by its starting point; away from, rather than towards, something definite'.¹¹⁸ What was being attacked, according to Eliot, was the dominance of theology, the truths of the Christian religion, its authority in moral practice, and the claims of its institutions to govern human life. What this attack comprised was the extension of conscientious theological doubt, first presented as a rightful claim to liberty over a fairly narrowly circumscribed range of beliefs, into a demand that reasons should be given for everything that is done. What it entailed was an assertion of the autonomy of the

¹¹⁴ See Timothy Stanton, 'Freedom of conscience, political liberty, and the foundations of liberalism' in *Freedom and the Construction of Europe: new perspectives on philosophical, religious, and political controversies*, ed. Quentin Skinner and Martin van Gelderen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013): 134-154.

¹¹⁵ John Rawls, for example, takes J. S. Mill's phrase regarding the sovereignty of individuals and transplants this in to Locke's body of work: 'In Locke the idea of the social contract is used to maintain that legitimate government can be founded only on the consent of free and equal, and reasonable and rational persons[...] all being, as it were, equally sovereign over themselves', *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 107. Thomas Nagel suggested that 'the original impulse of liberalism, found in Locke and Kant, is the idea of the moral sovereignty of each individual', 'Rawls and Liberalism' in *The Cambridge Companion to Rawls*, ed. Samuel Freeman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 63. See also, Kenneth Minogue, 'Locke, Kant, and the Foundations of Liberalism' in *John Locke und Immanuel Kant: Historische Rezeption und gegenwärtige Relevanz*, ed. M. P. Thompson (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1991), 269-83.

¹¹⁶ Jeremy Waldron suggested that it was Kant who provided the 'classical statement of the relationship between Enlightenment and liberal ideas', 'Theoretical Foundations of Liberalism', *Philosophical Quarterly* 37, no.147 (1987): 135n. James Alexander notes that, 'although Kant was nothing as simple as a liberal, his writings clearly state the liberal view of law', Alexander, 'The Major Ideologies', 985. See also Paul Kelly, *Liberalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), esp.25-9.

¹¹⁷ John Skorupski suggests that 'of the classic texts of liberalism, Mill's essay *On Liberty* stands in the first rank', *Why Read Mill Today?* (London: Routledge, 2006), 39. See also Freedman, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, 144-153.

¹¹⁸ T. S. Eliot, *The Idea of a Christian Society* (New York: Harcourt, 1940), 12-3. Cf. Eric Voegelin, 'Liberalism and its History'.

individual against religion and tradition.¹¹⁹ What it invited was something definite: a new conception of Western civilization and the fundamental ideal—freedom—that inspired it, in place of the older notion that civilization was somehow a distinctively Christian achievement. What it produced in the end was paradoxical: opposition to tradition became a tradition, a tradition of liberty culminating in modernity. And in the process tradition, as much as civilization, was reconceived as part of liberalism's own relationship to its history.

The suggestion that liberalism is best understood as an alternative religion with designs on replacing Christianity with its own assumptions and institutions has long been mooted by its critics.¹²⁰ Yet even if liberalism has failed to insinuate itself into the position once occupied by Christianity, it is helpful heuristically to consider it on analogy with Christianity when contemplating the process by which the meaning of liberalism has shifted and developed over time. What began as an attack on something definite has transformed into something not unlike its original target: it may lack some of the outward appearances of Christianity, but 'like other traditions liberalism has internal to it its own standards of rational justification[...] its set of authoritative texts and its disputes over their interpretation[...] [and] expresses itself socially through a particular kind of hierarchy'. In other words, it has become a tradition.¹²¹

The point I wish to make in conclusion, drawing together all the lines of thought I have been advancing in this introduction, is that liberalism became a tradition of a particular sort at a particular time for particular reasons. 'Liberalism', like 'Conservatism', was the product of late nineteenth and early twentieth century intellectual and political history. It was at this time that they became ideologies in the textbooks' sense and from this time that they were routinely traced back to the French Revolution, as the rear-guard battle against democracy and the potentialities it unleashed highlighted by Kahan become more and more desperate.¹²² In that battle, the implications of J. S. Mill's assertion that 'over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign' became a central bone of contention.¹²³ Mill fused an account of

¹¹⁹ The classic statement of this general view, which Eliot accepted, being J. H. Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua, Being a History of His Religious Opinions* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1890) esp. 288-96. See also Alasdair MacIntyre's 'Liberalism Transformed into a Tradition' in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (London: Duckworth, 1988), 326-348.

¹²⁰ See Maurice Cowling, *Mill and Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963) & *Religion and Public Doctrine in England*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980-2004).

¹²¹ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 345. See also J. H. Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011 [1845]) & James Alexander, 'A Systematic Theory of Tradition', *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 10, no.1 (2016): 1-28.

¹²² For conservatism, see Emily Jones, 'Conservatism, Edmund Burke, and the Invention of a Political Tradition, c. 1885-1914', *Historical Journal* 58, 4 (2015), 1115-39.

¹²³ John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* in *On Liberty and Other Writings*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989 [1859]), 13. For Mill's relationship to liberalism, often considered *the*

'modern' liberty with the stories of human development and the perils of the democratic age in terms that looked forward to the 'modern' narratives of liberalism's emergence. History, Mill suggested, was a struggle between despotism and liberty. From initially restraining the 'beak and claws' of those in power, it later became clear to the people that 'the various magistrates of the State should be their tenants or delegates, revocable at pleasure'. And so, 'in time[...] a democratic republic came to occupy a large portion of the earth's surface' with its expressions of the 'will of the people'. This, however, produced a new kind of tyranny, distinct from the old, a 'tyranny of the majority', pervasive throughout society and shaping custom, dogma, opinion, and sentiment.¹²⁴

Despite his differences from Mill, his contemporary Herbert Spencer likewise feared a new despotism replacing the old: just as 'true Liberalism in the past disputed the assumption of a monarch's unlimited authority, so true Liberalism in the present will dispute the assumption of unlimited parliamentary authority'.¹²⁵ Citing both Tocqueville and von Humboldt, Mill reflected on the diminishing individuality and diversity evident in modern society. The two 'necessary conditions of human development', Mill suggested, were 'freedom' and a 'variety of situations'.¹²⁶ For Humboldt, 'the highest ideal' to which liberty aimed at guaranteeing was 'a union in which each strives to develop himself from his own innermost nature, and for his own sake', looking to the 'sublime beauty of liberty'.¹²⁷ Faced with the potentially despotic modern condition, Mill emphasised 'the importance, to man and society, of a large variety in types of

philosopher of liberalism, see J. Salwyn Schapiro, 'John Stuart Mill, Pioneer of Democratic Liberalism in England' *Journal of the History of Ideas* 4, no.2 (1943): 127-160; Stefan Collini, 'Liberalism and the Legacy of Mill', *Historical Journal* 20, no.1 (1977): 237-254; John Gray, *Mill On Liberty: a defence* (London: Routledge, 1983); E. J. Eisenach, 'Introduction' to *Mill and the Moral Character of Liberalism* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998); John Gray, 'Mill's Liberalism and Liberalism's Posterity', *The Journal of Ethics* 4, no.1 (2000): 137-165; Alan Ryan, 'Mill in a Liberal Landscape' in *The Cambridge Companion to Mill*, ed. John Skorupski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 497-540. Cf. Menaka Philips, 'Troubling Appropriations: J. S. Mill, liberalism, and the virtues of uncertainty', *European Journal of Political Theory* 18, no.1 (2019): 68-88. See also Oakeshott, *Morality and Politics*, 78-86.

¹²⁴ Mill, *On Liberty*, 6-8.

¹²⁵ Herbert Spencer, 'The New Toryism' in *The Man Versus the State: with six essays on government, freedom, and society*, ed. Eric Mack (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1981, [1884]), 26.

¹²⁶ Mill, *On Liberty*, 72. For the relationship of Mill to Humboldt and Tocqueville, see Andrew Valls, 'Self-Development and the Liberal State: The cases of John Stuart Mill and Wilhelm von Humboldt', *The Review of Politics* 61, no.2 (1999): 251-274; Terence H. Qualter, 'John Stuart Mill, Disciple of de Tocqueville', *Western Political Quarterly* 13, no.4 (1960): 880-889; H. O. Pappé, 'Mill and Tocqueville' *Journal of the History of Ideas* 25, no.2 (1964): 217-234; & Byung-Hoon Suh, 'Mill and Tocqueville: a friendship bruised', *History of European Ideas* 42, no.1 (2016): 55-72. See also Kahan *Aristocratic Liberalism* and Larry Siedentop, 'Two Liberal Traditions' in *French Liberalism from Montesquieu*, 15-35.

¹²⁷ Wilhelm von Humboldt, *The Sphere and Duties of Government (On the Limits of State Action)*, trans. Joseph Coulthard (London: 1859 [1792]), 16, 54. For Humboldt's relationship to liberalism, see Ursula Vogel, 'Liberty is Beautiful: von Humboldt's gift to liberalism', *History of Political Thought* 3, no.1 (1982): 77-101. See also Fawcett, *Liberalism*, 28-31, 34-44.

character, and of giving full freedom to human nature to expand itself in innumerable and conflicting directions'.¹²⁸

The conditions of that self-development did not always look favourable. Tocqueville diagnosed that modern liberty and the advent of modern individualism posed a threat to the self-development of individuals when coupled with democratic egalitarianism due to the private and conformist nature of modern society; 'when men are no longer bound together by caste, class, corporate or family ties, they are only too prone to give their whole thoughts to their private interest, and to wrap themselves up in a narrow individuality in which public virtue is stifled'. For all that democracy had made possible for the self-development of individuals by breaking them out of the hierarchal order, it had presented them with the opportunity 'to hold themselves aloof from each other: it isolates them[...] it freezes their souls'.¹²⁹ Tocqueville, in some moods, suggested that it was at least possible for the balance to tip the other way: 'the nations of our time cannot prevent the conditions of men becoming equal[...] it depends upon themselves whether the principle of equality is to lead them to servitude or freedom, to knowledge or barbarism, to prosperity or wretchedness'.¹³⁰

What these developments meant, negatively, for Mill was a rejection of 'the tyranny of the prevailing opinion and feeling', which prevents the formation of 'any individuality not in harmony with its ways', thus compelling all 'characters to fashion themselves upon the model of its own'.¹³¹ On its positive side, however, the imperative for Mill was not only the protection of the right of the individual, but the duty to choose and self-improve, thus developing their own eccentricity and cultivating their individuality through their self-development, which in turn propelled the development of society—or rather avoided its degeneration into an 'inert and ossified condition'.¹³² Mill's worry was that 'the despotism of custom is everywhere the standing hindrance to human advancement', stifling the development of diversity and individuality characteristic of the 'spirit of liberty'.¹³³ 'While mankind are imperfect', there ought to be both 'differing opinion' and 'experiments of living' to allow both individual flourishing and social progress to eventuate. Again, this was in contradistinction to the 'ancient commonwealths' which 'thought themselves entitled to practise[...] the regulation of every

¹²⁸ John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography* (London: Penguin, 1989 [1873]), 189.

¹²⁹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. Patrick Renshaw and trans. Henry Reeve (Ware: Wordsworth, 1998), 353, 359, 366, & *The Old Regime and the Revolution*, viii-xi.

¹³⁰ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 374.

¹³¹ Mill, *On Liberty*, 8.

¹³² Oakeshott, *Morality and Politics*, 79-80.

¹³³ Mill, *On Liberty*, 70.

part of private conduct by public authority'.¹³⁴ In the modern world, the individual is sovereign, and our task is to maximise the potential gains and to inhibit the worst effects of this fact, by reconciling them to one another as self-developing individuals, whilst also curbing the excesses of unrestrained democratic forces.

It was an aim of Mill—as an exemplary liberal, if not so much an exemplary Liberal—to articulate liberal principles that suited and seemed capable of directing the spirit of the age in a way that went beyond and overcame the party divisions of British politics: 'something wider than either, which, in virtue of its superior comprehensiveness, might be adopted by either Liberal or Conservative without renouncing anything which he really feels to be valuable in his own creed'.¹³⁵ Mill's attempt to articulate liberal principles beyond the division of Liberal and Conservative was also, in his terms, an attempt to overcome the division between two intellectual heavyweights of the age: the 'two great seminal minds of England', Jeremy Bentham and Samuel Taylor Coleridge.¹³⁶ Mill died in 1873, and his name and his writings were revered by many young intellectuals of the mid-nineteenth century. These 'lights of Liberalism', as they have been called collectively, who included the lawyer and legal theorist A. V. Dicey, about whom more will be said in the next chapter, were much taken with the individualistic values they took him to be espousing and looked to them ever more keenly as their fear of socialism and the breakdown of ordered government increased in the final decades of the nineteenth century.¹³⁷ The first British Liberal government of William Gladstone ended in 1874. The worry grew that the Liberal Party was trying to buy working class votes with an ambiguous programme of land and social reform which, if successful, would weaken the defences of property and the power of the propertied classes. As a result, business and landowners united under the Conservative party's banner; the Liberal party lost its crucial middle class support, its identity, and, to the disillusioned, its soul.

The 1870s-1880s, I am suggesting, were a turning point not just for British liberalism, but also for European liberalism more broadly. It has been identified, as by Kahan, with decline and crisis for liberalism, when economic development and 'mass' politics begin to erode the social

¹³⁴ *ibid.*, 15-6.

¹³⁵ John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government* in *On Liberty and Other Essays*, ed. J. Gray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991 [1861]), 204. For Mill's relationship to the Liberals see Mill, *Autobiography*, 206-229. See also Bruce L. Kinzer et al., *A Moralist In and Out of Parliament: John Stuart Mill at Westminster, 1865-1868* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).

¹³⁶ See John Stuart Mill, 'Bentham' & 'Coleridge' in *Utilitarianism and Other Essays* (London: Penguin, 1987), 132-176, 177-227.

¹³⁷ See Christopher Harvie, *The Lights of Liberalism: University Liberals and the Challenge of Democracy, 1860-86* (London: Allen Lane, 1976).

bases on which the liberal attitudes of the first half of the century had rested; but it was also the period in which liberalism was reborn, or refashioned, as a tradition. The next chapter and its sequels explore the development of the liberal tradition from this new beginning down the long twentieth century. They do so by way of an exploration of the history of the history of liberalism, focusing on three figures: L. T. Hobhouse, Isaiah Berlin, and John Rawls, each of whom had particular reasons for construing liberalism as they did and propounding its history in the terms that they did.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I aim to explore the history of the history of liberalism by focusing on three particular histories. In the historiography on liberalism's history it is conventional to distinguish two phases in the development of liberalism; to discuss what liberalism *was* and what liberalism *became*.¹³⁸ The first discussion focuses on the 'proto-liberalisms' and the liberal languages of the nineteenth century while the latter considers the liberalism of the twentieth century and the development of the liberal tradition. My account complicates this narrative in two ways.

The first complication is that my account and the central chapters which examine the long twentieth century identify three phases. What liberalism *became* in the twentieth century was a different thing for Hobhouse, and for Berlin, and for Rawls, each with their accounts of liberalism offered within their own particular contexts, yet it was at the same time the same thing, part of a continuous process of development. What is more, these three accounts of the liberal tradition also stand in a dialectical relationship with one another. Hobhouse's liberalism represents the reconciliation of what he took to be the competing lines of descent within the liberal tradition to that point as part of the dialectical movement of history. Berlin's liberalism represents the liberal tradition as fractured, pluralist, and divided, but nonetheless living with these irresolvable tensions. Rawls' liberalism envisaged the liberal tradition as both pluralist and capable of reconciliation without the dialectical movement of history. These three accounts of the liberal tradition, if you like, involve different accounts of the historical past but they are related to one another as practical pasts. More than this, they seem to me to confirm

¹³⁸ Compare Bell 'What is Liberalism?'; Rosenblatt, *The Lost History of Liberalism*; & Alexander, 'A Conjectural History of Liberalism'.

the truth of Voegelin's assertion that liberalism is 'a series of political opinions and attitudes which have their optimal truth in the situation which motivates them, and are then overtaken by history and required to do justice to new situations': so Hobhouse is overtaken by Berlin who is overtaken by Rawls; and yet at the same time remain, for us in the present, living voices in an ongoing conversation about what liberalism was and is. For the reasons I have given in this introduction, this strikes me, as I said at its outset, as the best way, and perhaps the only way, to show what liberalism is and was.

I begin with L. T. Hobhouse, who published his classic account of liberalism and its history as the great powers of Europe were sleepwalking towards the First World War.¹³⁹

¹³⁹ See Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (London: Allen Lane, 2012).

2. L. T. Hobhouse: Old Liberals, New Liberalism, and British 'Hegelianism'

'[T]he nineteenth century might be called the age of Liberalism, yet its close saw the fortunes of that great movement brought to their lowest ebb'¹⁴⁰

'[T]he owl of Minerva begins its flight only with the onset of dusk'¹⁴¹

Introduction

It was only during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century that 'liberalism' began to be spoken of and presented in Britain as a distinct tradition. This partly reflected the wider popularisation of the political usage of the term 'liberal' throughout Europe during the nineteenth century. The term stood for a range of ideas, sentiments, and constitutional arrangements, to which the users of the term attributed an underlying consistency. As Duncan Bell has observed, during this period 'liberalism came to be viewed through a wide-angle lens, as a politico-intellectual tradition centred on individual freedom in the context of constitutional government'.¹⁴² The British Whig and Liberal parties had played an important role in the characterisation and development of this tradition, but it was suggested that liberalism had a history that predated and did not necessarily owe its character to—or even move in step with—the Liberal party or European liberal movements more generally. In the writings of J. S. Mill and James Fitzjames Stephen, among others, liberal political movements had already come to be identified as expressions of or vehicles for deeper and long-running

¹⁴⁰ L. T. Hobhouse, *Liberalism in Liberalism and Other Writings*, ed. James Meadowcroft (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 103.

¹⁴¹ G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood & trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991 [1821]), 23.

¹⁴² Duncan Bell, 'What is Liberalism?', *Political Theory* 42, no.6 (2014): 699.

intellectual currents that were now moving to the surface. The emergence of 'liberalism' as a distinct tradition, more urgently, was a response to a crisis at the end of the nineteenth century: to worries amongst its supporters about the perceived shortcomings of the Liberal party, to related doubts concerning the coherence of liberal principles in an age of mass democracy, to fears that the days of such principles were numbered, and that what the Liberal party had come to stand for was no longer 'liberalism' at all.

This chapter pays particular attention to one notable attempt to capture the meaning and trajectory of this tradition at a time when liberal fortunes appeared to be fading fast: L. T. Hobhouse's *Liberalism* (1911). Out of the competing and conflicting strains of Edwardian liberalism, Hobhouse defended his own account of liberalism, in part, by presenting it as the heir to a distinct tradition of liberty. In presenting a narrative arc from Mill—and earlier liberals—to himself, which justified and upheld one particular meaning of liberalism and, as it were, naturalised its historical emergence, Hobhouse defended a particular conception of liberalism from its development out of its roots in the liberal tradition. The retrospective nature of Hobhouse's *Liberalism* is important not only for considering the development and transformation of liberalism into a tradition in this period, but also for grasping the particular way in which this tradition was understood by Hobhouse. Hobhouse's liberalism drew from the writings of Mill, Stephen, and Spencer, in which much had been made of the potential antagonism between the individual and the state, and recast their arguments in a dialectic by which antagonism was a prelude to a reconciliatory stage that would disclose the fundamental unity obtained once liberty and the self-development of individuals were secured from within the social order. For Hobhouse, liberalism was part of the movement of history itself in the final realisation of liberty-for-a-community.

Section one of this chapter outlines the disagreements between British liberals over the shortcomings of the Liberal party during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. These are organised around three themes: liberalism's moral character, its relationship to socialism, and its engagement in imperialism. The fault lines these disagreements exposed prompted broader reflections on liberalism's principles, their historical development, and the question of their coherence in the course of that development. It is in these reflections that we find the clear emergence of 'liberalism' as a distinct tradition in Britain and the contestation over its principles, meaning, and mantle amongst factions of liberals. There is also a broader shift in this period from an 'old' liberalism to a 'new'. The central shift in liberalism within this period has traditionally been interpreted as a shift from the 'old' 'laissez-faire' individualism to

a 'new' 'collectivist' liberalism.¹⁴³ Whilst in some sense an accurate reflection of the way in which the 'new' liberals positioned themselves politically, this interpretation fails to capture the depth of the crisis over the meaning and coherence of liberalism for multiple factions of liberals in the early twentieth century and the relationship between the 'old' and the 'new' in this period. Rather than breaking with the old, the 'new' liberals often went to great lengths to suggest that their own accounts of liberalism were consistent with the historical development of the liberal tradition. The more significant shift in this period was to distinguish liberalism from the Liberals: a tradition with a wider meaning and significance that could transcend the limitations of any particular political movement. Where a 'new' liberalism *was* distinguished from the 'old', this was by countering a contemporary narrative most explicitly advocated by A. V. Dicey, who suggested liberalism was at its root a form of individualism. The 'new' liberal narrative, in contrast, attempted to show the unity between 'individualism' and 'collectivism'. One such account of the latter type, Hobhouse's *Liberalism*, is then explored in section two.

The cornerstone of Hobhouse's liberalism was growth: both in terms of the self-development of individuals and the movement of liberalism as a dynamic historical process. Liberalism aimed towards the growth of a community via the self-development of individuals and it developed out of the antagonisms between its negative and positive features, moving toward their dialectical reconciliation. Hobhouse's *Liberalism* broke new ground in depicting liberalism as an unfolding tradition of growth and development. In doing so it set the pattern for future attempts to explain what liberalism is with reference to what it has been and to recast its past in terms which ratified the preferences of the present. Just as important, however, was to not only understand what it was not and had not been and to ensure that as liberalism moved forward, it did so on terms that had been fully purged of the contamination of alien and regressive elements that inhibited its progressive development.

Section three explores Hobhouse's criticisms of Bernard Bosanquet's 'Hegelianism', and how for Hobhouse, 'Hegelianism' and 'liberalism' were antithetical. The relationship with Hegel, however, was ambivalent and the distance between the two was not as great as Hobhouse's rhetoric was apt to suggest. Hobhouse was a vocal critic of some of the political implications of Bosanquet's thought in the context of the First World War, particularly when it came to conceptualising the state. Nevertheless, we shall see that there was powerful 'Hegelian' resonances in his own thinking about growth, development, and the moral community. These

¹⁴³ See, for example, Alan Bullock and Maurice Shock, 'Introduction' to *The Liberal Tradition: From Fox to Keynes* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1956), xix-lv & Harold J. Schultz, 'Introduction' to *English Liberalism and the State: Individualism or Collectivism?* (Lexington: D. C. Heath & Co., 1972), viii-xxiii.

were integral to his account of liberalism as a tradition and they echoed Hegel's own account of the development of subjective freedom in history. The liberal tradition was defined by Hobhouse just as much by what it was not and could not be as what it was and had been. The liminal position of Hegel in Hobhouse's account, though, revealed something deeper about the intellectual contortions involved in the definition of liberalism as a distinct tradition—the shadow of Hegel was difficult to escape.

Hobhouse was not alone in distinguishing liberalism from the Liberals. Nor was he alone in developing an 'Hegelian' liberalism. Section four considers the liberalism of two later 'Hegelians', Guido De Ruggiero and R. G. Collingwood. These two liberals are placed alongside Hobhouse to consider a broad trend in which liberalism embodied an 'Hegelian' understanding of its own history, which was essential for the understanding of liberalism as a tradition, but particularly in the case of Hobhouse and Collingwood, was keen to move away from a history that included Hegel himself: 'Hegelianism' without Hegel, so to speak. Liberalism's history was one of intellectual and historical development between conflicting historical processes that aimed toward the realisation of liberty within communities and which acted as a 'true' imperialism to bring light to the world in the face of shifting threats. Those accounts, to differing extents, insisted—sometimes shrilly—on their distance from Hegel, or at least a distorted image of Hegel, in light of his purported role in fermenting European conflict by encouraging Germans to worship the state. It is in these accounts of liberalism's development, which were so closely anchored to specific occasions in the politics of Europe between two world wars, that we find, paradoxically, some of the earliest explicit presentations of liberalism as an Olympian intellectual tradition, that transcends time and place and belongs to no single party, nation, or class. Rooted in a particular context, at a moment when hopes for the future prospects of liberalism seemed slight, liberalism nevertheless became something universal and capable of realising human liberty as part of the antagonistic movement of history itself. That, however, is to anticipate. It is the crisis of liberalism in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century that will concern us first.

I. Liberals Old and New: Moralism, Socialism, and Imperialism

By the end of the nineteenth century, factions of British liberals had grown increasingly dissatisfied with the legacy of Liberal governments and the more general course that they had been dragging liberalism with them. The Liberals had suffered electoral defeat to Disraeli in

1874, split over Irish home rule and lost in 1886¹⁴⁴, and suffered another defeat to Lord Salisbury in 1895—one commentator suggested that 'the fall of the Liberal party in 1895 was an almost unprecedented fact in our political history', they could 'scarcely call to mind any defeat at the polls so overwhelming'.¹⁴⁵ The Liberals formed governments between these defeats and returned to power in 1905, but the gulf between the high ideals of liberalism and the low achievements of Liberal governments had only widened by the turn of the twentieth century and for many liberals, the cumulative effects of Liberal defeats had dampened their enthusiasm for the party. In 1909, J. A. Hobson spoke of a crisis in liberalism provoked in no small part by the failure of laissez-faire within the realm of social reform; the rise of imperialism, as exemplified in the Liberal government's involvement in the Boer war; and the 'constitutional *fracas* caused by the invasion of the ancient privileges of the House of Commons by the House of Lords' over the People's Budget.¹⁴⁶ 'For over a quarter of a century', Hobson opined, 'Liberalism has wandered in this valley of indecision, halting, weak, vacillating, divided, and concessive'.¹⁴⁷

Part of the problem, as Bullock and Shock later identified, was that 'the absolute faith in free competition which had marked earlier generations of Liberals was being eroded by harsh economic facts'.¹⁴⁸ There had been a downturn in economic growth following the 1870 depression, and whilst there had been an increase in real wages, the stratification of wealth and the concentration of capital implied to a new generation of liberals that it was unlikely for either of these to be redistributed spontaneously from the rich to the poor in the near future. For them, it had become increasingly clear by the end of the nineteenth century that unemployment and poverty had not been curtailed by the Poor Law and that the Gladstone governments had been ineffective at holding back the economic tide that was eroding the

¹⁴⁴ For discussion on Irish home rule with respect to both Liberals and Conservatives, see W. C. Lubenow, 'Irish Home Rule and the Social Basis of the Great Separation in the Liberal Party in 1886', *The Historical Journal* 28, no.1 (1985): 125-142 & Emily Jones, 'Irish Home Rule, c.1886-1893' in *Edmund Burke and the Invention of Modern Conservatism, 1830-1914; an intellectual history* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 114-155.

¹⁴⁵ P. J. MacDonell, 'The Historic Basis of Liberalism' in *Essays in Liberalism by Six Oxford Men* (London: Cassell and Company, 1897), 267. See also Jonathan Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

¹⁴⁶ J. A. Hobson, *The Crisis of Liberalism: New Issues of Democracy* (London: 1909), vii-viii. Introduced by Lloyd George in 1909 as a 'war' budget to 'wage implacable warfare against poverty and squalidness', it was passed by the Commons but rejected by the Lords, despite the constitutional convention that prohibited them from interfering with financial measures authorised by the Commons. See also Bruce K. Murray, 'The Politics of the People's Budget', *The Historical Journal* 16, no.3 (1973): 555-570.

¹⁴⁷ Hobson, *The Crisis of Liberalism*, viii.

¹⁴⁸ Bullock and Shock, 'Introduction', xlv.

liberal shore and people's livelihoods.¹⁴⁹ Growing economic insecurities had, in effect, 'erected a kind of despair' amongst liberals who were unable to confront them.¹⁵⁰ It is somewhat along these lines that Hobson, a member of the 'new' generation, declared 'the old laissez-faire liberalism is dead'.¹⁵¹

The distinction between 'old' liberals and 'new' liberals in this period can often be overdrawn.¹⁵² It is therefore necessary to make two general points before examining the emergence of the 'new' liberals and their relationship to liberalism in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. The first point is that the Liberal party under Gladstone had never wholly committed to 'laissez-faire' as a doctrinaire platform and they had already been slowly moving away from laissez-faire policies by the 1880s—they had also become common coin having been silently co-opted and then explicitly adopted by Conservatives. That being said, there was a conscious effort to distinguish a 'new' liberalism from those that looked back to an 'old' liberalism that had been, according to its admirers, anchored by a laissez-faire 'individualism' and erroneously abandoned in the pursuit of 'collectivism'. Herbert Spencer, in a collection of essays published in 1884, suggested that 'the so-called Liberalism of the present' was in fact a 'new Toryism', a perversion of 'what Liberalism was in the past': 'they have lost sight of the truth that in past times Liberalism habitually stood for individual freedom *versus* State-coercion'. 'How', Spencer asked, 'is it that Liberals have lost sight of this? How is it that Liberalism, getting more and more into power, has grown more and more

¹⁴⁹ Richard Bellamy, *Liberalism and Modern Society* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 47-8. Hobson suggested that 'readers of Lord Morley's "Life of Gladstone" will understand that it was possible for a great Liberal statesman of the Victorian age to conduct a long political career of large and fruitful effort without confronting in its full shape any of those great social-economic issues which now in this, as in every other civilised country, occupy the front places on the stage of politics'. Hobson, *The Crisis of Liberalism*, 3.

¹⁵⁰ Hilaire Belloc, 'The Liberal Tradition' in *Essays in Liberalism by Six Oxford Men*, 3, 18-9.

¹⁵¹ Hobson, *The Crisis of Liberalism*, 3.

¹⁵² Freedon, for example, acknowledges the connection and resemblance between the 'new' and the 'old'—the 'new' had to come from somewhere, after all—but is often keen to emphasise the novelty and unity of the 'new' as an ideology for social reform that replaced the 'old', suggesting that liberalism underwent a significant transformation where 'old Individualist notions were finally discarded in favour of a fusion of individualism and socialism'. Michael Freedon, *The New Liberalism; an ideology of social reform* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 257-8. Cf. Stefan Collini, *Liberalism and Sociology: L. T. Hobhouse and Political Argument in England 1880-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 13-50. For two broader challenges to the dichotomy between the 'new' liberals and the 'old' laissez-faire liberals, see David Weinstein, *Utilitarianism and the New Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), esp.1-20 & James Thompson, 'Modern Liberty Redefined' in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Political Thought*, ed. Gareth Steadman Jones and Gregory Claeys (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2011), 720-747.

coercive in its legislation?'.¹⁵³ Reflecting on the proper sphere of government, Spencer suggested that its true aim was

not to regulate commerce; not to educate the people; not to teach religion; not to administer charity; not to make roads and railways; but simply to defend the natural rights of man—to protect person and property—to prevent the aggressions of the powerful upon the weak—in a word, to administer justice

This was both 'the natural' and 'the original' aim of a government and 'it was not intended to do less: it ought not to be allowed to do more'.¹⁵⁴

In a series of lectures first published in 1905, A. V. Dicey juxtaposed 'individualism' and 'collectivism' as two contending philosophies that gave 'expression to different, if not absolutely inconsistent, ways of regarding the relation between man and the State'.¹⁵⁵ Dicey identified 'Benthamite individualism' as synonymous with liberalism and further suggested that 'liberty and equality, each of which represent the best aspect of *laissez-faire*, were the fundamental ideas embodied in the Benthamite reform[s]' that characterised the liberal politics of the early nineteenth century.¹⁵⁶ Alongside Bentham, 'the principle of free trade may, as far as Englishmen are concerned, be treated as the doctrine of Adam Smith'.¹⁵⁷ Dicey had little time for Spencer, but he did consider his arguments to be part of one continuum, between his 'absolute individualism' and the 'practical or utilitarian individualism of J. S. Mill and H. Sidgwick'.¹⁵⁸ Dicey's account of the ideas animating the nineteenth century's political landscape was a shift from this 'individualist liberalism to unsystematic collectivism or

¹⁵³ Herbert Spencer, 'The New Toryism' in *The Man Versus the State: with six essays on government, freedom, and society*, ed. Eric Mack (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1981, [1884]) 5, 10-11.

¹⁵⁴ Herbert Spencer, 'On the Proper Sphere of Government' in *The Man Versus the State*, 187. See also Edward Bristow, 'The Liberty and Property Defence League and Individualism', *The Historical Journal* 18, no.4 (1975): 761-789.

¹⁵⁵ Albert Venn Dicey, *Lectures on the Relation between Law and Public Opinion in England during the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Richard VandeWetering (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2008 [1917]), 212-3. See also William Sharp McKechnie, *The State and the Individual: An Introduction to Political Science, with special reference to socialistic and individualistic theories* (Glasgow: 1896).

¹⁵⁶ Dicey, *Law and Public Opinion in England*, 49-50, 140-141.

¹⁵⁷ Dicey, *Law and Public Opinion in England*, 19-20. F. A. Walker, an American political economist, in 1879 had suggested that the political economists of 'Germany, Italy, Belgium, and France' had been 'doing the work which Adam Smith began, in his spirit' in contradistinction to *laissez-faire* liberals who had turned a one-sided reading of Smith to their own purposes, F. A. Walker, 'The Present Standing of Political Economy' in *Discussions in Economics and Statistics*, ed. D. R. Dewey (New York: 1899), 320.

¹⁵⁸ Dicey, *Law and Public Opinion in England*, 14-15. D. G. Ritchie considered *The Man versus the State* to 'involve grave philosophical errors', but nonetheless suggested that it is 'the most conspicuous work of recent years in defence of "individualism"' and suggested that Spencer was 'the most formidable intellectual foe with whom the New Radicalism has to reckon'. D. G. Ritchie, *The Principles of State Interference* (London: 1902), 3. For Sidgwick's 'utilitarian individualism' in distinction to 'Absolute Individualism', see Henry Sidgwick, *The Elements of Politics* (London: MacMillan, 1908 [1891]), 44-66.

socialism'.¹⁵⁹ Dicey acknowledged the complex nature of this shift and the lingering presence of individualistic rhetoric under the governments of Gladstone, but in the introduction to the second edition of 1914, he summarised that 'by 1900 the doctrine of *laissez-faire*, in spite of the large element of truth which it contains, had more or less lost its hold upon the English people'.¹⁶⁰ Dicey recognised the shift from one to the other being 'the stress of circumstances', and one which many liberals found themselves caught between, but this was on his account nonetheless a deviation 'farther and farther from the lines laid down by Bentham, and followed by the Liberals of 1830'.¹⁶¹

The 'new' liberal narratives were a challenge to the 'old' in the sense that they presented an alternative image of a liberal tradition. The 'new' liberal account aimed to overcome what it perceived to be liberalism's previous limitations, whilst also countering the narratives that favoured the 'old' in the terms of 'laissez-faire' and 'individualism' in distinction to 'collectivism'. The second point to make is that whilst the rhetoric of 'new' liberalism suggested a significant transformation, if anything, the 'new' liberals were often as keen if not more so to emphasise points of continuity, rather than rupture and attempted to maintain some semblance of liberal values in a shifting political circumstance. For Hobson, liberals had never been exclusively committed to a 'negative' liberalism which removed 'political and economic shackles'; the previous century had only 'tended to lay excessive emphasis upon the aspect of liberty which consists in absence from restraint'.¹⁶² For many 'new' liberals, liberalism was characterised by *both* negative and positive accounts of liberty and they attempted to show either the unity or middle-way between the two contending philosophies of 'individualism' and 'collectivism'. Whilst there was a perceived failure of social reform and a sense that a *laissez-faire* 'individualism' was responsible for that failure, the gulf between liberal ambitions and Liberal actions was a more profound one, which prompted a reflection on the very nature of liberalism itself—for liberals both 'old' and 'new'.

The deeper worry at the turn of the century was not just that liberalism had abandoned *laissez-faire*, or remained myopically fixated with it, or that the Liberals were having their

¹⁵⁹ Dicey, *Law and Public Opinion in England*, 284.

¹⁶⁰ Dicey, *Law and Public Opinion in England*, 363-5.

¹⁶¹ Dicey, *Law and Public Opinion in England*, 213. It is important to note that Dicey did suggest that the teachings of Bentham could have socialistic implications once utility maximisation was plucked from Bentham's system and placed in a collectivist context, see Dicey, *Law and Public Opinion in England*, 215-220. Spencer also suggested that some of the confusion within liberalism had come from Bentham in relation to the 'divine right of parliaments', see Spencer 'The Great Political Superstition' in *The Man Versus the State*, esp.137-148.

¹⁶² Hobson, *The Crisis of Liberalism*, 92-3. See also Freedman, *The New Liberalism*, 32-35.

clothes stolen by the Conservatives (even though they were).¹⁶³ The deeper worry was that liberalism had lost its soul, not just because it had abandoned a principled commitment to laissez-faire, or anything else, but because it had abandoned *all* principle. It was widely felt that the Liberal party ought to move away from the 'old' by several factions of 'new' liberals in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, but the way that this was to be done was by finding and reconnecting with liberalism's historic principles, and renewing and revitalising them for a shifted political circumstance—not breaking with the past.¹⁶⁴ For liberals 'old' and 'new', the consensus was that liberalism had lost its soul; the question was where it had been misplaced and what could be done to reanimate the soulless Liberal body. As mentioned, there had been a steady growth of government intervention by Liberal governments towards the end of the nineteenth century in the move away from laissez-faire, much to Spencer's complaint, and though the rationale for such intervention had remained individualist, or 'Benthamite', this had proved in practice to be a rationale capable of justifying whatever the Liberal government wanted to do at any given time.¹⁶⁵ As even Hobson remarked, whilst there had been in fact 'various enlargements of public activity', this had produced weighty edifices with 'no avowed principle or system' underlying them. The aim of liberals, even those of a 'new' hue, was not to reverse or break with the previous Liberal legacy, but to find 'the intellectual and moral ability to accept and execute a positive progressive policy which involves a new conception of the functions of State', placing liberalism on a surer footing than it previously had enjoyed by reconnecting with its principles.¹⁶⁶

In 1895, Herbert Samuel presented a paper on 'The New Liberalism' to the Rainbow Circle.¹⁶⁷ He declared that 'the Liberalism based upon Bentham's philosophy & Adam Smith's economics is sapped and riddled & its most successful opponents have been the Socialists'. In response to this, Samuel evoked 'the possibility of a third social philosophy' whose 'root idea must be the unity of society' and 'a determination to abolish every evil condition from life'.¹⁶⁸ Whilst

¹⁶³ "'Laissez faire" and "Freedom of Contract" used to be Liberal watchwords, but have now been given up or left to the Tories', Ritchie, *The Principles of State Interference*, 4.

¹⁶⁴ See Collini, *Liberalism and Sociology*, 39-42.

¹⁶⁵ Dicey, *Law and Public Opinion in England*, 364. See also Bellamy, *Liberalism and Modern Society*, 21.

¹⁶⁶ Hobson, *The Crisis of Liberalism*, xi. See also, Belloc, 'The Liberal Tradition', 19.

¹⁶⁷ The Rainbow Circle were a group of liberals that met regularly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, often discussing some of the more radical ambitions of liberal social reform. See Michael Freeden, 'Introduction' to *Camden Fourth Series, Vol.38: Minutes of the Rainbow Circle, 1894-1924*, ed. Michael Freeden (London: University College London, 1989), 1-15.

¹⁶⁸ See William Clarke, 'Minutes of the Rainbow Circle, 6th November 1895' in *Camden Fourth Series, Vol.38: Minutes of the Rainbow Circle, 1894-1924*, ed. Michael Freeden (London: University College London, 1989), 27-28. The chairman noted that the discussion that followed considered 'whether apart from some wing of the Socialist party any party would be likely to adopt Mr. Samuel's view; & whether the Liberal party would'.

Samuel suggested that 'old beliefs must be left', he considered 'the greatest liberty of the greatest number' to be 'the motto of the New Liberalism', and later set out in 1902's *Liberalism*—Samuel became a Liberal MP by the end of that year—the aim to reconnect liberalism to its roots, and more importantly to the moral principles with which it had lost touch: 'the trunk of the tree of Liberalism [Samuel wrote] is rooted in the soil of ethics'. 'It is the duty of each man', he continued, 'to lead, so far as he is able, and to help others to lead, whatever may be held to be the best possible life'. If the state aimed 'to secure, so far as it is able, the fullest opportunities to lead the best life', then 'to lessen the causes of poverty and to lighten its effects are essential parts of a right policy of state action'.¹⁶⁹ Samuel further suggested that the New Liberalism must, 'above all... frankly accept democratic methods; & embrace our Imperial opportunities'. He distinguished between a 'true Imperialism and a false', the former signifying among other aims, 'a loyal determination to defend the empire we hold, a sentiment of close unity with the English colonists, a desire to promise the interest of the empire without injury to domestic progress' in distinction to 'a lust for dominion for the sake only of the glory and the wealth it brings'.¹⁷⁰

In this brief overview of Samuel's account, we find an attempt to distinguish a 'new' liberalism from an 'old' by reimagining the liberal tradition in the context of Liberal limitations. There are also three broader themes typical of the 'new' liberal narratives in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century: an account of the guiding historic moral principles of liberalism; a recognition of the relationship between liberalism and socialism in tackling poverty; and the question of liberalism's relationship to imperialism and empire. Whilst the focus of the narratives regarding liberalism's development in this period were primarily on the development, evolution, and reforms of the Liberal party, a side-effect was that 'liberalism' began to be represented and identified as an intellectual tradition that was distinct from the party and imbued with a wider intellectual and moral significance in its crusade to combat social ills. In one account, Charles James Fox was singled out as the 'founder of Liberalism as distinguished from Whiggism' for 'his far-sighted declaration on Colonial policy'—which suggested that self-government was the only method for 'retaining the Colonies'. 'The search into history reveals the Liberals as the builders of the Empire', and 'the grant of Home Rule[...] was the gift of successive Liberal statesmen in the face of strong opposition from the Tories'.¹⁷¹ A different account suggested, in good Whiggish fashion nonetheless, that the story of

¹⁶⁹ Herbert Samuel, *Liberalism: an attempt to state the principles and proposals of contemporary England* (London: 1902), 6, 11.

¹⁷⁰ Samuel, *Liberalism*, 343-344.

¹⁷¹ A. C. Forster Boulton, 'Liberalism and the Empire', *The Westminster Review* (1899): 1-4.

liberalism began 'in the revolution of 1688'¹⁷²; another account suggested slightly later during the reign of George III, 'the history of liberalism is, for practical purposes, the history of liberalism since 1760'.¹⁷³ Yet despite these differences, the history of liberalism was at the same time said to be a history with permanent significance that stood beyond the particularities of both the Whigs and the Liberals. As Walter Lyon Blease remarked in 1913, whilst Fox, Richard Cobden, and David Lloyd George 'exhibit great differences in comparison', 'the three men are alike in their desire to set free the individual from existing social bonds, and to procure for him liberty of growth'.¹⁷⁴

P. J. MacDonell suggested, as one of 'six Oxford men' reflecting on liberalism, that if liberalism was at all to survive following the defeat of 1895, it 'must once again base its claims on broad, abstract, moral lines'.¹⁷⁵ Liberalism, he suggested, ought to 'return to its earlier, better ideal[...] the moral grounds of liberty and justice'.¹⁷⁶ The progressive notion of individual freedom was sometimes presented as having bloomed from even older seeds of liberty whose potential was only now being fully realised, of which the Liberal party had been the historic custodians. One such account, from Lord Acton, hymned

the sowing of the seed of Athens[...] until the ripened harvest was gathered by men of our race. It is the delicate fruit of a mature civilisation[...] In every age its progress has been beset by its natural enemies, by ignorance and superstition, by lust of conquest and by love of ease, by the strong man's craving for power, and the poor man's craving for food¹⁷⁷

Even those less explicit in the ancient roots of this ethic presented liberalism as part of a wider story: as 'wherever there is inequality, wherever there is unjust privilege, wherever men are chattels rather than citizens, there will be liberalism and liberals fighting to redress the balance'.¹⁷⁸

These accounts of liberty's historical development often involved 'not only a negative but a positive conception' of liberty. For Lord Asquith, the 'true significance of liberty' was to 'make the best use of faculty, opportunity, energy, life'.¹⁷⁹ On its negative side, 'the Liberal movement

¹⁷² MacDonell, 'The Historic Basis of Liberalism', 219.

¹⁷³ W. L. Blease, *A Short History of English Liberalism* (London: 1913), 42.

¹⁷⁴ Blease, *History of English Liberalism*, 8-9.

¹⁷⁵ MacDonell, 'The Historic Basis of Liberalism', 269.

¹⁷⁶ MacDonell, 'The Historic Basis of Liberalism', 273.

¹⁷⁷ J. E. E. Dalberg-Acton, *The History of Freedom and Other Essays* (London: 1907), 1.

¹⁷⁸ MacDonell, 'The Historic Basis of Liberalism', 226, 275.

¹⁷⁹ H. H. Asquith, 'Introduction' to Samuel, *Liberalism*, x.

early acquired, and has never quite lost, the character of an attack on privilege, on oligarchy, on caste—on everything, in short, which derogates from the dignity and freedom of the individual man'.¹⁸⁰ J. S. Mill, retrospectively seen as one of liberalism's important articulators, had 'crystallised the principle in a treatise which, once [and] for all, vindicated the importance of individuality against the blessings of State-regulated existence'.¹⁸¹ Liberalism was taken to be the protection of the individual against what was considered arbitrary interference, not simply in terms of right but, for Lord Acton, in terms of duty: 'by liberty I mean the assurance that every man shall be protected in doing what he believes his duty against the influence of authority and majorities, custom and opinion'.¹⁸² On its positive side, for Samuel, the aim of liberalism was to improve both 'the moral and material condition of the people'.¹⁸³ For Blease, a liberal aimed 'to give equal opportunity' to oneself and one's fellows as equals in order 'for self-expression and self-development'. As such 'the ideal Liberal state is that in which every individual is equally free to work out his own life'.¹⁸⁴ Liberalism took the individual as citizen not simply as fact, but as an ideal.¹⁸⁵

The identification of liberalism's moral principles broadly converged over dual accounts of negative and positive liberty for the 'new' liberals, often emphasising the significance of the latter for tackling their contemporary social ills and elevating the individual's moral capacity. That being said, both positive and negative liberty had the potential to be put to radically different ends and masked deep conflicts between liberals and their critics about the particular characterisation of liberalism and the course of the Liberal party. The British Idealist Bernard Bosanquet, for example, derived support for a laissez-faire economic individualism and anti-welfare policies from collectivist premises. Thinkers as different as Spencer and Bosanquet provided rival accounts of the evolutionary and self-developing aspect of human moral capacity, but both were, for different reasons, critical of the state legislation that the 'new' liberals saw as conducive to the full development of that moral capacity.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁰ MacDonell, 'The Historic Basis of Liberalism', 226.

¹⁸¹ J. Allsebrook Simon, 'Liberals and Labour' in *Essays in Liberalism*, 109. It is worth noting that the legacy of Mill was not uncritically accepted by the 'new' liberals: 'even J. S. Mill, when he came to apply his utilitarianism to politics, left a good deal of his individualism behind', Hobson, *The Crisis of Liberalism*, 79.

¹⁸² Dalberg-Acton, *The History of Freedom*, 3.

¹⁸³ Samuel, *Liberalism*, 4, 12.

¹⁸⁴ Blease, *History of English Liberalism*, 7, 9.

¹⁸⁵ Belloc, 'The Liberal Tradition', 7.

¹⁸⁶ See Gerald F. Gaus, 'Bosanquet's communitarian defense of economic individualism: a lesson in the complexities of political theory', *The New Liberalism: Reconciling Liberty and Community*, eds. Avital Simhony, and David Weinstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 137–158. See also Gerald F. Gaus, 'Liberalism at the End of the Century', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 5, no.2 (2000): 179–199.

The rhetoric of 'positive' liberty often overlapped with socialist causes, and the rise of socialism was one of the factors, together with the opposition to the Conservatives, that contributed to self-defensive efforts to construct 'liberalism' as a distinct tradition. By the 1880s, socialism had emerged as a clear political movement that promised to at once fulfil liberal promises by transcending them, and threatened to topple Liberal parties as its momentum gained pace.¹⁸⁷ For Hilaire Belloc, writing in 1897, socialism sought to 'remedy a very present and terribly practical evil by sweeping away the highly chimerical and theoretic barriers which human religion and a sentiment as old as the race have opposed to their experiments', which included 'the sanctity of contract, the love of freedom, the virtue of self-control, and the inviolable right to property acquired by labour or self-denial'.¹⁸⁸ Socialism posed a threat to individual liberty as an 'attack upon personal production, personal accommodation, and consequent personal possession'.¹⁸⁹ Its relative appeal owed much to a failure in liberalism to 'mould the material obstacles in its path until they become food for its own continuance', which not only reflected liberalism's failure to will the means to its own ends, but also its passive compliance in that defeat.¹⁹⁰ For J. A. Simon, to admit that the 'wage-earning unit will be unequally matched in his struggle with the huge forces of capitalism' was not to denounce capitalism nor endorse the socialistic removal of industrial competition, but to suggest that 'free choice must be translated into power to effect our choice'.¹⁹¹ Quite how that choice was to be meaningfully effected was another matter.

In the early twentieth century, the persistent and pernicious problems of poverty and unemployment suggested not only that the chosen course of government action were defective, but that the nature and the scale of the problem had eluded understanding, so also the scale of its effects on individuals' self-development. Economic modernisation had come at a heavy cost; the individuals' moral character paid the price.¹⁹² Some liberals aimed to elevate the moral character of the masses through various campaigns and legislative measures, such as temperance movements, arguing that the 'social problem' was a significant barrier to freedom.¹⁹³ Others turned to the material conditions of poverty. J. S. Mill himself had of course flirted with the notion that 'society is fully entitled to abrogate or alter any particular right of

¹⁸⁷ Hobson, *The Crisis of Liberalism*, x-xi. See also Freedman, *The New Liberalism*, 25-52.

¹⁸⁸ Belloc, 'The Liberal Tradition', 29-30.

¹⁸⁹ Belloc, 'The Liberal Tradition', 4-5.

¹⁹⁰ Belloc, 'The Liberal Tradition', 3, 18-9.

¹⁹¹ Simon, 'Liberals and Labour', 123.

¹⁹² See Bellamy, *Liberalism and Modern Society*, 10-3.

¹⁹³ Alan Ryan, 'Liberalism 1900-1940' in *The Cambridge Companion to Liberalism*, ed. Steven Wall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 68.

property which on sufficient consideration it judges to stand in the way of the public good', and that 'the social problem of the future' was 'how to unite the greatest individual liberty of action, with a common ownership in the raw material of the globe, and an equal participation of all in the benefits of combined labour'.¹⁹⁴ As the nineteenth century progressed, industrial development had led to the 'antithesis' of liberalism, where capital was 'held in large masses and in a few hands', working conditions verged on servitude, economic interest was held over political interest, and the bulk of citizens were in a property-less position—owning 'not even their roofs'.¹⁹⁵

Hobhouse and Hobson, in particular, were concerned with rising inequality and the centralisation of capital, which threatened to erode the private space necessary for the individual's sense of security and freedom of expression. For Hobson, the Liberal party required 'a more evolutionary idea of liberty[...] to give the requisite *élan de vie* to the movement'.¹⁹⁶ As a consequence, they both construed the individualist claim to property as an aspect of the social nature of production, in order to generate claims about welfare which eschewed the rhetoric of taking the private income of one individual and giving to those in need, possibly through charity or moral duty, in favour of the social nature of wealth itself. As Hobhouse remarked: 'If he [the prosperous businessman who thinks that he has made his fortune entirely through his own will and self-help] dug to the foundations of his fortune he would recognise that, as it is society that maintains and guarantees his possessions, so also it is society which is an indispensable partner in its original creation'. Furthermore, 'an individualism which ignored the social factor in wealth will deplete the national resources, deprive the community of its just share in the fruits of industry and so result in a one-sided and inequitable distribution of wealth'.¹⁹⁷ More broadly for the 'new' liberals, it was clear that the aim of the 'practical interpretation and realisation of moral and intellectual liberty for the

¹⁹⁴ John Stuart Mill, 'Chapters on Socialism' in *On Liberty and Other Essays*, ed. J. Gray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991 [1861]), 279; *Autobiography* (London: Penguin, 1989 [1879]), 175. Hobhouse remarked that the Mill of liberal and socialist ideals are 'not conflicting, but complimentary', *Democracy and Reaction* (London: 1909), 225-7. For a recent defence of Mill's socialist credentials, see Helen McCabe, *John Stuart Mill, Socialist* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2021).

¹⁹⁵ Belloc, 'The Liberal Tradition', 29.

¹⁹⁶ Hobson, *The Crisis of Liberalism*, 93. See also Michael Freeden, 'J. A. Hobson as a New Liberal Theorist: Some Aspects of his Social Thought Until 1914', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 34, no.3 (1973): 424-5.

¹⁹⁷ Hobhouse, *Liberalism*, 92. See also John Allet, 'New Liberalism and the Property Doctrine', *Polity* 20, no.1 (1987): 66-78.

people' could not be 'detached in political endeavour from the other more material liberties'.¹⁹⁸

Whilst Hobhouse had shown intermittent flickers of enthusiasm for collectivist movements, by the end of the 1890s he came to distinguish the moral components of socialism from socialist organisations. Hobhouse was keen to show how 'true Socialism'—in distinction to its perverted organised forms—was the logical extension of liberalism, as it 'serves to complete rather than destroy the leading Liberal ideas'. For Hobhouse, socialism was desirable in its ethical and humanitarian content, rather than as a specific party doctrine, and in such a form was compatible with liberalism.¹⁹⁹ Edward Caird, a Scottish idealist, considered it 'altogether a mistake to think at the present time individualists and socialists generally stand to each other as absolutely opposed sects, holding reciprocally exclusive dogmas, and unable to make any concessions to each other'.²⁰⁰ Other liberals, however, suggested that too much had been conceded, as the Liberal party had 'been beaten because it [had] attempted to meet the Collectivist on his own ground', rather than basing liberalism on a higher moral grounding.²⁰¹

Not only were liberals such as Hobhouse and Hobson more sympathetic to socialism than some of their liberal contemporaries, both were also critical of Liberal imperialism—a common focus for critiques of liberalism made by their contemporary socialists.²⁰² Hobson lambasted Liberal leaders who had 'sold their party to a confederacy of stock gamblers and jingo sentimentalists' and how the party had now found themselves 'impotent to defend Free Trade, Free Press, Free Schools, Free Speech, or any of the rudiments of ancient liberalism'.²⁰³ As Hobhouse later reflected, the party were 'becoming Imperialists in their sleep'.²⁰⁴

Imperialism was the wedge that drove Hobhouse apart from Asquith. It not only revealed a conflict in policy but disclosed a difference in their accounts of liberalism's character and implications. Both deplored the poverty they saw in British society; both felt that the Liberal party had been politically weak and ineffective in dealing with that poverty; but they sharply disagreed on the Liberal party's involvement in the Boer war, which displayed a deeper disagreement about the nature of liberalism itself.²⁰⁵ Asquith understood freedom in universal

¹⁹⁸ Hobson, *The Crisis of Liberalism*, 94.

¹⁹⁹ Hobhouse, *Democracy and Reaction*, 229. Collini notes this shift in Hobhouse's relationship to the Fabians, *Liberalism and Sociology*, 72.

²⁰⁰ Edward Caird, *Individualism and Socialism* (Glasgow: 1897), 15.

²⁰¹ MacDonell, 'The Historic Basis of Liberalism', 272-3.

²⁰² Hobhouse, *Democracy and Reaction*, 211.

²⁰³ J. A. Hobson, *Imperialism* (London: 1902), 143-4.

²⁰⁴ Hobhouse, *Liberalism*, 107.

²⁰⁵ Collini, *Liberalism and Sociology*, 81-2.

terms, which justified the aggressive international development that socialist critics of liberalism deplored; whereas for Hobhouse, the more localised sense of community and the specific history of liberalism, to be explored below, led to a more cautious expansion of liberalism that was opposed to the imperialism sanctioned by the Liberal party. For Hobhouse, the operative principle of imperialism was the 'forcible establishment and maintenance of racial ascendancy' which was antithetical to liberal principles, as he construed them. Between 'liberalism' and 'imperialism', 'there can be no reconciliation'.²⁰⁶ Hobhouse was equally critical of biological differentiations between races, such as the evolutionary components embraced in Spencer's account of self-development and, in particular, the support for eugenics that stemmed from those beliefs, instead prioritising the *ethical* development of human beings.²⁰⁷ This again reinforced the argument against imperialism by denying its biological extension. In 1915, he lambasted the 'ideas of domination based on racial superiority' which had had a 'brief but disastrous ascendancy' in British liberalism and imperialism.²⁰⁸

This manner of presentation may suggest that the split was a relatively simple matter of two competing factions, one for and one against imperialism, the latter on the right side of history, the other not, continuing in this respect the polarised reaction among its supporters to the Liberal government's actions during the Boer war. The reality was more complex.²⁰⁹ Hobson, though a critic of imperialism, was often sympathetic to eugenics in the course of social improvement.²¹⁰ Hobhouse himself was sympathetic to 'earlier' approaches to empire, which he depicted in air-brushed terms: 'a free, informal union with the Colonies, combined with a conscientious but tolerant government of the tropical dependencies which have come under our control' that was, to his mind, fully compatible with the liberal principle of self-government.²¹¹ It is unlikely that the 'tropical dependencies' saw it in the same way. Imperialism, like socialism, posed a challenge to liberal assumptions: how could racial and economic inequality across the globe be justified in the terms of an intellectual tradition that was explicitly committed to the realisation of liberty and the self-development of individuals? For many liberals, this was reconciled as part of the 'civilising' mission that liberalism took upon itself as its burden, and though Hobson and Hobhouse had their differences to Samuel and were critics of imperialism, there was a similar attempt to separate out a 'true' approach

²⁰⁶ Hobhouse, *Democracy and Reaction*, 47-8.

²⁰⁷ Freedon, *The New Liberalism*, 177-180, 186-9.

²⁰⁸ L. T. Hobhouse, *The World in Conflict* (London: 1915), 52-3.

²⁰⁹ See David Boucher, 'Sane' and 'Insane' Imperialism: British Idealism, New Liberalism, and Liberal Imperialism', *History of European Ideas* 44, no.8 (2018): 1189-1204.

²¹⁰ Freedon, *The New Liberalism*, 185-6.

²¹¹ Hobhouse, *Democracy and Reaction*, 47.

to empire and social progress that was compatible with liberalism in distinction to some of the imperial practices of Liberals within the broader crisis of liberalism that Hobson identified.²¹²

To summarise, liberalism was initially tied in the minds of its British publicists to the activities of the Liberal party; ruminations upon the tradition of liberalism tracked the triumphs and defeats of the party itself. The manifest failure of the Liberal party—the party of principle—to exhibit those principles in government weakened that link by the end of the nineteenth century; the possibility that socialism might better represent and exemplify the ethical content of those principles crossed 'new' liberal minds with increasing regularity. Others were aghast and dismayed at liberals entertaining such a suggestion. This gave pause for reflection on all sides: liberalism was re-examined as an intellectual tradition that originated before and encompassed more than the commitments of the Liberal party. That re-evaluation was not prompted by one single issue alone. A constellation of particular crises, concerning the moral character of liberalism in an age of mass democracy, its relationship to socialism, and its adventures in imperialism, for the 'new' liberals in particular, put liberal values in a different light and suggested to many observers that liberalism had lost touch with its principles, that its inheritance was being squandered. What those principles were and how they related to one another differed for factions of liberals. Some idealised a past 'individualism' that had come to be abandoned in the pursuit of 'collectivism'; others attempted to show the consistency between 'collectivism' and 'individualism'. Some were more sympathetic to socialist and imperialist causes; others were more hesitant in their commitments.

Answers to these questions began to be formulated in terms that transformed the way in which liberalism was understood, because they could not be answered with sole reference to the party or without reference to the past. The result was a series of ruminations on both 'the deeds of the past' and the 'hopes of the future', which as Collini notes, introduced 'a curious traditionalism' into mainstream liberal thinking.²¹³ Though the 'new' liberals distinguished themselves from the 'old', they looked back to the past to understand liberalism's character and contested the liberal mantle. Collini suggests that the 'new' liberals were forming 'new patterns out of a common cloth'²¹⁴, which is true for some of the language and frames of reference in liberal thought, but the curiosity of this traditionalism that entered liberal thinking ought to not be understated when it comes to the emergence of liberalism as a retrospective

²¹² See Duncan Bell, 'Democracy and Empire: J. A. Hobson, L. T. Hobhouse, and the Crisis of Liberalism' in *Reordering the World: Essays on Liberalism and Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 341-362.

²¹³ Collini, *Liberalism and Sociology*, 39.

²¹⁴ Collini, *Liberalism and Sociology*, 50.

phenomenon in this period. The 'new' liberals did forge a novel path, not simply in terms of rejecting an 'old' laissez-faire liberalism, but by presenting liberalism as a moving and evolving tradition that was distinct from the narratives that saw a lost past of 'individualism' and a misguided future of 'collectivism'. That novelty, however, did not necessarily mark a movement of success or 'the essential continuity of the liberal tradition'.²¹⁵ The 'new' liberal narratives mark an important pivot in how liberalism was conceptualised at the time of a crisis of confidence in the Liberal future by revising and rewriting that very tradition. One powerful rumination on liberalism as a tradition, linking the past to the future, was Hobhouse's *Liberalism*.

II. *Liberalism*

Leonard Trelawny Hobhouse (1864-1929) was born on 8th September 1864 at St Ive, near Liskeard, Cornwall. He was the youngest of the seven children of the Revd Reginald Hobhouse (1818-1895), rector of St Ive for fifty years. At school at Marlborough he read the works of Spencer and Mill, and Mazzini's Essays, and from their influence became a liberal, albeit a radical one. He obtained a scholarship to Corpus Christi, Oxford, to study Classics, and later became a tutor there. From the late 1880s he developed an interest in trade union politics and became friendly with trade union leaders and the Fabians. Disillusioned with Oxford, he took a job as a journalist at the Manchester Guardian. His appointment coincided with the outbreak of the Boer war, and he used his position to criticise the government's imperialist policy, condemning the use of concentration camps and the suspension of the Cape constitution. He then resigned from the Guardian, and resumed an academic career in London, at the London School of Economics as Professor of Sociology. In 1910, Hobhouse was commissioned by the Home University Library to write what became his most enduring work, *Liberalism* (1911).²¹⁶

In 1905, Hobhouse concluded *Democracy and Reaction* by suggesting that 'the differences between a true, consistent, public-spirited Liberalism and a rational Collectivism ought, with a

²¹⁵ Freeden, *The New Liberalism*, 4.

²¹⁶ See Michael Freeden's entry on Hobhouse in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, from which these details are excerpted: [<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/33906>]. See also, J. A. Hobson and Morris Ginsberg, *L. T. Hobhouse, his Life and Work* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1931) & Maurice Cowling, *Religion and Public Doctrine in England, Volume III: Accommodations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 477-482.

genuine effort at mutual understanding, to disappear'.²¹⁷ *Liberalism* aimed to not only show the compatibility between the two, but reveal the fundamental unity in the dynamic of liberalism's history. In the latter work, Hobhouse gave an account of liberalism's historical development. He presented liberalism as one particular intellectual lineage amongst others in history but presented that history as a living and moving tradition in relation to the broader realisation of human freedom. This broader movement hinged on a fundamental antagonism: whilst freedom is an essential characteristic of human experience and of universal significance, 'at all times men have lived in societies'.²¹⁸ The modern state, as an expression of the social collective, starts 'from the basis of authoritarian order', negating that freedom. In contradistinction to this, 'the protest against that order' in its religious, political, economic, social, and ethical manifestations, is the 'historic beginning of Liberalism'. In its negative expression of freedom, liberalism aims to 'remove obstacles which block human progress' and 'everywhere it is removing super incumbent weights, knocking off fetters, clearing away obstructions'. As such, 'Liberalism appears first as a criticism, sometimes even as a destructive and revolutionary criticism'. But 'the work of reconstruction has gone on by side by side with that of demolition', such that the modern state is capable of embodying the progressive elements of liberalism.²¹⁹ Hobhouse adduced the example of arbitrary government, which had been 'both logically and historically the first negative point of attack', matched by a positive commitment to establishing the rule of law, in contradistinction to the rule of men. Rather than an irreconcilable antagonism between individual freedom and the social order, 'law is [shown to be] essential to liberty', a liberty which combines positive and negative elements in a single dynamic conception, dialectically reconciling the antagonism.²²⁰

The result of this antagonistic movement was liberty-for-a-community. For 'a man is not free when he is controlled by other men, but only when he is controlled by principles and rules which all society must obey, for the community is the true master of the free man'.²²¹ Liberalism as an historic force progressively removes obstacles and opens 'channels for the flow of free and spontaneous activity'; but equally it works within the restraint of society and law through the voluntary submission of individuals as part of a social collective. The dialectic is resolved when constraint is liberating: the social order is 'not an end but a means to an end',

²¹⁷ Hobhouse, *Democracy and Reaction*, 241.

²¹⁸ Hobhouse, *Liberalism*, 3.

²¹⁹ *ibid.*, 8-9.

²²⁰ *ibid.*, 10-11.

²²¹ *ibid.*, 12-3.

where 'one of the principles elements in that end is the enlargement of liberty'.²²² Rather than exchanging or replacing our 'natural' liberty in this voluntary submission, a greater meaning of liberty is realised as part of a community in the synthesis of freedom and the social order, which maintains the initial integrity of the individuals' freedom in that realisation—something not dissimilar to the Hegelian notion of 'sublimation'. Where Dicey saw a rift between opposing philosophies, Hobhouse saw an antagonism that was the driver of liberalism, ultimately moving toward its reconciliation.

Hobhouse not only outlined the philosophical content of this antagonism and reconciliation but traced its dynamism within the history of liberalism itself. As a historical phenomenon, the movement of liberalism can be 'understood by appreciating the successive points of view which its thinkers and statesman have occupied'. Hobhouse saw his task as being 'to determine the principal points of view which the Liberal movement has occupied, and [to] distinguish the main types of theory in which the passion for freedom has sought to express itself'. If anything, to understand liberalism, for Hobhouse, was to understand its history: 'the onward course of a movement is more clearly understood by appreciating the successive points of view which its thinkers and statesmen have occupied than by following the devious turnings of political events and the tangle of party controversy'.²²³

Hobhouse presented Locke, Rousseau, and Paine as part of a single line of thought that conceived 'political society as a restraint to which men voluntarily submitted themselves for specific purposes'. Over the course of the nineteenth century, 'a new and more concrete conception of liberty arose' on this foundation via an antagonism with utilitarianism. Hobhouse presented the emergence of modern liberalism as overcoming a dichotomy in liberalism's Lockean and Benthamite foundations, where the latter had the potential to not only undermine the liberty of the individual in its conditional endorsement of liberty, but risked the 'subordination of the individual to social claims' in the name of utility.²²⁴ Hobhouse's historical approach was in itself a partial critique of utilitarianism's ahistorical approach to liberty, but it was also an attempt to weave these two contending accounts of liberalism into a new integral account of the liberal tradition. The two tendencies of thought embodied in Locke and Bentham—represented respectively by natural liberty and utility—were said to have produced together a distinct 'English Liberalism', given expression by 'Gladstone in the world

²²² *ibid.*, 22, 64.

²²³ *ibid.*, 25.

²²⁴ *ibid.*, 26, 31-3, 42.

of action[...] [and] Mill in the world of thought'.²²⁵ Hobhouse presented a conscious attempt to unify thought and practice in relation to the historical lineages of liberalism, which in turn presented Hobhouse's own liberalism as the heir to that movement and part of its self-conscious continuation.

Hobhouse's distinct kind of liberalism presupposed an account of development and harmony which underpinned both the historical movement of liberalism and liberty-for-a-community as the reconciliation of liberalism's negative and positive dynamics. For Hobhouse, 'the foundation of liberty is the idea of growth'. But rather than spontaneous growth, crucially one must 'teach man to discipline himself' in order to foster 'the development of will, of personality, of self control' as part of the social collective.²²⁶ In the reconciliation of individual liberty and the social order, the aim is for each individual to find 'his own good in the common good' as part of the self-disciplined growth of all.²²⁷

Liberalism, as T. H. Green had informed the previous generation, was the project for the 'liberation of the powers of all men equally for contributions to a common good'.²²⁸ The self-realisation of all as individuals requires the self-realisation of each as a moral personality, which is developed by one's own good being found in relation to the rational common good.²²⁹ Progress and self-development, for Hobhouse, were part of this moral development. The intellectual development of self-consciousness unfolded as an ethical development towards the collective self-realisation and self-development of individuals in relation to the common good. We move toward an 'ethical harmony' as co-operative individual moral beings, as 'harmony is the persistent impulse of the rational being'.²³⁰ Hobhouse was keen to emphasise, however, that this was not a mechanical process, as it depends 'ultimately on choice'; 'progress is not a matter of mechanical contrivance, but of the liberation of living spiritual energy'.²³¹ As individuals, our liberty is realised socially, as part of the collective realisation of liberty, due to the harmonious tendency of our self-development. This did not mean that individuals did not have different ends in view, or that their ends never clashed, or that these ends always and necessarily advanced the common good directly—liberalism was driven by

²²⁵ *ibid.*, 36, 49.

²²⁶ *ibid.*, 59.

²²⁷ *ibid.*, 61.

²²⁸ T. H. Green, 'Liberal Legislation and Freedom of Contract' in *Lectures on the Principle of Obligation and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 194-212, 200.

²²⁹ See David Weinstein, 'The New Liberalism of L. T. Hobhouse and the Reenvisioning of Nineteenth Century Utilitarianism', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 57, no.3 (1996): 488-91.

²³⁰ Hobhouse, *Liberalism*, 62. See Peter Weiler, 'The New Liberalism of L. T. Hobhouse', *Victorian Studies* 16, no.2 (1972): 143-8. See also, Freedman, *The New Liberalism*, 85-93.

²³¹ Hobhouse, *Liberalism*, 65-6.

antagonism. For Hobhouse, the relationship between the two is that part of the self-realisation of individuals is the realisation of our good within the common good, premised upon an account of harmony, which allows individuals to self-develop in harmony as a social collective.²³² This underpinned the reconciliation of individual liberty and the social order, despite their initial antagonism, through the self-development of all as part of the social collective and in the realisation of liberty-for-a-community.

One implication of this social conception of liberalism was that 'liberty[...] becomes not so much a right of the individual as a necessity of society'.²³³ This did not, however, totally subsume or negate individual liberty in the name of the social collective or ethical community. Whilst the social nature of liberalism is expressed and embodied within the modern state, and as such 'might seem to make the individual too subservient to society', for Hobhouse, 'society consists wholly of persons. It has no direct personality separate from and superior to those of its members'.²³⁴ The two, instead, find a higher and more perfect expression in their reconciliation as part of liberty-for-a-community. Whilst there was this shift toward a social expression of individual liberty, there nonetheless remained a predominant focus on the individual in relation to the inherited language of liberalism, in particular a certain kind of individual—as Collini notes, 'the rational, earnest, self-improving, altruistic individual was the ghost at the feast in late-Victorian political debate'.²³⁵ In distinction to both Hobson and Green, who thought within an Idealist framework, Hobhouse's liberalism placed less emphasis on society as a semi-independent organism with its own moral status, instead emphasising the constitutive components of that social and historical organism: individuals. Whilst Hobhouse took up certain themes and language from the Idealists in the realisation of the common good and the self-development of individuals, he emphasised the individual as a distinct bearer of value. Liberty-for-a-community only made sense with reference to the individual members of that community: ultimately, a society 'lives and flourishes by the harmonious growth of its parts'.²³⁶

The notion of harmony in the co-operative self-development of all underpinned Hobhouse's attempt to fuse an individualist liberalism with the ethical aspects of humanitarian socialism.

²³² For the teleological differences between self-development and self-realisation, see Weinstein's remark: 'As Michael Freeden has usefully noted, self-development has historically implied growth, improvement and human flourishing whereas self-realization has historically been associated with the unfolding of potentiality', Weinstein, 'The New Liberalism', 494n.

²³³ Hobhouse, *Liberalism*, 59.

²³⁴ *ibid.*, 61.

²³⁵ Collini, *Liberalism and Sociology*, 50.

²³⁶ Hobhouse, *Liberalism*, 65.

Hobhouse held that the aim of state power was 'not to destroy property [as the socialists had threatened], but to restore the social conception of property to its right place under conditions suitable to modern needs', for property enables the individual 'to direct his personal concerns according to his own preferences'.²³⁷ As a result, 'it is, indeed, implied that the State is vested with a certain overlordship of property in general and a supervisory power over industry in general[...] For here, as elsewhere, liberty implies control', but 'it is a question not of increasing or diminishing, but of reorganising, restraints'.²³⁸ As mentioned above, this explained property in terms of the social nature of wealth, which enabled the self-development of all to be consistent with restraint in the realisation of liberty-for-a-community, premised upon the material considerations which foster such growth.

Hobhouse is sometimes taken to have provided a radical revision of liberal ideals by incorporating Idealist and socialist themes that 'departed most significantly from the earlier Liberal tradition', breaking with the 'individualism' of 'classical liberalism from Locke to Bentham'.²³⁹ Whilst it is true that his revision of liberalism moved it away from an association with laissez-faire and offered an alternative image of liberalism to Dicey, his position was much more nuanced than this picture suggests. For one thing, Hobhouse did emphasise the significance of the individual. Secondly, the antecedent presence of the positions he was espousing in Locke and Bentham was itself a vital part of Hobhouse's presentation of liberalism's history and development. Hobhouse did suggest that Bentham's views 'were often too crude and narrow', but he nonetheless considered the ideas of the 'older Liberalism' to form an 'ethical whole'.²⁴⁰ What is more, Hobhouse emphasised that his 'revision' was really no more than the ongoing development of liberalism out of its previous foundations, expressing a certain sense of continuity in liberalism's historical development and culmination in liberty-for-a-community. Locke was one of the originators of the rule of law against arbitrary power, 'summing up one whole chapter of seventeenth-century controversy'²⁴¹, which as we have seen, marks the historic beginning of liberalism in its rejection of an absolutist order and later in its antagonism with the ideas of Bentham produced the modern liberalism that Hobhouse sought to defend. Though liberalism had developed over time, this feature remains part of the negative and positive dynamic that drives liberalism in history. Whilst the triumph over

²³⁷ *ibid.*, 91, 100.

²³⁸ *ibid.*, 74, 101. See also Green, 'Liberal Legislation and Freedom of Contract', 200.

²³⁹ See Weiler, 'The New Liberalism of L. T. Hobhouse', 156 & John W. Seaman, 'L. T. Hobhouse and the Theory of "Social Liberalism"', *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 11, no.4 (1978): 780.

²⁴⁰ Hobhouse, *Democracy and Reaction*, 140, 164-6.

²⁴¹ Hobhouse, *Liberalism*, 11.

absolutism was deemed secure, what it represented remained integral to liberalism and integral to its grounding in an ongoing, dynamic intellectual tradition.

Hobhouse did not only stress liberalism's dependence on its historic foundations. He presented his own understanding of collectivism and idealism as emerging from those same foundations. Hobhouse's collectivism was premised upon the harmonious development of individuals, which was also presented in relation to the liberal tradition; 'the theory of harmony stands in close relation on the one side to the Utilitarian principle as developed by J. S. Mill, and on the other hand to the form taken by Ethical Idealism in the hands of T. H. Green'.²⁴² His early work on *The Labour Movement* similarly attempted to ground its argument by an appeal to Mill—in particular on the fallibility of human authority and the value of liberty.²⁴³ Rather than a change of doctrine, in Hobhouse there was a change of emphasis in relation to Mill and Green concerning the moral character of the individual and the individual's relationship to society. In Hobhouse, the account of the individual's relationship to society was presented as the heir to both the sovereignty of the individual and the collective self-development of individuals as part of an ethical community, or rather as the dialectical resolution of the two.²⁴⁴ After Mill, Hobhouse suggested, liberalism found a way of speaking about the nature of society and about self-development that embraced both the idealist perception that the individual outside of society was a meaningless abstraction and Mill's encouragement of experiments of living, appeals to self-development, and endorsements of collective and co-operative ownership in a single point of view. Just as the individual grows, so too does liberalism.

Bell suggests that Hobhouse's *Liberalism* 'was engaged in the attempt to craft a liberal socialist politics to replace the desiccated "old liberalism" of the "Manchester School" and the Benthamites'.²⁴⁵ As discussed in the previous section, some caution is needed in this suggestion. Hobhouse emphasised that his liberalism was the outgrowth of an 'old' liberalism and that rather than replacing it, the past was retained as part of the vitality to the evolving movement of liberalism. Nonetheless, his narrative did provide an alternative to the one proposed by Dicey. Where Dicey suggested that 'individualism' and 'collectivism' represented incompatible philosophies, Hobhouse attempted to show the unity behind that antagonism and its reconciliation in the 'new' liberalism. For Hobhouse, the project of liberalism was 'the problem of realising liberty', which needed to be progressively solved by the intertwining and

²⁴² L. T. Hobhouse, *The Rational Good* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1921), 193. See also Weinstein, 'The New Liberalism', 494-7 & Freedman, *The New Liberalism*, 17-18, 55-6.

²⁴³ L. T. Hobhouse, *The Labour Movement* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1912), 152-9.

²⁴⁴ Hobhouse, *Liberalism*, 60. See also Bellamy, *Liberalism and Modern Society*, 15-6, 21.

²⁴⁵ Bell, 'What is Liberalism?', 700.

antagonistic developments of liberalism, conjoining both the moral freedom and material conditions necessary for the growth of individuals.²⁴⁶ The mantle was identified in Locke, Rousseau, and Paine, through to Bentham, Mill, and Green, and then passed in the successive evolution of liberalism through a story of individuals' self-development in relation to the social order. Liberalism was itself shown to be transformative and subject to historical development in relation to transforming circumstances—as Freeden puts it, 'the world is naturally active and vigorous and liberalism is above all an instrument for freeing this flowing human essence'.²⁴⁷ This broader framework enabled Hobhouse to present liberalism's development as a unified tradition in its gradual realisation of liberty-for-a-community in changing historical circumstances that changed the nature of liberalism. Liberalism was a 'living force in the modern world' that held 'the prospect of transforming its ideals into actualities' through its successive developments and internal dynamics.²⁴⁸

In presenting liberalism in these terms, insisting upon its vitality and practical coherence, Hobhouse was arguing that it drew its strength and inspiration from the past. This required him to depict the past in terms that validated the present he was describing and the future he was imagining. His argument made sense only if that the ancestors he identified were genuinely his own, or more his own than any other claimant. Collini summarises Hobhouse's aim as in part to present a 'true liberalism against its recent individualist distortions, a true collectivism against threatened Socialist distortions, and both against their ever-present imperialist distortions'. In laying claim to liberalism's intellectual legacy, 'the kernel of proto-New Liberal truth present in each stage [was] extracted from the husk of historical circumstance' and presented in a narrative arc which culminated in Hobhouse's own account of liberalism.²⁴⁹ The true course of liberalism was the realisation of liberty-for-a-community. This account of liberalism's development represented any deviation as both an inhibition to progress, given Hobhouse's account of the historical evolution and movement of liberalism, and a perversion of liberalism's core principles. Hobhouse reconceptualised the crises in the Liberal party discussed in the previous section in a way that anticipated their resolution through Hobhouse's own liberalism, in his account of its moral character, relationship to humanitarian socialism, and distinction to imperialism.

²⁴⁶ Hobhouse, *Liberalism*, 120.

²⁴⁷ Michael Freeden, 'Twentieth Century Liberal Thought: Development or Transformation?' in *Liberal Languages: Ideological Imaginations and Twentieth Century Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 21-2.

²⁴⁸ Hobhouse, *Liberalism*, 23.

²⁴⁹ Collini, *Liberalism and Sociology*, 97-8.

This work of revision, as Collini highlights, is certainly a significant part of Hobhouse's *Liberalism*, whereby the past was shaped to fit contemporary demands. What needs to be emphasised, however, is not just Hobhouse's account of liberal history, but the way in which that historical revision was approached and incorporated into Hobhouse's liberalism. Hobhouse made an interjection in the liberal disputes of his time about the legacy and founding principles that the Liberal party had seemingly lost touch with, but his account of the history of liberalism as a movement of growth through antagonism and reconciliation displayed a distinct approach to the very concept of liberalism as a tradition. The 'new' liberal approach more broadly attempted to show the unity and development of liberal values in a way that challenged the suggestion that an 'old' liberalism defined by individualism had been erroneously left by the wayside. Hobhouse's *Liberalism* showed that the 'old' liberalism was retained within the 'new' and part of its internal development. Where tension existed between the two in their negative and positive dynamics, reconciliation could be found within liberty-for-a-community. This, as has been argued, is the significance of Hobhouse's *Liberalism* for thinking about the emergence of liberalism as a tradition in this period. Whilst Hobhouse was able to distinguish the principles of liberalism from the particularities of the Liberals by reconnecting it to and revising a broader account of the liberal tradition that reconciled its inner tensions, the place of Hegel in this story was a thornier issue for the legacy of idealist themes that had found their way into British thought.

III. The March of God

In 1911, Hobhouse was addressing a crisis-ridden world working towards continued peace. In 1914, it was transformed into a crisis-ridden world plunging into war. Whilst Hobhouse's account of liberalism's development left open the possibility of regression and decline if the active co-operation of individuals toward their harmonious self-development was not mobilised, Hobhouse was shaken by the disastrous consequences of the First World War and the implications this had for the meaning of liberalism—particularly in the individual's relationship to the state. This prompted further reflection on liberalism's core principles and their development, as what was considered antithetical to such principles and corrosive of the legacy of the liberal tradition was now seen in the harsher light of mass slaughter.

Hobhouse had initially opposed Britain's involvement in the First World War on pacifistic grounds. He deplored the imperialist sentiments that he found to be animating some of the

more aggressive defences of military action and lurking beneath claims of just causes. After the declaration of war, Hobhouse's position briefly shifted. He offered support for both the war effort and for conscription, seeing the conflict through the prism of a clash of values, and urging that liberalism as a value system had to be defended. By 1916, Hobhouse had returned to criticising the Liberal government and sunk into pessimism over the long-running effects of the war. After initially supporting the aim of military victory over Germany, Hobhouse grew alarmed at what he perceived to be the illiberalism of the Liberal government in both domestic and international affairs. At home, conscription and compulsion threatened to undermine the liberty and moral character of the individual as a self-developing agent, sacrificing what liberalism was attempting to secure and develop in the first place. Accordingly, Hobhouse became increasingly critical of Lloyd-George's liberalism for endorsing what was perceived as illiberal measures. By 1918, Hobhouse expressed a deep disillusionment with the direction that liberalism had taken and despaired of the future.²⁵⁰

The Liberal party itself was split on whether liberalism was compatible with conscription; many liberals did not renounce their liberalism in supporting conscription, and attempted to defend and articulate the compatibility between the two. Herbert Samuel, for one, had defended conscription on the premise that a restraint of liberty was necessary for the protection and future enlargement of liberty.²⁵¹ The problem for Hobhouse was much deeper than that. Whilst self-discipline and restraint were essential requirements for the realisation of liberty-for-a-community, these were constraints to which individuals all voluntarily submit. Hobhouse saw the prospects and indeed the meaning of liberty itself to be threatened when certain coercive demands were placed upon individuals by the state *against* their will. This not only undermined liberty. It denied the moral character of individuals as self-developing agents. Hobhouse's *Liberalism* tended to lay emphasis on the positive realisation of liberty-for-a-community, but this was premised on the assumption that negative liberty had in fact been secured against an arbitrary social order. War, however, had altered the way in which the positive and negative dynamic of liberalism was perceived by Hobhouse as well the barriers to liberty that liberalism was compelled to challenge. Conscription under the Liberal government looked closer to the arbitrary rule of the past than the realisation of positive liberty. As Freedman notes, the 'radical, pioneering ethic of the new liberalism was exchanged for a return to the basic building blocks, the removal of which now seemed to threaten the entire

²⁵⁰ See Harold Smith, 'World War I and British Left Wing Intellectuals: The Case of L. T. Hobhouse', *Albion* 5, no.4 (1973): 261-273.

²⁵¹ See Matthew Johnson, 'The Liberal Committee and the Liberal Advocacy of Conscription in Britain, 1914-1916', *The Historical Journal* 51, no.2 (2008): 399-420.

edifice'—a return to the building blocks of liberty had even prompted a re-evaluation of Bentham and Spencer by Hobhouse.²⁵² The results of the re-evaluation widened the breach between his liberalism and the Liberals. More pointedly, they opened a new front against those who glorified the state as an entity which stood over and above the liberty of individuals. This in 'state' philosophy was associated with Hegel, 'Hegelianism', and British 'Idealism' more broadly in opposition to 'liberalism'.

The preface to *The Metaphysical Theory of the State* (1918) depicted the author sitting reading Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: 'In the bombing of London I had just witnessed the visible and tangible outcome of a false and wicked doctrine, the foundations of which lay, as I believe, in the book before me'. What Hegel had set in motion was 'the most penetrating and subtle of all the intellectual influences which have sapped the rational humanitarianism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and in the Hegelian theory of the god-state all that I had witnessed lay implicit'.²⁵³

Hobhouse had, however, already laid the groundwork for some of these arguments. At least as early as 1904, Hobhouse had linked 'Hegelianism' to a 'reactionary' force that 'had its political sponsor in Bismarck' and bemoaned the influence of German Idealism in British thought: 'the Rhine has flown into the Thames, at any rate the upper reaches of the Thames'.²⁵⁴ In 1915, Hobhouse identified a broader Germanic canon which had animated a certain line of thinking that was, he had come to believe, responsible for escalating conflict. In *The World in Conflict*, Hobhouse identified how 'the Hegelian philosophy deified the State, and by making it the embodiment of the rational will, gave it an authority over the individual which regulated the free exercises of thought, the right of conscience, and the claims of personality to a subordinate position'. The state had been placed as the 'highest form of human association' and in political consequence, had 'turned resolutely away from the gospel of peace and humanity which had been preached by Kant'.²⁵⁵ In other words, the German contribution to liberal thought ended with Kant. The lines of thought in and after Hegel had subverted liberalism. Nietzsche's critique of morality and religion may have 'seemed destined to destroy the State religion', but this generated a vacuum for unrestrained power—notwithstanding the fact Nietzsche may have been 'act[ing] in the interest of the individual'. For Hobhouse, 'Hegel's divine State, [Heinrich von] Treitschke's power, Nietzsche's contempt of restraint are fused

²⁵² See Freedman, *Liberalism Divided*, 22-6, 29, 31-4; Weinstein, 'The New Liberalism', 493.

²⁵³ L. T. Hobhouse, *The Metaphysical Theory of the State; a criticism* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1918), 6.

²⁵⁴ Hobhouse, *Democracy and Reaction*, 77, 80-1.

²⁵⁵ Hobhouse, *The World in Conflict*, 54-5.

together in the faith which animates the governing classes of Germany', animated by 'some misty conception of the progress of mankind through competition and the fated superiority of the German race'.²⁵⁶ In 1917, Hobhouse turned his direct attention to scrutinising Hegelian presuppositions, which, to his mind, carried the lion's share of the blame.

Hobhouse identified two assumptions in the Hegelian understanding of the state. First, that society as an ethical community is taken to be a 'superpersonal entity' beyond the constitutive components of that community, and second, that this entity is identified with the state as its ultimate expression.²⁵⁷ Hobhouse, as we have seen, was keen to emphasise the place of individuals in relation to society in a way that did not place society as a distinct organism over and above its component parts. For Hegel, however, 'any discussion of freedom must begin not with individuality or the individual self-consciousness, but only with the essence of self-consciousness; for whether human beings know it or not, this essence realizes itself as a self-sufficient power of which single individuals are only moments'. What this culminates in, is that as the ultimate expression of the ethical community's rational development, is the state: 'the state consists in the march of God in the world, and its basis is the power of reason actualizing itself as will'.²⁵⁸ For Hobhouse the worry was that such an account in 'the Hegelian logic abolishes on the one side the independence of the individual living human being, and on the other side the universal ties of identity of character which relate the individual to the human species as a whole', substituting them for 'the organized body of human beings, which in its highest manifestation is the state'.²⁵⁹ The state therefore has a kind of primacy over the individual as the ultimate expression of the community, and 'freedom in Hegel's sense turns out to be conformity with the law and custom as interpreted by the ethical spirit of the particular society to which the individual belongs'.²⁶⁰

This reading of the Hegelian state, based on the cited passages, is at best something of a one-sided and selective reading of Hegel. For Hegel, modern individualism was at once both a

²⁵⁶ Hobhouse, *The World in Conflict*, 56. For a similar argument regarding Nietzsche and Treitschke, see John Watson, 'Germany Philosophy and the War', *Queen's Quarterly* 23 (1916): 365-79. For a broader account of Treitschke's political thought, see Karl H. Metz, 'The Politics of Conflict: Heinrich von Treitschke and the Idea of *Realpolitik*', *History of Political Thought* 3, no.2 (1982): 269-284.

²⁵⁷ Hobhouse, *Metaphysical Theory of the State*, 30.

²⁵⁸ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 279 [258A]. Charles Taylor offers the following translation of this infamous passage: 'it is essential to God's progress in the world that the state may be'. As Taylor notes, the state being the 'march of God' is often the root of readings of Hegel as an anti-liberal, despite being a dubious interpretation of the phrase, *Hegel and Modern Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 73.

²⁵⁹ Hobhouse, *Metaphysical Theory of the State*, 68.

²⁶⁰ Hobhouse, *Metaphysical Theory of the State*, 31.

break with traditional society and part of our dialectical reconciliation with the social order.²⁶¹ The historical movements of Protestantism and the development of commercial society represented a twofold breakdown of traditional society by unleashing the modern individual onto the world. Modern individualism was the 'abstract and formal freedom of subjectivity', which 'has a more determinate content only in its *natural subjective existence [Dasien]* - its needs, inclinations, passions, opinions, fancies[...]' . As a world-historical phenomenon, 'the right of *subjective freedom*, is the pivotal and focal point in the difference between *antiquity* and the *modern age*', and had 'become the universal and actual principle of the new world'.²⁶² As Hegel remarks, 'the principle of the modern world at large is freedom of subjectivity, according to which all essential aspects present in the spiritual totality develop and enter into their right'. Consequently, political regimes which 'cannot sustain within themselves the principle of free subjectivity and are unable to conform to fully developed reason' are 'one-sided'.²⁶³

This movement of modern individualism, Hegel argued, was an incomplete movement towards self-consciousness and self-actualisation of Spirit.²⁶⁴ In our realisation of our relationship to 'the ethical substance and laws and powers', as part of the self-conscious expression of ethical life, we can be liberated from 'dependence on mere natural drives' and from an 'indeterminate subjectivity', in recognising that 'all these substantial determinations are *duties* which are binding on the will of the individual'. As such, it is 'in duty, [that] the individual liberates himself so as to attain substantial freedom'.²⁶⁵ This movement, or '*development*[...] implies that there is an inner determination, an implicitly presupposed ground that is to bring itself into existence. In its essence, this formal determination is Spirit, which uses world history as its theatre, its property, and the field of its actualization'.²⁶⁶ As such, 'world history[...]' presents the development of consciousness, the development of Spirit's consciousness of its freedom, and the actualization that is produced by that consciousness'.²⁶⁷ The individual had to be

²⁶¹ For Hegel's relationship to liberalism, see Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 450-460, 560-2; Richard Bellamy, 'Hegel and Liberalism', *History of European Ideas* 8, no.6 (1987): 693-708; Steven B. Smith, *Hegel's Critique of Liberalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Paul Franco, 'Hegel and Liberalism', *The Review of Politics* 59, no.4 (1997): 831-860; Dominic Losurdo, *Hegel and the Freedom of Moderns* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); & Dana Villa, 'Hegel, Tocqueville, and 'Individualism'', *The Review of Politics* 67, no.4 (2005): 659-686.

²⁶² Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, 150 [123], 151 [124R], 223 [185R]. See also G. W. F. Hegel, *On Christianity: Early Theological Writings*, trans. T. M. Knox (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961).

²⁶³ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 312 [273A].

²⁶⁴ *ibid.*, 196, 275-8 [153A, 258].

²⁶⁵ *ibid.*, 190-2 [146-9].

²⁶⁶ G. W. F. Hegel, 'Introduction' to *The Philosophy of History*, trans. Leo Rauch (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1988), 58.

²⁶⁷ *ibid.*, 67.

reconciled with the movement of history and universal Spirit—not transported to a Kantian kingdom of ends that stood outside of time—as 'the task of leading the individual from his uneducated standpoint to knowledge had to be seen in its universal sense, just as it was the universal individual, self-conscious Spirit, whose formative education had to be studied'.²⁶⁸

Hegel therefore placed a strong emphasis on individual subjective freedom and how that freedom performs a pivotal role in the development of the modern state—and the very nature of modernity itself—even though the state stands as an expression for the moral and rational whole.²⁶⁹ What 'Hegelianism' stood for was a convenient and politically loaded way of expressing a particular worry for British liberals about the conceptualisation of the state and its political consequences, which Hegel could scarcely have imagined but did nonetheless reflect the position of the state in Hegel's thought in distinction to civil society. 'Hegelianism' was a convenient for British liberals in divesting themselves of any particular blame for those consequences associated with the conceptualisation of the state. This last point was an especially sensitive one, as similar lines of thought could just as readily have been found in British liberalism.

T. H. Green, for one, had announced how 'it is only as members of society, as recognising common interests and objects' that we can come to have any sense of individual right. It is through our social development that we are 'clothed with rights and duties, and with senses of rights and duties, which are neither natural nor derived from a sovereign power' but are part of this social development of the ethical community. To ask why one ought to submit to the power of the state, as an expression of this ethical community, is to ask 'why I am to allow my life to be regulated by that complex of institutions without which I literally should not have a life to *call my own*'.²⁷⁰ The political consequences of such thinking had come sharply into view. The crux of the matter, for Hobhouse, was the possibility that the actually-existing state could be taken as the total expression of the moral community and deified as a rational entity. Hobhouse followed Green in situating the individual's self-development in relation to the community and the state as the expression of the modern social collective, as we have seen, but for 'Hegelianism', he feared, 'the state in and for itself is the ethical whole, the actualization of freedom', and as such is rational—as 'it is the absolute end of reason that

²⁶⁸ G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977 [1807]), 16 [28], 363 [595].

²⁶⁹ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 312 [273A].

²⁷⁰ Green, *Lectures on Political Obligation*, 89-90 [113-4].

freedom should be actual'.²⁷¹ This line of thinking legitimised the claims of *the* state over the individual.

The ambiguity of the Hegelian state is whether the 'real' is taken to mean the 'actual' or the 'ideal', something which had been resolved by the British Idealists in good faith, but had become all the more alarming in a political context where particular states may fail to uphold the moral good and respect the individuality of citizens. This problem of conceiving the actual as the universal stems from the British Idealists seeming to lose the historical development of thought itself, as conceived by Hegel.²⁷² As Hegel contended, 'the state is not a work of art; it exists in the world, and hence in the sphere of arbitrariness, contingency, and error, and bad behaviour may disfigure it in many respects'.²⁷³ Hegel's idealised state would reconcile the individual liberties of the French Revolution with the self-actualization of world Spirit in the rational development of the ethical community. Whether the British state from 1914-1918 could claim to be such a state was far from clear. The problem was in the political consequences of that gap.

This was the problem that Hobhouse discerned in the Idealist position of Bernard Bosanquet, the eminent English inheritor of this line of thinking.²⁷⁴ For Bosanquet, 'by the State[...] we mean Society as a unit, recognised as rightly exercising control over its members through absolute physical power'.²⁷⁵ Hobhouse's concern was that the state could not be controlled in the same way in which individuals qua individual wills can be controlled. Neither could the state be held morally or politically accountable as a defender of the moral community if it was identical to the moral community. For Bosanquet, even universal moral sentiments were still 'possessions of particular communities', forming only 'elements in the diverse moral worlds which states exist to guard'.²⁷⁶ This appeared to amount to a denial of the existence, or of the salience, of moral bonds between individuals qua individuals, sinking everything in to the state as the expression and defender of the moral community in a way that placed its claims

²⁷¹ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 279 [258A].

²⁷² Stefan Collini, 'Hobhouse, Bosanquet, and the State: Philosophical Idealism and Political Argument in England 1880 - 1918', *Past & Present* 72, no.1 (1976): 90, 104-106.

²⁷³ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 279 [258A].

²⁷⁴ See Bernard Bosanquet, *The Philosophical Theory of the State* (London: MacMillan, 1958 [1899]). Herbert Marcuse suggests that 'the more Hegelian in wording this idealism became, the further it removed itself from the true spirit of Hegel's thought', *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1954), 393.

²⁷⁵ Bosanquet, *The Philosophical Theory of the State*, 172-3.

²⁷⁶ Bernard Bosanquet, 'The Function of the State in Promoting the Unity of Mankind' in *The British Idealists*, ed. David Boucher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 287-9.

over the individual, beyond rational scrutiny or moral reproach, in what amounted to a radical relativisation of Hegel's thinking about the state.²⁷⁷

One practical consequence of this conception of the state was in the debate on conscription. It suggested a line of thinking on which one's highest duty as an individual was owed to the state. Hegel had himself suggested that in the dialectical reconciliation of subjective freedom and the ethical community, the individual's '*highest duty* is to be [a] member[...] of the state.'²⁷⁸ When it came to considering whether self-sacrifice for world conflict in the name of freedom and duty was ultimately justified, Hobhouse felt that liberal values were under threat. Whilst Bosanquet stressed the possibility of peace between states, any moral choice between a defence made by the state's self-defence and the submission of a state to the interests of world peace was, in his terms, a 'really tragic crisis' that no moral authority was able to guide.²⁷⁹ The state, in other words, could not be held accountable for the use of individuals as cannon fodder in world conflict and the ethical self-development of individuals was caught in no man's land.

British Idealism, as developed by Bosanquet, seemed to leave an irresolvable gap between the two meanings of the 'real' that either underestimated the capacity for growth, or elevated the existing state as supremely rational: 'there is no question here of realizing an ideal by human effort[...] we are already living in the ideal'. Not only did this deify the state and its claims, making them unaccountable, it also diminished the sensuous capacity and moral character of the individual, as 'it does not much matter whether we are rich or poor, healthy or enfeebled, personally aware of happiness or misery; nay, it does not seem to matter very much whether we are just or unjust, virtuous or depraved', for all of these are mere moments of expression that play their part 'in the magnificent whole'.²⁸⁰ The problem was that in the idealism of Bosanquet, or so Hobhouse contended, this relation of the individual and the social collective resulted in the 'division between self and others' dissolving 'away into the conception of a common self and the division between the individual and the state disappears in the conception of a law expressing our own real will'.²⁸¹ Within liberalism, by contrast, 'we are

²⁷⁷ See Collini, 'Hobhouse, Bosanquet, and the State', 101-3.

²⁷⁸ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 275 [258].

²⁷⁹ Bosanquet, 'The Function of the State', 287, 291-4.

²⁸⁰ Hobhouse, *Metaphysical Theory of the State*, 18.

²⁸¹ *ibid.*, 40-1.

contending for individuality, for the irreducible distinction between self and others', rather than their individuality simply being a fleeting moment in an unfolding universal category.²⁸²

The distance between Hobhouse's liberalism and Bosanquet's 'Hegelianism', however, was not always as wide as this contradistinction implied. The positive expression of freedom, liberty-for-a-community, that Hobhouse's liberalism took to be compatible with the modern state seemed to have an equal potential to undermine the liberty on which liberalism rested its case. It also, no less, shared some affinities with Hegel's project as much as Bosanquet's could plausibly lay claim to. In the context of the First World War, Hobhouse became increasingly pessimistic about the state's capacity, let alone its good faith, to fulfil its positive role and uphold the negative base of liberty. We cannot, however, have an unrestrained or unlimited negative liberty, 'for no one must override the remainder'. Any restraint is conditioned, and thus limits liberty 'by the conditions of development in harmony', which requires the liberty necessary for the individual's self-development; but what could successfully determine and foster those conditions, if not the state in some capacity, as the expression of the modern social collective, was unclear.²⁸³ The state, Hobhouse concluded, ought to be seen and judged as a means to our ends, rather than an end in itself or as 'the sole guardian of moral worth'.²⁸⁴ This made an important emphasis in the antagonism between liberalism's negative and positive dynamics and the status of the individual in relation to the social order and the ethical community, but the two could not be fully reconciled outside of the state and remained perpetually in tension without Hobhouse's account of reconciliation through growth and harmony, which itself has the potential to lapse into the problems associated with Bosanquet's 'Hegelianism'.

Hobhouse's account of the 'real' being harmonious in our collective self-development owes a good deal to Idealism, in the sense of the comprehension of the whole being able to transcend the contradiction of experience—one contemporary commentator was quick to emphasise that 'Hobhouse's qualified acceptance of Hegel's evolutionary formula does not by any means imply that he accepts the Hegelian theory of the state'.²⁸⁵ Given that the state is, however, the expression of the modern social collective for Hobhouse, the harmonious self-development of individuals requires a role for the state in reconciling the antagonism between separate selves

²⁸² *ibid.*, 62.

²⁸³ *ibid.*, 36.

²⁸⁴ *ibid.*, 137.

²⁸⁵ H. E. Barnes, 'Some Typical Contributions of English Sociology to Political Theory', II, *American Journal of Sociology* 27, no.4 (1922): 445n. See C. M. Griffin, 'L. T. Hobhouse and the Idea of Harmony', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 35, no.4 (1974): 648-9.

in order to achieve liberty-for-a-community. There is a certain language of the development of ourselves, which Hobhouse inherited from Green, that situates the problem in relation to the social collective.²⁸⁶ The problem can be traced back further, as Hobson did, as an intellectual line from Rousseau that equally leads to Hegel and to Bosanquet as plausibly as it does to Hobhouse via Green, coming to rest on understanding the relationship between the individual will and the general will.²⁸⁷ As we have seen, Hobhouse expresses a certain sympathy with Rousseau and includes him alongside Locke and Paine for the development of liberty-for-a-community. For Green, whilst Rousseau expresses the 'hopelessness' of attempting to 'reconcile submission to government with the existence of natural rights antecedent to the institution of government', the notion of the state as an expression of the general will and the attempt to understand the relationship of obligation between individuals and that general will is 'the permanently valuable thing in Rousseau'.²⁸⁸

Whilst Hobhouse challenged the 'Hegelian' state, he did not really escape the problem of the 'real' meaning both the 'actual' and the 'ideal' with regard to the ethical community and whether the individual's good can be found in the common good.²⁸⁹ Collini suggests that this problem of Idealism is contained within Hobhouse's liberalism, but the full implication of this when it comes to the state and in particular Hobhouse's attempt to distinguish an 'Hegelian' problem of the state in opposition to his own liberalism is insufficiently spelled out. Marcuse noted that the 'great merit' of *The Metaphysical Theory of the State* 'is in its exposure of the incompatibility between Hegel's conception and the material basis of the existing state', but the same problem arises in the principles of liberalism and the concrete forms of 'liberal' societies which were defended in the evocation of such principles.²⁹⁰ Hobhouse's liberalism encounters similar problems to the ones he identified with Bosanquet's 'Hegelianism', as much as it could also be said to be a descendent of the problems associated with Rousseau and Hegel, due to the role of the state when it comes to the reconciliation of antagonism between individuals. The family resemblances between Hobhouse and Bosanquet are close enough to raise questions about a shared paternity.

It would be incorrect to overstate an influence of Hegel on Hobhouse—as though we might trace a line from Green, Hobhouse was keen to distinguish Green from the Idealists in virtue of a more 'liberal' outlook. It is Green, Hobhouse suggested, 'in whom we get most of the cream

²⁸⁶ See Bellamy, *Liberalism and Modern Society*, 35-47.

²⁸⁷ Hobson, *The Crises of Liberalism*, 76.

²⁸⁸ Green, *Lectures on Political Obligation*, 65.

²⁸⁹ See Collini, *Liberalism and Sociology*, 127-8.

²⁹⁰ Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, 395-6.

of Idealism and least of its sour milk'.²⁹¹ It is important to therefore recognise, as Freedon suggests, that he saw his own intellectual legacy as owing more to Mill and Green.²⁹² At the same time, we ought not to uncritically accept this image of Hegel nor the antithesis between 'liberalism' and 'Hegelianism' when it comes to Hobhouse's revision of the liberal tradition. For example, Freedon notes that Green's very question of political obligation only arises if the moral community is taken to be somewhat distinct from its ultimate expression in the state. However, Freedon's reading underestimates the implication for Hobhouse's account of moral harmony between the self-development of selves and overlooks how this opposition between 'liberalism' and 'Hegelianism' was constructed by Hobhouse in relation to his liberalism.

Hobhouse had already identified 'Hegelianism' as reactionary force inhibiting the progressive flow of liberal ideals before the outbreak of the First World War and before his own *Liberalism*. After 1914, Hobhouse turned to a stronger opposition between 'liberalism' and 'Hegelianism', rather than the latter merely being a reactionary force, in an attempt to expunge the influence of the latter. With the shift in circumstances, the characterisation of 'Hegelianism' shifted in tone and emphasis, but the significance of the term remained the same as an expression of a particular worry about the relationship between individuals and the state that manifested in different political circumstances. These consequences were antithetical to liberalism and were used to reinforce the value and meaning of liberalism as a distinct tradition. In *The Metaphysical Theory of the State*, what Hobhouse was attacking was a reading of Hegel that placed the actual as the ideal, placed the state as the ultimate expression of the ethical community, valorised the claims of the existing state as over and above the claims of the individual, and subsequently came to conclusions which were antithetical to Hobhouse's own understanding of liberalism. Liberalism was subsequently Anglicised by the paternal line of Mill and Green, and by the explicit rejection of malign 'Hegelian' influences, but the worry that 'Hegelianism' represented, for Hobhouse, was closer to home.

Collini suggests that it is the ambiguities of Bosanquet's thought that prompted both the assault from Hobhouse and the confusing legacy of British Idealism.²⁹³ However, as I have argued, the ambiguity of Hobhouse's thought is as much a problem for the apparent distance between 'liberalism' and 'Hegelianism' as it is for the coherence of Bosanquet's Idealism. Collini is right to suggest that 'Hobhouse could quite properly and consistently refer to "Hegelianism's bed-rock conservatism"' when it came to, on the one hand, overemphasising the

²⁹¹ Hobhouse, *The Elements of Social Justice* (New York, 1922), 41n.

²⁹² See Freedon, *The New Liberalism*, 55-6 & *Liberalism Divided*, 35-7.

²⁹³ Collini, 'Hobhouse, Bosanquet, and the State', 91, 101.

existing state, and understating the capacity for the state to provide the conditions for the social development of individuals.²⁹⁴ This reading, however, overstates the consistency in the target of critique, given the shift in political circumstances from Hobhouse's early critique, but also understates the problem this provides for the consistency of Hobhouse's liberalism standing in opposition to 'Hegelianism'. The problem is in Hobhouse's relationship to 'Hegelianism' as much as it is in Bosanquet's to Hegel.

Hobhouse's liberalism was not, then, a total rejection of Hegel, as those such as Karl Popper later declared.²⁹⁵ His account of the harmonious self-development between selves as part of the reconciliation with the modern social collective precluded blank rejection. It was, rather, an 'Hegelian' liberalism of sorts—in terms of the account of liberalism as a historical movement of growth and reconciliation between individual freedom and the social collective—that distanced itself from the political consequences associated with Hegel's name and his conceptualisation of the state. This ambiguous relationship can be seen as part of a broader trend in liberal thought in relation to two later 'Hegelian' liberals, Guido De Ruggiero and R. G. Collingwood. Making this comparison, I argue, helps to assess the development of Hobhouse's 'new' liberalism in the inter-war period, where the political circumstances seemed to be tipping further and further away from the ideal of a collective and harmonious self-development of individuals, and how this branch of liberals nonetheless aimed to find a historical process of reconciliation in the conflicting lines of liberal values.

IV. Hegelianism without Hegel: Hobhouse, De Ruggiero, and Collingwood

In a lecture of 1919, R. G. Collingwood declared that 'the German Empire is defeated, but the Prussian philosophy is not crushed'.²⁹⁶ Like Hobhouse, Collingwood depicted an 'Hegelian' undercurrent flowing through Europe and attempted to counterbalance this influence in a defence of liberalism. For Collingwood, a 'spiritual disease' had spread, culminating in 'the absolutist theory of the state'. The only thing said to be able to counter this force was a 'true imperialism', in distinction to a false one, that would 'bring light to the dark places of the earth'. 'We', Collingwood continued, 'have a heritage of gifts—political, legal, scientific,

²⁹⁴ Collini, 'Hobhouse, Bosanquet, and the State', 110.

²⁹⁵ Hobhouse was said to have 'fought bravely against Hegelianism', Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, Vol. II: The High Tide of Prophecy* (London: Routledge, 1945), 79. Cf. Griffin, 'L. T. Hobhouse and the Ideal of Harmony', 651.

²⁹⁶ R. G. Collingwood, 'The Prussian Philosophy' in *Essays in Political Philosophy*, ed. David Boucher (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 205.

artistic—in virtue of which we can call ourselves civilised', which find their expression in the dual processes of 'liberty and co-operation'.²⁹⁷ Defending that gift had become all the more necessary for Collingwood as it had for Hobhouse.

Collingwood belonged to the subsequent generation, but like Hobhouse and the 'new' liberals before him, he emphasised the co-operative and moral side to liberalism as a 'true' imperial force in distinction to a 'false' imperialism. Like Hobhouse in particular, Collingwood's liberalism attempted to show how contradiction could be reconciled within a particular liberal community, fostering the growth and self-development of individuals. For these reasons alone, a comparison between Hobhouse and Collingwood is warranted.²⁹⁸ Again, however, like Hobhouse, the relationship between Collingwood's liberalism and the perceived threats of the 'Prussian philosophy' was complicated by the broader relationship to Idealism and the legacy of Hegel. While translating the liberal Idealism of Guido De Ruggiero's *History of European Liberalism* (1925)²⁹⁹ he announced an identity in their understandings of liberalism: 'the political principles expounded and implied are at every point my own'. De Ruggiero, in turn, praised Hobhouse for providing 'the best formulation of the new English Liberalism of the twentieth century', 'the teaching of Mill and Green in a modernized form'.³⁰⁰ De Ruggiero is not only therefore useful in illuminating Collingwood's liberalism, as the relationship between the three exemplifies some of the tensions between 'liberalism' and 'Hegelianism' in the last decade of Hobhouse's life, and the broader legacy of the 'new' liberals in the inter-war period from the perspectives of two of its late defenders.

All three advanced what can be considered, I argue, an 'Hegelian' liberalism. Liberalism, for Hobhouse, De Ruggiero, and Collingwood, was understood through its historical development by considering the conflicting expressions of liberal ideals and the dynamics produced by the attempts to realise a deeper human freedom, which was possible through the co-operative and collective self-development of all as part of a community. Liberalism was, in other words, a

²⁹⁷ Collingwood, 'The Prussian Philosophy', 203, 205.

²⁹⁸ For a comparison of Hobhouse to De Ruggiero and a comparison of Collingwood to De Ruggiero (with some inclusion of Hobhouse) see Freeden, 'Twentieth Century Liberal Thought' & David Boucher, 'Collingwood and Liberalism' in *R. G. Collingwood: An Autobiography and Other Writings; with essays on Collingwood's life and work*, ed. David Boucher and Teresa Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

²⁹⁹ 1925 is the Italian publication date. Collingwood's English translation of the book was published in 1927.

³⁰⁰ Letter from Collingwood to De Ruggiero, quoted in David Boucher's 'Introduction' to R. G. Collingwood, *Essays in Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 10; Guido De Ruggiero, *The History of European Liberalism*, trans. R. G. Collingwood (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959 [1927]), 155 & 'Liberalism', *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, Vol. IX, ed. E. R. Seligman (London: Macmillan, 1933), 441.

self-conscious historical movement that moved through antagonism, which could be understood in retrospect at each moment of a community's development. At the same time, this development had to steer clear of the existential threats that undermine the very values of liberalism by negating them, quite often from under the 'Hegelian' banner. Not all contradiction could necessarily be solved by the cunning of reason. The 'Hegelian' state continued to haunt liberal imaginings as new threats emerged at the close of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s in ways that were often closer to home in terms of their own accounts of liberalism.

As we have seen, Hobhouse and the 'new' liberals gave the term 'liberalism' a wider significance than the Liberal party. In the preface to De Ruggiero's *History of European Liberalism*, Collingwood suggested that the term was likewise used in a 'significance far wider than the platform or policy of any single party'.³⁰¹ De Ruggiero identified as the 'primary postulate' of liberalism a 'deep lying mental attitude' toward the 'spiritual freedom of mankind'. Rejecting determinism, 'it posits a free individual conscious of his capacity for unfettered development and self-expression'.³⁰² The 'liberal attitude of the modern man', is found in 'the inviolability of his person and his freedom'.³⁰³ Whilst as a movement liberalism embodies a 'complex pattern of interrelated strands which cannot be disentangled', in its political expression it came to be the institutional and cultural guarantee of liberty that encompassed pan-European liberal movements.³⁰⁴ Although 'various definitions of Liberalism have been given[...] a method, a party, an art of government, a form of State organization', in the historical development of these expressions, 'these descriptions are complimentary rather than exclusive, since each expresses a particular aspect of the Liberal spirit'.³⁰⁵

Like Hobhouse, De Ruggiero had inherited a notion of historical development, from Benedetto Croce rather than T. H. Green, where 'process entails history; history is the intellectual coherence of liberalism, rather than being superimposed to count for it'.³⁰⁶ Juxtaposing Continental and English liberalism, De Ruggiero identified a clear pattern of development: 'each tends to reproduce in itself the phase which the other was manifesting in the previous century'—leading toward, he optimistically wrote, 'the final result[...] an interpenetration

³⁰¹ Collingwood, 'Translator's Preface', 175. Collingwood goes on to quote from Lord Balfour's introduction to the English translation of Treitschke's *Politics*.

³⁰² De Ruggiero, 'Liberalism', 435.

³⁰³ De Ruggiero, *History of European Liberalism*, 23.

³⁰⁴ De Ruggiero, 'Liberalism', 435.

³⁰⁵ De Ruggiero, *History of European Liberalism*, 357.

³⁰⁶ Freedon, 'Twentieth Century Liberal Thought', 25-8.

giving rise to a genuinely European liberalism'.³⁰⁷ The interrelationship of the two was that 'the former felt the need of tempering its abstract revolutionary attitude by the introduction of a historical point of view; the latter, the need of infusing new life into its traditionalism by contact with a rationalistic point of view'.³⁰⁸ For every 'ambitious designs of radicals', these were 'curbed by the tenacious forces of tradition'.³⁰⁹ Liberalism contorts and encompasses contradictory expressions by acting as a 'flexible equilibrium' between a conservatism which enshrines the status quo and a radicalism which makes a 'tabula rasa of the past'. Liberalism navigates between the two by both 'recognizing freedom as an expansive force tending toward the future', and giving due weight to the 'historical continuity of the actions through which the human spirit gradually realizes itself'.³¹⁰ This 'fusion' was an expression of a dynamic conception of liberalism which historically developed through navigating movements and counter-movements in order to form a higher expression of reconciliation, not unlike Hobhouse's account of the relationship between the negative and positive expressions of liberalism.

One of the clearest expressions of this movement of liberalism was the clash between liberalism and democracy in the French revolution, which came to expand the meaning of both.³¹¹ This movement of contradiction and reconciliation is best expressed in how 'little by little we enter upon a sphere in which the mere expansion of natural rights profoundly alters their original aspect'. What we found in the course of the eighteenth century was that 'the utter negation of individualism proceeds by a logical development from the conception of individuality'.³¹² Again in the nineteenth century, for De Ruggiero, rather than the socialist and radical democrat threat toppling liberalism, as some liberals feared, 'the proletariat's efforts to overthrow the new privilege, though anti-liberal in appearance, were in reality to bring into existence a wider liberalism'.³¹³ The conflicting expressions of liberalism found their reconciliation in the movement of history.

De Ruggiero singled out Hegel as a figure who had recognised the conflicting dynamics of liberal principles and ultimately sought their reconciliation. Hegel, standing in relation to this historical movement, synthesised an account of the individual and the state through an organic conception of society, which 'makes it possible not only to place the idea of the State

³⁰⁷ De Ruggiero, *History of European Liberalism*, 13.

³⁰⁸ *ibid.*, 171, 347-8.

³⁰⁹ De Ruggiero, 'Liberalism', 438.

³¹⁰ *ibid.*, 436.

³¹¹ *ibid.*, 437.

³¹² De Ruggiero, *History of European Liberalism*, 26-8.

³¹³ *ibid.*, 48.

in a region secure against the assaults of the individual, but also to canalize into that idea, in an organic and disciplined form, all the claims and aspirations that spring spontaneously out of the individual life'. Hegel both divided and united the revolutionary and reactionary forces that suggested the state was caught between being the mere 'product of convention and caprice' and that the 'State is identical with the prince and stands over against the consciousness of the people as an external object'.³¹⁴ De Ruggiero noted that such an account of the state 'had the misfortune to be frequently quoted in isolation from [its] context in his system' and as such had been 'regarded by incompetent and prejudiced judges as a shibboleth and a scandal'.³¹⁵ It's liberalism, however, was said to lie in how rather than simply deifying the state, 'the superiority of the State is manifested by permitting the maximum liberty to the Church, in the consciousness that since this freedom is the law of the spirit, it cannot prejudice the claims of a spiritual rationality'.³¹⁶

What De Ruggiero took from Hobhouse was the essential component of liberty as growth and that the self-development of the individual was necessary for the development of the community. Though an ethical community was essential for our self-development in which our shared values could be realised as well as our own good as part of the common good, the co-operative pursuit of self-development each as an individual was a necessary requirement for the realisation of the moral and spiritual whole.³¹⁷ De Ruggiero did, however, place more emphasis on the cunning of reason and the metaphysical realisation of Spirit when it came to reconciling the self-development of individuals as part of a community. For Hobhouse, any optimism about the future prospects of liberalism was both dependent upon circumstance and a faith in the possibility of harmony through self-conscious co-operation—not metaphysical necessity. The emphasis for Hobhouse was on the possibility of rational progress through the co-operative endeavour of self-development; an ideal which is striven towards, rather than something spontaneously realised.³¹⁸

Whilst Hobhouse was much preoccupied with the local fortunes of the Liberal party as a potential vehicle of liberalism and emphasised the co-operative aspect of self-development, whereas De Ruggiero emphasised an unfolding logic that worked to toward a pan-European liberalism as an unfolding of Spirit on the world stage, both saw liberalism as a process of

³¹⁴ *ibid.*, 231.

³¹⁵ *ibid.*, 234.

³¹⁶ *ibid.*, 239.

³¹⁷ *ibid.*, 156-7. See also Richard Bellamy, 'Idealism and Liberalism in an Italian 'New Liberal Theorist': Guido De Ruggiero's *History of European Liberalism*', *The Historical Journal* 30, no.1 (1987): 192, 194-5, 200.

³¹⁸ See Griffin, 'L. T. Hobhouse...', 652-3, 656, 659. See also Freedman, *Liberalism Divided*, 44.

movement, energy, and vitality toward the self-development of individuals within a community. Both saw liberalism as a relationship between the individual and the social order that historically developed. Both held that the antagonisms of this relationship could be reconciled through the co-operative self-development of individuals as part of a shared community of values. The problem, for both, was whether all antagonisms could ultimately be reconciled as part of world-history. Hobhouse, as we have seen, retained a certain pessimism about the possibility for regression and decline, that could only be countered by the faith in progress and development that came with co-operation. Leading up to and immediately beyond 1914, it certainly seemed that the 'march of history was proceeding rapidly in the wrong direction'.³¹⁹

Whilst the First World War dealt a heavy blow to Hobhouse's confidence in liberalism's future, by the 1920s a certain measure of faith had been regained, coeval with De Ruggiero's, in the possibility of 'human development as moving to a maturity of rational self-direction'.³²⁰ Hobhouse's tempered optimism was nonetheless accompanied by a general despondence that he had developed for Liberal movements and the trajectory of British politics. Hobhouse was not alone in this. John Maynard Keynes suggested that 'the Liberal party is still the best instrument of future progress—if only it had strong leadership and the right programme' that was capable of grappling with matters of 'living interest and urgent importance'; 'but when we come to consider the problem of party positively [Keynes continued]—by reference to what attracts rather than to what repels—the aspect is dismal in every party alike, whether we put our hopes in measures or in men'.³²¹ In seeking a non-communist rejection of fascism, De Ruggiero looked to the 'political and parliamentary orientation of Germany' as the 'greatest triumph of post-war Liberalism'. Whilst the 'political fruits of this régime cannot as yet be precisely estimated', given the difficulties presented to the Weimer government in its emergence, 'one may conclude that the omens are favourable towards the capacity of the German people to win for itself that liberal education in politics which the old régime denied it'.³²² Whilst the First World War had 'blighted the spirit of liberty', the 'menace of Communism' grew, and 'political nationalism ha[d] still further aggravated antiliberal forces', for De Ruggiero still holding out in 1933, it seemed that these forces of 'extreme oppression

³¹⁹ Collini, *Liberalism and Sociology*, 243-247.

³²⁰ See the preface to the second edition of L. T. Hobhouse, *Development and Purpose*, 2nd ed. (London: MacMillan & Co., 1927), xxxvi. See also Collini, *Liberalism and Sociology*, 252.

³²¹ J. W. Keynes, 'Am I a Liberal? [1925]', in E. Johnson & D. Moggridge (Eds.) *The Collected Writings of John Maynard Keynes, IX: Essays in Persuasion* (Royal Economic Society, 2012), 295-306.

³²² De Ruggiero, *History of European Liberalism*, 274. See also Bellamy, 'Liberalism and Idealism...', 191.

may once again generate new stimuli to liberty'.³²³ De Ruggiero's view was uncharacteristically optimistic by this point. For Collingwood, a keen sailor, the prevailing winds were driving towards the rocks.

Collingwood's fear was that liberalism was on the decline and this increasingly came to occupy his writings in the 1930s. As we have seen, Collingwood had already identified 'Hegelianism' as a pernicious force. By the 1930s, the rise of totalitarianism was in part, for Collingwood, an offshoot of these early concerns and an explicit threat to liberalism. What was declining was 'the idea of a community as governing itself by fostering the free expression of all political opinions that take shape within it, and finding some means of reducing this multiplicity of opinions to a unity' through the 'dialectical solution of problems'.³²⁴ As he put it, 'healthy political life, like all life, is conflict: but this conflict is political so long as it is dialectical, that is, carried on by parties which desire to find an agreement beyond or behind their differences'.³²⁵ Liberalism, for Collingwood, was in its political expression this dialectical solution to problems as part of a collective culture. European conflict and the totalitarian threat, however, threatened the liberty of individuals that was presupposed by the dialectical solution of problems and further threatened the social collective that constituted a liberal culture.

Collingwood agreed with the British Idealists in seeing freedom and self-consciousness as only possible within a social context, and the creation of that context itself as an achievement of an antagonistic development between the individual and the social collective.³²⁶ Our freedom is not an innate capacity, summarising De Ruggiero's view, as freedom comes 'by degrees as a man enters into the self-conscious possession of his personality through a life of discipline and moral progress'.³²⁷ Freedom is found in 'an act of *self-liberation*'.³²⁸ Collingwood's liberalism was similar to the likes of Green, Hobhouse, and De Ruggiero in this regard, where the 'principles are gradually acquired through the self-conscious possession or development of personality by the exercise of discipline and the deliberate cultivation of progress in moral

³²³ De Ruggiero, 'Liberalism', 441.

³²⁴ R. G. Collingwood, 'Modern Politics' in *Essays in Political Philosophy*, 177-8. See also Boucher, 'Introduction' to Collingwood's *Essays in Political Philosophy*, 6.

³²⁵ Collingwood, 'Modern Politics', 183.

³²⁶ David Boucher, *The Social and Political Thought of R. G. Collingwood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 144-5, 149.

³²⁷ Collingwood, 'Translator's Preface' in *Essays in Political Philosophy*, 175.

³²⁸ R. G. Collingwood, *The New Leviathan; or Man, Society, Civilization, and Barbarism*, ed. David Boucher (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992 [1942]), 91 [13.21-25].

action'.³²⁹ As Collingwood continued, 'the aim of liberalism is to assist the individual to discipline himself and achieve his own moral progress'. The state, as part of that process, is not a 'vehicle of superhuman wisdom or a superhuman power, but the organ by which a people expresses whatever of political ability it can find, and breed, and train within itself'.³³⁰ A liberal society is characterised, or better still, constituted by 'a distinct mode of conduct' as a result of this process, where historical locality is a necessary component of self-understanding, and the setting for a liberal culture in which human freedom is able to be expressed and find resolution through the dialectical solution of problems allows the individual as part of the community to grow.³³¹

Collingwood's account of the dialectical nature of liberalism bears some similarity to Hobhouse's expression that 'the problem of reason is to make a consistent system of all forms of experience, rejecting none except on the ground of proved incoherence'. If two forms of experience came to 'a final clash between two such orders it will not presume *a priori* that one must prevail but will enquire, as it does within each department, whether it is not possible to find a synthesis which will eliminate the elements of inconsistency'.³³² The harmonious self-development of individuals does not preclude any discord, but finds reconciliation via a process of antagonism. Like Hobhouse's *Liberalism* in particular, Collingwood's *The New Leviathan* would situate this dialectic into a broader story about European politics: 'Throughout European history, from at least the times of ancient Greece, democracy and aristocracy... have gone hand in hand as the positive and negative elements of a dialectical development'.³³³ The defining characteristic of 'English political life' in the nineteenth century was not, however, the internal dynamics of liberalism, but the dialectical relationship between 'Liberal and Conservative'.³³⁴ Collingwood also seemed to consider this as an open dialectic, an ongoing process which is continually under threat—even if the solely imminent threat is its own complacency. As Collingwood reflected, we may have heritage of certain gifts, 'but we can very easily destroy these gifts'.³³⁵

³²⁹ David Boucher, 'Collingwood and Liberalism' in *R. G. Collingwood: An Autobiography and Other Writings; with essays on Collingwood's life and work*, ed. David Boucher and Teresa Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 380-1.

³³⁰ Collingwood, 'Translator's Preface', 175-6.

³³¹ Peter Johnson, *R. G. Collingwood: an introduction* (Bristol: Thommes Press, 1998), 107-8.

³³² Hobhouse, *Development and Purpose*, xxxviii.

³³³ Collingwood, *The New Leviathan*, 206 [27.5].

³³⁴ Collingwood, *The New Leviathan*, 208-9 [27.71, 27.8].

³³⁵ Collingwood, 'The Prussian Philosophy', 205.

Liberalism was caught in a pincer movement between an 'external illiberalism' that had led to one world war—and would shortly lead to another—and a spiritual assault on the 'inner life of communities' that was embodied in a growing individualism internal to liberalism—the erroneous assumption 'that free pursuit of individual interest best subserved the interest of all'.³³⁶ Collingwood diagnosed the problem in how liberal and democratic principles had 'lost their 'punch'', becoming 'mere matters of habit', rather than a fully realised cultural engagement, and that as such, were too weak to hold back more destructive forces that utilise emotive sentiments.³³⁷ The failure of liberalism was not a matter of principle, 'not from weakness or falsity in the principles of liberalism itself', but in the failure to enact those principles and counter the forces that undermine the very possibility of those principles; 'the militarism and the revolutionary socialism which threaten to destroy civilization today are a just punishment for its crimes in the years of its greatness'. What was being witnessed was 'the [unwitting or witless] jettison of the liberal principles which our civilisation so long and painfully acquired'.³³⁸ Collingwood would later suggest that part of the problem was that the Liberals had fundamentally misunderstood the dialectical nature of politics itself.³³⁹

Liberalism was threatened both internally by its own complacency and externally by the rise of fascism. What was required to keep those principles alive was not merely a passive tolerance, but an 'active fostering of free speech as the basis of all healthy political life'.³⁴⁰ Free speech and an active citizenship is necessary for the dialectic process of a liberal politics, particularly in distinction to fascism.³⁴¹ The challenge of fascism was the erosion of peace and liberty, the conditions of growth, by 'a permanent declaration of a state of emergency'.³⁴² Not only was it an erosion of peace and liberty, but an erosion of the culture that fostered peace, as 'liberal or democratic principles[...] are a function of Christianity', whereas fascism is a function of 'pre-Christian paganism'. The grounding 'for the 'liberal' or 'democratic' devotion to freedom was religious love of God who set an absolute value on every individual human being'.³⁴³ What Collingwood retained faith in was the process of civilisation in combating that ever present possibility of regression and decline embodied in the forces of barbarism. If anything, the *New Leviathan* was Collingwood's war effort, an 'expression of his faith in European liberalism and

³³⁶ Collingwood, 'Modern Politics', 185.

³³⁷ Collingwood, 'Fascism and Nazism' in *Essays in Political Philosophy*, 191-2, 194.

³³⁸ Collingwood, 'Modern Politics', 180, 186.

³³⁹ Collingwood, *The New Leviathan*, 211 [27.92-27.97].

³⁴⁰ Collingwood, 'Modern Politics', 177-8.

³⁴¹ Boucher, 'Collingwood and Liberalism', 382.

³⁴² Collingwood, 'Modern Politics', 178-9.

³⁴³ Collingwood, 'Fascism and Nazism', 190, 195.

its ability to defeat the forces of irrationalism'.³⁴⁴ Liberalism was not a theory but 'something in the doing', a distinct historic practice, and when it came to it, that doing required combating the forces of barbarism.³⁴⁵ This was particularly true at a moment when world-history was defined by world-conflict and the 'true imperialism' of liberalism was facing new threats.

Fascism was not the only threat, though it was the most dangerous and urgent for Collingwood. Another threat to liberal conduct came from the practice of socialism. The socialist critique of liberalism for failing to achieve its aims highlighted how 'behind a façade of liberal principles, the reality of political life has been a predatory system by which capitalists have plundered wage-earners', which was correct for Collingwood 'so far as its analysis of historical fact'. Socialism had exposed the complacency of liberal practice. But this was in fact a 'vindication' of liberal principle, rather than a call for its violent overthrow and the establishment of dictatorship by or on behalf of the proletariat. The socialist critique must 'carry conviction to anyone who is genuinely liberal in principle and not merely a partisan of the outward forms in which past liberalism has expressed itself'.³⁴⁶ Dictatorship is the 'imposition of ready-made political solutions on a passive people', rather than the dialectical solution of problems, and as such is antithetical to liberalism in method.³⁴⁷ Much like Hobhouse's distinction between the ethical-humanitarian aspects of socialism and its organised forms, Collingwood saw the ends of liberalism and socialism to be compatible, but starkly opposed in method. In the dialectical solution of problems, liberalism maintains faith in the method and cultural practice of antagonism and reconciliation, rather than an ultimate solution that would transcend conflict.³⁴⁸

For Collingwood, liberalism, not socialism, was the true heir to the dialectic. Marxism had inherited from Kant, alongside a belief in 'enlightened despotism', 'dualism between a period of revolution and crisis, and a period when all conflict shall be at an end' and from Hegel, a sense of war—class-war—being 'glorious consummation of political activity, the same idea which has maddened the brains of the militarists'.³⁴⁹ What Marx had erroneously imbibed from Hegel was a perverted deification of the state. The problem of how the state had come to be conceived was that 'individual man is by himself powerless for good or evil' and that such an individual consequently 'owes his economic, political, and spiritual life to the society into

³⁴⁴ Boucher, 'Collingwood and Liberalism', 391. See also Adrian Paylor, 'R. G. Collingwood's Critique of Nazism: Liberal, Marxist or Conservative?', *Politics, Religion, & Ideology* 16, no.2-3 (2015): 161-3, 167-8.

³⁴⁵ Collingwood, 'Modern Politics', 178. See also Johnson, *R. G. Collingwood*, 135.

³⁴⁶ Collingwood, 'Modern Politics', 181-2.

³⁴⁷ Collingwood, 'Modern Politics', 183.

³⁴⁸ Collingwood, 'Fascism and Nazism', 193.

³⁴⁹ Collingwood, 'Modern Politics', 183-4.

which he is born', which whilst true for Collingwood, did not entail that the state was to be held above all and 'answerable to no one but itself'. This was not integral to Hegel's understanding of society, but was an 'irrational excrescence', on Collingwood's interpretation, that had erroneously been taken up by Marx in the absolute of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and been fused with Nietzscheanism where 'the will of the state could only be defined as a will to power'. The result was a total state and a glorification of war, culminating in a 'spiritual disease that has caused the war'³⁵⁰—a disease which, like Hobhouse, Collingwood traced to Germanic sources.

Collingwood, meanwhile, distinguished Green from 'Hegelianism' with an eye on the constitution of liberalism, as this connection was perhaps 'used by their opponents, more through ignorance than through deliberate dishonesty, to discredit them in the eyes of a public always contemptuous of foreigners'.³⁵¹ More strikingly still, Collingwood claimed that the outstanding exemplification of the dialectic of which he spoke was found in Hobbes, not Hegel. What Collingwood found in Hobbes was not strictly an account of liberalism, but a contribution to Collingwood's own understanding of liberalism as the dialectical solution to political problems.³⁵² Hobbes was favoured by Collingwood over Hegel for a dialectical understanding of politics—and one must also admit frankly for his nationality, being an Englishman—which Hegel had seemingly misunderstood. This, however, perhaps undermined Collingwood's earlier understanding of historical development and the nature of that historical development.³⁵³ Rather than a linear narrative of the transition from a state of nature to civil society that one may read in Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, Collingwood saw this as a continual dialectic between positive civilising forces and negative regressive ones, which antagonistically developed over time and found their modern expression in liberalism. Socialisation was a process within the body politic which was tied to the consciousness of freedom; more specifically, a social consciousness, in recognising ourselves and others as free, in which the liberty of individuals is found in the social collective.³⁵⁴ It was liberalism—and more specifically, a British line of liberalism—that was the heir to the progressive forces of socialisation and the dialectical resolution of problems.

³⁵⁰ Collingwood, 'The Prussian Philosophy', 202-3.

³⁵¹ R. G. Collingwood, *Autobiography* in *R. G. Collingwood: An Autobiography and Other Writings*, 15-6.

³⁵² See Robin Douglass, 'Leviathans Old and New: What Collingwood saw in Hobbes', *History of European Ideas* 41, no.5 (2015): 527-543.

³⁵³ James Alexander, 'The Philosophy of History in Oakeshott and Collingwood', *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 10, no.2 (2016): 21-2.

³⁵⁴ Boucher, 'Collingwood and Liberalism', 395-6.

What Collingwood produced was essentially 'a Hegelian history with Hobbes and not Hegel as its central character'.³⁵⁵ As I have argued, this does not only concern Collingwood's account of history, but Collingwood's account of liberalism and the perceived threats to it, given the particular way in which Collingwood understand liberalism as a historical phenomenon. Whatever Hegel's merits, his name had come to stand for the glorification of the state and for the unleashing of the forces of barbarism against rational humanitarianism, for both Hobhouse and Collingwood, which cast him out of the liberal tradition and led to 'Hegelianism' as one of liberalism's antagonists. This was despite the similarities to Hegel and 'Hegelianism' for the way in which liberalism was understood as an historical movement of growth through an ongoing process of antagonism and reconciliation, whether by Hobhouse, De Ruggiero, or Collingwood. European conflict and the elevation of the state had tarnished the progressive development of liberalism in world-history, but faith was retained in liberalism's capacity to overcome the antagonism and to reconcile the individual to the social order and to create the conditions for the self-development of all as part of a community. The distance between 'liberalism' and 'Hegelianism', and the assurance that the former would not necessarily lapse into the problems associated with the latter, however, was more rhetorically than substantively persuasive.

By 1936, Collingwood had suggested that: 'the plainest political fact of our times is the widespread collapse of what I shall call, using the word in its Continental sense, liberalism'.³⁵⁶ Collingwood was looking to the rising threat of totalitarianism but his account of the dialectical nature of liberalism also looked back to the fall of the Liberals. In 1942, Collingwood suggested that 'the most remarkable event in our political history during the twentieth century has been the eclipse of the Liberal party'.³⁵⁷ Liberalism would undergo a significant revision in its efforts to combat totalitarianism, perhaps most significantly by severing liberalism from any 'Continental' sense and by discarding the 'new' liberal legacy and a dialectical understanding of liberalism. The defences of liberalism made by De Ruggiero and Collingwood in the 1920s and '30s, it would come to seem, were using old tools in different ways to tackle new threats, just as Hobhouse had attempted to revise liberal arguments at a moment of crisis in the early twentieth century. The use of those old tools substantially reshaped how liberalism was understood and perceived as a historical phenomenon. As the following chapter will explore, a different story about liberalism was already being told—one which would cast the 'new' liberals out with the 'Hegelians'—that relied upon a different conception of liberalism as a

³⁵⁵ Alexander, 'The Philosophy of History...', 25.

³⁵⁶ Collingwood, 'Modern Politics', 177.

³⁵⁷ Collingwood, *The New Leviathan*, 210 [27.91].

tradition. What I have tried to recover, in this section, is a way of thinking about liberalism that Hobhouse shared with De Ruggiero and Collingwood, as a dialectical movement that sought reconciliation from its internal antagonisms.

Conclusion

Hobhouse's liberalism has often been presented as representative of the 'new' liberals, a break with the 'old' nineteenth century liberalism. This chapter has argued that this manner of presentation neglects the way in which Hobhouse himself presented that historical shift and the way in which liberalism was conceptualised as a broader tradition of growth and development. At the turn of the century in Britain, liberals searched for the core principles of liberalism out of a deep satisfaction with the British Liberal party. Out of the differing strains of Edwardian liberalism, Hobhouse depicted his own liberalism as the true heir to the liberalism of Mill and Green, providing not only an intellectual lineage from previous liberals to himself, but an understanding of liberalism as a moving and growing tradition from its conflicting dynamics. In the reconciliation of liberalism's negative and positive dynamics, the self-development of individuals could be achieved as part of liberty-for-a-community. Hobhouse's liberalism, as he presented it, was not a break with the past, but part of the evolutionary growth of liberalism as an historical phenomenon and part of the self-conscious expression of that movement as its inheritor. Where Hobhouse did distinguish himself from the 'old', this was in terms of countering the narrative associated with Dicey that saw a lost past of individualism as the 'true' account of liberalism. Hobhouse, as part of the 'new' liberals more broadly, attempted to show the unity of 'individualism' and 'collectivism' in liberalism as a historical movement of growth and development.

Whilst Hobhouse stressed historical continuity and growth in his conception of liberalism, his defence of liberalism nonetheless distinguished it both from the Liberals and from Hegel, which distanced liberalism from undesirable political outcomes witnessed in the failures of laissez-faire, the Boer war, and the First World War. In response to material crises, liberalism was defended as a spiritual—though nonetheless historical—phenomenon, which could transcend the limitations of its particular manifestations. Though Hobhouse went to great lengths suggesting the compatibility of certain antagonisms, such as liberalism and humanitarian socialism or the individual and the social order, not everything could be reconciled. One of the most prominent intellectual antagonisms, for Hobhouse, was between

liberalism and a German line of thought originating with Hegel that was said to have deified the state, animating world conflict. Though Hobhouse was vocal about his distance from Bosanquet's 'Hegelianism', particularly in his characterisation of the state, Hobhouse's liberalism shared certain affinities with 'Hegelianism' when it came to his conceptual understanding of liberalism as a living and moving tradition. The distance between the two was less than his rhetoric suggested.

Hobhouse was a signpost to broader trends in liberal thought in the inter-war period. After him, De Ruggiero and Collingwood provided accounts of liberalism that understood it as a tradition of growth and development, as the spiritual realisation of liberty in history, and as the key to the self-development of individuals from within the social order. Whilst this historical awareness played its role in transforming liberalism into a tradition—and a distinct kind of tradition at that—this went with a familiar process of editing: on the one hand, liberalism was understood from considering the successive stages of its historical development, but on the other hand, the meaning of liberalism was revised from the perspective of the present, editing out sources of present discomfort, in this case, the legacy of Hegel and its undesirable political outcomes. This left behind an 'Hegelian' account of liberalism's history without a place for Hegel. The expunging Hegel from the liberal tradition was a marker of things to come. As the Second World War slid into the Cold War, the enthusiasm among liberals for casting off any continental heritage for their conceptions of liberalism only grew. Hegel's role in formulating the outlines of the story of the development of subjective freedom in history, which did so much to shape the accounts of liberalism developed by Hobhouse, De Ruggiero, and Collingwood, was pushed to the margins. What receded in the process was an understanding of liberalism as a tradition to which Hobhouse, De Ruggiero, and Collingwood contributed centrally and which embraced within its terms oppositional forces that drove it forward and which would achieve ultimate resolution in the reconciliation of the individual and the community. The next chapter of the thesis tells the story of that movement, focussing on the contribution to it by the writings of Isaiah Berlin.

3. Isaiah Berlin: A Tale of Two Liberties

'[W]hat gods were to the ancients at war, ideas are to us'³⁵⁸

'The dilemma is logically insoluble: we cannot sacrifice either freedom or the organization needed for its defence, or a minimum standard of welfare. The way out must therefore lie in some logically untidy, flexible, and even ambiguous compromise'³⁵⁹

Introduction

During the First World War and in its immediate aftermath, a strand of Germanic philosophy was singled out by British liberals as having contributed towards the intellectual justification for German militarism and the deification of the state. One of the most notable contributors to this line of thought, or so it was alleged, was Hegel. Similarly, following the Russian revolutions, liberals were keen to distance themselves from the revolutionary politics and reconfiguration of democracy as dictatorship that had become synonymous with Marx's name via Lenin.³⁶⁰ The previous chapter showed how the likes of L.T. Hobhouse, Guido De Ruggiero, and R.G. Collingwood retained certain elements of 'Hegelian' thinking in their views on liberalism, whilst simultaneously distancing themselves from the political consequences they

³⁵⁸ Lionel Trilling, 'The Sense of the Past' in *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (New York: New York Review of Books, 1950), 193.

³⁵⁹ Isaiah Berlin, 'Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century' in *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 39.

³⁶⁰ See Freedman, *Liberalism Divided*, 179-181, 186-8.

associated with Hegel's name. These three liberals—Hobhouse in particular—had also attempted to show the compatibility of at least one form of socialism with liberalism, articulating a version of liberalism that was capable of incorporating into itself some socialist criticisms that remedied its perceived defects. Liberalism was subsequently cut off from Hegel and Marx in ways that were perhaps more apparent than real: ritual expressions of disapproval masked shared premises and intellectual lineages. As a second world-engulfing conflict approached, and the more so in its wake, a more radical break was made. 'Liberalism' came to be distinguished more decisively from 'Hegelianism' and 'Marxism' by its proponents. They reached back before Hegel and Marx to a more individualist tradition of liberalism originating in the seventeenth century. The gap between 'true' liberalism and its distortions, which Hobhouse and Collingwood had opened, was widened into a chasm between liberalism and the menace of totalitarianism in all its guises.

As we saw in the previous chapter, Hobhouse, De Ruggiero, and Collingwood had all emphasised liberalism's commitment to the individual. Liberalism was not seen, however, *primarily* as a tradition of individualism, but rather as a tradition that enabled the collective self-development of individuals within a specific social and cultural setting. Individualism had been a key part of the early articulations of liberalism, and it continued to play a role in the internal dynamics—the dialectics—of liberalism's historical development, but liberalism's ultimate expression was found, according to this branch of liberals, in a liberal community in which people's energies were mobilised to a common end. Liberalism moved in history from an individualist foundation to the collective realisation of liberty. This chapter explores the movement away from *this* view of liberalism's character, and as such the transformation in the meaning of the liberal tradition, in the mid-twentieth century and the construction of liberalism as the antonym to totalitarianism. The new meaning that came to be distinguished from the 'new' liberals ironically resembled aspects of the 'old' liberalism that the 'new' liberals had attempted to distinguish themselves from.

Sections one and two outline a twofold shift in the way that individualism figured as the 'true' foundation of liberalism. First, in contradistinction to the narratives of Hobhouse, De Ruggiero, and Collingwood, liberalism came to be primarily associated with a Hobbesian, Lockean, and Smithean individualism found in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—what we might call a 'negative' individualism. For both liberalism's critics and its defenders, the collectivist turn was not the culmination of all that liberalism promised, but a false step, a somewhat unsuccessful attempt to break free of a past that haunted liberal values. Section two then

explores the shift in valuation. From initially being criticised as the dead weight of liberalism in the 1930s, this individualist lineage came to be seen as liberalism's primary asset against the totalitarian threat in the 1940s and early 50s by factions of liberals. This was not individualism in any Hegelian, 'new' liberal, 'positive', or socialistic sense of individualism as self-development within a community—which were now thrown together as one. Liberalism was exorcised of any such underlying processes and instead defended as a lost tradition of 'negative' individualism originating in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in direct antagonism to the anti-liberal tradition—for want of a better phrase. In each case, what liberalism stood for and what it opposed became more and more abstract, encompassing broad intellectual trends and timeless values that stood at opposing sides of the chasm. Liberalism was defended as the 'true' Western tradition in contradistinction to the totalitarianisms and fascisms of Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin.

Section three then explores one especially influential narrative that surveyed the history and character of liberalism in the aftermath of the Second World War and the emergence of the Cold War: Isaiah Berlin's 'Two Concepts of Liberty'. Berlin's text—originally delivered as his inaugural lecture as Chichele Professor of Social and Political Theory at Oxford in 1958—recast the lineage of liberalism as a clash between two traditions of liberty, which he famously dubbed 'negative' and 'positive'; one of which had greater claims to rule the present.

Late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century liberals had infused their liberalisms with both of these concepts and attempted to find the compatibility between them. On the surface of Berlin's account, negative liberty had been an ally to liberal individualism and the pluralism of values, whereas positive liberty had sacrificed the individual on the altar of history. The two were therefore in tension. An effect of this was to solidify the meaning of liberalism as a tradition committed to the individual in distinction to another, increasingly misguided tradition that authorised the sacrifice of the individual to the collective, rewriting the intellectual legacy of liberalism to suit Berlin's political preferences and the wider geo-political divisions of his time. Whilst Berlin's narrative set out a vision of liberalism that was opposed to the totalitarianisms he associated in theory with Hegel, Marx, and also Rousseau, and in practice with the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc in particular, his was not a crude valorisation of 'negative' liberty. Section four sets out the deeper ambiguity of the Enlightenment legacy for Berlin, which impacted the way in which liberalism was defended by Berlin and the way its history was presented by him. Liberalism, for Berlin, was an ambiguous product of Enlightenment, romantic, and counter-Enlightenment ideals. This ensured that it never broke

free entirely from the figures from whom Berlin aimed to distance liberalism from. The two meanings of liberty he identified were not, as it is sometimes supposed, mutually secluded from one another in two entirely separate lines of descent but remained twin elements of a single complex idea that perpetually jostled for primacy with one another. The two liberties were perpetually in tension with one another and the liberal tradition reflected both of them. It could therefore not so easily be suggested that negative liberty had liberal political consequences, whereas positive liberty had illiberal ones. The significance of liberalism was its embodiment of that tension.

Section five then develops a comparison between Berlin's division of liberalism and similar divisions made by both F. A. Hayek and Michael Oakeshott. Each of Berlin's and Hayek's narratives also nodded to Benjamin Constant's contrast between ancient and modern liberty. This section says more about the way liberalism was understood as a historical phenomenon and the shift away from an 'Hegelian' meaning of liberalism as a tradition, in which liberalism was seen as an historical process of conflicting dynamics that found resolution, to one which saw liberalism as a lost tradition of 'negative' liberty originating in the seventeenth century that defended the individual and stood opposed to a corrupted tradition of 'positive' liberty. The previous chapter showed how Hobhouse, De Ruggiero, and Collingwood attempted to reconcile the 'positive' and 'negative' dynamics of liberalism. This chapter shows how Berlin—despite his frustrated attempts to pull them apart—saw them as endlessly clashing with one another as contrary aspects of a single tradition in a pluralistic world. Berlin's narrative, as we shall see, was more sensitive to the ambiguities in liberalism and to the precarious meaning and historical contingency of liberalism than Hayek's binary narrative. The problems that Oakeshott criticised Hayek for attempting to evade in his binary narrative are therefore not only significant for challenging the common interpretation of Berlin's liberalism but also for considering a different set of problems. This section therefore draws attention to Oakeshott in contrast to Hayek for illuminating Berlin's liberalism and for his understanding of liberalism as a 'tradition'. The tensions within Berlin's liberalism were neither resolved nor fully accommodated within his account of liberalism as a historical phenomenon. This meant, however, that Berlin's liberalism was often closer to what it insisted upon its distance from. Liberalism was never too far from its enemies and this gave little assurance of its primacy as a 'tradition'. That is the prospectus for the chapter that follows. It begins by drawing a contrast. In the last chapter, mention was made of De Ruggiero's *History of European Liberalism*. The current chapter sets off from a rival attempt to elucidate that history made some years later by the English socialist Harold Laski.

I. Assaults on Individualism

The initial enthusiasm that the 'new' liberal ideal had injected into liberalism had suffered a blow during the First World War, and whatever may have remained of its optimism had certainly waned by the 1930s for the majority of liberals. Following the Great Depression, 'Liberals[...] were fatally caught between a desire to remain progressive and a fear, now reinforced by political impotence, of the Labour party'. Factions of left-leaning British liberals had even turned their support to the Labour party once the Liberal party had seemingly lost direction—or, to more cynical minds, electoral advantage. Michael Freedon suggests that liberalism in Britain was caught and ultimately divided between a left-liberalism and a centrist-liberalism in this period and subsequently entered a 'decade of dormancy'—only to then find a strange expression in the Beveridge report of 1942 once the vehicle of the Liberal party had been abandoned.³⁶¹ The 1930s were a tumultuous period for the hopes of liberals, as Freedon explores, but it was also a period where 'liberalism' started to become a more common object of study as a tradition of thought and came to be analysed as a social doctrine in distinction to its ideological rivals.³⁶² The idea of the liberal tradition came to be focused around an image of 'individualism' that had originated in Britain in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for commentators in Europe as well as in the United States, despite the waning hopes of liberals. The irony, however, was that this image of the liberal tradition had its roots as much from those that were critical of it in the 1930s owing to the general malaise of liberalism as to those that would go on to defend it during the Second World War.

Harold Laski's *The Rise of European Liberalism* (1936) echoed the sentiments of liberals at the start of the twentieth century, that 'the nineteenth century [was] the epoch of liberal triumph'.³⁶³ Its roots stretched over 'the last four centuries', such that liberalism had become

³⁶¹ Freedon, *Liberalism Divided*, 348.

³⁶² The final four chapters of George H. Sabine's *A History of Political Theory* (originally published in 1937), for example, are organised around 'Liberalism', 'Marx and Dialectical Materialism', 'Lenin and Communism', and 'Fascism' (London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1941 [1937]). This should not, however, be overstated. Francis W. Coker's *Recent Political Thought* (originally published in 1934), uses the term 'liberalism' throughout but does not use the term as an organising category (London: Appleton-Century, 1934). It does however dedicate the first part to 'Socialistic Doctrines' and later includes a chapter on 'The Fascists'. Michael Oakshott's *The Social and Political Doctrines of Contemporary Europe* (originally published in 1939 and discussed further below) uses 'Representative Democracy' (instead of 'liberalism'), 'Catholicism', 'Communism', 'Fascism', and 'National Socialism' (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939). See also Gunnell, 'The Archaeology of American Liberalism', 133-5.

³⁶³ Harold Laski, *The Rise of European Liberalism* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1936), 237. For the 'one-sided' truth of Laski's work, see G. C. Field 'The Rise of European Liberalism, Harold J. Laski', *Mind* 45, no.180 (1936): 525-529.

'the outstanding doctrine of Western Civilisation'.³⁶⁴ Whilst 'the evolution, of course, was never direct and rarely conscious'³⁶⁵, the seventeenth century began a long march to victory for 'utilitarianism in morals, for toleration in religion, for constitutional government in politics', and for the state as 'the handmaid of commerce' in the economic realm, all of which had later converged into a coherent body of thought. In a phrase, liberalism was 'the triumph of bourgeois virtue'.³⁶⁶ An inadvertent triumph, perhaps, as Laski took this to be 'a by-product of the effort of the middle class to win its place in the sun'.³⁶⁷ Whilst the nineteenth century was an epoch of liberal triumph, the twentieth century was another matter.

Laski had originally aligned with left-leaning liberals in the inter-war period, before moving toward a broadly Marxist critique of liberalism's limits in the 1930s. Initially, Laski had been attracted to the progressivism of the 'new' liberals. If anything, the problem of the 'new' liberals for Laski was neither their goals nor the egalitarianism that informed them, but the worry that the institutional regime required by a community of self-developing individuals would infringe upon the liberty of individuals. Laski had probed the gap between 'liberalism' and 'Hegelianism' that Hobhouse's *The Metaphysical Theory of the State* had opened by making a further defence of the claims of the individual against the state, in particular against considering the state as the realisation of individuals' wills and as the expression of the social collective.³⁶⁸ This not only further distinguished liberalism from Idealism, but used the edges of that distinction to critique the 'new' liberalism of which Hobhouse himself was a part and proponent. During the 1920s, Laski's position was a liberal one. By the 1930s, he had come to think of liberalism as a failed ideology in consequence of its limited conception of society and adherence to one stunted form of individualism.³⁶⁹

There were two primary postulates to the individualism of liberalism as Laski construed it. On the one hand, there was the 'emancipation of the individual' as a 'by-product of the Reformation'³⁷⁰, where 'the human mind had largely been freed itself from dependence upon theological authority'.³⁷¹ On the other, 'the idea of liberalism[...] [was] historically connected, in an inescapable way, with the ownership of property'.³⁷² The former often acted as a façade

³⁶⁴ Laski, *Rise of European Liberalism*, 9.

³⁶⁵ *ibid.*, 12.

³⁶⁶ *ibid.*, 86-7.

³⁶⁷ *ibid.*, 258.

³⁶⁸ See Harold Laski, *Liberty in the Modern State* (London: Faber & Faber, 1930).

³⁶⁹ See Freedon, *Liberalism Divided*, 295-311.

³⁷⁰ Laski, *The Rise of European Liberalism*, 30.

³⁷¹ *ibid.*, 125.

³⁷² *ibid.*, 18.

for the latter. Whilst 'status was replaced by contract as the juridical foundation of society'³⁷³, this had only altered those at the top as the position of dominators and secured the pursuit of wealth as the means to that position of domination, for 'liberalism has been affected by its tendency to regard the poor as men who have failed through their own fault'.³⁷⁴ Liberalism, for Laski, was a failure in realising liberty, due to its adherence to an individualist conception of liberty that could only find expression in a contractual society. Rather than a story of individual self-development evolving through its historical expressions, such as in Hobhouse's *Liberalism*, liberalism as a tradition came to be associated with a particular individualism in the sense of individual self-interest, with individuals being reduced to separate and self-sufficient right-bearers, distinguished by their competing interests.

The key characters in this story, for Laski, were Locke and Smith. Locke 'defined the essential outlines of Liberal doctrine for nearly two centuries'³⁷⁵ and then 'Smith complete[d] an evolution that had been continuous from the Reformation'.³⁷⁶ In contrast to Hobhouse's account of liberalism that saw Locke and Rousseau placed together, in Laski the two were consciously uncoupled, with Locke prioritised and Rousseau marginalised as an ambiguous figure of radicalism and conservatism, 'with a proletarian nuance to his theory' that produced both Marat and Robespierre on the one hand, and Hegel and Savigny on the other.³⁷⁷ Hobhouse too came to be revised in this story. Though Laski credited the more 'generous minds'³⁷⁸ of Green, Tocqueville, and Hobhouse for a more genuine concern for the common good, Locke and Smith were taken as the foundational figures of a liberalism marked by a hard-edged individualism in this narrative arc. Whilst Laski was polite about Hobhouse, he observed that 'men[...] have their compass by other stars'.³⁷⁹ As Laski's *The Decline of Liberalism* later averred, there had indeed been two meanings of liberty, 'one negative, the other positive'; one with a legacy in Locke and Smith, the other in Green and Hobhouse. Rather than the latter being part of the evolution of the former, liberalism had inherently failed in bringing the two together, as their separateness was a symptom of liberalism's crisis. It

³⁷³ *ibid.*, 11. 'THERE are few general propositions concerning the age to which we belong which seem at first sight likely to be received with readier concurrence than the assertion that the society of our day is mainly distinguished from that of preceding generations by the largeness of the sphere which is occupied in it by Contract'. Henry Sumner Maine, *Ancient Law; in connect with the early history of society and its relation to modern ideas* (New York: 1906), 295.

³⁷⁴ Laski, *The Rise of European Liberalism*, 259, 264.

³⁷⁵ *ibid.*, 104-5.

³⁷⁶ *ibid.*, 180.

³⁷⁷ *ibid.*, 211.

³⁷⁸ *ibid.*, 259.

³⁷⁹ Harold J. Laski, 'The Decline of Liberalism' in *Hobhouse Memorial Lectures 1930-1940* (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), 4.

bespoke an inability to adapt to the times that liberalism itself had created. Liberalism, for Laski, was 'a doctrine of negation', but when that negation had 'still left great masses in poverty in ignorance', liberalism could only stand apart and look on dumbfounded. It could only 'embark upon half-hearted concessions; it did not re-examine its constitutive principle'.³⁸⁰ Liberalism had failed due to the weight of the seventeenth century's legacy, 'from its inability to recognize how to adapt[...] to a new world for which it was unprepared'.³⁸¹ Similar conclusions were reached by John Dewey.

Dewey was an American philosopher and social theorist. He began as a follower of Hegel, influenced in particular by T. H. Green. Under the influence of William James, he rejected Idealism but remained a critic of laissez-faire liberalism and the individualistic view of man and society that he took it to embody. Like the 'new' liberals, he regarded it as impotent in the face of the straitened material and political circumstances of the early twentieth century.³⁸² The distinction between laissez-faire liberalism and state-centred welfare was the 'inner split' within liberalism.³⁸³ Previous liberals had erroneously 'put forward their ideas as immutable truths good at all times and places; they had no idea of historical relativity, either in general or in its application to themselves'.³⁸⁴ For Dewey, liberalism was 'committed to an end that is at once enduring and flexible: the liberation of individuals so that realisation of their capacities may be the law of their life'.³⁸⁵ This, however, could only be achieved by recognising the externalities that impacted on the effectiveness of liberty and the security necessary for its realisation, which required the 'reversal of the means to which early liberalism was committed'.³⁸⁶ Earlier liberalisms had posited the individual as 'a Newtonian atom having only external time and space relations to other individuals, save that each social atom was equipped with inherent freedom'. For Dewey this 'absolutism, this ignoring and denial of temporal relativity, is one great reason why the earlier liberalism degenerated so easily into pseudo-liberalism'.³⁸⁷ The problem of the 'degenerate' pseudo-liberalism was that 'the laissez-

³⁸⁰ *ibid.*, 21.

³⁸¹ *ibid.*, 6.

³⁸² See Mathew Festenstein, 'Dewey, John (1859-1952)' in *The Encyclopaedia of Political Thought*, eds. Michael T. Gibbons, Diana Coole, Elisabeth Ellis, and Kennan-Ferguson (Wiley- Blackwell, 2015).

³⁸³ John Dewey, *Liberalism and Social Action* (New York: G. P. Putnm's Sons, 1935), 21, 26-7.

³⁸⁴ Dewey, *Liberalism and Social Action*, 32. See also, John Dewey, 'The Future of Liberalism', *Journal of Philosophy* 32, no.9 (1935): 226.

³⁸⁵ Dewey, *Liberalism and Social Action*, 56.

³⁸⁶ *ibid.*, 51-2, 54, 57.

³⁸⁷ Dewey, 'The Future of Liberalism', 226. See also John Dewey, *Individualism Old and New* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1930).

faire doctrine was held[...] to express the very order of nature itself' and so variation from its course was to their minds impossible.³⁸⁸

Dewey's account of the 'old' liberalism's historical foundations and trajectory echoed Laski. There was an individualistic and property-owning base to liberalism first found in Locke, which Smith had developed in a direction that, in the end, subordinated the political to economic activity—putting politics under the control of the economically powerful.³⁸⁹ Whist the efforts of T. H. Green and his followers had exposed a 'weakness in all phases of the atomistic philosophy that had developed under the alleged empiricism of the earlier liberal school', taking Locke as their target, this had only caused an inner split and an internal ambiguity in liberalism.³⁹⁰ For Dewey, pseudo-liberalism remained rooted in individualist Lockean and Smithean presuppositions, the 'old' individualism, which when facing the twentieth century was 'mealy-mouthed, a milk-and-water doctrine' that was 'unwilling to take a stand in the social conflicts going on'.³⁹¹

Two features of Laski's and Dewey's accounts of liberalism are worth highlighting. The first is that the discussion on the 'future' and health of liberalism had continued to take a less optimistic tone in the inter-war period and most importantly, did not see itself as ultimately reconciling the 'old' and the 'new' in a dynamic conception of liberalism. Guido De Ruggiero's *The History of European Liberalism*, as discussed in the previous chapter, maintained an optimism throughout its dialectical understanding of liberalism, whereby the positive and negative dynamics would be reconciled in a genuinely pan-European liberalism. In 1933, he had hoped that that challenges posed to liberalism by the dual threats of communism and fascism would 'once again generate new stimuli to liberty'.³⁹² Dewey similarly called for a liberalism that made 'full cultural freedom supreme' in the face of absolutist doctrines—'whether proceeding from Mussolini or from Marx'—in order to avoid descending in to a 'degenerate and delusive liberalism'. The connection that this had to the 'old' was not in terms of content or in terms of a dynamic conception of liberalism but in terms of ethos: 'it is worth noting [Dewey remarked] that the earlier liberals were regarded in their day as subversive

³⁸⁸ Dewey, 'The Future of Liberalism', 227.

³⁸⁹ Dewey, *Liberalism and Social Action*, 6-7.

³⁹⁰ *ibid.*, 24-6.

³⁹¹ *ibid.*, 1.

³⁹² De Ruggiero, 'Liberalism', 441.

radicals'. 'The earlier liberal philosophy rendered valiant service', but the moment had come for 'radicalism in action'. Liberalism was split into the delusive and the decisive.³⁹³

In the same journal that Dewey's reflections on the future of liberalism appeared, William Hocking made a far more damning diagnosis: 'that Liberalism has shown itself incapable of achieving social unity; that it has created a pernicious separation of individual rights from individual duties; that it has lost its emotional grip because its emotional basis was in a serious degree unrealistic'.³⁹⁴ Unless liberalism was able to adapt, which in many ways it had shown itself inherently unable to do, then 'Liberalism as a special historic pattern of political and economic ideas has already passed: it has no future'.³⁹⁵ Hocking called for 'a collectivism of a sort' that was neither the 'collectivism of either the Fascist or the Communist sort', nor the 'headlessness of Liberalism and the headiness of these two devices'.³⁹⁶ These calls for liberalism to transform were not unlike the 'new' liberals of the previous generations. The difference was that the 'old' individualism had to be left behind if liberalism was to successfully transform and there was a growing sense that the 'new' liberals had not quite fully exorcised the individualist spirit. Though somewhat less sympathetic, Laski similarly suggested that a transformative break had to be made. Laski stated that 'what is required is a refreshment and reinvigoration of the doctrinal content of liberalism comparable in magnitude to the work of the Benthamites a century ago'.³⁹⁷ The problem, for Laski, was whether liberalism was up to the task and able to grasp the urgency of the situation, as 'men do not move to violence until they have been driven to despair'.³⁹⁸

A second point to be emphasised in their accounts of liberalism is the role that the names of Locke and Smith had come to play for evoking 'individualism' and consolidating the idea of liberalism as a distinct tradition anchored by a particular canon. The association of Locke and Smith with liberalism is something that would be developed more fully in the 1940s and 50s as the following section will discuss, but it was present in the 1930s.³⁹⁹ The significance of their names at this point is the way that they had come to be retrospectively tarnished by the brush of 'individualism' for Laski and Dewey. Hobhouse had attempted to show Locke as part of a line of thought from Rousseau to Paine that considers consensual restraints upon the

³⁹³ Dewey, 'The Future of Liberalism', 226, 229-30.

³⁹⁴ William Ernest Hocking, 'The Future of Liberalism', *Journal of Philosophy* 32, no.9 (1935): 231.

³⁹⁵ Hocking, 'The Future of Liberalism', 230.

³⁹⁶ Hocking, 'The Future of Liberalism', 240.

³⁹⁷ Laski, 'The Decline of Liberalism', 22.

³⁹⁸ *ibid.*, 23.

³⁹⁹ See, for example, Merle Curti, 'The Great Mr. Locke: America's Philosopher, 1783-1861', *The Huntington Library Bulletin* no.11 (1937): 107-151.

individual that are necessary for society to secure the self-development of individuals, as discussed in the previous chapter. The difference for Laski and Dewey is the way that Locke and Smith had come to be associated with the 'old' as the target of criticism of the laissez-faire liberals, rather than reclaiming them as part of the broader movement of liberalism in history.

Whilst Locke and Smith came to be canonised as liberal forefathers, others looked elsewhere. The German legal jurist and thinker Carl Schmitt—who, like Dewey, had been an Hegelian in his youth—pointed to a 'barely visible crack in the theoretical justification of the sovereign state' made by Hobbes, which paved the 'inroad of modern liberalism'. This crack was said to be Hobbes' individualism—later exploited by the 'liberal Jew' Spinoza, Schmitt declared in a characteristically antisemitic passage from this period— that posited the state as the result of a covenant between egoistic individuals. This distinguished between the public and private demands of such individuals' consciences, which contained the seed that sapped the life and vitality of the Leviathan.⁴⁰⁰ From such a seed, what grew was an individualist programme that undermined the very nature of the political, suffocating and obscuring political judgement in the smothering embrace of moral sentiment and economic interest. For Schmitt, 'the systematic theory of liberalism concerns almost solely the internal struggle against the power of the state'. Its purpose is 'protecting individual freedom and private property', reducing politics to 'ethics and economics'. There is 'a liberal policy of trade, church, and education, but absolutely no liberal politics, only a liberal critique of politics'.⁴⁰¹ Liberals were depicted as embodying an inability to think decisively, and as such, an inability to think politically. Whilst differing from Schmitt in their accounts of the nature of the political and in their accounts of political action, and importantly in their own personal politics, Leo Strauss and Hannah Arendt later nonetheless agreed with him in seeing the intellectual roots of liberalism in a Hobbesian individualism which had reconfigured the meaning and nature of politics itself.⁴⁰² Liberalism, on Schmitt's account, had inherently failed politically due to this individualism.

What I am suggesting is that the individualism narrative that came to be associated with liberalism was developed as much by those that were critical of it as those that sought to

⁴⁰⁰ Carl Schmitt, *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Hobbes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938), 56-7. On Schmitt's reading of Hobbes, see Timothy Stanton, 'Hobbes and Schmitt', *History of European Ideas* 37, no.2 (2011): 160-7. See also Orton's claim that 'If liberalism is supposed to revolve on a core of individualism, then it is in Hobbes, not Locke, that we find the theory of individualism first categorically stated', *The Liberal Tradition*, 105.

⁴⁰¹ Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1932), 70.

⁴⁰² See Liisi Keedus, *The Crisis of German Historicism: The Early Political Thought of Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 138-42; Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London: Penguin, 1951), 189-90.

defend it. This ranged from those that were not unsympathetic to liberalism, like Laski and Dewey in their differing ways, to those that were openly hostile like Schmitt. This is not to suggest, however, that there was a consensus over the characterisation of liberalism as individualism or a settled account of this characterisation. Michael Oakeshott's *The Social and Political Doctrines of Europe* rejected the term 'liberal democracy' owing to 'the crude and negative individualism which is apt to be associated with Liberalism'. Instead, Oakeshott saw liberalism as an expression, though an incomplete expression, of 'Representative Democracy'. The individualism of liberalism, to the extent that it existed as a tendency in a broad constellation of principles rather than a conscious doctrine, was on Oakeshott's terms characterised by the suggestions that 'a society must not be so unified as to abolish vital and valuable differences, nor so extravagantly diversified as to make an intelligently co-ordinated and civilised social life impossible, and that the imposition of a universal plan of life on a society is at once stupid and immoral'. This, Oakeshott suggested was not so much of 'an entirely coherent doctrine', but reflected the multiplicity of the term. 'Ignorant people [Oakeshott bemoaned] are still to be found writing as if the history of Liberalism were merely the history of the rise and dominance of a peculiarly narrow brand of individualism'.⁴⁰³ The fact that it had been tarnished in such a way and had become synonymous with individualism was part of the problem.

Despite Oakeshott's frustrations, this 'narrow brand of individualism' became more central to liberalism as a tradition. Whether liberalism's foundations originated in Hobbes, Locke, or Smith, the similarity between the differing accounts I have explored so far was that their names had come to be associated with the 'individualism' of liberalism and a growing sense that if liberalism was to survive the dual threats of communism and fascism, for those that wished to still defend it, a break had to be made with this line of thought. As the next section will outline, a break *was* made. It was not, however, the kind of break that Laski and Dewey had thought necessary for liberalism. Dewey suggested that whilst 'the ideas of liberty, of individuality, and freed intelligence have an enduring value', it is 'well known that everything for which liberalism stands for is put in peril in times of war'.⁴⁰⁴ The Second World War was an irresistible motivational force, calling liberals to arms both literally and metaphorically, and it saw a decisive shift towards defending liberalism as a tradition of individualism against its enemies. Individualism subsequently shifted from being the dead skin that liberalism shed as it grew to maturity to becoming its essence as a tradition in a trans-valuation of liberal values.

⁴⁰³ Oakeshott, *Social and Political Doctrines*, xviii-xix.

⁴⁰⁴ Dewey, *Liberalism and Social Action*, 2, 47.

II. The Classical Liberals Strike Back

For Ludwig von Mises, writing originally in the 1920s, 'the social order created by the philosophy of the Enlightenment assigned supremacy to the common man', and between the Napoleonic Wars and the First World War, there had been an ideal of 'free trade in a peaceful world of free nations' that was built upon the individualism of this social order. The problem was that this social order had become corrupted by an ideal 'that only in detail differs from the totalitarianism of the socialists'.⁴⁰⁵ The supremacy of the common man had been supplanted by an ideal that gave primacy to economic planning and extended state welfare to the extent that it overrode the wishes of the common man. The result of this corruption was that 'liberalism was never permitted to come in to full fruition'; liberalism had been cut short, even by those supposedly acting in its name.⁴⁰⁶ 'The programme of liberalism', von Mises declared, '[...] if condensed in to a single word, would have to read: *property*'. All else followed from that demand and it was a 'moral justification for private property' that stood in direct antagonism to the collective ownership of property.⁴⁰⁷ Liberalism was primarily concerned with individuals' 'outward, material welfare and does not concern itself directly with their inner, spiritual and metaphysical needs'—the sovereign individual need not self-develop by the terms of the social collective.⁴⁰⁸ Even fascism, 'an emergency makeshift', was commendable on von Mises' terms for tackling the creeping menace of Communism, which threatened to corrupt liberal ideals from within.⁴⁰⁹

The previous chapter discussed how the 'new' liberals had attempted to counter the 'old' liberalism of Dicey and Spencer by fusing their 'collectivism' with the 'individualism' of liberalism. Reflecting on these shifts, and the blurring of lines they seemed to represent, Ludwig von Mises recounted his horror at the 'new' liberals transforming liberalism into its apparent opposite. In reaction to the 'new' liberalism, liberalism would be transformed again—later dubbed 'neo'-liberalism and aligning itself with Conservative and New Right politics on both sides of the Atlantic⁴¹⁰—by reclaiming for itself continuity with a 'classical' tradition of liberalism that reanimated the 'old' line of thought that the 'new' liberals had

⁴⁰⁵ Ludwig von Mises, *Liberalism: the classical tradition* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2005), xiii. Originally published in 1927 as *Liberalismus*.

⁴⁰⁶ *ibid.*, xvii.

⁴⁰⁷ *ibid.*, 2, 14.

⁴⁰⁸ *ibid.*, 4, 150-1.

⁴⁰⁹ *ibid.*, 29-30, 147.

⁴¹⁰ See Daniel Stedman Jones, *Masters of the Universe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

attempted to counter. The difference, however, was that this 'classical' heritage came to focus on a particular canon, most notably including Locke and Smith, that was juxtaposed to a counter-canon of malign 'totalitarian' influences.

F. A. Hayek was of the similar opinion that liberalism had 'progressively been moving away from the basic ideas on which Western civilisation has been built', not only the ideas of Cobden, Bright, Smith, Hume, Locke, and Milton, but also 'the basic individualism inherited by us from Erasmus and Montaigne, from Cicero and Tacitus, Pericles and Thucydides'—the 'respect for the individual man *qua* man'.⁴¹¹ Hayek even suggested that it was a shame that 'men like[...] Lord Acton or A. V. Dicey, who were then admired in the world at large as outstanding examples of the political wisdom of England, are to the present generation largely obsolete Victorians'.⁴¹² This road had been abandoned in the pursuit of organising society through economic planning, what Hayek would dub *The Road to Serfdom*. To this end he was not averse to treating liberalism and individualism as synonymous, once 'true' individualism was distinguished from a 'false' one in virtue of the respect for the individual man *qua* man, and further distinguished from the 'various kinds of collectivism' that differed 'from liberalism and individualism in wanting to organise the whole of society and all its resources' to a single, common, and rational end.⁴¹³ This collective impulse was present, and perhaps derived from, the Continental line of so-called 'liberalism' and 'individualism' in which Rousseau was a central figure, in direct contrast to the British individualist liberalism with its origins in Locke—later, Hayek would single out Smith's *Wealth of Nations* as 'mark[ing] perhaps more than any other single work the beginning of the development of modern liberalism'.⁴¹⁴ On Hayek's reading, Constant and Tocqueville were continuators of this earlier British liberalism, standing apart from the Rousseauian line by respecting the individual—not withstanding their French nationality and the chronological dislocation involved in sending them back in time by elective

⁴¹¹ Friedrich Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944), 12-4. See also von Mises, *Liberalism*, 153-5.

⁴¹² Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, 183.

⁴¹³ Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, 42, 83n. See also Hayek's 'Individualism: True and False' in *Individualism and Economic Order* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), 1-32.

⁴¹⁴ Friedrich Hayek, 'Liberalism' in *New Studies in Philosophy, Politics, Economics and the History of Ideas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 125. For the republican undertones of Smith's thought, and therefore the possible characterisation of Hayek as a kind of republican—albeit a strange one—with particular regard to the development of his thought in the 1960s and 70s, see Sean Irving, *Hayek's Market Republicanism: The Limits of Liberty* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), esp. ch.3-4.

affinity to the seventeenth century. As such, on Hayek's account, they were responsible for some of the last few statements of 'true' liberalism and 'true' individualism before the fall.⁴¹⁵

Hayek's diagnosis of liberalism's decline was that 'unemployment and unstable currencies, seemed to demand much more economic control by government and led to a revival of protectionism and other nationalistic policies'. For Hayek, 'the inglorious years' from 1931 to 1939 marked a 'head-long plunge' in to the transformation of Britain's 'economic system beyond recognition'.⁴¹⁶ The 1930s had witnessed nothing less than the death of liberalism after becoming entwined with socialistic and rationalist planning: 'the final abandonment of the gold standard and the return to protection by Great Britain in 1931 seemed to mark the definite end of a free world economy'.⁴¹⁷ Hayek closed his most famous work *The Road to Serfdom* with an appeal to return to the nineteenth century ideal of 'freedom of the individual' as 'the only truly progressive policy', in order to pick up from where liberalism went off course.⁴¹⁸

Hayek listed Hegel alongside Marx as avatars of the malign Germanic influence in favour of planning in all its guises that had infected British thinking: after 1870 'England lost her intellectual leadership in the political and social sphere and became an importer of ideas', as a result, 'German ideas were everywhere readily imported and German institutions imitated'.⁴¹⁹ von Mises additionally criticised Hegelian philosophy for the way it had 'elevated the state to a position of divine entity' and for seeing the state as the expression of the moral community; it was no wonder, he lamented, that it became 'blasphemous [to make] any attempt to limit the function of the state'.⁴²⁰ The gap between 'liberalism' and 'Hegelianism' that Hobhouse and Collingwood had opened was now being stretched wider to even engulf the likes of Hobhouse and Collingwood themselves. Continental liberalism and the stories of self-development and social reconciliation that shaped it had become suspect for their collectivist and rationalist tendencies, but 'the same is largely true [Hayek suggested] of what has called itself Liberalism in England at least since the time of Lloyd George'.⁴²¹ For von Mises, J. S. Mill was partly to blame for the confusion of liberalism in Britain and was accused of opening the door to

⁴¹⁵ Friedrich Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1960), 110-1, 529n. Michael Freeden notes the somewhat arbitrary way in which Hayek divides an English tradition and a French tradition and also underestimated Mill's and Green's attempts to *fuse* the two, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, 298-301.

⁴¹⁶ Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, 12n.

⁴¹⁷ Hayek, 'Liberalism', 130-1.

⁴¹⁸ Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, 240.

⁴¹⁹ Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, 21.

⁴²⁰ von Mises, *Liberalism*, 18.

⁴²¹ Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty*, 529.

Continental thought. He was at once 'an epigone of classical liberalism' and 'under the influence of his wife [Harriet Taylor Mill], full of feeble compromises', which resulted in a 'thoughtless confounding of liberal and socialist ideas'.⁴²² Rather like von Mises, Hayek saw Mill and Green as part of a shift toward socialism made by liberalism in the latter half of the nineteenth century, which ultimately cut short the progressive realisation of liberalism itself in Britain.⁴²³ Contra the 'new' liberals, rather than an ambiguity within Mill marking the turn to a greater liberalism, Mill had assisted the slide away from the 'true' tradition of liberalism.

Even those less explicitly aligned with the 'classical' revival followed with similar accounts of liberalism and the liberal tradition to von Mises and Hayek. George H. Sabine considered liberalism to be attached to 'the primacy of individual rights' and it was 'individualist also in the sense that it stood generally for the independence of private enterprise from political control and consequently for freedom in exercising rights of property'. What had come to complicate matters was the 'infiltration into liberal thought of the collectivist criticisms of individualism by Rousseau, Burke, and Hegel'.⁴²⁴ Whilst Sabine recognised that T. H. Green and the 'new' liberals were not strictly Hegelians, the worry was that a turn to 'positive' liberty had opened the door to Rousseau and Hegel.⁴²⁵ The use of such ideas by Green, and perhaps even earlier by Mill, had only confused liberalism by collapsing it into socialism and conservatism.⁴²⁶ For Sabine, 'traditional liberalism' had reached its apex in 1846 with the establishment of free trade.⁴²⁷ Again, liberalism had lost itself somewhere in the nineteenth century as a result of the infiltration of political thought from the Continent.

For John H. Hallowell, freedom of conscience had an integral role for liberalism, but it had a definite end that had been abandoned. *The Decline of Liberalism as an Ideology* (1943) was story of decline in German liberalism due to Kantianism and Hegelianism, on one side, and Pragmatism and Positivism on the other, which had led to the abandonment of liberalism's roots in natural law. Liberalism reflected the 'age of individualism', but was bound with duty,

⁴²² von Mises, *Liberalism*, 153-5. Cf. Hobhouse, *Democracy and Reaction*, 225-7. von Mises took Mill to be 'a great advocate of socialism' to the extent that 'in comparison with Mill all other socialist writers[...] are scarcely of any importance', *Liberalism*, 154. On the relationship between Mill and Taylor-Mill, and Hayek's fascination, see also Hayek's *John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor: Their Friendship and Subsequent Marriage* (London: Routledge, 1951) & Sandra J. Peart's 'Introduction' to *Hayek on Mill: The Mill-Taylor Friendship and Related Writings (Collected Works of F. A. Hayek, Vol.XVI)*, ed. Sandra J. Peart (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), xix-l.

⁴²³ Hayek, 'Liberalism', 128-30.

⁴²⁴ George H. Sabine, *A History of Political Theory* (London: George G. Harrap & Co.,1941), 648-9.

⁴²⁵ *ibid.*, 674.

⁴²⁶ *ibid.*, 680.

⁴²⁷ *ibid.*, 672.

responsibility, and autonomy.⁴²⁸ Whilst the political expression of liberalism's 'individualistic *Weltanschauung*', was expressed and formalised by von Humboldt and Fichte in the German context, freedom for Kant and Hegel was found within the state and the reconciliation of individual wills is found within the rational state. This had the consequence of undermining the 'natural' liberties of the individual and 'it was largely due to [Hegel] that state and society were conceptually severed'.⁴²⁹ Whilst some blame was placed at Kant's and Hegel's feet, the wider effect 'of positivism on liberalism was to encourage men to abandon belief in objective values', 'to identify rights with interests', and to hollow out the content of law, which undermined an 'integral liberalism' that secured right in natural law and saw such rights as antecedent to the state.⁴³⁰ A 'degenerate' liberalism, on Hallowell's account, came from abandoning objectivity. Without objectivity, 'with the infiltration of positivism into all realms of thought', conscience is denied an overarching end and obligation is hollowed out, either making the sovereign absolute or the individual, leading to 'tyranny or unbridled subjectivism'.⁴³¹

In direct contrast to Hallowell's fears of subjectivism opening the door to tyranny, liberalism was also presented as in its very nature the embodiment of free and rational inquiry against the enforced realisation of any metaphysical truths, which was said to be the road to totalitarian thinking. For Bertrand Russell, liberalism was a 'disposition' opposed to creeds and fanaticism, which had its foundations in Locke's probabilistic attitude of 'live-and-let-live [based] on the fallibility of all human opinion'.⁴³² Locke held a particular significance, because 'a characteristic of Locke, which descended from him to the whole liberal movement, is a lack of dogmatism'.⁴³³ As Russell noted, 'the liberal creed, in practice is one of live-and-let-live, of toleration and freedom as far as public order permit, of moderation and absence of fanaticism in political programmes'; it was 'not apologetic towards dogmatisms of the right or the left'.⁴³⁴ Its 'essence[...] is an attempt to secure a social order not based on irrational dogma, and insuring stability without involving more restraints than are necessary for the preservation for the community'.⁴³⁵

⁴²⁸ John H. Hallowell, *The Decline of Liberalism as an Ideology* (London: Kegan Paul, 1946) 12, 20.

⁴²⁹ *ibid.*, 14, 59-62.

⁴³⁰ *ibid.*, 18.

⁴³¹ *ibid.*, 11, 89.

⁴³² Bertrand Russell, 'The Best Answer to Fanaticism - Liberalism', *The New York Times*, December 16th (1951). See also *Philosophy and Politics* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1947), 20-1.

⁴³³ Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1946), 586.

⁴³⁴ Russell, *Philosophy and Politics*, 21, 27.

⁴³⁵ Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, 21-2.

Russell's *History of Western Philosophy* (1946) went further to identify not only liberalism's own heritage, but in addition several counter-lineages against which liberalism positioned and actively sought to distance itself. Since Rousseau and Kant, there had been two other 'liberalisms', on Russell's account, one flowing from Bentham, Ricardo, and Marx, whose line of descent ended in Stalin, and another whose line of descent from Fichte, Byron, Carlyle, and Nietzsche ended in Hitler. There was, however, the third untainted stream of liberalism originating in Locke.⁴³⁶ Locke was prioritised, in distinction to Hobbes, Rousseau, and Hegel—who were irredeemably identified with a troublesome state worship on this account—and as an apostle of free and rational enquiry, against the anti-rationalism and anti-scientism of Rousseau, Fichte, and Nietzsche—all of whom were precursors to fascism, or so it was claimed.⁴³⁷

Karl Popper, in his own war effort *The Open Society and its Enemies* (1945), regarded the 'dualism of facts and standards' as the basis of liberalism, in distinction to the 'dangerous' monistic position which identifies the two, singling out Plato in the ancient world and Hegel and Marx in the modern as originators of totalitarian thought.⁴³⁸ 'Modern totalitarianism', Popper claimed, 'is only an episode within the perennial revolt against freedom and reason'.⁴³⁹ The practice of liberalism was not, however, a detached intellectual tradition, as the open society was distinctly British and it was a line of German thinking that was (not coincidentally) singled out for critique.⁴⁴⁰ Hegel, in claiming to be speak for liberty, had lapsed in to a 'collectivist mysticism (of Rousseau's making) and into historicism' that undermined the status of both freedom and reason. Hegel's historicism was 'the fertilizer to which modern totalitarianism owes its rapid growth'.⁴⁴¹ Marx's analyses of capitalism were 'in spite of their bias', 'excellent in so far as they were descriptive', but erroneously inherited from Hegel a historicist view point.⁴⁴² Popper disapprovingly cited R. Metz's criticism of T. H. Green and L. T. Hobhouse for lapsing into a liberal individualism that stunted Hegel's radical implications, when in fact 'the Hegelian farce has done enough harm'. Whilst Green's and Hobhouse's

⁴³⁶ *ibid.*, 618-9.

⁴³⁷ *ibid.*, 755.

⁴³⁸ Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, 392-3. Hallowell, by contrast, had suggested that it was by 'denying the existence of facts as values' and the 'absolute value of human personality' that positivism had bred fascism, *The Decline of Liberalism as an Ideology*, 20.

⁴³⁹ Popper, *Open Society and its Enemies*, 60.

⁴⁴⁰ J. W. Müller, 'Fear and Freedom: On Cold War Liberalism', *European Journal of Political Theory* 7, no.1 (2008): 54.

⁴⁴¹ Popper, *Open Society and its Enemies*, 44-5, 59. Cf. Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Fascistic and Nazi 'state philosophies exemplify the abolition of the rational standard and the individual freedom on which Hegel's glorification of the state depended'*, 389-90.

⁴⁴² Popper, *Open Society and its Enemies*, 193.

accounts of liberalism as a historical tradition owed a debt to Hegel, Popper implored those 'to continue Schopenhauer's fight against this shallow cant [Hegel]'.⁴⁴³

Whilst Popper had primarily laid blame at Hegel's door for a monistic position that was antithetical to a free society, for J. L. Talmon, Rousseau was the villain. He had planted totalitarianism's roots in the soil of popular sovereignty. The general will was the 'driving force of totalitarian democracy'.⁴⁴⁴ For Talmon, totalitarianism was a particular creature. It was a 'dictatorship resting on popular enthusiasm' and was thus distinct from 'a divine-right King' or a 'usurping tyrant'. It was a hybrid of 'natural order and the Rousseauist idea of popular fulfilment and self-expression'. It was from this synthesis, with Rousseau as its key intellectual figure, that 'rationalism was made into a passionate faith' and the claims of individuals could be sacrificed to the social collective.⁴⁴⁵ Robert Nisbet made a similar argument regarding Rousseau's connection to totalitarianism.⁴⁴⁶ For Nisbet, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Hegel, and Nietzsche had all been criticised for the consequences of their doctrines, but 'it is in Rousseau's absorption of all forms of society into the unitary mould of the state that we may observe the first unmistakable appearance of the totalitarian theory of society'.⁴⁴⁷ Totalitarianism 'first blurs, then obliterates the distinction between society and state', making way for a total state of the 'undifferentiated mass'.⁴⁴⁸ As Nisbet reflected, 'whether Rousseau would have used the firing squad and labor camps to enforce freedom is a matter perhaps for conjecture', but what was clear was that 'Rousseau is the philosopher of democracy, but never of liberalism'.⁴⁴⁹

In the writings of von Mises, Hayek, Russell, Popper, Talmon, and Nisbet alike we find certain ideas and the authority of their authors being used to justify the suppression of the individual by the collective. In reaction, liberalism came to see itself more and more as protecting that individual and electing affinities with those historical authors that prioritised a sense of individual liberty against the social collective and the philosophical presuppositions which challenged a rationalistic totality. A canon was constructed in tandem with a counter-canon that aimed to distance liberalism from its Continental heritage. Hobhouse and Collingwood, as we have seen, felt the way the wind was blowing and were critical of Hegel and some aspects of his use by posterity. Collingwood's *New Leviathan* was also a contribution to the war effort.

⁴⁴³ *ibid.*, 79.

⁴⁴⁴ Jacob L. Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (London: Mercury Books, 1952), 6, 35, 43, 47. See also Hayek's citation of Talmon, *Constitution of Liberty*, 114.

⁴⁴⁵ Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*, 6.

⁴⁴⁶ Robert A. Nisbet, 'Rousseau and Totalitarianism', *The Journal of Politics* 5, no.2 (1943): 93-114.

⁴⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 93-4.

⁴⁴⁸ *ibid.*, 96.

⁴⁴⁹ *ibid.*, 112-3.

The difference was that the liberals discussed above aimed to purge liberalism of any vestigial 'Hegelian' influences and cast away the totality of Hegel's thought, as well as that of Rousseau and Marx, as antithetical to liberalism, and whilst Collingwood had turned away from Hegel in favour of Hobbes, and done so explicitly, what Collingwood had found in Hobbes was not the individualism that others were to find, but rather a dialectical understanding of the social nature of politics. One result of this shift was that 'Green and the new liberals were thrown out with the metaphysical bathwater of idealism'⁴⁵⁰—they found themselves on the enemy's side of the battle lines, along with the likes of Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, and Rousseau. Two traditions were now at war and one had to take sides: reconciliation was impossible, synthesis implied appeasement or surrender. The situation was summed up as memorably as it was shallowly in Russell's remark that 'Hitler is an outcome of Rousseau; Roosevelt and Churchill of Locke'.⁴⁵¹

In the post-war context, a richer version of this story was slotted into this general framework. An account was given of liberalism's historical development which brought together the disparate parts of the story I have been recounting into a single narrative. In this narrative, liberalism was associated with the freedom to choose, and the freedom to choose with the necessity of choosing between values that were irreducibly plural in their nature and could not be organised into a single harmonious scheme. This provided a logical warrant for excluding other accounts of liberty and liberalism which suggested, erroneously, that human values, rightly understood, were fundamentally harmonious and that liberty meant the power to realise or to participate in the realisation of a single scheme of values. This was the message trumpeted in Isaiah Berlin's 'Two Concepts of Liberty'. What was most crucial, was the way in which liberalism's historical resources were marshalled into a story that reflected on the relationship between two warring traditions, the promises made by each, and the implications that this had for liberalism as a tradition and for its political bearings.

III. 'Two Concepts of Liberty'

Isaiah Berlin was born on the 6th of June 1909 in Riga, formally a part of imperial Russia, as the only surviving child of Mendel and Marie Berlin.⁴⁵² Born into an educated and reasonably

⁴⁵⁰ David Weinstein, 'English Political Theory in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries' in *Handbook of Political Theory*, eds. Gerald F. Gaus and Chandran Kalcathus (London: SAGE 2011), 418.

⁴⁵¹ Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, 660.

⁴⁵² Details taken from Ian Harris, 'Isaiah Berlin: Two Concepts of Liberty' in *The Political Classics: Green to Dworkin*, eds. Murray Forsyth and Maurice Keens-Soper (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 122-3

wealthy family, Berlin's early life was characterised by periods of stability being suddenly overturned by political upheaval when the family was forced to move, often owing to their Jewish identity. In the first instance, the family moved to Pskov and then St. Petersburg after being caught between the antagonisms of the German and Russian empires in the First World War. Later, the family moved from St. Petersburg back to Riga before emigrating to Britain in the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution. Berlin himself had often stated that witnessing the February and October revolutions had a profound effect on his own political outlook, seeing first-hand the role of ideas in the march of history and the terror and violence utilised in the name of those ideas.⁴⁵³ Once the family settled in England, Berlin studied Greats and PPE at Oxford, before being appointed as a tutor in philosophy and later elected to a fellowship at All Souls College in 1932.

Berlin remained at Oxford for the majority of his career—this was interrupted by a brief spell working for the British government providing press reviews and information from Washington and Moscow during the Second World War—but his intellectual interests underwent a notable shift in turning away from philosophy towards the history of ideas. This shift reflected his political conviction in attempting to diagnose and understand what he considered to be the great divisions of the twentieth century. Whilst Berlin himself was not engaged with direct political action, his political conviction was directed against the regimes of Hitler, Stalin, and Mussolini, owing to reflections on his early life, his support for Zionism, and his defence of a liberal outlook that was antithetical to totalitarianism. His intellectual output on the history of ideas was often an attempt to understand the roots and developments, the continuities and discontinuities in these ideas and how the past might illuminate the condition of the present.⁴⁵⁴

In 1949, Berlin gave a speech at Mount Holyoke College that placed Rousseau and Marx together—the latter's rationalism being an offshoot of the former's on Berlin's analysis—as two thinkers that had mistakenly seen liberty and equality to be compatible values. Berlin, in contrast, saw these as incompatible though nonetheless equally valuable human ends. The

& Michael Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin: a life* (London: Vintage, 1998). See also Christopher Hitchens' review of Ignatieff's biography, 'Moderation or Death', *London Review of Books* 20, no.23 (1998): 3-11.

⁴⁵³ Berlin often recounted a story of a policeman being dragged off to his death by the mob, Isaiah Berlin, 'In Conversation with Steve Lukes', *Salmagundi* 120 (1998): 76. As Christopher Hitchens noted, Berlin often only reflected on 'certain sorts of physical violence and political experiment' and left out the part of the story where the police were fond of shooting civilians, 'Moderation or Death', 3-11.

⁴⁵⁴ See Ryan Patrick Hanley, 'Berlin on the Nature and Purpose of the History of Ideas' in *The Cambridge Companion to Isaiah Berlin*, ed. Joshua L. Cherniess (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 81-96.

disastrous consequences of conjoining the two had been a denial of differing ends of individuals and the subsequent sacrifice of the individual to the ideals of communism, fascism, and totalitarianism in the name of freedom. Marx had previously been singled out by Berlin, in his 1939 biography, as one among 'the great authoritarian founders of new faiths', to which nothing was 'too sacred to sacrifice'. Whilst Berlin had a certain intellectual admiration and sympathy for some of Marx's ideas, the reality of Marx's intellectual legacy, he decided, was witnessed in the Eastern bloc.⁴⁵⁵ Berlin also distinguished two competing meanings of freedom in this early work—one might call this his own *Grundrisse*, as Henry Hardy suggests—the first of which held a 'romantic' sense of self-realisation by seeing freedom as 'ecstatic self-absorption in an activity'; the other held a more 'liberal' sense of 'the individual left to pursue his purposes without interference'.⁴⁵⁶ The former, more romantic of these two meanings of freedom had come to inspire 'passionate self-immolation on the altar of State or race or religion or history or the 'dynamic' pursuit of power for its own sake[...] on the part of Fascists and other hysterical romantics, or embittered anti-liberals'.⁴⁵⁷ Berlin identified this romantic view of freedom behind these ideals and was under 'no doubt [that] it begins with Rousseau'.⁴⁵⁸

These lines of thinking later emerged in Berlin's account of the development of liberalism, where he distinguished between two liberties: 'negative' and 'positive'. This first, negative concept of liberty meant 'not being interfered with by others'; the logical implication was 'the wider the area of non-interference the wider my freedom'.⁴⁵⁹ The other, positive concept was a 'freedom which consists in being one's own master'.⁴⁶⁰ Whilst Berlin acknowledged that these two senses of liberty 'on the face of it, seem concepts no great logical distance from each other', they had 'historically developed in divergent directions[...] until, in the end, they came into direct conflict with each other'.⁴⁶¹ 'Negative liberty' was confronted by a corrupted 'positive liberty' which seemed to sacrifice what liberalism, rightly understood, held most dear and what the Allies had given countless lives to defend in the Second World War. What was

⁴⁵⁵ Isaiah Berlin, *Karl Marx; his life and environment* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), 9, 19. See also, David Leopold, 'Isaiah Berlin, Karl Marx, and the Enlightenment' in *Isaiah Berlin and the Enlightenment*, eds. Lawrence Brockliss and Ritchie Robertson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 21-34.

⁴⁵⁶ Isaiah Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Freedom: Romantic and Liberal' in *Political Ideas in the Romantic Age*, ed. Henry Hardy (London: Chatto & Windus, 2006), 255. See also Henry Hardy, 'Editors Preface: a tale of a torso' in *Political Ideas in the Romantic Age*, xxv-xlii.

⁴⁵⁷ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Freedom', 255-6.

⁴⁵⁸ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Freedom', 244.

⁴⁵⁹ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' in *Four Essays on Liberty*, 123.

⁴⁶⁰ *ibid.*, 131.

⁴⁶¹ *ibid.*, 131-2.

sacrificed in the political application of a corrupted positive liberty was the very liberty and value of the individual as a self-choosing agent.⁴⁶²

In its political application, the harmony of the group, and in particular the state, came to dominate over the liberty of the individual that this positive liberty initially attempted to secure. This was a result of a split between the 'transcendent, dominant controller, and the empirical bundle of desires and passions to be disciplined and brought to heel'. The historical and psychological development was an accelerating descent 'from an ethical doctrine of individual responsibility and individual self-perfection to an authoritarian state obedient to the directives of an *élite* of Platonic guardians'.⁴⁶³ Berlin identified a metaphysical assumption, bordering on faith, behind this abuse of positive liberty, one in which there is a fundamental harmony and singularity in to which all values and all legitimate forms of life can be rationally assimilated: 'the conviction that all the positive values in which men have believed must, in the end, be compatible, and perhaps even entail one another'.⁴⁶⁴ What totalitarianism meant for Berlin was placing the claims of the state as over and above the individual; making those claims consistent with one another as part of a 'single scheme of values'; and subsequently denying any claims of individuals which deviated from that scheme of values.⁴⁶⁵

Berlin, in defending liberalism's commitment to the individual, subsequently rejected the metaphysical assumption of the ultimate harmony of values, citing the irreducible incompatibility of both political equality and efficient organisation with individual liberty. More broadly, our values as individuals making choices were incompatible and incommensurable, because human values were many and the types of life and thought that embodied them too various to ever be cast into a single form. Whilst Berlin's pluralism was itself an ethical pluralism, a pluralism of values, its significance and the defence that Berlin made of it was deeply political.⁴⁶⁶ Everything that flowed from the metaphysical assumption of a harmony of values —the misuse of positive liberty and its political application in 'the slaughter of individuals on the altars of the great historical ideals' —was rejected in favour of a conception

⁴⁶² *ibid.*, 121-2. See also Harris, 'Isaiah Berlin', 131, 139-40 & Ian Shapiro and Alicia Steinmetz, 'Negative Liberty and the Cold War' in *The Cambridge Companion to Isaiah Berlin*, 192-211.

⁴⁶³ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', 134, 152.

⁴⁶⁴ *ibid.*, 167.

⁴⁶⁵ Harris, 'Isaiah Berlin', 123, 125-6. See also Noël O'Sullivan, 'Visions of Freedom: The Response to Totalitarianism' in *The British Study of Politics in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Jack Hayward, Brian Barry, and Archie Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 63-88. Hannah Arendt suggested that not only was liberalism ineffective as a countermeasure to this line of thinking, but part of the very problem in the rise of totalitarianism, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 301, 440-1.

⁴⁶⁶ For an example of the counter claim that it is distinctly ethical and that its potential fault is that it is silent on being political, see O'Sullivan, 'Visions of Freedom', 72.

of value pluralism, which was said to be protected by the tradition of negative liberty.⁴⁶⁷ The world we inhabit, Berlin wrote, 'in ordinary experience is one in which we are faced with choices between ends equally ultimate, and claims equally absolute, the realization of some which must inevitably involve the sacrifice others'. As a result, 'the necessity of choosing between absolute claims is[...] an inescapable characteristic of the human condition'. Pluralism acknowledges this and does not 'deprive men, in the name of some remote, or incoherent ideal, of much that they have found to be indispensable to their life as unpredictably self-transforming human beings'.⁴⁶⁸ Instead it allows, protects, and encourages the individuals' capacity to choose.

This endorsement of pluralism was a countermove directed against—as Berlin would put it as part of a paean of praise to the Russian aristocrat Alexander Herzen—'those who appealed to general principles to justify savage cruelties and defended the slaughter of thousands to-day by the promise that millions would thereby made happy in some invisible future', thereby 'condoning unheard-of miseries and injustices in the name of some overwhelming but remote felicity'.⁴⁶⁹ Negative liberty, as one line of liberalism's lineage, was preferred for protecting the individual politically. The intellectual legacy of negative liberty was found in 'such libertarians as Locke and Mill in England', alongside their Continental counterparts Tocqueville and Constant, who each assumed that 'there ought to exist a certain minimum area of personal freedom which must on no account be violated'. If it were to be overstepped, the individual would be unable to develop their natural capacities that 'makes it possible to pursue, and even to conceive, the various ends which men hold good or right or sacred'. There is thus a 'frontier[...] between the area of private life and that of public authority'.⁴⁷⁰ Constant, Mill, Tocqueville, 'and the liberal tradition to which they belong' held that it was the rights of individuals, not the power of authorities, that was absolute and as such there was a certain frontier within which 'men should be inviolable'. Whilst not always in tandem, Berlin presented this heritage as 'almost at the opposite pole from the purposes of those who believe in liberty in the 'positive'—self-directive—sense'.⁴⁷¹

The ideals of positive liberty generalised a line of thought inherited from Herder, Hegel, and Marx, who 'substituted their own vitalistic models of social life for the older mechanical ones,

⁴⁶⁷ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', 167-8.

⁴⁶⁸ *ibid.*, 168-9, 171.

⁴⁶⁹ Isaiah Berlin, 'Introduction' to Alexander Herzen, *From the Other Shore and The Russian People and Socialism*, trans. Moura Budberg and Richard Wollheim (London: Widenfield & Nicolson, 1956), xvii.

⁴⁷⁰ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', 124.

⁴⁷¹ *ibid.*, 165-6.

but believed, no less than their opponents, that to understand the world is to be freed', which placed an unfolding historical logic over and above the transient ends of individuals.⁴⁷² Rousseau, Kant, and Fichte, whilst in some sense being 'individualists', likewise 'came at some point to ask themselves whether a rational life not only for the individual, but for society, was possible'.⁴⁷³ This had subsequently come to posit a knowing master over the individual in the corruption of positive liberty. In the name of freedom, the master commanded: 'if you fail to discipline yourself, I must do so'.⁴⁷⁴ Whilst the intellectual line of positive liberty had several branches, 'from the tough, rigidly centralized, 'organic' state of Fichte, to the mild and humane liberalism of T. H. Green', one of, if not the primary paternal figures that Berlin's allegiance to negative liberty was directed against was Marx—and by extension, Rousseau as Marx's intellectual forefather.⁴⁷⁵ The political message of *Two Concepts* 'was anti-Marxist, quite deliberately'.⁴⁷⁶

Duncan Kelly traces the lines of the anti-monist position back through to Berlin's biography of Marx, mentioned above, and is justified in suggesting that Berlin's views of Marx did not change in the way that Marx was aligned with monism from the 1930s through to the 1950s. The anti-Marxist message of 'Two Concepts', as Berlin puts it, is an anti-monist one.⁴⁷⁷ However it is important to recognise that though the division between liberalism and Marxism would become a central feature of the intellectual divide during the ideological Cold War, the opposition to Marx in the 1930s did not rely on an explicit endorsement of either 'liberalism', 'value pluralism', nor 'negative liberty'. Furthermore, the broader appeal to the 'Cold War divide' oversimplifies the relationship between liberalism and pluralism as it overlooks the monist tendencies within both liberalism and negative liberty that 'Two Concepts' identifies. In other words, there is some consistency in Berlin's anti-monism, as shown by the early engagement with Marx and later anti-Marxist position, but the divisions that Berlin uses to articulate the opposition to monism and the corruption of positive liberty are not all the same and not all simply part of one single dichotomy.

There were tensions within the tradition of negative liberty which made the historical dimensions of the two liberties blur. Pluralism respected the individual's capacity to choose, and in respecting their liberty, saw individuals 'as ends in themselves, very much as Kant

⁴⁷² *ibid.*, 142.

⁴⁷³ *ibid.*, 145.

⁴⁷⁴ *ibid.*, 152-3.

⁴⁷⁵ *ibid.*, 150.

⁴⁷⁶ Berlin, 'In Conversation with Steve Lukes', 92.

⁴⁷⁷ Duncan Kelly, 'The Political Thought of Isaiah Berlin', *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 4, no.1 (2002): 30. See also Müller, 'Fear and Freedom: On Cold War Liberalism', 14.

recommended'; 'there is therefore nothing outside them to which they can in principle be deemed worthy of sacrifice'.⁴⁷⁸ Excluding the 'teleological implications' in the expansion of one's personal capacities and moral self-development that Kant appealed to, Kant's expression of freedom 'does not at first appear very different from orthodox liberalism' in terms of the maximisation of freedom between individuals within the institution of law and fundamental respect for individuals. The problem, however, was that the ends chosen by individuals in the kingdom of ends are not 'ends of equal value', as 'in the name of reason anything that is non-rational may be condemned, so that the various personal aims which their individual imagination and idiosyncrasies lead men to pursue[...] may, at least in theory, be ruthlessly suppressed to make way for the demands of reason', opening the slide into the problems of positive liberty.⁴⁷⁹ Kant was not the only ambiguous figure in Berlin's cavalcade of heroes and villains. Jeremy Bentham, like Hobbes, was mentioned by Berlin as a great proponent of negative liberty.⁴⁸⁰ Utilitarianism had, however, led to a certain prioritisation of utility as an ideal that was over and above the individual, where liberty was held as a purely formal means to another end—such as the maximisation of pleasure, happiness, or utility—which did not value liberty in and of itself with regard to the pluralism of values.⁴⁸¹

Berlin recognised that the extent of negative liberty cannot be total nor unlimited, as 'legal liberties are compatible with extremes of exploitation, brutality and injustice'. Liberty must be balanced by other values, as negative liberty as a single value had an equal potential to be twisted. At its cruellest, 'freedom for the wolves has often meant death to the sheep'.⁴⁸² Later, Berlin would reflect that he perhaps 'ought to have made more of the horrors which of negative liberty and what that led to'.⁴⁸³ This fact may have been obscured by a tendency among commentators to interpret Berlin's distinction between two concepts of liberty as rival definitions of a single value, only one of which was deemed valid and ought to be maximised; rather than as two rival lines of descent.⁴⁸⁴ To a certain extent, the barrier between positive and negative liberty is permeable, as the exercise of rationality which is constitutive of the

⁴⁷⁸ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Freedom', 259.

⁴⁷⁹ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', 153n.

⁴⁸⁰ Berlin, *ibid.*, 123n.

⁴⁸¹ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Freedom', 257.

⁴⁸² Isaiah Berlin, 'Introduction' to *Four Essays on Liberty*, xlv-xlvi. See also, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', 169-70.

⁴⁸³ Berlin, 'In Conversation with Steve Lukes', 93.

⁴⁸⁴ Consider, for example, James Tully's summary of Berlin's aim: 'to define liberalism in terms of negative liberty alone and to claim that this is what the capitalist West is fighting for in the "open war," whereas the communist countries are fighting for a separate and opposed concept of liberty: positive liberty', "Two Concepts of Liberty' in Context' in *Isaiah Berlin and the Politics of Freedom: 'Two Concepts of Liberty' 50 Years Later*, eds. Bruce Baum and Robert Nichols (New York: Routledge, 2012), 25.

latter, once it becomes a subject of sustained attention, all too readily invites a slide into the problems Berlin associated with the former. To be a choosing individual requires a certain level of self-determination, self-ownership, and self-control—terms which had become closely associated with positive liberty and the very negation of the individual determining their own ends.⁴⁸⁵ Not only this, but the corrupted fate that befell positive liberty 'could equally have been the fate of the doctrine of negative liberty'.⁴⁸⁶ For Berlin, there was even a certain tragedy in the fact that 'so well-meaning a liberal as T. H. Green, so original a thinker as Hegel, or so profound a social analyst as Marx' had, despite their best intentions, become tainted by positive liberty's potentialities.⁴⁸⁷

Berlin, equally, recognised the appeal of positive liberty and monolithic ideals. For 'monism, and faith in a single criterion, has always proved a deep source of satisfaction both to the intellect and to the emotions'.⁴⁸⁸ Commenting on the romantic and liberal conceptions of freedom, Berlin conceded that the latter, seen from the perspective of the romantic ideal, 'seems not freedom at all, but a form of aimless drift, idle and formless self-indulgence, a feckless pursuit of short-term ends, an ad hoc hand-to-mouth morality lacking in all dignity or seriousness of purpose'. Liberal freedom, when seen through the lens of a more romantic sense of self-realisation, 'seems trivial and precarious and empty to those inured to or hankering after some form of collective self-sacrifice, some Messianic mission' or in the terms of the creative and expressive aspects of self-development.⁴⁸⁹ Berlin recognised this 'deep and incurable metaphysical need; but to allow it to determine one's practice is a symptom of an equally deep, and more dangerous, moral and political immaturity'.⁴⁹⁰

It has been suggested that Berlin was a 'hedgehog'—who only know one big thing—when it came to his broad and constant insistence on pluralism in distinction to monism.⁴⁹¹ This is certainly true of the anti-monism that runs through his work, but both liberalism and negative liberty had monist tendencies which meant that the consistency of Berlin's position was a

⁴⁸⁵ Harris, 'Isaiah Berlin', 129. See also Joshua L. Cherniss, 'Against 'Engineers of Human Souls: paternalism, 'managerialism', and the development of Isaiah Berlin's liberalism', *History of Political Thought* 35, no.3 (2014): 565-588.

⁴⁸⁶ Berlin, 'Introduction' to *Four Essays on Liberty*, xlv.

⁴⁸⁷ *ibid.*, lxi.

⁴⁸⁸ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', 170.

⁴⁸⁹ Berlin 'Two Concepts of Freedom', 256.

⁴⁹⁰ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', 172.

⁴⁹¹ Isaiah Berlin, 'The Hedgehog and the Fox' in *Russian Thinkers* (London: Penguin, 1978). Gellner characterises Berlin as a 'veritable hedgehog of foxiness', Ernest Gellner, 'Sauce for the Liberal Goose', *Prospect* November 20 (1995)

[<https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/saucefortheliberalgoose-isaiah-berlin>]. See also George Crowder, *Liberty and Value Pluralism* (London: Continuum, 2002), 2.

negative one, what it was defined against, and it was also sensitive to historical contingency in a way that precluded a neat one-to-one correspondence between pluralism and liberalism. As Berlin later clarified, 'positive liberty is as noble and basic an ideal as negative', but 'positive liberty was politically perverted far more' than its negative counterpart.⁴⁹² Both had liberal roots and both had ambiguous consequences, but one had political consequences that were clearly antithetical to liberalism. Positive liberty had been 'a cloak for despotism in the name of freedom'.⁴⁹³ Negative liberty, from the results witnessed in history, was a greater guarantor of the lives and purposes of individuals and a means to institutionalising the pluralism of values, over its rivals, due to the measure of negative liberty that pluralism entails. Whilst pluralism was not the same as liberalism, for Berlin, 'the measure of negative liberty that pluralism, according to me, entails[...] does not fall short of full-blown liberalism'.⁴⁹⁴ That entailment, however, is a historically contingent claim and particular to the kind of liberalism evoked.

Some commentators have attempted to draw out from this suggestion by Berlin that pluralism can and does provide sufficient grounding for liberalism. George Crowder, for example, acknowledges the tensions within Berlin's thought but ultimately aims to resolve them by building a pluralist defence of liberalism: 'pluralism[...] recommends liberalism in the political field, as a humane response to human imperfection and disagreement'.⁴⁹⁵ Pluralism, one might say, provides 'the ideological material for constructing a polity of liberal tolerance' in virtue of the incompatibility and incommensurability of values.⁴⁹⁶ Whether pluralism ultimately can or not is one question and it is a question that often risks overlooking the reasoning behind Berlin's own hesitation. Liberalism does not necessarily entail pluralism, according to Berlin, 'but if pluralism, then some kind of liberalism necessarily follows'.⁴⁹⁷ The relationship between 'pluralism', 'liberalism', and 'negative liberty', as Berlin emphasises in 'Two Concepts', is a historically contingent one and it is also a more precarious relationship than some neat formulations may suggest.

⁴⁹² Berlin, 'In Conversation with Steve Lukes', 93.

⁴⁹³ Berlin, 'Introduction' to *Four Essays on Liberty*, xvii.

⁴⁹⁴ Berlin quoted in Henry Hardy, *In Search of Isaiah Berlin* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2018), 249-50.

⁴⁹⁵ Crowder, *Liberty and Value Pluralism*, 5, 10-11. Elsewhere, it is suggested by Crowder that 'it has been left to his successors to connect pluralism and liberalism more securely', 'Pluralism, Relativism, and Liberalism' in *The Cambridge Companion to Isaiah Berlin*, 230.

⁴⁹⁶ Eric Mack, 'Isaiah Berlin and the Quest for Liberal Pluralism', *Public Affairs Quarterly* 7, no.3 (1993), 216.

⁴⁹⁷ Berlin quoted in Hardy, *In Search of Isaiah Berlin*, 255. On this relationship, see John Gray, *Isaiah Berlin* (London: Harper Collins, 1995), esp. ch.6 & George Crowder, *Isaiah Berlin: Liberty and Pluralism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004), esp. ch.6.

Berlin's liberalism was inherently tied to a form of pluralism that respected the choosing capacity of individuals and was directed against totalitarianism. Pluralism recognised the 'fact that human goals are many, not all of them commensurable, and in perpetual rivalry with one another'.⁴⁹⁸ Berlin's denial of any single overarching framework into which human beings could be made to fit, expressed plainly once again in Berlin's admiration for Herzen, 'hit[...] both left and right: against romantic historians, against Hegel, and to some degree against Kant, against utilitarians and against supermen, against Tolstoy and against the religion of art, against 'scientific' and 'evolutionary' ethics, against all the churches'.⁴⁹⁹ This endorsement of pluralism was directed against those that 'seek for final solutions and single, all-embracing systems, guaranteed to be eternal'.⁵⁰⁰ Pluralism defined itself negatively against those who had, however unwittingly, contributed to those doctrines which had sacrificed the individual and thus broken the promises liberalism had made to the future—even those that could be said to be part of a liberal tradition in their relation to negative liberty. All this came with precautionary notes attached. There remained lingering worries as to how the promises of liberalism could be kept and how the individual could be protected against the best intentions of political theorists and social engineers. Quite often, this could only be achieved through the very thinking that came to be associated with positive liberty, as negative liberty and pluralism were not necessarily able to guarantee a liberal outcome nor one in which individuals were able to exercise their capacity to choose—perhaps even descending in to an exhausted nihilism or meaningless relativism.⁵⁰¹ If we wish to allow a hundred flowers to blossom, it may be necessary to exercise some control over how people choose to cultivate their gardens—and it may also be necessary to ensure that people have a garden to cultivate in the first place.

IV. Between Romanticism and Enlightenment

Behind Berlin's exploration of the political consequences of positive and negative liberty, there was a deeper ambivalence concerning the legacy of the Enlightenment; an ambivalence which held significance for both the meaning of liberalism and its status as a single tradition that stood against totalitarian regimes in all their forms. Liberalism was inexorably tied to pluralism. To understand the liberal tradition, for Berlin, required understanding the sources of pluralism, not only negative liberty. This meant, somewhat paradoxically, that liberalism was the result of

⁴⁹⁸ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', 171.

⁴⁹⁹ Berlin, 'Introduction' to *From the Other Shore*, xvi.

⁵⁰⁰ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', 170.

⁵⁰¹ *ibid.*, 171-2. See also Dunn, *Western Political Theory*, 48-53.

both the Enlightenment and its critique from romantic and counter-Enlightenment perspectives. There is subsequently a deeper ambiguity to Berlin's liberalism behind the already ambiguous distinction between positive and negative liberty. Berlin certainly helped himself to aspects of the canon and counter-canon narrative of his contemporaries when dividing up those in the liberal camp and those on the totalitarian side, and similarly identified some of liberalism's sources with seventeenth century individualism more broadly, but the sources of pluralism made his understanding of liberalism somewhat different and more ambiguous about its status as a distinct historical phenomenon—particularly when it often appeared to be closer to the arch anti-liberals than first appears.

The Enlightenment project, Berlin suggested, rejected the 'authority of revelation' and held the 'autonomy of reason and the methods of natural science' in the highest regard both in and of themselves and for being capable of discerning and comprehending the ultimate ends of individuals. This quest to know the ends of man had become fused with the presupposition of an essential nature of man, in virtue of their adherence to natural laws, which would be rationally discerned and known.⁵⁰² Whilst there was a diverse array of characterisation, the unity in the presupposition 'that these laws were real, and could be known, whether with certainty, or only probability, remained the central dogma of the entire Enlightenment'.⁵⁰³

The history of liberalism was entwined with this rationalist movement, suggesting that 'there is in principle a rational answer to every question', which mankind are capable of coming to know through the exercise of reason. Furthermore, they could not only be known, as 'these solutions, because they are rational, cannot clash with one another, and will ultimately form a harmonious system in which the truth will prevail'.⁵⁰⁴ Locke, Smith, and Mill—'in some moods'— offered 'an optimistic view of human nature and the belief in the possibility of harmonizing human interests' as part of this rationalism, and were equally the forefathers of liberalism due to the fact that this rational realisation of human ends was achievable only in relation to an account of negative liberty. As we have seen, on Berlin's view, they 'believed that social harmony and progress were compatible with reserving a large area for private life over which the state nor any other authority must be allowed to trespass'. In order for the rational realisation of human ends, individuals had to make their own choices free from interference on the good faith that such truth would prevail.⁵⁰⁵ Marx was no less an heir to the

⁵⁰² Isaiah Berlin, 'The Counter-Enlightenment' in *Against the Current* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 1.

⁵⁰³ *ibid.*, 4.

⁵⁰⁴ Berlin, 'Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century' in *Four Essays on Liberty*, 8.

⁵⁰⁵ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', 126.

Enlightenment in terms of discerning the rational laws of history, on Berlin's account, but as we have seen, he had taken this rationalism in the direction of a positive account of liberty.⁵⁰⁶

The Enlightenment was not, however, the only source of liberalism. The value pluralism that Berlin insisted upon was forged in a critique of Enlightenment rationalism by both romantic and counter-Enlightenment lines of thinking. Hobbes and Locke were, as we have seen, early articulators of negative liberty for Berlin. They both, however, understood liberty in relation to the science of man and the laws that determine our actions and ends in this frame of reference. Berlin subsequently noted the appeal of William Blake's criticisms of Enlightenment rationalism, challenging those who placed the human spirit in a cage of Newtonian physics.⁵⁰⁷ For Berlin, if determinism were true as an outcome of Enlightened thinking, then there would need to be a fundamental revision of our moral language and it would perhaps even lead to the curtailment of self-expression. There was an anti-rationalist sympathy in Berlin's liberalism, where the increase of knowledge and the determination of our ends did not entail an increase in liberty, and perhaps may even be a threat to liberty.⁵⁰⁸ Enlightenment rationalism was at its limit a threat to the very individual liberty that it prized. Knowledge was not always liberating.

Romanticism, by contrast, challenged the very status of this knowledge: 'romanticism[...] shattered this orderly, smooth understanding of the world of values, replacing it with a darker and more chaotic vision of the ultimate goals of men as invented and created rather than found'.⁵⁰⁹ Whilst the Enlightenment encouraged the free exercise of reason, it was romanticism in distinction to Enlightenment that recognised plurality and conflict between values, and the conflicting and tragic nature of the human condition. Romanticism was, then, part of the intellectual heritage of liberalism as much as the Enlightenment, if not more so, as Berlin summarised:

the result of romanticism, then, is liberalism[...] This was very far from the intentions of the romantics. But at the same time—and to this extent the romantic doctrine is true—they are the persons who most strongly emphasised the unpredictability of all

⁵⁰⁶ Berlin, *Karl Marx*, 5-6. See also, David Leopold, 'Isaiah Berlin, Karl Marx, and the Enlightenment' in *Isaiah Berlin and the Enlightenment*, eds. Lawrence Brockliss and Ritchie Robertson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 21-34.

⁵⁰⁷ Berlin, 'The Counter-Enlightenment', 16.

⁵⁰⁸ Berlin 'Introduction' to *Four Essays on Liberty*, xxii. See also Mark Bode, 'Everything is What It is and Not Another Thing: Knowledge and Freedom in Isaiah Berlin's Political Thought', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 19, no.2 (2011): 305-326.

⁵⁰⁹ Gina Gustavsson, 'Berlin's Romantics and their Ambiguous Legacy' in *The Cambridge Companion to Isaiah Berlin*, 155.

human activities. They were hoist with their own petard. Aiming at one thing, they produced, fortunately for us all, almost the exact opposite⁵¹⁰

Liberalism was an offshoot of both Enlightenment *and* romanticism, and it also rejected the totalising effects of both in relation to the capacity to choose. Though liberalism lay between the two, there was perhaps a closer relationship to romanticism given Berlin's defence of pluralism at its heart. Berlin did not, however, ever abandon the Enlightenment legacy: 'although I came in due course to oppose some of the bases of their common beliefs, I have never lost my admiration for and sense of solidarity with the Enlightenment of that period'.⁵¹¹

Berlin's appreciation for the roots of pluralism went further, embracing not only the liberal sentiments and unintended consequences of romanticism but also the 'counter-Enlightenment'—a trend of thought that was superficially more hostile to liberal ends. Berlin praised Vico for recognising the plurality of cultures and the multifaceted ways in which those cultures were expressed as a collective experience that resisted uniformity and recognised diversity.⁵¹² Berlin's pluralism subsequently bears some close links to counter-Enlightenment lines of thought in order to curb the more hubristic claims of optimism and rationality in a pluralistic world. There perhaps never was a 'counter-Enlightenment' as an historical phenomenon in the same way we might talk of Romanticism⁵¹³, but what Berlin traced were the multifaceted and sometimes unexpected sources of pluralism. More often than not, these unexpected sources, such as Machiavelli as one of the 'makers of pluralism', were 'wholly unintended by its originator'.⁵¹⁴

Whilst romanticism shared an affinity with counter-Enlightenment in terms of their shared suspicions of the priority of reason, the two were distinct. The former was a closer contributor to liberalism. It would therefore be more accurate to place Berlin's liberalism between romanticism and Enlightenment, rather than Enlightenment and counter-Enlightenment—though the second of these distinctions does play an important part for the consideration of pluralism's value and development. The peculiarity of the two distinctions, though, is the same

⁵¹⁰ Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, ed. Henry Hardy (London: Pimlico, 2000), 147.

⁵¹¹ Isaiah Berlin, 'My Intellectual Path' in *The Power of Ideas*, ed. Henry Hardy (London: Chatto & Windus, 2000), 4.

⁵¹² Berlin, 'The Counter-Enlightenment', 4-6. See also Steven B. Smith, 'Isaiah Berlin on the Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment' in *The Cambridge Companion to Isaiah Berlin*, 143. See also, Graeme Garrad, 'The Counter-Enlightenment Liberalism of Isaiah Berlin', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 2, no.3 (1997): 287-8.

⁵¹³ See Jeremy L. Caradonna, 'There Was No Counter-Enlightenment', *Eighteenth Century Studies* 49, no.1 (2015): 51-69.

⁵¹⁴ Berlin, 'The Originality of Machiavelli' in *Against the Current*, 79.

when it comes to Berlin's defence of liberalism, as set out in the previous section. On Berlin's own terms, romanticism and counter-Enlightenment were partly responsible for nationalistic and fascist movements; counter-Enlightenment having a particular responsibility for 'modern irrationalism, a resistance to, even a hatred of, science, reason, and "enlightened" morality'.⁵¹⁵ The Enlightenment also carried some responsibility. Marx and his ilk, as one line of descent, were placed in direct opposition to others who had promised to be liberators in their critique of Enlightenment, such as Vico, Herder, and Nietzsche, but whose doctrines had 'in their most violent and pathological form' both led to fascist and totalitarian doctrines.⁵¹⁶

On the one hand, then, one offshoot of the Enlightenment became entwined with negative liberty and was politically preferable for its liberal outcomes that protected pluralism. Another legacy of the Enlightenment became entangled with positive liberty, the political consequences of which were witnessed in totalitarian regimes. But on the other hand, pluralism was antithetical to Enlightenment rationalism, having closer ties to romanticism and counter-Enlightenment lines of thought, both of which had done as much or more to inspire to totalitarian outcomes than they had unknowingly contributed to liberalism. The sources of Berlin's liberalism, then, are neither neat nor simply multifaceted, but often in direct tension. John Gray has even noted the irony here that '[Berlin] seems to find in the Enlightenment's illiberal Romantic critics a stronger support for liberal ideals than any that can be found in the liberal Enlightenment'.⁵¹⁷

Gray suggests that one consequence of this irony is that Berlin's defence of pluralism undermines a rational and universal case for liberalism—there can only be an 'agnostic' liberalism.⁵¹⁸ This places too much emphasis on one side of the balancing act. The conflicting sources of liberalism can be seen most plainly in Berlin's appreciation for both Mill and Herzen where the liberalism of each contained a romantic sentiment, but neither could be said to be agnostic in their liberalisms. Mack argues that 'the liberalism of his own nineteenth century heroes[...] reflects the anti-universalism and even anti-rationalism of the Counter-Enlightenment and its Romantic reverberations'.⁵¹⁹ This, like Gray, certainly captures one side. Herzen appreciated a creative and powerful urge in human beings to strive for freedom, but was free from 'the protestation before the mere spectacle of triumphant power and violence', 'from contempt for the weak' and 'from the romantic pessimism' that spurs nihilism and

⁵¹⁵ Smith, 'Isaiah Berlin on the Enlightenment', 143-4.

⁵¹⁶ Berlin, 'The Counter-Enlightenment', 19, 24.

⁵¹⁷ Gray, *Isaiah Berlin*, 147.

⁵¹⁸ Gray, *Isaiah Berlin*, 189-190.

⁵¹⁹ Mack, 'Isaiah Berlin and Liberal Pluralism', 218.

fascism.⁵²⁰ Mill was drawn to two different facets of Enlightenment: a utilitarian line of thought in which mankind are part of the order of nature and subject to its laws, which can be rationally known; and another line of thought that prioritised mankind's ability to choose, develop, and evolve in the way that they themselves saw fit. The individual is the chooser, 'the rider and not the horse; the seeker of ends and not merely of means, ends that he pursues, each in his own fashion'.⁵²¹ On Berlin's analysis, Mill was caught between the two: a reductive utilitarian individualism and a transcendent self-improving individualism, which suggested that nature and our future was at one and the same time open-ended and reducible or tractable to the science of society that utility maximisation posits.⁵²² For Berlin, in fusing romanticism and rationalism, Mill was neither original nor able to find a comprehensive solution to the problem of free will drawn out of the incompatibility between these two value systems.⁵²³ The mistake was to perhaps assume that there ever could be.

These tensions nonetheless added depth to Mill's passionate defence of individual liberty, for Berlin, and expressed not the confused nature of liberalism, but its uniqueness in its recognition of the individual in a pluralist world. Prefiguring Berlin's value pluralism, Mill reflected in his own thinking the multifaceted strains of liberalism's history and was the more admirable, if also the more confused, for it. He had been right to suggest that we must learn from both Bentham and Coleridge, placing ourselves within the tensions between two sets of values, as '[Mill was] acutely aware of the many-sidedness of the truth and of the irreducible complexity of life which rules out the very possibility of any simple solution, or the idea of a final answer to any concrete problem'.⁵²⁴ For Berlin, liberalism recognised the condition of the individual who is confronted with this feature of life and championed the choosing capacity of that individual in a pluralistic world, for all its imperfection and unpredictability, and therefore leant heavily toward a romantic liberalism.⁵²⁵

Berlin's account of the choosing individual tragically caught between these values was romantic but also in some sense existentialist; he was a Kantian without a kingdom of ends. His value pluralism was neither one which aimed to satisfy consumer choice nor one that saw a range of options that could be harmoniously realised:

⁵²⁰ Isaiah Berlin, 'Herzen and Bakunin on Liberty' in *Russian Thinkers*, 97, 99.

⁵²¹ Isaiah Berlin, 'John Stuart Mill and the Ends of Life' in *Four Essays on Liberty*, 178.

⁵²² *ibid.*, 182, 189.

⁵²³ *ibid.*, 199, 205.

⁵²⁴ *ibid.*, 192.

⁵²⁵ See Hardy, *In Search of Isaiah Berlin*, 249-50. See also Gustavsson, 'Berlin's Romantics', 166 & Cherniss, 'Against 'Engineers of the Human Soul'', 579-80.

if you choose one value, you must sacrifice another. Sacrifices can be agonising, but unless you refrain from choosing, (which would make you inhuman, because making choices is intrinsic to a human being), unless you cancel that, you have to choose and therefore you have to sacrifice something, namely the values you don't realise

Not all can be united without loss. It was in regard to this account of pluralism that Berlin claimed, 'in a sense I am an existentialist'.⁵²⁶ Our 'ends collide' in such a way that means 'one cannot have everything'. Our choice to sacrifice one value rather than another is our human predicament.⁵²⁷ This was something not only between individuals, but within ourselves. The 'truthfulness' of pluralism was in reflecting the 'deep and creative' role that divisive values play in our experience of the world.⁵²⁸ Pluralism and liberalism were both rational and universal by recognising this condition, but defended on romantic grounds, as a result of how they reflected human experience and the pluralist condition which confronts the individual. If liberalism was fighting an internal battle with the excesses of its own Enlightenment and romantic heritage, it was nevertheless the only conceivable way to respect the plurality of values, and the individual liberty to choose and create that was its pendant.

Enlightened thought, to summarise, prioritised toleration and reason as means to discovering the ends of individuals, but it also threatened a totalising determinism as a result of that rationalism; romanticism and counter-Enlightenment, in contrast, prioritised a passionate freedom, but at the cost of irrationalism and nationalism. There are, then, clear tensions between Berlin's defence of liberalism as an antithesis to totalitarianism, and the sources of those same liberal values. Berlin's dichotomies often distorted, shoehorned, and misrepresented a number of figures—he seemed to see the Enlightenment through a certain monopolistic monism, for example, which uncomfortably lumped Hume and Montesquieu in with a rationalist project.⁵²⁹ But it is a mistake to see all dichotomies as species of one larger rift. Rather, Berlin showed the inner tensions between historical concepts as they have developed and the contradictory tendencies within our lines of thinking, in particular, within liberalism. But rather than the two sources of liberalism from Enlightenment and romanticism finding resolution via dialectic, we remain between the two—inheritors of a conflict that is perpetually present. Berlin admired Mill and Herzen for having glimpsed this truth. Liberalism, for Berlin, therefore precariously tread between the pitfalls of both Enlightenment and

⁵²⁶ Berlin, 'In Conversation', 101.

⁵²⁷ Berlin, 'Introduction' to *Four Essays on Liberty*, li.

⁵²⁸ See Bernard Williams' 'Introduction' to *Concepts and Categories*, ed. Henry Hardy (London: Pimlico, 1999), xiii-xx. See also Mack, 'Isaiah Berlin', 219-20.

⁵²⁹ Smith, 'Isaiah Berlin on the Enlightenment', 137. See also Mack, 'Isaiah Berlin', 222.

romanticism, defending the choosing capacity of individuals in a pluralistic world, and recognised the often tragic position in which those individuals were caught. In the wake of the Second World War, avoiding those pitfalls seemed evermore necessary.

V. The Plan to End All Plans: Berlin, Hayek, and Oakeshott

I have so far explored the tensions in Berlin's liberalism in the previous two sections, and I now return to some of the broader shifts in liberalism from the 1930s through to the 1950s which were set out in the first two sections of this chapter in order to better position Berlin's account of the fractured liberal tradition within these developments. Without the new liberal synthesis of the internal rivalries of liberalism, a set of questions arise about which liberalism is the 'true' one, if a single line of descent could claim that title, and whether the competing lines of descent are compatible with one another whilst nonetheless being in tension with one another? As has been argued, the answer to this question for Berlin is more complex than the Cold War divide suggests. His answer is therefore not only distinct from Hobhouse, but also more nuanced than some of his contemporaries, as the 'true' liberalism could not be so easily disentangled from its 'false' manifestations. This, I argue, presents a different set of challenges to Berlin's liberalism than has often been acknowledged when viewed next to his contemporaries, in particular the Hayek and the work of Michael Oakeshott.

Berlin's dichotomies certainly held similarities to those of von Mises, Hayek, Russell, Talmon, and Popper, the common threads being a suspicion of a totalising rationalism, a defence of individual liberty broadly construed in a 'negative' sense, and an embrace of pluralism as the base of liberalism.⁵³⁰ Furthermore, their defences of liberalism were intertwined with tracing both the liberal tradition and the ideological sources of totalitarianism, setting out an individualist tradition in explicit contrast to a collectivist tradition and the villainous figures that had betrayed the meaning of liberty. More often than not, the likes of Locke, Smith, and Constant were juxtaposed to Rousseau, Hegel, and Marx—Mill was plonked in the middle. Berlin's liberalism, however, contained a certain ambiguity owing to its romantic sources and recognition of positive liberty that could not completely escape from the totalitarian lines of thinking he criticised. Seemingly aware of this, the tension was left at the heart of liberalism itself, as an endorsement of a value pluralism that sprung from both Enlightenment and romantic sources. This account of liberalism not only sets Berlin apart from some of his

⁵³⁰ Müller, 'Fear and Freedom', 51 & Mack, 'Isaiah Berlin', 217.

contemporaries, Hayek in particular, but reveals some of the tensions between pluralism and liberalism when it comes to considering the latter as a unified tradition of individual liberty.

As we have seen, Hayek had set out a tale of two liberalisms that was not dissimilar to Berlin's on first glance: one was based on a 'true' individualism and came to be part of a British tradition of liberalism, whereas the other was based on a 'false' individualism and identified with a Continental tradition; the latter of which had led us down the path to serfdom under its faux banner of 'liberalism' and 'individualism', eventually infiltrating the British tradition. One posited freedom as 'the freedom of the individual in the sense of a protection by law against all arbitrary coercion'; whereas, the other, posited freedom as 'the self-determination of each group according to its form of government' and held a 'rationalist or constructivist view which demanded a deliberate reconstruction of the whole of society in accordance with the principles of reason'.⁵³¹

Berlin considered Hayek to be 'too ideological' for his taste.⁵³² Despite their similarities, the two stood opposed to one another in their accounts of liberalism and how they understood the relationship between liberty and pluralism. Liberty, for Berlin, was closer to the choosing capacity of individuals within a conflicting ethical and political world, rather than their pursuit of material interests. Likewise, Hayek seemed to be resistant to any pluralism that did not place a free economy at the heart of its defence and considered the market to be the arena of individual liberty: 'economic control is not merely control of a sector of human life which can be separated from the rest; it is the control of the means for all our ends'.⁵³³ The difference between Berlin and Hayek went further and was not only related to their understandings of liberty, but to how the historical evolution of liberty was presented and defended by the two. Both portrayed two traditions of liberty that jostled for primacy and both aligned themselves with a similar looking victor over a common rival. Hayek, however, presented one meaning of liberty as the 'true' meaning, and therefore one form of liberalism as 'true' in opposition to a corrupted rationalism that had betrayed liberty, and as such was an attempt to sift out the impure ambiguities of liberalism. Berlin himself is sometimes read in this way—not in the least because Berlin does at times lean in to such a reading—but as the chapter has argued, the

⁵³¹ Hayek, 'Liberalism', 119-20.

⁵³² Berlin, 'In Conversation with Steve Lukes', 98. See also Cherniss, 'Against 'Engineers of Human Souls'', 584.

⁵³³ Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, 92. In 1952, Berlin had remarked: 'I even find myself in some sympathy with the wicked Hayek, although I think he is quite wrong in assuming that political liberty is indissolubly tied to economic private enterprise', Shapiro and Steinmatz, 'Negative Liberty and the Cold War', 198n.

status of his liberalism is much more ambiguous when considering its intellectual roots and the two traditions cannot be so easily separated.

Berlin's narrative was more nuanced in admitting the ambiguous sources of liberalism and the interrelationship of the two meanings of liberty, neither being sufficient for defending the choosing capacity of individuals and both being rival lines of descent. Both sources had contributed something of what was valuable to the liberal tradition; both contained threats to it and to what it protected when considering their political consequences. Rather than presenting Cold War ammunition and 'cheer-leading for the West', Berlin's work reflected 'deep anxieties about cultural and political trends' that he found within Western democracies—partly due to the complex character of liberalism itself—that threatened to undermine the choosing capacity of the individual.⁵³⁴ For Berlin, the two traditions of liberty were two equal lines of descent and liberalism grew out of sources that provided both its ideals and their negation. It was also important, for him, in his practice of intellectual history to understand and express their tensions and sources. In contrast to Hobhouse, De Ruggerio, and Collingwood, however, these rival lines of descent and inherent tensions found no resolution. Liberalism was caught in the tensions between the two.

Distancing themselves from one another and also from the 'new' liberals, both Berlin and Hayek paid homage to Benjamin Constant as one of the intellectual fathers of liberalism—a figure who similarly made a distinction between two meanings of liberty in his 1819 lecture on 'The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with That of the Moderns' and who also saw Rousseau as a suspect figure for endorsing a tyrannical version of liberty.⁵³⁵ Constant posed his central distinction as follows: if one were to ask 'what an Englishman, a Frenchman, and a citizen of the United States of America understand today by the word 'liberty'', they would answer that it was the 'right to be subjected to the laws', rather than being subject to 'the arbitrary will of one or more individuals'. It is for an individual to 'express their opinion, choose a profession and practise it, to dispose of property, and even to abuse it', to associate with other individuals through such an equal liberty—of which religion is such a right of association—and to pose a

⁵³⁴ Cherniss, 'Against 'Engineers of Human Souls'', 566.

⁵³⁵ See Benjamin Constant, 'The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with That of the Moderns' in *Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Biancamaria Fontana (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988 [1819]), 308-328. For the relationship between Constant and liberalism, see Stephen Holmes, *Benjamin Constant and the Making of Modern Liberalism* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 1984); Pierre Manent, *An Intellectual History of Liberalism*, trans. Rebecca Balinski (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 84-92; Helena Rosenblatt, *Liberal Values: Benjamin Constant and the Politics of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) & *The Lost History of Liberalism*, esp.41-87; & K. Steven Vincent, *Benjamin Constant and the Birth of French Liberalism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

right 'to exercise some influence on the administration of the government'. This account of liberty was famously contrasted to the liberty of the ancients, which prioritised the collective and the direct exercise of sovereignty as a public body. Prized above all else was dutiful participation in political life. This, however, was a 'collective freedom' entailing 'complete subjection of the individual to the authority of the community'. The right to choose one's own religious affiliation, for example, was not simply valued less, but was 'a crime and a sacrilege' to the ancients. In contrast to the value placed on individual's liberty by the moderns, 'the authority of the social body interposed itself and obstructed the will of individuals'. Though this ancient liberty encouraged civic engagement, the result was that 'the individual, almost always sovereign in public affairs, was a slave in all his private relations'.⁵³⁶

This shift in conceptions of liberty had roughly, and by 'lucky accident', coincided with the rise of commerce, which had inspired a 'vivid love of individual independence'. For modern individuals with their private interests, commerce 'supplies their needs, satisfies their desires, without the intervention of authorities'.⁵³⁷ The individual was able to enjoy liberty outside the realm of political life and this shift was reflected in the values of commercial society, and in the sense and reference of liberty, which now referred to the liberty of the private individual. With the march of time and the rise of modern commercial society, Constant remarked that 'we can no longer enjoy the liberty of the ancients, which consisted in an active and constant participation in collective power'.⁵³⁸ This was despite the wishes of those such as Rousseau and the Abbé de Mably, who Constant associated with nostalgic longing for ancient liberty. For Rousseau in particular, the traditions of liberal education and the advancements of the liberal arts and sciences, alongside the growth of commercial society, had not only failed to develop the moral sensibility, but in fact had veiled a drift away from previously held civic values, and more pointedly, provided shackles which inhibited our natural liberty and produced widespread misery. These 'liberal' advancements had in fact corrupted the moral nature and virtue of men; 'the Sciences, Letters, and Arts[...] spread garlands of flowers over the iron chains with which they are laden'.⁵³⁹ Whilst Rousseau had been 'animated by the purest love of liberty' in valuing the liberty of the ancients, something which Constant himself acknowledged retained the romantic pull of something once cherished now lost to us, both he had nevertheless 'furnished deadly pretexts for more than one kind of tyranny' by mistaking

⁵³⁶ Constant, 'The Liberty of the Ancients...', 310-1.

⁵³⁷ Constant, 'The Liberty of the Ancients...', 314-5.

⁵³⁸ *ibid.*, 316.

⁵³⁹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 'Discourse on the Arts and Sciences' in *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1-28. See also, 'Discourse on the Origins of Inequality' in *The Discourses*, 111-188.

'just as the ancients did, the authority of the social body for liberty'.⁵⁴⁰ In contradistinction to this ancient liberty and its value, as Constant restated, 'individual liberty[...] is the true modern liberty'.⁵⁴¹

For all that he was critical of Rousseau, Constant's defence of 'modern' liberty was not without ambiguity and its words of caution. In embracing our individual liberty, he admonished, we must avoid wholly sacrificing 'our right to share in political power too easily' when pursuing our private interest as individuals and we ought not strive for individual happiness alone: 'it is to self-development that our destiny calls us'.⁵⁴² In order to achieve this goal, not only did 'modern' liberty leave individuals potentially ill-prepared to realise that destiny by encouraging the pursuit of private interest outside of the political realm; elements of civic participation and self-development within a community that had been associated with ancient liberty had to be reconciled with modern liberty to avoid a narrow individualism that consumed and undermined what that modern political liberty was attempting to secure. It was for this reason that Constant acknowledged the appeal, if not the feasibility, of ancient liberty. As Constant concluded, 'it is necessary[...] to learn to combine the two [conceptions of liberty] together' if individuals are to develop themselves for themselves.⁵⁴³

Berlin and Hayek both found an affinity with Constant, despite their differences, reformulating the problem of his own time as one that had significance for the defence of liberalism against totalitarianism in their differing ways. Whilst Constant had warned of appeals to a lost tradition of thought and was far from understanding a 'liberal tradition' constituted in the manner in which Locke and Smith were corralled together and canonised by some commentators in the twentieth century, both Berlin's and Hayek's narratives shared some affinities to Constant's. As Berlin put it deferentially, 'no one saw the conflict between the two types of liberty better, or expressed it more clearly than Benjamin Constant'.⁵⁴⁴ Hayek similarly placed Constant as an heir to the British tradition of liberalism, despite his nationality, for guaranteeing 'constitutional limitations of government' and defending the rule of law.⁵⁴⁵ Constant was also perceptive enough to see 'in Rousseau the most dangerous enemy of

⁵⁴⁰ Constant, 'The Liberty of the Ancients...', 318.

⁵⁴¹ *ibid.*, 323.

⁵⁴² *ibid.*, 327.

⁵⁴³ *ibid.*, 327. See also Holmes, *Benjamin Constant*, 39-46 & Jeremy Jennings, 'Constant's Idea of Modern Liberty' in *The Cambridge Companion to Benjamin Constant*, ed. Helena Rosenblatt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 69-91.

⁵⁴⁴ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', 163.

⁵⁴⁵ Hayek, 'Liberalism', 126.

individual liberty'—who Berlin infamously listed as one of six enemies to human liberty in the modern age.⁵⁴⁶

The ambiguities of the Enlightenment and romantic sources of liberal values, however, made Berlin's own distance from someone like Rousseau trickier to measure. At the same time, it potentially made Berlin closer to the spirit of Constant's distinction. Berlin found himself in agreement with Rousseau that 'to know one's chains for what they are is better than to deck them with flowers'.⁵⁴⁷ Echoing Russell, Nisbet, and Talmon, Berlin also saw Hitler and Mussolini as heirs to Rousseau.⁵⁴⁸ Berlin saw Rousseau as part of a line of thought—stretching down to Kant and Fichte—that posited the rule of reason in the place that God had once held. From this position, what followed was the question of a rational life for society into which individuals had to be properly assimilated, harmonised under the rule of reason. This rule of reason, however, was given the name of liberty.⁵⁴⁹ Rousseau, in contrast to Constant, saw liberty as a collective 'public power which is entitled to interfere with every aspect of every citizen's life' as part of realising this rule of reason, and considered that such a public power cannot be tyrannical as it is an expression of law, which itself is above the human.⁵⁵⁰ The general will was more than the mere aggregation of individual wills in a 'mystical moment' that placed the true self as part of a super-personal entity that is over and above the empirical self. Individuals could be despotically forced to be free through this 'mythology of the real self'.⁵⁵¹ Whilst Rousseau emphasised the role of passions and spoke of balancing liberty and authority, much like Hume and Shaftesbury, these languages were turned on their heads. The discord of the passions showed the unity in reason and the absolute value of liberty showed the necessity of it being synonymous with authority.⁵⁵² On Berlin's reading, this was 'a kind of simplicity and a kind of lunacy which maniacal natures are often capable of'.⁵⁵³ A 'universal consent to loss of liberty' does not 'somehow miraculously preserve it merely by being universal, or by being consent'—at least Hobbes 'did not pretend that a sovereign does not enslave'.⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁴⁶ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', 164. See Isaiah Berlin, *Freedom and its Betrayal: six enemies of human liberty*, ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014). The six being Helvétius, Rousseau, Fichte, Hegel, Saint-Simon, and Maistre.

⁵⁴⁷ Berlin, 'Introduction' to *Four Essays on Liberty*, xxxix.

⁵⁴⁸ Isaiah Berlin, 'Rousseau' in *Freedom and its Betrayal*, 43. See also Isaiah Berlin, 'The Idea of Freedom' in *Political Ideas in the Romantic Age*, 143.

⁵⁴⁹ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', 138, 145, 148.

⁵⁵⁰ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', 162-3.

⁵⁵¹ Berlin, 'Rousseau', 47-50.

⁵⁵² Berlin, 'Rousseau', 29-33, 39 & 'The Idea of Freedom', 150.

⁵⁵³ Berlin, 'Rousseau', 39.

⁵⁵⁴ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', 164.

Rousseau was for Berlin both a figure of Enlightenment rationalism and romantic sentiment, but this was by no means a stable view of a single Rousseau, and it is often unclear why Berlin scapegoated Rousseau for conjuring up the wrong kind of conjunction between Enlightenment and romanticism, given Berlin's own account of liberalism's intellectual sources and his appreciation for Mill and Herzen. As Brooke argues, this was perhaps the result of Berlin seeing Marx as fusing rationalism and sentiment in a problematic political programme, and Rousseau as the intellectual source of that through Hegel.⁵⁵⁵ In an illuminating letter to Talmon, Berlin reflected that despite Rousseau being the 'father of Totalitarianism in a sense[...] because of the despotism of the general will', there was merit in the recognition of one's will in relation to others as part of a general process of reflection. The problem is 'that Rousseau thinks that an absolutely objectively true answer can be reached about political questions; that there is a guaranteed method of doing so; that his method is the right one; and that to act against such a truth is to be wrong, at worst mad, and therefore properly to be ignored', and that 'the mystique of the *soi commun* and the organic metaphor which runs away with him and leads to mythology, whether of the State, the Church, or whatever'. Berlin, however, ended on a hesitant note: 'Is this all? or is there more to complain of? I don't feel sure. The muddle is so great'.⁵⁵⁶

Berlin had reformulated and reinterpreted Constant's problem, seeing Hegel and Marx as pathological offshoots of Rousseau, but was sufficiently self-aware to see that his own liberalism walked between Enlightenment and romanticism and shared family resemblances to those that had been portrayed as liberalism's most dangerous villains. For Constant, the modern predicament was, mentioned, that 'it is necessary[...] to learn to combine the two [understandings of liberty] together'. Whilst Berlin's liberalism was defended in direct antagonism to Soviet communism and denounced its intellectual heritage, Berlin saw an ambiguity at the heart of liberalism in its relation to Enlightenment and romanticism that was perhaps neither resolvable nor able to guarantee a safe distance from the enemies of liberty. The two liberties could not be easily combined but the importance of liberalism was in keeping the tension alive and recognising the complexities of the two. Whilst, as argued in the previous section, this reflected for Berlin the condition of the individual in a pluralistic world, it left open what made liberalism a distinct 'tradition' and what gave it priority over its rivals, other than the contingent consequences of rival traditions clashing in the march of history. In other words, what made liberalism *the* tradition of a pluralistic world, other than the contingent

⁵⁵⁵ Christopher Brooke, 'Isaiah Berlin and the Origins of the 'Totalitarian' Rousseau' in *Isaiah Berlin and the Enlightenment*, 94.

⁵⁵⁶ Berlin quoted in Brooke, 'Origins of the 'Totalitarian' Rousseau', 97-8.

results of history, and *how* could its ambiguous sources be reconciled in a way that avoided the pitfalls of totalitarianism?

Michael Oakeshott, a near contemporary of Berlin, diagnosed a similar problem and critiqued the likes of Hayek for attempting to evade it. For Oakeshott, this was a problem of dually seeing one liberalism as the 'true' liberalism while simultaneously embracing an account of pluralism as the foundation for liberalism in distinction to totalitarian practices: 'a plan to resist all planning may be better than its opposite, but it belongs to the same style of politics'.⁵⁵⁷ Hayek's liberalism and Marxism, 'the most stupendous of our political rationalisms', were two sides of the same coin.⁵⁵⁸ While Berlin's critique of positive liberty and monism bore a similarity to Oakeshott's critique of rationalism, what Oakeshott meant by the term included both Berlin's target and the unrestrained endorsement of a plan to end all plans, which eroded the status of practical knowledge and traditional sources for forming civil associations.

Oakeshott made this point in criticism of Hayek's *Road to Serfdom*, but the same criticism could be made to the image of Berlin as a defender of negative liberty and pluralism over positive liberty and monism. What I am therefore suggesting is that interpretations of Berlin's 'Cold War liberalism' often bear as much if not more resemblance to Hayek than they do to Berlin when negative liberty is interpreted as the 'true' line of descent in the liberal tradition. Berlin's own anxieties about his project and the tensions of his commitments to both liberalism and pluralism certainly do reflect these problems and they are never fully resolved within his work. In Oakeshott's terms, without an account of tradition, civil association, and historical practice—such thinking being junked along with Rousseau, Hegel, and Marx—and without liberalism's core components finding dialectical resolution, liberalism was left in an ambiguous space, being the contingent result of incompatible modes of thinking clashing in history and reflective of a pluralistic world. This left liberalism with seemingly few, equally unpalatable options for those that looked for a consistent position: a plan to end all plans or the surrender to the romantic impulse which had contributed centrally to the corruption of positive liberty. Once the ambiguous status of Berlin's liberalism is recognised, however, a more nuanced presentation of liberalism's inner-tensions is revealed. With this comes the realisation that liberalism is never that far from what it purports to be against, always caught between warring Gods. Whilst Berlin's liberalism does not resolve or overcome this problem, it is nonetheless at

⁵⁵⁷ Michael Oakeshott, 'Rationalism in Politics' in *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1991), 26. For Hayek's 'plan', see Irving, *Hayek's Market Republicanism*, chs.7-9.

⁵⁵⁸ Oakeshott, 'Rationalism in Politics', 31.

the heart of his liberalism and in his engagement with the contending lines of descent in the liberal tradition reveal its significance.

What I therefore want to suggest is that a different set of Oakeshottian problems are relevant to Berlin's liberalism. As has been mentioned, attention is usually paid to the relationship between pluralism and liberalism in Berlin's account, attempting to provide a stronger connection between the two of these. There is a further unresolved problem for Berlin about the status of liberalism as a tradition and its relationship to the value pluralism he endorsed, which reflected the broader trend of liberal thought in the mid-twentieth century. As we have seen, liberals frequently turned back to salvage a lost tradition of liberty from the seventeenth century. This said more about the condition of liberalism than what were its intellectual sources: it showed what contemporary liberals were looking for, the models they wished to imitate. Locke's *Second Treatise* was singled out by Oakeshott as an explicit example of attempting to rationalise tradition, a work of 'political vulgarization', which did not deny the value of traditions and the status of practices for forming civil associations, but attempted to abridge them by 'purporting to elicit the 'truth' of a tradition and to exhibit it in a set of abstract principles'. The problem of such rationalisms is that they could only lapse in to what they proposed to be in distinction to, as they either relied upon tradition or could not express themselves beyond it.⁵⁵⁹ The implication was that imitating such works as these was not the route to the promised land.

Paul Franco has suggested that Oakeshott's own work on traditions and civil associations represents a liberal space 'between the rigid monism Berlin attacks and the radical (if not relativistic) pluralism he embraces; something between the Enlightenment rationalism Berlin often caricatures and the Romantic celebration of diversity and particularity he sometimes seems to endorse'.⁵⁶⁰ This is not an unfair suggestion, but it misrepresents how Berlin's own engagement with liberalism and the liberal tradition in 'Two Concepts' is, in part and alongside his engagement with the history of ideas more broadly, an attempt to work though that space between enlightenment and romanticism, where the liberal tradition is open-ended, flexible, and unfinished. Though the tensions of liberalism are left unresolved by Berlin and he did not develop an account of a tradition or practice in the way that Oakeshott would come to⁵⁶¹, we as inheritors and inhabitants of the liberal tradition need to be aware of those tensions and

⁵⁵⁹ Oakeshott, 'Rationalism in Politics', 30. See also, Michael Oakeshott 'John Locke', *The Cambridge Review* November 4th (1932): 72-3. For a comparison of Oakeshott and Berlin, see Paul Franco, 'Oakeshott, Berlin, and Liberalism', *Political Theory* 31, no.4 (2003): 484-507.

⁵⁶⁰ Franco, 'Oakeshott, Berlin, and Liberalism', 494.

⁵⁶¹ See Michael Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), esp.55-80.

keep them alive, whilst avoiding their excesses. Whilst Berlin lacks a systematic account of practice, his own practice is an attempt to balance the rival lines of descent in the liberal tradition, and in Constant's terms, find a way of balancing the two liberties whilst recognising their tensions.

Conclusion

As set out in the first part of this chapter, Laski, Dewey, Schmitt, and Oakeshott all challenged the central tenets of liberalism. What they found to be the stumbling blocks of liberalism later came to be defended as its greatest asset in the 1940s and early 1950s. Individualism transformed from a weakness of liberalism to its great strength as an intellectual tradition, even as that tradition found a new way of saying what it meant to be committed to the individual. This transformation not only recast liberalism in a new light, suggesting that it was a 'lost' tradition, but redrew the boundaries of who and who was not part of the liberal tradition. Where liberals such as Hobhouse and Collingwood had attempted to distance liberalism, to a certain extent, from Marx and Hegel, Rousseau was now cast out of the liberal tradition as the primary influence from whom Marx and Hegel had inherited all their major vices. Despite Hobhouse's and Collingwood's engagements with Rousseau, his thought was now seen to be antithetical to human liberty. The tradition of liberalism, as now presented, looked back to Hobbes, Locke, and Smith as articulators of the 'true' liberalism, even casting out the very liberals at the end of the nineteenth and start of the twentieth century who had played the major part in the intellectual transformation of liberalism into a tradition. They had granted too much to the likes of Rousseau, Hegel, and Marx. Both a canon and a counter-canon were constructed to legitimise liberalism's shift in meaning. Liberalism, transformed by both its critics and defenders, became a 'lost' tradition of individual liberty found in the seventeenth century, that had provided a cornerstone for Western values and stood in direct antagonism to the lines of thinking which had led to totalitarianism and collectivism.

Isaiah Berlin, whose writings took aim at both, identified two meanings of liberty claimed to be capable of securing individual freedom. He suggested that only one had done so while the other had been diverted on another degenerative course. Liberalism's commitment to the individual came from both Enlightenment and romantic sources, with a certain suspicion for Enlightenment rationalism, but it was buttressed by negative liberty. Negative liberty respected the individual's capacity to choose and the plurality of values, whereas grand

totalitarian structures sacrificed the individual in the name of monist ideals. Liberalism's intellectual heritage was reassessed in confronting and facing down the totalitarian threat. The problem was that liberalism often remained closer than was comfortable to the ideas and ideals it set itself against. Rousseau illustrated the difficulty well: he was hard to fit into Berlin's story, and Berlin was reduced to the epistolary equivalent of embarrassed coughing when put on the spot about how and where he did fit in, and why.

The limitations of Berlin's liberalism are nonetheless symptomatic of its particularities, which set him apart from some of his contemporaries—and perhaps closer to others in often unacknowledged ways, like Oakeshott. Berlin's liberalism not only contained a deep duality concerning its intellectual origins, which impacted on its meaning and the kinds of arguments that could be mobilised in its defence, but the embrace of pluralism made liberalism's status as the exemplary modern tradition unclear. Without an underlying historical process which gave sense and direction to the changes that were taking place within liberalism, which affirmed its hopes and ratified its claims to shape the future, there was no great reason to suppose it would or should triumph in the clash of values that characterised the disenchanted world in which people found themselves. Liberalism could only reflect this condition, defending the individual's capacity to choose and attempting to keep alive the conditions under which the clash of values was not abridged by force. What Berlin did provide, however, is an engagement with the liberal tradition that attempted to reveal and work through these tensions even if they can never be fully resolved. Liberalism was perpetually caught between negative and positive liberty, between Enlightenment and romanticism. This was not the way John Rawls saw things and it is Rawls's contribution to liberal thinking, and his conception of the liberal tradition, that I turn next, which attempted to bring the rival lines of descent back together.

4. John Rawls: From Moral Geometry to Reasonable Pluralism

'We, too, have our "ideology", inherited from the past as the liberal tradition, the American creed, the Judeo-Christian heritage of Western Civilisation'⁵⁶²

'We should strive for a kind of moral geometry with all the rigor which this name connotes'⁵⁶³

'If a reasonably just society that subordinates power to its aims is not possible and people are largely amoral[...] one might ask with Kant whether it is worthwhile for human beings to live on the earth?'⁵⁶⁴

Introduction

During the first half of the twentieth century, it appeared to many observers that liberalism was on the brink of collapsing in on itself. The failure of liberal movements to live up to their promises seemed palpably obvious as wave upon wave of economic crises gripped Europe and the incapacity of those movements to diffuse the rising tide of political extremism across the Continent was equally clear. Liberalism's days, it was feared, were numbered. In reaction, the proponents and defenders of liberalism aimed not only to restate its core principles and values

⁵⁶² Arthur E. Murphy, 'Ideas and Ideologies:1917-1947', *The Philosophical Review* 56, no.4 (1947): 386.

⁵⁶³ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice; revised edition* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1991), 105.

⁵⁶⁴ John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), lx.

but to present liberalism as a legitimate heir to a distinct heritage of liberty, that stood opposed to extremists, revolutionaries, and all-embracing creeds, and transcended the limitations of any one particular movement. In the aftermath of the Second World War, liberalism was revised once more. A commitment to the individual was prioritised in contradistinction to doctrines that were said to have sacrificed the individual to the state and to the social collective—often under the spurious title of 'liberty'. *This* liberalism's forefathers and architects were revered as heroes, while its critics were cast out—most notably the likes of Rousseau, Hegel, and Marx, along with the liberals that had strayed from the path, such as the 'new' liberals and even, in some accounts, J. S. Mill.

Liberalism came to hold one determinate meaning above others as a tradition of individual liberty that had emerged in reaction to tyrannical politics and religious persecution in the seventeenth century and which had survived into the present day to combat a new tyranny represented by totalitarian creeds of the 1930s and the totalitarian forms of government that dominated the Eastern Bloc after the Second World War. Cold War anxieties about the ambiguous status of liberalism in the modern world remained, but liberalism came to occupy an unrivalled position as part of 'Western' liberal democracies' self-understanding. The 'liberal tradition' formed part of the background culture of liberal democracies and buttressed their legitimacy in 'the West'. It was widely seen, even by critics, as one of the most influential traditions shaping modern Anglo-American thought—if not *the* tradition that defined modernity itself—and as an embodiment of 'Western values'. Liberalism became its own kind of totality.

This chapter explores a further shift in the perception and terms through which liberalism's origins and fortunes were assessed via a close consideration of the work of John Rawls and his relationship to the liberal tradition. It examines the ways in which liberalism came to be viewed in contemporary political thought through the Rawlsian lens, as opposed to the lenses of Hobhouse and Berlin. The Rawlsian attempt to resuscitate the liberal tradition in his preferred form, which has been in train since the 1950s and gathering speed since the 1970s, embraces both a particular conception of what liberalism is—or at least what it ought to be—and of how it relates to its past, and how it carries forward and disburses the legacy it has inherited from the past. The ambitions of liberalism and its intellectual lineage are presented together in a single self-image as one tradition, as if the former was a—if not the only—natural successor to the latter, and that forms part of the background culture to the institutions of liberal democratic societies. Rawls not only played a pivotal role in shaping how commentators

understand both the project of liberalism and its historical development; he himself has come to be canonised in his turn as part of that tradition, so much so that his name is often used as a byword for liberalism in contemporary political thought. This chapter critically examines this development and explores the consolidation of liberalism as the exemplar tradition of 'the West', with Rawls at the helm.

Section one explores concerns about 'the death of political philosophy' and how these concerns went hand in hand with the consolidation of 'liberal democracies' in the post-war era. Whilst political thinking had certainly not ceased, the problem seemed to be the eclipse of a certain kind of political thinking and the degree to which liberal democracies seemed to rely for intellectual support on a way of thinking that was no longer viable. In this section, I draw on the relationship between liberal discourse in the mid-twentieth century and the so-called 'death of political philosophy' to show the position that liberalism had come to occupy in Anglophone political thought. Section two then outlines Rawls' rehabilitation of both political philosophy and the liberal tradition in his defence of the social contract he found in Locke, Rousseau, and Kant. In Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* (1971), a debt to Kant was emphasised in the primacy given to the individual and with the liberal polity, idealised as the 'well-ordered society', being the result of a rational consensus between those individuals. Later in *Political Liberalism* (1991), Rawls came to position Locke and Rousseau at the centre of the liberal tradition, particularly Locke, and relied less explicitly upon Kant and 'moral geometry'; at the end of *A Theory of Justice* he claimed that the theory represented the position of individuals in society from all social and temporal points of view. Rawls' aim shifted from 'moral geometry' towards finding the grounds for stability and consensus given the fact of reasonable pluralism. Despite this important revision, which will be discussed below, liberalism was understood under the terms of the social contract and aimed at balancing conflicting claims between individuals on the scales of justice as part of the self-understanding of citizens in liberal democracies; where Berlin saw negative and positive liberty in perpetual tension, Rawls attempted to neutralise that tension and reconcile the two. Both *A Theory of Justice* and *Political Liberalism* together, I argue, are necessary for a complete picture of Rawls' liberalism.

Section three explores how this process of balance and reconciliation extended to Rawls' engagement with the liberal tradition, where he often demonstrated the compatibility between differing versions of liberalism and his own project—despite, for example, prioritising the social contractarianism of the seventeenth century over utilitarianism of the nineteenth. The effort towards balance and reconciliation extended further still to include some critics of

liberal values, such as Rousseau and Hegel who were welcomed back to the liberal tradition, and those such as Marx and Nietzsche, whose criticisms were now deemed to be answerable from within the terms of the social contract. Pluralism—as Rawls construed it and sometimes in distinction to Berlin—was able to reconcile a range of views by showing them to be compatible with the pursuit of justice and the legitimate grounds for stability in a liberal democratic society, in turn bolstering the values of a liberal democratic culture and broadening the conception of liberalism as a tradition.

One of the shifts from *A Theory of Justice* to *Political Liberalism* and the later lectures was the more conscious role that the historical sources of pluralism and consensus within a liberal democratic culture played for Rawls' liberalism and for the status of liberalism as a tradition. Section four reflects on the Rawlsian project and some of his contemporary critics as part of a broader reflection on the legacy of liberalism and the way that it came to be characterised as the exemplar tradition of 'Western' life. Rawls came to rely more explicitly upon the historical conditions of consensus and the supposed revival of political thought has often attempted to work within the terms of Rawls' liberalism. Whilst Rawls came to move away from Kant, moving closer to Locke and perhaps even Hegel in the end, critics often challenged the political nature of Rawls' project—or rather, the apolitical nature of his 'political liberalism'—and whether he ever truly broke with Kantian moral geometry—or if he did, what was left of his theory without it. For them, Rawls' project was not the revival of political philosophy at all, but the eclipse of political thinking and the last gasp of a defunct tradition that was unaware of its own historical contingency. Rawls' later revisions of his liberalism and the move toward Hegel aimed to reconcile liberalism with this criticism—and for that matter, to reconcile Hegel himself with the liberal tradition. Rawlsian liberalism was an attempt to reconcile ourselves to the best possibilities of liberal democracies and a mechanism for balancing the conflicting claims of liberalism. That mechanism, however, often made it unclear what stood inside and outside of the project; what primacy, if any, liberalism had as a tradition; and what its claims to 'reasonableness' amounted to as part of the background culture of liberal democratic states. The significance of Rawls' liberalism, however, nonetheless lies in the attempt to reconcile both pluralism and consensus from within the liberal tradition and to frame the terms of political thought from within the assumptions of a liberal democratic culture. But we should start with the death of political philosophy before considering its revival.

I. 'The Death of Political Philosophy' in Liberal Democracies

Following a call to arms in a war of ideas, political philosophy was said to have fallen into a deep slumber, perhaps having all lasting vitality extinguished—or so it was declared in the 1950s and early 60s.⁵⁶⁵ A 'sense of political helplessness' had been 'induced by years of instability, war, and totalitarianism'.⁵⁶⁶ Whilst political thinking had certainly not ceased and political philosophy's obituary may have been written prematurely⁵⁶⁷, there was nonetheless a deep anxiety over the status of political thought in post-war Anglo-American circles. It was not necessarily the case that all questions regarding political obligation and the values and ends of human beings had been exhausted or suddenly rendered obsolete, leaving only the technical administration of means. There was rather a gathering sense that, whatever its successes, political theory could no longer carry on in the way that it once had done. A dichotomy was registered between 'the English-speaking world, where so many of the interesting political problems have been solved (at least superficially)' and 'the Communist countries' in which political thought '[was] imprisoned', which suggested that even if, or more assertively when, political thinking transcended the Cold War divide, the prognosis was quite bleak.⁵⁶⁸ The problem was whether political thought could say anything meaningful in the aftermath of two world wars and whether any claims to the intellectual heritage of Hobbes to Bosanquet—exemplars of systematic political thinking because they wrote as philosophers applying to politics the implications of a view of reality as a whole—could be considered legitimate or even useful anymore. As Peter Laslett famously reflected, the 'tradition has been broken' and 'for the moment, anyway, political philosophy is dead'.⁵⁶⁹

There had been a turn away from the grand visions, overarching narratives, and constructive rationalism associated with political theory in Anglo-American thought. In many respects it was a turn inwards, towards an analysis of the meaning and structures of political language and history, and the empirical description of institutions. As Isaiah Berlin diagnosed, there was much talk *about* political theory in terms of its syntax, development, and applications, but little

⁵⁶⁵ See Peter Laslett, 'Introduction' to *Philosophy, Politics, and Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1956); Judith Shklar, 'Conclusion: The Impasse of Political Thought' in *After Utopia: the decline of political faith* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 270-274; Robert Dahl, 'Political Theory: Truth and Consequences' *World Politics* 11, no.1 (1958): 89-102; & Isaiah Berlin, 'Does Political Theory Still Exist?' in *Concepts and Categories*, 143-172.

⁵⁶⁶ Shklar, *After Utopia*, vii.

⁵⁶⁷ See Mark Bevir and Robert Adcock, 'The Remaking of Political Theory' in *Modern Political Science: Anglo-American Exchanges since 1880*, Ed. Robert Adcock, Mark Bevir, and Shannon C. Simon (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007): 209-233 & Quentin Skinner, 'Introduction: The Return of Grand Theory' in *The Return of Grand Theory in the Human Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 1-20.

⁵⁶⁸ Dahl, 'Political Theory: Truth and Consequences', 89.

⁵⁶⁹ Laslett, 'Introduction' to *Philosophy, Politics, and Society*, vii.

theorising was being done: 'the principal symptom which seems to support this belief is that no commanding work of political philosophy has appeared in the twentieth century'.⁵⁷⁰ Judith Shklar confirmed that 'historical surveys are plentiful, as are descriptive analyses of political processes and institutions', but 'to think of politics in broad terms has come to seem futile'.⁵⁷¹

This concern was, in part, a reflection of the analytic turn in Anglo-American philosophy. Under the influences of Gottlob Frege, Bertrand Russell, G. E. Moore, the early Ludwig Wittgenstein, and A. J. Ayer, a more formal approach to the analysis of language had been developed, which had problematic consequences for the status of moral language—and indirectly, the language of political thought as an employment of moral categories—in how it had previously been understood.⁵⁷² If the truth of propositions was either to be determined internally by their logical status or by externally verifying them via an objective criteria as statements pertaining to the empirical world, then value judgements could neither be true nor false as propositions. Moral language, as one kind of value judgement, merely expressed subjective emotion. The influence from the logical positivism of the Vienna circle and the development of meta-ethical emotivism most explicitly challenged the pretensions of political and ethical statements by pushing this account of language to its logical end point. The problem, at bottom, was essentially whether political thought—despite its best intentions—was attempting to say something in the realm whereof, as Wittgenstein put it, one cannot speak.⁵⁷³

Taking up this line of criticism, T. D. Weldon's *The Vocabulary of Politics* (1953) poured 'cold water on the aspiration of political philosophy'⁵⁷⁴ to say much that was meaningful about politics in the way that it had been conducted up to that point in the 'Western' world. As Weldon noted, there had been a growing shift in Anglo-American thinking where 'philosophers have become extremely self-conscious about language' as they formed the view that 'many of the problems which their predecessors have found insuperable [had arisen] not from anything mysterious or inexplicable in the world but from the eccentricities of the language in which we try to describe the world'. Weldon identified as an especially problematical assumption that political language could have some intrinsic meaning to be discovered for particular words—such as 'state', 'authority', or 'law'—and that existing institutions exhibited, to differing degrees, non-ideal embodiments of those ideas or idealisations which could be usefully judged

⁵⁷⁰ Berlin, 'Does Political Theory Still Exist?', 143.

⁵⁷¹ Shklar, *After Utopia*, vii. See also Dahl, 'Political Theory: Truth and Consequences', 89.

⁵⁷² In particular, see A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic* (New York: Dover, 1952 [1936]).

⁵⁷³ This is not to suggest that Wittgenstein himself should necessarily be read in this way.

⁵⁷⁴ Philip Pettit, 'Analytic Philosophy' in *A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy*, ed. Robert E. Goodin, Philip Pettit, and Thomas Pogge (Oxford: Blackwell, 2017), 7.

against the ideal criterion. Though he rejected that assumption, Weldon did not say that political thought was obsolete or that the questions belaboured in political thinking from Hobbes to Hegel and Marx, and beyond were ultimately unanswerable. His suggestion, rather, was that a reorientation of those questions was in order and ought to be pursued because 'all of them [were] confused formulations of purely empirical difficulties'.⁵⁷⁵

Even if political thinking was essentially about empirical phenomena, with a more modest role for political philosophy as classically understood, it was unclear in what that role consisted once the practice of politics was considered in its own terms. Michael Oakeshott and Maurice Cowling neither shared a positivist nor an analytic outlook, but what they did share—besides the vocabulary Cowling borrowed from Oakeshott—was a certain scepticism regarding the role of rationalism in political thought, and as a result, about the sorts of claims that political thinking could make in regard to the practices of politics.⁵⁷⁶ Oakeshott made a distinction between technical and practical knowledge, noting how the common rationalism of political thinking erroneously attempted to subject practical knowledge to a technical rule-bound logic. Cowling pressed that distinction with polemical vehemence: 'once the attempt to inform gives way to the pretension to preach, irrelevance begins'.⁵⁷⁷ In his opinion, political philosophy overstepped its proper limits as soon as it began to pontificate about what ought to be done, which (he suggested) it almost always did. The methodological assumptions of behaviourism and institutionalism that were also becoming more influential in the Anglo-American study of political practices told a similar story in a less confrontational way.⁵⁷⁸ As Judith Shklar concluded, with a note of regret, 'the grand tradition of political theory that began with Plato is[...] in abeyance. A reasoned skepticism is consequently the sanest attitude for the present'.⁵⁷⁹

The 'death of political thought' had a close relationship to the development of liberalism and the ways in which the latter was characterised reflected some of the same concerns that commentators had expressed. This turn away from grand visions roughly coincided with the

⁵⁷⁵ T. D. Weldon, *The Vocabulary of Politics* (London: Penguin, 1953), 9, 14-5, 192-3.

⁵⁷⁶ See Oakeshott, 'Rationalism in Politics', 5-42 & Maurice Cowling, *The Nature and Limits of Political Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963).

⁵⁷⁷ Cowling, *The Nature and Limits of Political Science*, 8.

⁵⁷⁸ See Robert A. Dahl, 'The Behavioural Approach in Political Science: Epitaph for a Monument to a Successful Protest', *The American Political Science Review* 55, no.4 (1961): 763-772 & K. W. Kim, 'The Limits of Behavioural Explanation in Politics', *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* 31, no.3 (1965): 315-327.

⁵⁷⁹ Shklar, *After Utopia*, 272-3. On Plato and 'the political tradition', see Hannah Arendt, 'Tradition and the Modern Age' in *Between Past and Future* (London: Penguin, 2006 [1961]), 17-40 & Catherine H. Zuckert, *Postmodern Platos* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).

broad acceptance of pluralism as integral to a liberal outlook, for both advocates and critics⁵⁸⁰, and for 'liberalism' to be part of the *de facto* political position of 'the West' in opposition to the totalitarian shadow over the Eastern bloc.⁵⁸¹ This was particularly true for Berlin and Shklar, who in their differing ways attempted to articulate and defend a form of liberalism that was attuned to a pluralistic and often hostile world, but it was true for Weldon too, who, despite critiquing the philosophical standing of the value judgements in political thought, identified his own 'political prejudices' as 'very much the same as those of J. S. Mill and the British liberals of the nineteenth century'.⁵⁸² This was perhaps a fairly unreflective genuflection to the fact that the Cold War had divided the world into liberals and communists as it was an affirmation of liberal ideals—Pettit notes that 'the majority of analytic philosophers lived in a world where such values as liberty and equality and democracy held unchallenged sway'.⁵⁸³ This acceptance of liberalism as a pluralistic position in democratic regimes seeped further down into the study of politics itself, as 'behaviouralism was at its core an affirmation of liberalism', a 'commitment to liberalism qua pluralism'.⁵⁸⁴ Robert Dahl's pluralist analysis of power similarly endorsed a liberal outlook, as the presupposition of a pluralistic political system was the 'liberal societies in which these systems operate'.⁵⁸⁵

In the 1940s and 50s, there had been the consolidation and popularisation of the term 'liberal democracy' as indicative of the pluralistic and representative political regimes associated with industrialised 'Western' states.⁵⁸⁶ In works such as Seymour Martin Lipset's *Political Man* (1960), liberalism came to be twinned with democracy as representative of a democratic middle ground between extremes, and Jacob Talmon's *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (1952) juxtaposed one totalitarian form of democracy with a liberal variety, the latter of which regarded 'political systems as pragmatic contrivances of human ingenuity and spontaneity',

⁵⁸⁰ Oakeshott and Cowling, on the other hand, took liberalism—in at least some of its guises—to be one of their targets in the critique of rationalism and therefore took liberalism to be antithetical to a 'plural' view. In particular, see Cowling, *The Nature and Limits of Political Science*, 9-10.

⁵⁸¹ See Hubert H. Humphrey, 'Liberalism', *The American Scholar* 24, no.4 (1955): 419-433.

⁵⁸² Weldon, *The Vocabulary of Politics*, 16.

⁵⁸³ Pettit, 'Analytic Philosophy', 8.

⁵⁸⁴ John G. Gunnell, *Imagining the American Polity: Political Science and the Discourse of Democracy* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 221.

⁵⁸⁵ Robert A. Dahl, *Who Governs?: Democracy and Power in an American City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 305-6

⁵⁸⁶ See Bell, 'What is Liberalism?', 703-4. For examples of usage in the 1930s, see Maurice Parmelee, 'Liberal Democracy, Fascism, and Bolshevism', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 180, no.1 (1935): 47-54 & J. A. Hobson, 'Thoughts on our Present Discontents', *Political Quarterly* 9, no.1 (1938): 47-57. At the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, both liberalism and democracy came to be retrospectively seen as synonymous, before the particular term 'liberal democracy' was used; 'fundamentally, nineteenth century Liberalism meant democracy', William A. Dunning, 'A Century of Politics', *The North American Review* 179, no.577 (1904): 803.

rather than mortal Gods.⁵⁸⁷ For Reinhold Neibuhr, writing in 1955, whilst the specific connotations of liberalism were certainly contested, "liberalism" in the broadest sense is rightly identified with the rise of a modern technical society availing itself of democratic political forms and of capitalistic economic institutions—more specifically, the societies of Britain, France, and America—and as such "Liberalism" in the broadest sense is therefore synonymous with "democracy".⁵⁸⁸ For Hans Kelsen, if there were tensions between liberalism and democracy that any scrupulous scholar ought to acknowledge, it was clear that in practice 'modern democracy cannot be separated from political liberalism'.⁵⁸⁹

As a result of this conjunction, 'liberalism' and 'democracy' were becoming more and more closely entwined as part of one broader intellectual heritage that provided the implicit assumptions of 'Western' political life. The study of the 'history of ideas' itself was often used to 'underscore the centrality of democratic and liberal ideas to Western culture' and to 'confirm the vaunted unity of that culture'.⁵⁹⁰ J. Salwyn Schapiro's twin essays on Tocqueville and Mill, published in 1942 and 1943 with France occupied and England's fate still in the balance, lauded both figures as pioneers of 'democratic liberalism' in their respective countries.⁵⁹¹ Whilst Tocqueville and Mill represented the apex, for others, the origins of this intellectual heritage were to be found in 'the religious strife of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries', out of which 'grew also the concept of liberal democracy, especially in England'. This tradition was not unique to England, as 'this conception, developed in the philosophy of John Locke, was the basis of the British Revolution of 1688, of the American Revolution of 1776, and of the French Revolution of 1789'.⁵⁹² Louis Hartz's *The Liberal Tradition in America* (1955) aimed to articulate a liberal consensus in American thinking and saw Lockean ideas as synonymous with the 'American Way of Life', which was a 'nationalist articulation of Locke which usually does not know that Locke himself is involved'.⁵⁹³ If, Sheldon Wolin wrote, 'modern liberalism can be said

⁵⁸⁷ Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* 1-2 & Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Basis of Politics* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1960), 133. See also Ernest Barker, 'Democracy Since the War and Its Prospects for the Future', *International Affairs* 13, no.6 (1934): 757.

⁵⁸⁸ Reinhold Neibuhr, 'Liberalism: illusions and realities', *The New Republic* July 4th (1955).

⁵⁸⁹ Hans Kelsen, 'Foundations of Democracy', *Ethics* 66, no.1 (1955): 27.

⁵⁹⁰ Jotham Parsons, 'Review: Defining the History of Ideas', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 68, no.1 (2007): 687.

⁵⁹¹ See J. Salwyn Schapiro, 'Alexis de Tocqueville, Pioneer of Democratic Liberalism in France', *Politics Quarterly* 57, no.4 (1942): 545-563 & 'John Stuart Mill, Pioneer of Democratic Liberalism in England' *Journal of the History of Ideas* 4, no.2 (1943): 127-160.

⁵⁹² Quincy Wright, 'International Law and Ideologies', *The American Journal of International Law* 48, no.4 (1954): 619.

⁵⁹³ Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (Orlando: Harvest, [1955] 1991), 6, 10-11. See also Merle Curti, 'The Great Mr. Locke, America's Philosopher, 1783-1861', *The Huntington Library Bulletin* 11

to be inspired by any one writer, Locke is undoubtedly the leading candidate'.⁵⁹⁴ Others preferred to single out Adam Smith as the primary forefather of an 'economic' liberalism that matched the free market economies of Western liberal democracy.⁵⁹⁵ Others still, notably Leo Strauss, preferred to single out Hobbes.⁵⁹⁶ In each case, the 'liberal tradition' came to be spoke of in more abstract terms which identified the values of past thinkers with the formation of a distinct 'Western' culture, as if they were part of one self-conscious historical movement to which liberal democracies were the heir.⁵⁹⁷

Whilst there had been a shift to pluralism as the root of liberalism, and a turn back to liberal forefathers from the seventeenth century, utilitarianism was something of a last man standing in terms of the philosophical content of liberalism and was subsequently revised on broadly pluralist terms. Utilitarianism had achieved a 'dominance-by-default' in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. Whilst few principled defences of utilitarianism had been produced since Henry Sidgwick's *The Methods of Ethics*, it had nonetheless retained a lasting influence in welfare economics and had been silently revived post-war following the rejection of idealism and 'new' liberalism. Furthermore, the expansion of the welfare state had lent itself to a utilitarian logic among institutions allocating resources between competing claims.⁵⁹⁸ By a related route, negative liberty, which was said to be closely related to both liberalism and pluralism, came to be associated with the protection of the interests of individuals, an association that hardened through the 1950s and 1960s as assumptions about 'economic rationality' spread through the social sciences and humanistic disciplines. Negative liberty, in this setting, implied the maximization of alternatives between which rational agents could chose on the basis of what seemed best for their own purposes.⁵⁹⁹

(1937): 107-151 & Marvin Meyers, 'Louis Hartz, The Liberal Tradition in America: an appraisal', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 5, no.3 (1963): 261-268.

⁵⁹⁴ Sheldon S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, [1960] 2004), 263. See also Kenneth R. Minogue, *The Liberal Mind* (New York: Vintage, 1963), 'A fair case could be made for John Locke as [liberalism's] founding father, even though the actual term 'liberalism' was only imported from Spain early in the nineteenth century', 1-2. John Plamenatz, *Man & Society*, vol.1 (London, Longman [1963] 1992), '[Locke's] political philosophy, if I may so put it, the soul of liberalism', 377.

⁵⁹⁵ See Grampp, *Economic Liberalism*. See also, Arthur Salz, 'Economic Liberalism Reinterpreted', *Social Research* 8, no.3 (1941): 373-389.

⁵⁹⁶ See Leo Strauss, 'On the Spirit of Hobbes' Political Philosophy' & *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953).

⁵⁹⁷ Gunnell, 'The Archaeology of American Liberalism', 125-145.

⁵⁹⁸ David Miller and Richard Dagger, 'Utilitarianism and Beyond: contemporary analytic political theory' in *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Political Thought*, ed. Terence Ball and Richard Bellamy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 449-50.

⁵⁹⁹ See Paul Diesing, 'The Nature and Limitations of Economic Rationality', *Ethics* 61, no.1 (1950): 12-26.

Utilitarianism's position did not hold unchallenged authority, however, even for self-described liberals. The problem was that there was little to rival its influence. Brian Barry, to give only one example, rejected the primacy of utility, but was then confronted with the problem of how to weigh principles in relation to the relative trade-offs and the merits of institutional mechanisms through which those values could be substantiated.⁶⁰⁰ Reflecting later, Barry remarked that in the early 60s, one 'could turn over whole volumes of the philosophical journals and find nothing about political philosophy—indeed very little substantive moral philosophy except for an occasional piece of utilitarian casuistry'.⁶⁰¹ Robert Paul Wolff's *The Poverty of Liberalism* (1968) also pointed out that there was a lacuna in liberal thinking that hadn't got much beyond Mill and utilitarianism—a claim that may have surprised some of the New Liberals, but which nonetheless revealed the subsequent reliance on Mill's arguments for several generations of liberals.⁶⁰²

While a broad liberal democratic tradition was identified and consolidated as part of the legitimacy of states in the 'Western' world, either explicitly endorsed or tacitly consented to, there was nonetheless a deep concern that it was a decadent tradition, or one in decline, which reflected the broader anxiety over the status of political philosophy in those states. While most analytic philosophers lived in parts of the world where such values nominally held unchallenged sway, the existence of other parts of the world where they did not hold sway could scarcely be ignored. Neither could the possibility that they held sway more broadly in 'the West', if they did, for any reasons other than their supposedly inherent rational superiority and persuasiveness—claims which now seemed dubious—or that it would not take very much to throw their primacy into doubt. Perhaps for these reasons, the health and long-term prospects of liberalism was a frequent preoccupation. In the words of Judith Shklar, reflecting on the mood of these times, 'nothing that has occurred since the First World War could conceivably encourage the orthodox liberal[...] [liberalism] has now succumbed to the spirit of despair'.⁶⁰³ Even Berlin's passionate defence of liberalism and endorsement of value pluralism conceded how 'it may be that the ideal of freedom to choose ends without claiming eternal validity for them, and the pluralism of values connected with this, is only the late fruit

⁶⁰⁰ Pettit, 'Analytic Philosophy', 9.

⁶⁰¹ Brian Barry, 'The Strange Death of Political Philosophy', *Government and Opposition* 15, no.3-4 (1980): 283.

⁶⁰² Robert Paul Wolff, *The Poverty of Liberalism* (Beacon Press: Boston, 1968).

⁶⁰³ Shklar, *After Utopia*, 235.

of our declining capitalist civilisation'.⁶⁰⁴ The endorsement of pluralism itself was, as John Dunn put it, 'the political theory of bourgeois society up against the wall'.⁶⁰⁵

Whilst Berlin ultimately endorsed an account of value pluralism, pluralism was often presented by critics as a symptom of a broader breakdown or a mask for a more pernicious force in society. For a generation of émigré scholars in the 1950s, 'pluralism was viewed through the lens of Weimar and perceived as the political counterpart and consequence of a defective liberal philosophy and as the precursor of mass society and totalitarianism'.⁶⁰⁶ Strauss in particular saw pluralism as a crisis in liberalism's attempt to break free of its own 'absolutistic basis' in favour of a form of relativism, which only diminished the meaning and value of liberalism itself.⁶⁰⁷ Strauss saw liberalism as not only synonymous with pluralism, but synonymous with modern political philosophy itself and as such, part of the broader breakdown in traditional modes of thought that pluralism represented. For Strauss, modern liberalism marked a loss of meaning and moral excellence. Strauss saw an individualist philosophy behind modern liberal pluralism as breaking down society in to its atomistic components, such a philosophy being found in Hobbes, which upturned any once coherent order and meaning without offering a stable replacement. As we will see below, Rawls' liberalism resembles something from both accounts of pluralism; that it is a 'reasonable' outcome, but one that liberalism takes as a starting problem to find a solution for.

For C. B. Macpherson, a pupil of Harold Laski's, there was no doubt that from Hobbes to Bentham, 'individualism has been an outstanding characteristic of the whole subsequent liberal tradition'. His point of critique, however, was not that pluralism represented the breakdown of a previous ideal, but that this individualism had come to mean not merely the ownership of one's thoughts, but the ownership of private property and the instigation of a market society, all to the benefit of the property-owning class, with Locke as its intellectual forefather and propagandist.⁶⁰⁸ Beneath pluralism lurked the domination of capital. For Herbert Marcuse, similarly, liberalism marked 'the individual economic subject's free ownership and control of private property'. Whilst liberalism had often presented itself in distinction to totalitarianism, as totalitarianism had likewise done, liberalism often pursued this rationale with an all-encompassing force that reflected an underlying wish for the one

⁶⁰⁴ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', 172.

⁶⁰⁵ Dunn, *Western Political Theory*, 50.

⁶⁰⁶ Gunnell, *Imagining the American Polity*, 215.

⁶⁰⁷ Leo Strauss, 'Relativism' in *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, ed. Thomas L. Pangle (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 16-8.

⁶⁰⁸ C. B. MacPherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 1-2.

dimensional society that matched its own preferences. The technological apparatus upon which liberal democracies relied was itself a form of totalitarianism.⁶⁰⁹ Maurice Cowling, whose preoccupations were otherwise very different, offered a similar diagnosis. Liberalism was a kind of totalitarianism because it was the organised attempted to subvert Christianity by supplanting it with a religion of humanity, a form of *moral* totalitarianism beneath the appearance of individual liberty and pluralism—Cowling placed the blame with Mill.⁶¹⁰

It may help the reader to pause here to summarise the claims of the chapter so far. I have explored a number of slightly abstract lines of thought as the status of liberalism as a tradition became more abstract in the mid-twentieth century. I have argued that if liberalism had gained a certain ascendancy and hegemonic position within post-war 'Western liberal democracies', many doubts remained concerning its legitimacy and coherence as a tradition of thought, which reflected the broader anxieties that came to be associated with 'the death of political thought'. Just as political thinking had not actually ceased to exist, liberalism was omnipresent, but the questions about the health and vitality of the two suggested that they could no longer be conceived in the way that they perhaps once had. There was not only a worry over whether anything meaningful could be said about liberalism; about whether it was in fact an expression of either the loss of meaning and tradition or the aggressive triumph of a totalising society; and also about what, if anything, was doing the intellectual work of buttressing liberalism against the intellectual and practical challenges that confronted it when its traditional grounds seemed ill-suited to the modern predicament. There were also questions about the relationship between liberalism and democracy despite the widespread use of the term 'liberal democracy' and, as a means of positioning 'Western' liberal democracies against the so-called 'totalitarian' democracies of the Eastern Bloc, a growing emphasis on pluralism of various kinds as constitutive of the liberal tradition and, more generally, of the way of life to which it was (somehow) connected. Liberalism came to mean everything and nothing in the background culture of 'Western' industrialised states.

This relationship between 'the death of political thought' and liberalism was reflected in the so-called 'end of ideology'.⁶¹¹ Against grand monolithic narratives emerged a consensus

⁶⁰⁹ Herbert Marcuse, 'The Struggle Against Liberalism in the Totalitarian Views of the State' in *Negations: essays in critical theory* (London: Allen Lane 1968), 5-6, 11-13. See also Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 1-3.

⁶¹⁰ Maurice Cowling, *Mill and Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963). See also, 'Preface to the Second Edition' in *Mill and Liberalism*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), ix-xlvi.

⁶¹¹ For one influential account of the 'end of ideology' thesis, see Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: on the exhaustion of political ideas in the fifties* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2000 [1960]). See also, Ian

between 'a democratic polity, with contending groups espousing different values and different claims to rights, a mixed economy, a welfare state, a pluralist diversity of social groups, a syncretistic culture, [and] the rule of law'.⁶¹² Alasdair MacIntyre pointed that the 'end of ideology' was the 'latest of liberalism's ideological masks'.⁶¹³ The significance of this point was not just a challenge to the pretensions of the liberal view and an unmasking of liberalism's ideological claims behind a self-image of neutrality, but a reflection of the transformation and change in liberalism from an explicit rival to various *-isms* to an all-encompassing expression as a tradition of traditions in the background of 'Western' political societies. That expression, however, was not necessarily one of ideological victory or an article of faith in the status quo, as it was more an expression of ideological exhaustion and the contingent synthesis of liberal values that had been bolted onto democratic politics. For many, contingency was little consolation in the unstable relationship between the two.

A powerful attempt to steer liberalism away from these related problems was made in John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*, which was not only said to have revived political theory, but a distinctly *liberal* political theory in response to the 1950s and 1960s that defended the institutions of 'Western' liberal democracies and built upon the liberal tradition. As Brian Barry remarked, 'there can be no question that *A Theory of Justice* is the watershed that divides the past from the present'.⁶¹⁴ An early review suggested that Rawls's 'book could give the liberal democratic and welfare oriented states a renewed confidence in their rectitude and a broadened agenda for practical action', an 'ideology that the "end of ideology" theorists of the 1950s were seeking'.⁶¹⁵ Rather than a break with the past, though, Rawls provided a line of continuity and a restatement of liberal ideals that revised the liberal tradition once again and provided a defence of liberal democracies in the post-war landscape.

II. *A Theory of Justice and Political Liberalism*

Stewart, 'The End of Ideology' in *Raymond Aron and Liberal Thought in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 120-166.

⁶¹² Daniel Bell, 'The End of Ideology of Revisited (Part I)', *Government and Opposition* 23, no.2 (1988): 141.

⁶¹³ Alasdair MacIntyre's, *Against the Self-Images of the Age* (London: Duckworth, 1971), 282. See also, 'The End of Ideology and the End of the End of Ideology' in *Against the Self-Images of the Age*, 3-11.

⁶¹⁴ Brian Barry, *Political Argument: a reissue with new introduction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) lxix.

⁶¹⁵ John H. Schaar, 'Reflections on Rawls' Theory of Justice', *Social Theory and Practice*, 3, no.1 (1974): 75-100, 75, 95.

John Rawls was born on the 21st February 1921 in Baltimore, Maryland, the second of five sons.⁶¹⁶ After attending boarding school and later majoring in philosophy at Princeton, Rawls served the U.S. army in New Guinea, the Philippines, and Japan during and in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. Upon leaving the army and reflecting on both what he had witnessed in the Pacific and what had been reported of the Holocaust, Rawls's faith in the Episcopalian Christianity in which he was brought up was slowly abandoned, and the pursuit of priesthood was traded in for the pursuit of philosophy. Rawls completed his thesis at Princeton and went on to teach at Princeton, Cornell, MIT, and Harvard, with a brief but consequential year spent at Oxford. It has often been remarked that Rawls' intellectual life was devoted to a single problem, of how a just political order can be secured given the fact of reasonable pluralism.⁶¹⁷ Never truly shaking off his religious conviction, this problem was motivated by the question of what made human life both redeemable and worth living for citizens, as part of a reasonable society opposed to the irrationality and senseless violence of war.⁶¹⁸

The roots of Rawls' project stretch back to the late-1940s and concern, broadly speaking, the self-understanding of citizens in post-war liberal democracies.⁶¹⁹ Rawls was interested in what citizens can reasonably accept as the rules of a liberal democratic society of which they are members; rules that set the terms of fair co-operation of all members as reasonable citizens. What this was predicated upon was an account of what it means to be engaged in a 'practice' that could be determined as fair in both the terms of co-operation and the rules for decision making processes.⁶²⁰ Rawls' early writings offered an analysis of moral judgements in order to tackle this issue, that is to say, to work out a procedure by which these terms of co-operation could be assessed and accepted as fair and justified from within individuals' own self-understanding and moral capacities. The importance of this justification was not merely in terms of their self-sufficiency. It lay more precisely in establishing how those judgements could

⁶¹⁶ Details taken from Thomas Pogge, *John Rawls: His Life and Theory of Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), ch.1. See also Samuel Freeman, *Rawls* (New York: Routledge, 2007), ch.1.

⁶¹⁷ Susan Mendus, 'John Rawls: *Collected Papers*', *Philosophical Investigations* 24, no.1 (2001): 79.

⁶¹⁸ Pogge, *John Rawls*, 26-7. See also, John Rawls, 'On my Religion' in *A Brief Inquiry Into the Meaning of Sin and Faith* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2010), 259-270.

⁶¹⁹ For the link between the self-understanding and rational explanation of *Christian* experience, and the self-understanding of citizens in liberal democracies, see David A. Reidy, 'From Philosophical Theology to Democratic Theory: Early Postcards from an Intellectual Journey' in *A Companion to Rawls*, ed. Jon Mandle and David A. Reidy (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 132-5. See also David A. Reidy, 'Rawls' Religion and Justice as Fairness', *History of Political Thought* 31, no.2 (2010): 309-343 & P. Mackenzie Bok, 'To the Mountain Top Again: The early Rawls and post-protestant ethics in postwar America', *Modern Intellectual History* 14, no.1 (2015): 153-185.

⁶²⁰ See John Rawls, 'Outline of a Decision Procedure for Ethics [1951]' and 'Two Concepts of Rules [1955]' in *Collected Papers* ed. Samuel Freeman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 1-19 & 20-46.

be accepted as part of a fair system of rules that determined between competing claims, given that moral judgements were likely to differ between persons and were to be respected by reasonable citizens.

By engaging with these problems of moral judgement and self-understanding the terms of justification for political practices within a broadly analytic framework, Rawls has been seen both as rescuing political theory from the hands of post-war positivism, and as an exemplar of that positivist framework. While there was a passing endorsement of the Vienna circle's project, expressed by Rawls in his talk of analysing the 'logical syntax of moral judgements', he was really interested in the moral psychology and holistic justification of those judgements. Rawls' early project was an attempt to combine the insights of logical positivism regarding the analysis of moral language, 'the logical syntax of moral judgements', with an account of a framework for understanding the moral psychology and holistic justification of those judgements, that was also sympathetic to utilitarianism for providing the criteria of deciding between competing moral claims.⁶²¹ This was a fine balancing act. Anxious to avoid the inflexible Gradgrindianism with which utilitarianism was sometimes associated, Rawls sought to distinguish different levels of justification and, more especially, to explore justification from within the terms of what he called 'practices': any forms of activity specified by a system of rules that defined office, roles, moves, and so on and which gave those activities their structure, which emphasised the self-understanding of agents as part of a system of co-operation.⁶²²

By the late 1950s, the balancing act was looking increasingly unsteady. It was unclear whether a moral constructivism based on utilitarianism was up to the task of establishing the terms of reasonable disagreement in a co-operative society, and more pointedly, whether utilitarianism was able to take sufficiently seriously the moral status of persons as separate agents to whom justice is owed individually. Justice, for the utilitarian, 'is a kind of efficiency' that directed benefits and burdens to independent ciphers of utility, but could not make that judgement 'in any way on the moral relations in which individuals stand, or on the kinds of claims which they are willing, in the pursuit of their interests, to press on each other'.⁶²³ The problem was, as the great late Victorian utilitarian Henry Sidgwick had recognised, that the logic of utilitarianism opened the door to practices which could not be understood as constitutive elements of fair

⁶²¹ For Rawls' relationship to post-war positivism, see Mark Bevir and Andrius Gališanka, 'John Rawls in Historical Context', *History of Political Thought* 33, no.4 (2012): 701-3.

⁶²² Rawls, 'Two Concepts of Rules', 40-3. See also Bevir and Gališanka, 'John Rawls in Historical Context', 714.

⁶²³ John Rawls, 'Justice as Fairness', *The Philosophical Review* 67, no.2 (1958): 186-7.

terms of co-operation and deferred to a higher order of decision making: it might make sense on utilitarian grounds, for instance, to withhold from 'the vulgar' a full understanding of the rules by which their lives were being directed.⁶²⁴ For Rawls, the problem was wider: utilitarianism 'permits one to argue' the case for the injustice of slavery with reference to the relative utility of competing claims, but it cannot rule out slavery as unjust *per se* and thus would contradict the fair terms governing the practice of weighing competing claims.⁶²⁵ In order to escape this difficulty, Rawls turned to the idea of a social contract, which captured the essence of separate individuals hypothetically agreeing to the fair rules of conduct that determine their political practice and, by inference, what would count as a failure to honour that contract.

Rawls seems to have been moved by reasons internal to his theory to contemplate the benefits of a contractual account of political society at this juncture. He was not obviously responding to the political upheavals of the 1960s for the inspiration of his project—his project originated in the 1940s—and he said much less than many of his contemporaries about the issues of civil rights and civil disobedience, though his concerns on these issues were certainly incorporated and reflected in his shifting framework.⁶²⁶ Civil disobedience, when it was discussed, was placed by him within his established framework of moral judgment and practices specifying and exemplifying fair terms of co-operation; as a rule, his interest lay more with how the sense of fair play related to general law-abidingness and did not ultimately question the cornerstones of American liberal democracy nor the civility of the civil order.⁶²⁷ As such, Rawls neutralised the 'subversive effects of disobedience' and the 'wider and open vision of disobedience' by translating it into a different idiom: as possible moral disagreement

⁶²⁴ See Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics* (London: Macmillan, 1907), 489-90.

⁶²⁵ Rawls, 'Justice as Fairness', 64-7.

⁶²⁶ See John Rawls, 'The Justification of Civil Disobedience [1969]' in *Collected Papers*, 176-189. Civil disobedience and draft resistance were particular concerns for the Anglo-American journal *Philosophy and Public Affairs* in the context of the Vietnam war. Civil disobedience and both anti-war and anti-nuclear movements had put a question mark against the nature of political obligation and asked when dissent was morally justified, in a shift away from a more abstracted and analytic account of ethics toward a focus on particular practical problems. The shift in focus was provoked in part by the fact that, while the war was far away, its consequences presented themselves at every university via the practical issue of students being able to pass the draft. As Forrester summarises, civil disobedience was understood within 'the democratic legitimacy of the war; the justice of its aims; the morality of its conduct; and the legitimacy of conscription and the grounds for conscientious refusal'. See Katrina Forrester, 'Citizenship, War, and the Origins of International Ethics in American Political Philosophy 1960-1975', *The Historical Journal* 57, no.3 (2014): 776, 779-80 & Terry, 'Conscription and the Color Line: Rawls, Race, and Vietnam'. For a broader attempt to place the origins of Rawls' work in the immediate post-war context, see also Katrina Forrester, *In the Shadow of Justice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

⁶²⁷ Forrester, 'Citizenship, War...', 777-8.

about the legitimacy of certain claims arising out of the self-understanding of citizens within a liberal democracy and the terms of justification for the rules that governed their shared political practice.⁶²⁸ Rawls neither provided a challenge to the political order, nor an attempt to show the *incivility* of the civil order. Rather, it embodied an appeal to all citizens to rationally consider the rules of that order as *prima facie* agreed terms of social co-operation.

After twenty years of fine tuning, *A Theory of Justice* was published in 1971—one early review declared it 'the most substantial and interesting contribution to moral philosophy since the war'.⁶²⁹ *A Theory of Justice* continued the style of thinking outlined above and set out to 'generalize and carry to a higher order of abstraction the traditional theory of the social contract as represented by Locke, Rousseau, and Kant'.⁶³⁰ Whilst Rawls intended to emphasise the hypothetical nature of the social contract, in distinction to contractual claims regarding the historical origins and foundational moments of civil societies, 'expressing the tie with this line of thought helps to define ideas and accords with natural piety'.⁶³¹ Unlike Hobhouse's *Liberalism* and Berlin's 'Two Concepts of Liberty'—the principle foci of the two previous chapters—*A Theory of Justice* was not an explicit attempt to trace the history of liberalism. It was not until the 1980s in the papers that would go on to form elements of *Political Liberalism* that Rawls began to speak of defending 'liberalism'⁶³²—rather than the liberalism implied in a liberal democratic society—and it was only in the lectures published after his death that a more significant engagement with the history of liberalism was clearly set out.⁶³³ The role and significance of the liberal tradition for Rawls' work was nonetheless something broadly

⁶²⁸ See Raffaele Laudani, *Disobedience in Western Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 112-4. Whilst viewing post-war American liberalism as a monolithic entity neglects the various attempts of social democratic reform and how the emergence of the New Left and ADA held close ties to liberal organizations during the 1960s, what became clearer was the gap between those that attempted to challenge the status of liberal democracies and those that attempted to foster some middle ground between democratic reform and social welfare, whilst maintaining the basic institutions of liberal democracies. See Scott Kamen, 'Rethinking Post-War Liberalism: the Americans for democratic action, social democracy, and the struggle for racial equality', *The Sixties: A Journal of History, Politics, and Culture* 11, no.1 (2018): 69-71, 85.

⁶²⁹ Stuart Hampshire, 'A New Philosophy of the Just Society', *The New York Review of Books*, February 24th (1972). For the impact and somewhat less enthusiastic reception of *A Theory of Justice* in Britain, see John Horton, 'Rawls in Britain', *European Journal of Political Theory* 1, no.2 (2002): 147-161.

⁶³⁰ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, xviii, 10. Hobbes' *Leviathan* was initially excluded from this list, as 'for all of its greatness[...] [it] raises special problems', 10n. Hobbes was later reinstated at the expense of Kant, John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), xvii.

⁶³¹ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 15.

⁶³² See John Rawls, *Collected Papers*, ed. Samuel Freeman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999). In particular, 'Social Unity and Primary Goods' [1982], 'Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical' [1985], 'The Idea of an Overlapping Consensus' [1987], and 'The Priority of Right and Ideas of the Good' [1988].

⁶³³ Rawls, *History of Political Philosophy*, 11-16.

consistent across these works and reflected in the assumptions that Rawls made about the liberal democratic order—something which, early on, required little defence given its apparent omnipresence.

Recent work has drawn attention to the 'historical' Rawls with a particular focus on the origins and initial context of the ideas that would become central to *A Theory of Justice*. This has raised important questions for considering how to situate some of the early Rawlsian reflections of the immediate post-war context within the later defence of 'liberalism'.⁶³⁴ What I want to suggest is that *A Theory of Justice* provided a set of arguments that implicitly relied upon his own view of what the liberal tradition and the background culture of liberal democratic states were, now construed as the social contract tradition, which Rawls' theory engaged with and was an extension of. Rawls' manner of presentation left no doubt about the importance and value of that continuity, and later came to rely more explicitly on its articulation as part of the background culture of a liberal democratic society. *Political Liberalism* differed in significant ways from *A Theory of Justice*—which partially explained the more ambivalent reception it received than the earlier work.⁶³⁵ Where *A Theory of Justice* would emphasise 'moral geometry', *Political Liberalism* would emphasise 'reasonable pluralism'; where *A Theory of Justice* emphasised moral consensus between autonomous agents, *Political Liberalism* would emphasise stability arising from a 'political' conception of justice. These differences are not insignificant, as explored below, but the two works together offer a richer understanding of Rawls' engagement with the liberal tradition rather than exclusively focusing on one particular text. Rawls' liberalism has to therefore be read both forwards and backwards to see not only the origins of Rawls' arguments, but the significance that they came to hold in the context of his later defence of liberalism. In particular, I argue, the conception of liberalism based on both pluralism and consensus, rather than liberal 'egalitarianism'.⁶³⁶

⁶³⁴ For an overview of this work, see Sophie Smith 'Historicizing Rawls', *Modern Intellectual History* 18, no.4 (2021): 906-939.

⁶³⁵ *Political Liberalism* was something of a 'fall from grace' according to Mendus, 'John Rawls: Collected Papers', 80-1. See also Hampshire, 'Liberalism: The New Twist', *The New York Review* (1993). Cf. Joshua Cohen, 'A More Democratic Liberalism', *Michigan Law Review* 92, no.6 (1994): 1503-1546. 'Because it pays less attention to substantive issues of political justice and lacks such sharply defined opponents, *Liberalism* is unlikely to generate either the excitement of *Theory* or the same interdisciplinary ferment. But these are caveats, not criticisms. *Liberalism* is a book of very great depth and importance', 1511.

⁶³⁶ For two recent accounts of Rawls' development that attempt to place Rawls' liberalism within the context of post-war liberalism, with a particular focus on the account of distributive justice and the 'liberal egalitarianism' of *A Theory of Justice*, see Forrester, *In the Shadow of Justice* & Samuel Moyn, *Not Enough: Human Rights in an Unequal World* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018), 146-172.

A Theory of Justice aimed at determining the fair rules that could be agreed upon for adjudicating and deciding between competing claims as part of the self-understanding of citizens in liberal democracies, reflecting Rawls' earlier convictions. The 'principles for the basic structure of society', Rawls postulated, are 'principles that free and rational persons concerned to further their own interests would accept in an initial position of equality as defining the fundamental terms of their association'.⁶³⁷ The opening premise of *A Theory of Justice* was that 'justice is the first virtue of social institutions' and that 'each person possess an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override'.⁶³⁸ Justice held priority, acting as a balancing mechanism between competing claims made by individuals consenting to the rules that would regulate their conduct. Given that opinions on the basic structure of society itself are 'likely to differ', one must find 'which constitutional arrangements are just for reconciling conflicting opinions of justice'.⁶³⁹ Understanding justice through the social contract also recognised the fair terms to which individuals would freely consent without considering those individuals as mere ciphers of utility: 'the intense convictions of the majority[...] have no weight to begin with. The satisfaction of these feelings has no value that can be put in the scales against the claims of equal liberty'.⁶⁴⁰

Rawls argued, more exactly, that two principles of justice would be agreed upon in his hypothetical choice situation to regulate the basic structure of society. The first principle guaranteed basic rights and liberties to all, to the extent that they were fully compatible with one another. The second principle, which qualified the moral egalitarianism of the first principle, defended social and economic inequality on the basis that such differences in distribution could be arranged to the benefit of the whole of society, such that the differences would be weighted to the benefit of the worst-off.⁶⁴¹ These two principles, which expressed Rawls' presuppositions about the primacy of individual agency and its value, were then cashed out through social and institutional prescriptions that reflect and respect these values. The two principles can sometimes pull in different directions, so that claims to property are modified by the need to secure conditions under which people can meaningfully decide for themselves how to live; while abstract claims to autonomy and self-determination are restrained *in concreto* by the rule of law or mediated by the invisible hand of the market to provide sufficient incentives. The agreement sought between contracting individuals is one that

⁶³⁷ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 10.

⁶³⁸ *ibid.*, 3.

⁶³⁹ *ibid.*, 1-7, 171.

⁶⁴⁰ *ibid.*, 39.

⁶⁴¹ *ibid.*, 53, 266.

combines the moral organisation of economic inequality, and an economic organisation of moral equality.

Rawls' principles of justice prioritised the basic equality of persons to reflect the value of individuals as, in his words, a 'self-authenticating source of valid claims'.⁶⁴² The two principles of justice aimed to balance conflicting claims and values within liberal democracies, simultaneously respecting the autonomy and separateness of persons whilst also striving for 'a kind of moral geometry' in the consensus between reasonable citizens.⁶⁴³ In doing so, a debt to Kant, as a representative of the social contract tradition, was initially emphasised.⁶⁴⁴

For Kant, the defining feature of modern individuality was the exercise of our own reason as individuals. Our freedom as individuals was revealed through the rational moral law; 'among all the ideas of speculative reason freedom is also the only one the possibility of which we *know* a priori, though without having insight into it, because it is the condition of the moral law, which we do know'.⁶⁴⁵ Kant went on to say that this individual freedom is given centrality as '*autonomy* of the will is the sole principle of all moral laws and of duties in keeping with them'.⁶⁴⁶ As he famously put it, to recognise the centrality of autonomy is to recognise that 'a human being alone, and with him every rational creature, is an *end in itself*'.⁶⁴⁷ Kant was not only an historical point of reference, but an active resource to be utilised for the normative project: 'the original position [Rawls' heuristic device for determining principles of justice] may be viewed[...] as a procedural interpretation of Kant's conception of autonomy' and 'the principles of justice are analogous to categorical imperatives'.⁶⁴⁸ In Kantian terms, when we consider the totality of individuals and the ends they pursue, 'a whole of all ends in systematic connection (a whole of both rational beings as ends in themselves and of the ends of his own that each may set himself)', we can consider this 'a kingdom of ends'.⁶⁴⁹ From within 'the kingdom of ends everything has either a *price* or a *dignity*'; the former is that which satisfies human inclinations and can be exchanged for equivalents, the latter is that which holds an 'inner worth'. For Kant, 'morality, and humanity insofar as it is capable of morality, is that

⁶⁴² Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 32.

⁶⁴³ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 105.

⁶⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 28n, 38n, 156, 221, 226.

⁶⁴⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, ed. and trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997 [1788]), 3-4 [5:4]. See also Immanuel Kant, 'An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?' in *Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss and trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970 [1784]), 54-60.

⁶⁴⁶ *ibid.*, 30 [5:33].

⁶⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 74 [5:87].

⁶⁴⁸ *ibid.*, 222, 226.

⁶⁴⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, ed. and trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998 [1785]), 41 [4:433].

which alone has dignity'.⁶⁵⁰ Our '*autonomy* is[...] the ground of the dignity of human nature and of every rational creature'.⁶⁵¹ This was the crucial point for Rawls, in affirming that 'the lexical priorities of justice represent the value of persons that Kant says is beyond all price' and that the principles of justice speak to each in turn as an autonomous and rational agent.⁶⁵² Individuals could not be exchanged or interchanged as if they were mere ciphers of utility, and they stood together as equals pursuing their ends under the fair terms of co-operation to which they consented.

It has been suggested that in seeking public justification of the terms of fairness within a social form of co-operation, rather than seeking to determine principles of justice *a priori* through their rational derivation, that Rawls' philosophical procedure owed as much or more to Wittgenstein than to Kant.⁶⁵³ Even if so, Rawls provided a rehabilitation of Kant's liberal credentials, which had fallen in to disrepute during the Second World War, and he offered a re-articulation of something like Kant's kingdom of ends as a social ideal for liberal democracies, particularly when it came to combining 'moral geometry' with the separateness of persons. For several mid-twentieth century liberals, Kant was viewed with suspicion. Offering an ethic of 'unvarying a priori principles' and 'freedom-based-on-reason' seemed to demand a rigidity that, at its worst, could be used to justify totalitarianism by subordinating the individual to the demands of a rational order.⁶⁵⁴ The same could be—and was—said of Rousseau, whom Rawls also included in the social contract tradition.⁶⁵⁵ When Isaiah Berlin reflected on his own differences with Rawls it was clear that he had detected more than a hint of problems he associated with Rousseau and Kant. Berlin emphasised the incompatibility of values by suggesting that 'if justice is an ultimate value it is not compatible with mercy'. Justice is one value amongst others, perpetually in tension, between which we will always be required to choose. Berlin also saw himself as placing emphasis on 'the irrational impulses of men', which Rawls was said to have neglected in favour of establishing 'political government purely

⁶⁵⁰ *ibid.*, 42 [4:434-5].

⁶⁵¹ *ibid.*, 43 [4:436].

⁶⁵² Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 513.

⁶⁵³ See, for example, Reidy, 'Rawls' Religion and Justice as Fairness', 310-2 & Mark Bevir, 'John Rawls in Light of the Archive', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 78, no.2 (2017): 255-263.

⁶⁵⁴ Raymond Geuss, 'Liberalism and its Discontents' in *Outside Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005) 15-7. Though 'we are indeed lawgiving members of a kingdom of morals possible through freedom and represented to us by practical reason for our respect', nonetheless, 'we are at the same time subjects in it, not its sovereign' and as such hold an 'inferior position', Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 70 [5:82].

⁶⁵⁵ Reidy emphasises the influence of Rousseau's *Emile* on *A Theory of Justice*, Reidy, 'Rawls' Religion and Justice as Fairness', 337. See also, Jeffrey Bercuson, *John Rawls and the History of Political Thought: The Rousseauvian and Hegelian Heritage of Justice as Fairness* (New York: Routledge, 2014), ch.1.

on the basis of what is rational'.⁶⁵⁶ Despite Rawls paying lip service to Berlin and the pluralism he valorised, there was no rational consensus and no 'moral geometry' in Berlin's liberalism.⁶⁵⁷

Rawls's ambition, then, was to represent society—more specifically, a liberal democratic society—as a system of fair co-operation between free and equal individuals by discerning the principles of justice that can regulate the basic structure of society and be reasonably accepted by those persons. More pointedly, the aim was to vindicate the possibility that it could actually be that way in the face of deeply discouraging historical precedents. The failure of the Weimar Republic, on Rawls' account, was the result of pathological political and social institutions which, in combination, prevented 'the sincere appeal to justice and common good' and 'fair principle[s] of political cooperation'; this background unfairness and the 'inability of the liberals and the social democrats to work together to form a government was fatal in the end to German democracy'.⁶⁵⁸ For Rawls, in confronting the 'manic evil of the Holocaust', we must ask ourselves whether 'political relations must be governed by power and coercion alone'. For the future of liberal and democratic values, 'we must start with the assumption that a reasonably just political society is possible' and that morally motivated citizens can be 'sufficiently moved by a reasonable political conception of right and justice to support a society guided by its ideals and principles'—otherwise 'one might ask with Kant whether it is worthwhile for human beings to live on the earth?'.⁶⁵⁹

The terms in which Rawls attempted to realise such ambitions shifted between the original 1958 essay 'Justice as Fairness', *A Theory of Justice* (1971), and *Political Liberalism* (1993)—each iteration gradually relying less explicitly upon Kant and each becoming a more self-conscious expression of 'liberalism'. Rawls later suggested that 'the historical origin of political liberalism (and of liberalism more generally) is the Reformation and its aftermath, with the

⁶⁵⁶ Berlin, 'In Conversation with Steve Lukes', 113.

⁶⁵⁷ For Berlin, the merest hint of Kantian 'moral geometry' was odious because it implied a rejection of the ultimate incompatibility and incommensurability of values in favour of a view on which all values and all persons could be fixed into one single all-embracing mould. It was also incompatible with his own understanding of Kant: Berlin was especially fond of quoting Kant's dictum that 'out of the crooked timber of humanity, no straight thing was ever made', and it provided the title for one of his collections of essays. Whether Kant meant what Berlin wished him to mean is a different matter. See Immanuel Kant, 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose' in *Political Writings*, 41-53.

⁶⁵⁸ Rawls, *History of Political Philosophy*, 7-9.

⁶⁵⁹ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xxvi-xxvii, lx. See also, Reidy, 'Rawls' Religion and Justice as Fairness', 333-4, 340. Reidy emphasises the original iteration of this line, which makes explicit reference of our orientation to God. For a provocative account of Rawls' argument and the justice of God, see Eric Nelson *The Theology of Liberalism* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019). Like Forrester and Moyn, Nelson's reading of Rawls tends to focus on the 'liberal egalitarianism' of *A Theory of Justice*.

long controversies over religious toleration in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries'.⁶⁶⁰ In a response to the German social theorist Jurgen Habermas, originally published in 1995, Rawls would say that his settled aim had been to defend 'liberalism properly interpreted, as I hope it to be in justice as fairness and in other liberal doctrines going back to Locke'.⁶⁶¹ In the move away from Kant, Rawls came to place more emphasis on a 'political' conception of both justice and the self-understanding of citizens, contrasting them to the comprehensive moral conceptions that he had come to associate with Kant and Mill.⁶⁶² Rawls dwelt on one important assumption of liberalism in particular, rather as Berlin had intimated in slightly different language, that there exists a 'pluralism of incompatible yet reasonable comprehensive doctrines'.⁶⁶³ The result was that 'under modern conditions there are bound to exist conflicting and incommensurable conceptions of the good', a feature which has been characteristic of 'modern culture since the Reformation'.⁶⁶⁴ For Rawls, the liberalisms of Constant, Tocqueville, and Mill accepted the 'plurality of incommensurable conceptions of the good as a fact of modern democratic culture' and liberalism's task as a political doctrine was to understand how social unity was possible given these differing conceptions of the good, without itself becoming merely another one of those conceptions of the good.⁶⁶⁵

Forrester suggests that in *Political Liberalism*, Rawls would come to 'look back to ideas he had left behind'.⁶⁶⁶ This suggested continuity with the earlier work is somewhat true for the sources of both pluralism and consensus that Rawls would later come to explicitly rely upon, though these continuities can be seen to run through both *A Theory of Justice* and *Political Liberalism* in Rawls' understanding and engagement with the liberal tradition as the social contract tradition and in the background assumptions that were made of a liberal democratic culture. However, the discontinuities between *A Theory of Justice* and *Political Liberalism* reflect a shift not in the intellectual sources of Rawls' arguments and the figures he would draw upon, nor a radical break, but a tension in the ends and conditions of consensus in

⁶⁶⁰ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xxiv.

⁶⁶¹ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 412 & *History of Political Philosophy*, 107.

⁶⁶² 'Not very much of the content of the doctrine of justice as fairness needs to be changed', '[*Political Liberalism*] stresses the difference between political autonomy and moral autonomy' in distinction to '[*A Theory of Justice*] in which autonomy is interpreted as moral autonomy in its Kantian form, drawing on Kant's comprehensive liberal doctrine', *Political Liberalism*, xli.

⁶⁶³ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xvi.

⁶⁶⁴ Rawls, 'Justice as Fairness: political not metaphysical', 412-3. See also *Political Liberalism*, xxiv.

⁶⁶⁵ Rawls, 'Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical', 413. For two attempts to place this revised aim of Rawls within the context of twentieth century thought more broadly, see David Dyzenhaus 'Liberalism After the Fall: Schmitt, Rawls, and the problem of justification', *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 22, no.3 (1996): 9-37 & Peter Lassman, 'Political Theory in an Age of Disenchantment', *Max Weber Studies* 4, no.2 (2004): 253-271.

⁶⁶⁶ Forrester, *In the Shadow of Justice*, xiii, 3, 259.

relation to pluralism. The Rawlsian framework in *Political Liberalism* shifts from 'moral geometry' to 'reasonable pluralism', the latter of which is taken to be a 'fact' of the world that justice as fairness must be reconciled with if stability is to arise for the right reasons.⁶⁶⁷ The emphasis on the 'liberal egalitarianism' of *A Theory of Justice* in recent accounts of Rawls' oeuvre has tended to understate the significance of this shift for understanding the development of Rawls' liberalism. When Rawls looked back, he found something different.

The 'moral geometry' of *A Theory of Justice* distanced Rawls from Berlin, but *Political Liberalism*'s emphasis on 'reasonable pluralism' is more difficult to measure.⁶⁶⁸ Rawls not only cited Berlin on the essential role that pluralism played in the liberal tradition, but also on the sense of loss that it inevitably led to within the social world because of a 'limited social space'. Despite this, Rawls' liberalism remained committed to articulating the fair terms of social cooperation and the political conception of the person necessary for being able to realise those fair terms whilst respecting the fact of reasonable pluralism.⁶⁶⁹ One of the particular examples that preoccupies Rawls on this is the suggestion that there may be 'various religious sects oppose the culture of the modern world and wish to lead their common life apart from its unwanted influences'. Justice as fairness honours such claims on the requirement that 'they acknowledge the principles of the political conception of justice and appreciate its political ideals of person and society'.⁶⁷⁰ Rawls suggested—by his own admission 'perhaps too optimistically'—that, 'except for certain kinds of fundamentalism, all the main historical religions' admit of an account of free faith such that they are 'reasonable comprehensive doctrines'.⁶⁷¹ Rawls' liberalism was subsequently re-orientated toward a 'social union [that] is no longer founded on a conception of the good as given by common religious faith or philosophical doctrine, but on a shared public conception of justice appropriate to the conception of citizens in a democratic state as free and equal persons'.⁶⁷²

⁶⁶⁷ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xli-xlvi, 140-4, 390-2.

⁶⁶⁸ See for example Crowder's account of 'reasonable disagreement', *Liberalism and Value Pluralism*, 158-184. The extent to which Crowder ends up 'reasonably disagreeing' with Rawls is uncertain, given that his stated aim is to reveal the pluralist assumptions of Rawls liberalism and offer a contrasting account of the critical role of philosophical enquiry towards truth, which as Rawls suggested, is the first virtue of systems of thought. Whilst in *Political Liberalism* the status of philosophy has a less obvious role with regard to truth in public reason due to the appeal to the politically reasonable, it nonetheless holds an important place in 'the defense of reasonable faith in the possibility of a just constitutional regime', *Political Liberalism*, 172.

⁶⁶⁹ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 57-8, 301-4.

⁶⁷⁰ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 199-200. See also 458-462.

⁶⁷¹ Rawls *Political Liberalism*, 170.

⁶⁷² Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 304.

Despite this revision in Rawls' outlook with the emphasis on 'reasonable pluralism', justice as fairness remained rooted in the social contract tradition as a means of modelling the fair terms of co-operation between reasonable citizens. The difference was in the source of that consensus being explicitly drawn from political liberalism's relationship to the liberal tradition, rather than 'moral geometry'. The success of liberalism and its intellectual legacy was, Rawls proclaimed, a joint enterprise which owed something to the paternal line of Rousseau—a tradition valuing ancient liberties of 'equal political liberties and the values of public life'—and something else to the paternal line of Locke—a tradition valuing modern liberties of 'freedom of thought and conscience, certain basic rights of the person and of property, and the rule of law'.⁶⁷³ Whilst 'one of the tenets of classical liberalism is that the political liberties are of less intrinsic importance than liberty of conscience and freedom of the person', for Rawls, 'the decision is not an all or nothing affair'. Rather, 'it is a question of weighing against one another small variations in the extent and definition of the different liberties'.⁶⁷⁴ Justice as fairness aims to 'adjudicate between these two contending traditions' by carrying the mantle and fulfilling the promises made in and by each through respecting the assumption of pluralism.⁶⁷⁵ Whilst the liberty of ancients and the liberty of moderns are both 'deeply rooted in human aspirations', and along with Constant, one might want to maintain that 'freedom of thought and liberty of conscience, freedom of the person and the civil liberties ought not to be sacrificed to political liberty, to the freedom to participate equally in political affairs', Rawls aimed to bring the two traditions together in an ecumenical package that consolidated and gave equal primacy to the basic liberties for all.⁶⁷⁶ Rather than finding a dialectical resolution of these two lines of thought, or placing them in antagonism, Rawls' framework aimed at balancing the two on the scales of justice.

This balanced framework, to come full circle, was to provide orientation for the self-understanding of liberal democratic citizens. The form of justification that a political conception of justice entails for a liberal democratic regime is one that insists 'that its political and social institutions are justifiable to all citizens—to each and every one—by addressing their reason, theoretical and practical', which 'connects with the tradition of the social

⁶⁷³ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 4-5.

⁶⁷⁴ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 202.

⁶⁷⁵ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 4-5.

⁶⁷⁶ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 177. Rawls cites both Guido de Ruggiero and Isaiah Berlin on this point. Whilst, as argued above, Rawls only came to explicitly defend a conception of 'liberalism' in the 1980s, *A Theory of Justice* similarly expressed affinities with Constant and Berlin as part of a liberal tradition whereby justice as fairness is an attempt to reconcile two competing lines of descent.

contract'.⁶⁷⁷ Rawls' project was increasingly cast as a restatement of that position and of the social contract tradition, placing justice as fairness alongside Locke, Rousseau, and Kant as an exposition of the rules, offices, and rights that characterised a liberal democratic society. This revealed both the fundamental unity, or so it was being suggested, between Rawls' liberalism and the liberal tradition. They formed one projected that reflected the presuppositions of liberal democratic regimes—initially for all times and all places, later for most times and most places—attempting to find balance between the competing lines of liberal thought. Rawls' liberalism can therefore be seen as an attempt to synthesise pluralism and consensus from within the contending lines of descent within the liberal tradition itself, and *A Theory of Justice* and *Political Liberalism* together reflect two sides of that attempt.

III. The Terms of the Contract

One central aim of *A Theory of Justice* was to provide a 'viable alternative to[...] [intuitionism and utilitarianism] which have long dominated our philosophical tradition'.⁶⁷⁸ *Political Liberalism* aimed to distinguish a 'political' conception of justice from comprehensive moral doctrines, such as utilitarianism among other forms of comprehensive liberalism.⁶⁷⁹ A 'political' conception was not, however, intended to be one option among others or simply an alternative to dominant comprehensive moral doctrines. *Political Liberalism* aimed to articulate 'a reasonable liberal conception that can be supported by an overlapping consensus of reasonable doctrines'. In Rawls' attempt to move from a modus vivendi to an overlapping consensus, a consensus was said to be possible in relation to the fact of reasonable pluralism 'by a concordant fit between the political conception and the comprehensive views together with the public recognition of the great values of the political virtues'.⁶⁸⁰ Rawls' liberalism therefore aimed to not be one alternative among other comprehensive liberalisms, but to provide a stable framework for an overlapping consensus of comprehensive doctrines. Whilst pluralism was a 'reasonable' outcome of individuals pursuing their conceptions of the good, it presented a puzzle to be solved by political liberalism via the overlapping consensus.

In work published after his death, Rawls spoke of liberalism as 'expressing a political conception of justice[...] from within the tradition of democratic constitutionalism' and stated

⁶⁷⁷ Rawls, *History of Political Philosophy*, 13.

⁶⁷⁸ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 3.

⁶⁷⁹ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 13-4.

⁶⁸⁰ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 171.

that there were two lines of descent in this tradition, the social contract tradition on the one hand and utilitarianism on the other.⁶⁸¹ He also later expanded his account of the origins of liberalism to not only include the Reformation but also 'the gradual taming of royal power by the rising middle classes' via constitutional arrangements and 'the winning of the working classes to democracy and majority rule'.⁶⁸² Rawls, citing Jeremy Waldron, suggested that a central aim of liberalism as to recognise that 'a legitimate regime is such that its political and social institutions are justifiable to all citizens—to each and every one—by addressing their reason, theoretical and practical'. 'The requirement of a justification to each citizen's reason', Rawls continued, 'connects with the tradition of the social contract and the idea that a legitimate political order rests on unanimous consent'. The condition of that consent being the mutual acknowledgement 'from the view point of each reasonable and rational person'.⁶⁸³

Rawls' later engagements with the liberal tradition was not an attempt to prioritise one line of descent within liberalism over every other, as the stated aim of *A Theory of Justice* seems to suggest, but to show how at least two lines of descent could be reconciled together as part of one single tradition of thought or to at least be shown to co-exist with one another under the umbrella of political liberalism. Given the fact of reasonable pluralism, the conditions of stability required that the political conception of justice be 'freestanding' and not dependent on any particular comprehensive doctrine, but neither should it be incompatible. As Rawls' suggested, 'the general problems of moral philosophy are not the concern of political liberalism, except insofar as they affect how the background culture and its comprehensive doctrines tend to support a constitutional regime'.⁶⁸⁴ Just as Rawls attempted to balance the lines of descent from Locke and Rousseau within the social contract, the overlapping consensus seemed to extend to comprehensive doctrines more broadly in order to reconcile the competing lines of descent within the liberal tradition—and possibly extended even to those that lay outside of it.

This attempt to reconcile competing lines of descent within liberalism can most explicitly be seen in both the lectures published after Rawls' death and in Rawls' engagement with the liberal tradition as part of political liberalism. Teresa Bejan has suggested that Rawls' engagement with the 'tradition' of political philosophy is heavily indebted to the broader

⁶⁸¹ Rawls, *History of Political Philosophy*, xvii.

⁶⁸² Rawls, *History of Political Philosophy*, 11. This was according to Rawls 'a philosopher's schematic version of speculative history', 11n.

⁶⁸³ Rawls, *History of Political Philosophy*, 13.

⁶⁸⁴ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xxviii & 40.

concerns over the 'death of political philosophy' in the mid-twentieth century.⁶⁸⁵ As argued in first section of this chapter, liberalism plays a significant role in this debate and it is therefore necessary to not only think of Rawls' engagement with the 'tradition' in a more general way, but in a more specific way in terms of Rawls' engagement with the liberal tradition in this context of the 'death of political philosophy'. Rawls' engagement with the liberal tradition—as well as the 'tradition' more broadly—is a further reflection of the assumptions made of a liberal democratic society and the grounds for consensus among the reasonable comprehensive doctrines of its background culture. It has also been suggested that the 'historical' claims of political liberalism have often done more work than has commonly been acknowledged—perhaps undermining the aim to provide a 'free standing' non-comprehensive liberalism.⁶⁸⁶ What I want to suggest is that there is a broad consistency in Rawls' engagement with the liberal tradition in the attempt to find not only the sources of pluralism but also the conditions of consensus between comprehensive doctrines, which aims to situate political liberalism within the liberal tradition and the background assumptions of a liberal democratic culture. Whilst Rawls' engagement with the liberal tradition in *A Theory of Justice* suggested that his own liberalism was one amongst others and detached from the particularities of historical contingency, the later defence of liberalism suggested that it was a more explicit extension of the liberal tradition and was said to be able to provide the means of reconciling competing lines of descent as part of an overlapping consensus within a liberal democratic culture.

Rawls' engagement with the liberal tradition and the attempt to ground consensus by reconciling its competing lines of descent can be seen in the relationship to utilitarianism, the second line of descent that Rawls identified in contrast to the social contract tradition. Rawls deepened his criticisms of utilitarianism, underlining the shift away from his own earlier defences of utilitarianism toward the social contract tradition, but did so in a way which complemented his own project and which often drew affinities between the utilitarian project and his own. He did so via a direct engagement with three utilitarians in particular—Hume, Mill, and Sidgwick⁶⁸⁷—showing the compatibility between his own project and theirs.

⁶⁸⁵ Teresa M. Bejan, 'Rawls' Teaching and the "Tradition" of Political Philosophy', *Modern Intellectual History* 18, no.4 (2021): 1058-1079.

⁶⁸⁶ See Jan-Werner Muller, 'Rawls, Historian: Remarks on Political Liberalism's 'Historicism'', *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 60, no.237 (3) (2006): 327-339 & Ronald Beiner, 'John Rawls' Genealogy of Liberalism' in Shaun P. Young ed. *Reflections on Rawls: An Assessment of His Legacy* (London: Routledge, 2009), 73-90.

⁶⁸⁷ Rawls, *History of Political Philosophy*, 375.

Hume has often been engaged with as a critic of the social contract tradition, situated between Locke and Rousseau as someone who rejected consent as a plausible basis for political obligation and regarded explanations of government as originating out of explicit agreement between contracting parties as bogus.⁶⁸⁸ Rawls saw the appeal of Hume's arguments regarding an 'original' contract, particularly in the case of the consent of those worse-off in society; as Hume asked, 'can we seriously say, that a poor peasant or artisan has a free choice to leave his country, when he knows no foreign language or manners, and lives, from day to day, by the small wages which he acquires?'.⁶⁸⁹ Whilst Hume saw a place for consent between agents in many instances, this seemed to be an inaccurate account of legitimate political authority and its origins. Rawls went on to insist upon the compatibility—or rather, lack of incompatibility—between Hume's views with some central tenets of the social contract tradition: 'there is offhand no conflict with the priority of justice and no incompatibility with Locke's contract doctrine'.⁶⁹⁰ Rather than being an obstacle to the notion of consent as the foundation of all legitimate authority, Hume was fashioned as part of an empirical approach to moral judgements and placed as a comprehensive liberal by Rawls, alongside Kant, who were said to have provided a descriptive framework for our moral sentiments without undermining the status of consent within liberalism or the heuristic device of the original position for determining principles of justice.⁶⁹¹

A number of attempts were made during the twentieth century to revitalise Mill's defence of individual liberty as a potential alternative to the Rawlsian paradigm.⁶⁹² On Rawls' account, however, whilst Mill contributed to the development of utilitarianism, Mill's morally comprehensive account of individuality was similar to Kant's account of autonomy and both were labelled 'reasonable liberalisms'—distinct from 'reasonable utilitarianism'. The problem for Rawls was that these 'reasonable liberalisms' would eventually have to rely on the 'sanctions of state power' to secure their hegemonic position. It was true however that they

⁶⁸⁸ See M. P. Thompson, 'Hume's Critique of Locke and the 'Original Contract'', *Il Pensiero Politico* 10, no.2 (1977): 189-201; P. F. Brownsey, 'Hume and the Social Contract' 28, no.111 (1978): 132-148; J. G. Murphy, 'Hume and Kant on the Social Contract', *Philosophical Studies* 33, no.1 (1978): 65-79. Cf. F. G. Whelan, 'Hume and Contractarianism', *Polity* 27, no.2 (1994): 201-224.

⁶⁸⁹ David Hume, 'Of the Original Contract' in *Political Essays*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 186-201, 193. See Rawls, *History of Political Philosophy*, 165-73.

⁶⁹⁰ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 29 & *History of Political Philosophy*, 187. See also, A. Coventry and A. Sager, 'Hume and Contemporary Political Philosophy', *The European Legacy* 18, no.5 (2013): 597-8.

⁶⁹¹ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xxvii.

⁶⁹² John Gray, *Mill On Liberty: a defence* (London: Routledge, 1983) & Eisenach, 'Introduction' to *Mill and the Moral Character of Liberalism*. Gray in particular attempts to rehabilitate Mill's liberalism against the 'anaemic pluralism of life-plans celebrated in Rawls and in the American liberalism which Rawls expresses', 157.

could, and perhaps did, perform a vital function in liberal democratic society by supporting liberal democratic institutions.⁶⁹³ Indeed, such 'liberalisms have a certain historical pre-eminence as being among the first and most important doctrines to affirm modern constitutional democracy and to develop ideas that have been significant in its justification and defence'.⁶⁹⁴ Mill's 'political and social doctrine, for instance—abstracted from his wider moral view—could give us the principles of a modern and comprehensive liberalism'; a liberalism not too far from Rawls' own, it turned out.⁶⁹⁵ Rawls expressed a certain sympathy for Mill, as his political framework was said to hold 'roughly the same content as the two principles of justice' and would hold 'basic institutions quite similar to those of the well-ordered society of justice as fairness', despite providing a comprehensive account of the permanent interests of mankind as a progressive being.⁶⁹⁶ Again, Rawls' broader ecumenical purpose was evident: here he was emphasising the compatibility of a Milleian liberalism—alongside a Humean utilitarianism—with his own political liberalism.

The most prominent of the utilitarians with whom Rawls engaged, and in many ways the figure to whom *A Theory of Justice* offered a kind of critical answer, was Henry Sidgwick.⁶⁹⁷ In contrast to Hume, Rawls argued, the merit of Sidgwick's line of utilitarianism is that 'it clearly recognises what is at stake, namely the relative priority of the principles of justice and of the rights derived by these principles'.⁶⁹⁸ Furthermore, Sidgwick was said to have grappled with the difficulties of utilitarianism 'in a consistent and thorough way while never departing from the strict doctrine, as for example J. S. Mill did'. Whilst Sidgwick was said to provide a statement of the classical doctrine of utilitarianism, *The Method of Ethics* is 'modern both in its method and in the spirit of its approach'.⁶⁹⁹

In determining the principles of justice to regulate the basic structure of society, a certain equality is implied through the administration and application of those principles. Rawls remarked that 'as Sidgwick emphasized, this sort of equality is implied in the very notion of a

⁶⁹³ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xliii, 37, 78 & *History of Political Philosophy*, 301-11. See also Leif Wenar, 'Political Liberalism: an internal critique', *Ethics* 106, no.1 (1995): 32-62 & Ruth Abbey and Jeff Spinner-Halev, 'Rawls, Mill, and the Puzzle of Political Liberalism', *The Journal of Politics* 75, no.1 (2012): 124-136.

⁶⁹⁴ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 135n.

⁶⁹⁵ Rawls, *History of Political Philosophy*, 313. See also, Jonathan Riley, 'Rawls, Mill, and Utilitarianism' in *A Companion to Rawls*, 397-412.

⁶⁹⁶ Rawls, *History of Political Philosophy*, 297.

⁶⁹⁷ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 20.

⁶⁹⁸ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 29.

⁶⁹⁹ Rawls, *History of Political Philosophy*, 378.

law or institution, once it is thought of as a scheme of general rules'.⁷⁰⁰ How those principles were to be justified similarly bears a resemblance to Sidgwick, as on Rawls' account, '[Sidgwick's] originality lay in his conception of the subject of moral philosophy, and in his view that a reasoned and satisfactory justification of any particular moral conception must proceed from a full knowledge and systematic comparison of the more significant moral conceptions in the philosophical tradition'.⁷⁰¹ As such, Sidgwick is said to have anticipated in his own practice what Rawls called 'reflective equilibrium'.⁷⁰² Perhaps not surprisingly, Rawls subsequently presented his own project as having certain affinities with Sidgwick's. One difference was that Sidgwick had not engaged adequately with Kant—or, presumably, the social contract tradition—but Sidgwick's objections to Kant were said by Rawls to be capable of being met via Rawls' own engagement with Kant.⁷⁰³ With Mill and Sidgwick, when 'confronted with a clash of precepts[...] we have no alternative to adopt utilitarianism'.⁷⁰⁴ Rawls' alternative, on the other hand, used one line of descent in liberalism as the instrument by which all lines could be recombined through the justification of principles of justice that could be endorsed on the basis of the utilitarian assumptions of Hume, Mill, and Sidgwick as readily as on the contractualist assumptions of Locke, Rousseau, or Kant.

In *Political Liberalism*, Rawls somewhat strikingly suggested that the utilitarianism of Sidgwick, as well as Bentham, '[supported] the political conception for such reasons as our limited knowledge of social institutions generally and on our knowledge about ongoing circumstances'. This, among other reasons, 'may lead the utilitarian to think a political conception of justice liberal in content a satisfactory, perhaps even the best, workable approximation to what the principle of utility, all things tallied up, would require'.⁷⁰⁵ What has often appeared striking in this suggestion is the apparent revision of Rawls' earlier aim to not only provide an alternative to utilitarianism, but to show how utilitarianism failed to adequately consider society as a fair system of co-operation between free and equal persons.⁷⁰⁶ The apparent shift here is not only due to Rawls' shifting aims in *Political Liberalism*—whereby the 'political' conception of justice requires support from a range of

⁷⁰⁰ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 51.

⁷⁰¹ Rawls, *History of Political Philosophy*, 379.

⁷⁰² Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 44. See also Peter Singer, 'Sidgwick and Reflective Equilibrium', *The Monist* 58, no.3 (1974): 490-57; Steven Sverdlik, 'Sidgwick's Methodology', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 23, no.4 (1985): 537-553; & Anthony Skelton, 'Henry Sidgwick's Moral Epistemology', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 48, no.4 (2010): 491-519.

⁷⁰³ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 221, 221n, 224-5.

⁷⁰⁴ *ibid.*, 36.

⁷⁰⁵ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 170.

⁷⁰⁶ See Samuel Scheffler 'Rawls and Utilitarianism' *The Cambridge Companion to Rawls*, ed. Samuel Freeman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 426-459.

comprehensive doctrines in a liberal democratic culture in order to be stable—as it further reflects the revision of how Rawls understood liberalism and positioned political liberalism in relation to the liberal tradition, as he understood it. Whether Rawls' political liberalism ends up making comprehensive claims is one question, but the point to emphasise here is the significance for Rawls' political liberalism of showing the possibility of consensus and reconciliation between competing lines of descent of the liberal tradition as part of a liberal democratic culture. The comprehensive liberalisms that historically *have* informed the development of liberalism are, on Rawls' terms, importantly not incompatible with political liberalism and used as examples for finding an overlapping consensus from within the terms of justice as fairness.

The aspiration towards reconciliation not only extended to hitherto competing lines of descent within liberalism. It also included some of liberalism's historic critics, by showing how their criticisms and the values they represented could be met from within justice as fairness and the social contract tradition more broadly. In discussing utilitarianism, Rawls took an intuitive feature of its teleological moral view to be defining the good independently from the right and the right subsequently being that which maximises the good. In the particular case of utilitarianism, the good was utility and the right was the maximisation of utility. Rawls also addressed himself to another moral view that he placed alongside utilitarianism: perfectionism. Rawls presented Aristotle and Nietzsche as perfectionists in *A Theory of Justice*, as they were said to follow the teleological logic and define the good as 'the realization of human excellence in the various forms of culture'.⁷⁰⁷

Despite Nietzsche's disparaging remarks about utilitarianism, and Mill in particular, Rawls fashioned Nietzsche as part of the same teleological moral view only with a differing end goal, and as an extreme example at that, sacrificing all other claims to the goal of human perfection.⁷⁰⁸ This was not merely drawing attention to utilitarianism's blind spot for potentially allowing such claims to be balanced against the claims of human liberty, but challenging the view of whether certain practices actually reflect the 'pathos of distance'

⁷⁰⁷ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 21-3. See also Will Kymlicka, 'Rawls on Teleology and Deontology', *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 17, no.3 (1988): 185, 187-9.

⁷⁰⁸ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 286-90, 387-8, 462. Nietzsche is absent from *Political Liberalism*, but a similar discussion on 'a conception of the good requiring the repression or degradation of certain persons' on perfectionist grounds is discussed and rejected, *Political Liberalism*, 196. See Friedrich Nietzsche, 'The Greek State' in *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 176-186. On Rawls and Nietzsche, see also Allan Bloom, 'Justice: John Rawls Vs. The Tradition of Political Philosophy', *The American Political Science Review* 69, no.2 (1975): 648-662 & Vanessa Lemm, 'Is Nietzsche a Perfectionist? Rawls, Cavell, and the Politics of Culture in Nietzsche's "Schopenhauer as Educator"', *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 34 (2007): 5-27.

required for human excellence. For Nietzsche, both democratic values *and* 'liberal institutions' were part of the same degeneration of the aristocratic and noble, a 'long-drawn-out slave revolt', of 'the whole herd against everything that is shepherd, beast of prey, hermit and Caesar, to preserve and elevate all the weak, the oppressed, the mediocre, the hard-done-by, the half-failed'.⁷⁰⁹ 'Liberalism' was, 'in plain words, *reduction to the herd animal*'.⁷¹⁰ As discussed above, Rawls qualified his first principle of justice with a second one that reflected the required 'difference' between persons in order for justice to be achieved. The Nietzschean challenge assumed that only 'difference' could foster certain psychological sentiments to achieve excellence and the space for the creation of values for judging such excellences in and of themselves, in distinction to the sluggishness of egalitarianism—the recognition of 'difference', on Rawlsian terms, was a pittance for the cultivation of higher goals in Nietzschean terms.⁷¹¹

Rawls wanted to show that his own 'two principles of justice provide a better understanding of the claims of freedom and equality in a democratic society' than, amongst others, forms of perfectionism that attempted to pursue this goal of human excellence. Rawls' liberalism, in contrast to the perfectionist, attempted to be neutral between competing conceptions of the good by prioritising the right over the good.⁷¹² Rawls saw his own view as being able to 'define an ideal of the person without invoking a prior standard of human excellence' and that the principle of perfection ultimately fails the test of the original position, providing an 'insecure foundation for the equal liberties'.⁷¹³ More broadly, Rawls defined the problem for moderns as stability in a world of plural goods, which is 'a problem for political justice, not a problem about the highest good'.⁷¹⁴ Whilst Rawls considered the perfectionist ideal as a question for a bygone age, a less extreme version of this line of thinking would recognise that 'comparisons of intrinsic value can obviously be made; and although the standard of perfection is not a

⁷⁰⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Writings from the Later Notebooks*, ed. Rüdiger Bittner & trans. Kate Sturge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 68 [2[13]], 172 [10 [2]]. See also, Keith Ansell-Pearson, *Nietzsche Contra Rousseau: a study of Nietzsche's moral and political thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

⁷¹⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols; or how to philosophize with a hammer in Twilight of the Idols and the Anti-Christ*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin 1990 [1889]), 103.

⁷¹¹ Rawls' 'method and the man he wishes to produce impel me to think that Nietzsche[...] might provide a more appropriate title for this book: *A First Philosophy for the Last Man*'. Bloom, 'Justice', 662.

⁷¹² Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 287, 290 & *Political Liberalism*, 292-4. See also John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: a restatement*, ed. Erin Kelly (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 97. On Rawls and perfectionism, see Simon Caney, 'Anti-Perfectionism and Rawlsian Liberalism', *Political Studies* 43, no.2 (1995): 248-264 & Steven Wall, 'Perfectionist Justice and Rawlsian Legitimacy' in *A Companion to Rawls & 'Rawlsian Perfectionism'*, *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 10, no.5 (2013): 573-597.

⁷¹³ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 287, 290; *Political Liberalism* 6, 188, 295.

⁷¹⁴ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xii, xv.

principle of justice, judgements of value have an important place in human affairs'.⁷¹⁵

Furthermore, as a criticism of egalitarianism; 'the greater happiness of the less fortunate does not in general justify curtailing the expenditures required to preserve cultural values[...] the only exception is when these claims clash with the demands of the basic needs'.⁷¹⁶

Perfectionism 'is denied as a political principle', for the coercive apparatus of the state cannot be used for such ends: 'human perfections are to be pursued within the limits of the principle of free association' and art, science, high religion, and high culture have 'no special merit from the standpoint of justice'.⁷¹⁷ Whilst perfectionism fails to recognise the self-respect and self-worth of these associations' members, Rawls' theory leaves space for a subordinate role in public reason that perfectionist values can hold; he did not deny claims of human flourishing, but favoured political values for balancing those claims on the scales of justice.⁷¹⁸

Rawls doubted the coherence of perfectionism as a stable basis for the basic structure of society, but it was also incompatible with his premise that the contracting parties that comprise a well-ordered society are 'moral persons, rational individuals with a coherent system of ends and a capacity for a sense of justice'.⁷¹⁹ Again, perhaps with Nietzsche in mind, envy is recognised by Rawls as a significant emotive force, but it is suggested that the 'principles of justice are not likely to arouse excusable general envy (nor particular envy either) to a troublesome extent', by respecting the self-worth and self-esteem of citizens.⁷²⁰ What is required to meet the Nietzschean challenge, is said to be a firm faith in our moral conviction and our capacity as reasonable persons. In other words, the challenge could be met by a restatement of the presuppositions of Rawls' account of liberalism, bolstered by the continuity of the liberal tradition and the culture of liberal democracies.

The Nietzschean challenge was not one that Rawls took lightly. Nietzsche—along with Marx—was characterised by him as one of those 'anatomists of human nature and its moral psychology[...] whose views can undermine and put in doubt our common moral sentiments'.⁷²¹ Their looming presence acted as a shadow that cast a dividing line between what stands within the realm of reasonable disagreement and what appears to be antithetical to liberal values. Marx's work, however, was seen as presenting something of a contradiction

⁷¹⁵ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 289.

⁷¹⁶ *ibid.*, 286.

⁷¹⁷ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 462.

⁷¹⁸ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 462; *Justice as Fairness*, 14, 152.

⁷¹⁹ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 289.

⁷²⁰ *ibid.*, 469-71.

⁷²¹ John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*, ed. Barbara Herman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000): 100.

in relation to our moral sentiments. It was duly regarded as the exposure of great injustices in the capitalist system, without a corresponding theory of justice.⁷²² For Rawls, 'the absence of concern with justice is undesirable as such, because having a sense of justice, all that it involves, is part of human life and part of understanding other people and of recognizing their claims'.⁷²³ If anything, 'once we think of a conception of political justice in a broad fashion as applying to the basic structure of society and thus to the institutions of background justice, then Marx might have had, at least implicitly, a conception of political justice in a broad sense'.⁷²⁴

Whilst Rawls ultimately endorsed the 'difference' principle, this was motivated by his reflection that the needs and desires of citizens are related to and influenced by the economic sphere, perhaps even limited by economic institutional arrangements, so in Rawls' own work 'questions of political economy are discussed to find out the practical bearing of justice as fairness'.⁷²⁵ For Marx, political emancipation had brought about the '*dissolution* of the old society', freeing the individual as expressed in human rights. But this expression of '*political* man is only abstract, artificial man, man as an *allegorical, moral* person', an abstraction which Hegel, according to Marx, had registered but failed to resolve. This had reduced and split man to the '*egoistic, independent* individual' of civil society and the '*moral* person' of citizen, which could only be truly resolved and transcended by human emancipation.⁷²⁶ For Rawls, 'the division of labour is overcome not by each becoming complete in himself, but by willing and meaningful work within a just social union of social unions in which all can freely participate as they so incline'.⁷²⁷ Rawls engaged with Marx's 'critique of liberalism' as 'criticisms of capitalism as a social system[...] that might seem offhand to apply equally to a property owning democracy, or equally to liberal socialism'. Rawls ultimately endorsed a property owning democracy as being able to meet Marx's demands, and in particular fashioned Marx's critique as a criticism that the rights of individuals are purely negative in such a property owning democracy, when in fact 'the background institutions of a property-owning democracy, together with fair equality of opportunity and the difference principle [the two principles of justice][...] give adequate protection to the so-called positive liberties'.⁷²⁸

⁷²² Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 249n; *History of Political Philosophy*, 335-7, 356-9, 370-2.

⁷²³ Rawls, *History of Political Philosophy*, 372.

⁷²⁴ *ibid.*, 336; *A Theory of Justice*, 268n, 460n.

⁷²⁵ Rawls, *History of Political Philosophy*, 229, 234, 271-2n.

⁷²⁶ Karl Marx, 'On the Jewish Question' in *Early Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Joseph O' Malley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 47-50.

⁷²⁷ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 464.

⁷²⁸ Rawls, *History of Political Philosophy*, 320-1 & *Justice as Fairness*, 177.

Rawls did, however, concede that there may in fact be a prior principle of justice to his two that required a distribution of goods such that all basic needs are met; 'at least insofar as their being met is necessary for citizens to understand and to be able fruitfully to exercise those rights and liberties' required of the first principle of justice. What the fulfilment of these basic needs may or may not have looked like in terms of either the requirements of justice or of political liberalism was left relatively open-ended by Rawls. That space has often re-opened the New Liberal discussion of liberal values within the realities of capitalism.⁷²⁹ Rawls' attempt to reconcile liberalism with socialistic values did acknowledge that both a property-owning democracy and a 'liberal socialist' regime could be consistent with the principles of justice, the choice between the two being determined by 'society's historical circumstances[...], its traditions of political thought and practice, and much else'. The defence of the property-owning democracy was premised upon realising in 'the basic institutions the idea of society as a fair system of cooperation between citizens regarded as free and equal'.⁷³⁰ As we have seen, it was these terms that Rawls took to be the important assumptions of a liberal democratic culture.

Rawls' response to Marx and Nietzsche, then, was an attempt to restate the presuppositions of his own rehabilitation of the social contract and to pass a critical judgement upon those critics on the basis of those presuppositions. This move more broadly reinforced the defence and legitimacy of liberal democratic institutions in 'the West' and the broader sense that liberalism was the exemplar tradition of modernity—or, it might be countered, lent to it a false sense of security. Allan Bloom, in an infamous review of Rawls' earlier work suggested that: '[Rawls] takes it for granted that they [Marx and Nietzsche] are wrong, that they must pass before his tribunal, not he before theirs'. For Bloom, Rawls' liberalism was 'redolent of that hope and expectation for the future of democracy that characterized the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, forgetful of the harsh deeds that preceded it and made it possible, without anticipation of the barbarism that was to succeed it'.⁷³¹

Whilst perhaps unfairly hostile to Rawls' engagement with the 'tradition' based upon Bloom's own gate-keeping defence of its canonical credentials, Bloom's line of criticism did identify something present in *A Theory of Justice* which would later become more prominent in

⁷²⁹ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 7; *Justice as Fairness*, 44n. See, Martin O'Neill and Thad William, *Property-Owning Democracy: Rawls and Beyond* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014) & A. Edmundson, *John Rawls: Reticent Socialist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). See also Gerald F. Gaus, 'Liberalism at the end of the century', 179-199.

⁷³⁰ Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, 138-140.

⁷³¹ Bloom, 'Justice', 648. See also Bejan, 'Rawls' Teaching', 1065.

Political Liberalism and the later lectures, whereby Rawls' engagement with both the liberal tradition and its critics was premised upon the conditions of consensus required of political liberalism's overlapping consensus and reflective of the assumptions made about a liberal democratic culture. One of the shifts from the earlier work to the later defence of liberalism was the more significant role that this played for Rawls' account of liberalism itself and the historical positioning of political liberalism within the context of liberalism's development, rather than being a detached engagement with the 'tradition'. Whilst the main emphasis was often on ensuring support for a 'political' conception of justice from a range of reasonable comprehensive doctrines, the terms of Rawls' engagement with the liberal tradition extended to its critics by accommodating competing values and claims to the requirements of his two principles of justice.

Berlin's liberalism had often attempted to widen the gap between liberalism and its critics—though that gap was often not as wide as it appeared at first glance—and saw the competing lines of descent within liberalism in perpetual tension, whereas Rawls's liberalism aimed to reconcile the competing lines of descent within liberalism and with its critics as part of the overlapping consensus required of political liberalism. This was not unlike Hobhouse's attempt to show the compatibility between liberalism and its rivals—and as Bloom suggested, the optimism of that attempt was familiar despite the differing contexts—but this was without the dialectical reconciliation in history of liberalism's component parts and placed an important emphasis on the fact of reasonable pluralism. What I am therefore suggesting is that *A Theory of Justice* and *Political Liberalism* represent two sides of the attempt to reconcile pluralism and consensus, and the later lectures provide further insight into the extended process of reconciliation to find consensus between political liberalism and the liberal tradition—which often extended to its margins with liberalism's critics.

Thomas Nagel remarked that whilst "'liberalism" means different things to different people', 'Rawls occupies a special place in this tradition'. The sanctification of his 'special place' in many ways marked not only the influence of Rawls on contemporary liberalism, but the canonisation of Rawls himself as a part of the liberal tradition. It remains true that the Rawlsian brand 'is at odds with many others in the liberal camp', but nonetheless Rawls has 'transformed the subject of political theory in our time' and part of Rawls' success has been the success with which he persuaded his contemporaries to align themselves to a liberal tradition made in his image: as Nagel goes on to remark, "Rawls' theory is the latest stage in a long evolution in the content of liberalism that starts from a narrower notion, exemplified by Locke, which focused

on personal freedom and political equality'.⁷³² Rawls' impact on contemporary political theory is obtrusive—'more than five thousand learned articles of interpretation, commentary, objection, and defense'⁷³³—but his impact upon what liberalism has come to mean for contemporary political theorists has been only marginally less significant. What they have come to accept ever more readily is an image of liberalism retrospectively captured and entwined with the currently fashionable manifestation of liberalism: 'seventeenth-century contractualism fits neatly into a liberal tradition seen retrospectively through the conceptual and justificatory concerns of Rawls and his legacy'.⁷³⁴ It is no longer clear what stands inside and outside of Rawls' project and the ambitions of the liberal tradition when all values and lines of thought can potentially be balanced on the scales of justice. Just as liberalism more broadly came to be an abstract totality that defined the background culture and implicit assumptions of 'Western' states, so Rawlsian liberalism has come to supply terms in which liberalism is understood and assessed that are so capacious and absorbent of criticism that many comprehensive doctrines can be accommodated and used to bolster faith in a liberal democratic culture via an overlapping consensus.

IV. Political Liberals and Liberal Politics: Rawls and his Critics

As the twentieth century closed, liberal democracies had gained a dominant position—there was even talk of the 'end of history', implying that the bearings for the future had been set.⁷³⁵ Yet there were clouds on the horizon. It was unclear to some whether Rawls had reanimated liberalism and political thought more generally, and had therefore overcome the anxieties set out at the start of this chapter, or whether he was merely propping up their corpses. As the political and social theorist Raymond Geuss remarked, 'we seem to have no realistic alternative to liberalism'; at the same time, 'there are signs of a significant theoretical, moral, and political disaffection with some aspects of liberalism'. Perhaps most poignantly, liberalism 'has for a long time seemed to lack much inspirational potential'.⁷³⁶ Geuss often made it clear that Rawls was one of his principal targets—and one he enjoyed berating more with

⁷³² Nagel, 'Rawls and Liberalism' in *The Cambridge Companion to Rawls*, 62-3.

⁷³³ Edmund Fawcett, *Liberalism; the life of an idea* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 339.

⁷³⁴ David Weinstein, 'Nineteenth- and Twentieth- Century Liberalism', *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Political Philosophy*, ed. George Klosko (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 415. See also Waldron, 'Theoretical Foundations of Liberalism', *Philosophical Quarterly* 37, no.147 (1987): 127-150 & Paul Kelly, *Liberalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005).

⁷³⁵ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1992).

⁷³⁶ Geuss, 'Liberalism and its Discontents', 11.

broadsword than rapier in hand⁷³⁷—so it would perhaps be more accurate to say that, in his opinion, there is a lack of inspirational potential in the Rawlsian project, which has become synonymous with liberalism.

The relationship between Rawls' political liberalism and the liberal tradition, in Rawls' terms, and how that relationship changed and evolved not only over Rawls' body of work but also in relation to the development of liberalism from the mid twentieth century onwards have often been thrown together or even seen as synonymous. Rawls had attempted to show how political liberalism was historically situated within the development of the liberal tradition and attempted to show how consensus could be achieved via an overlapping consensus within a liberal democratic culture whilst recognising the fact of reasonable pluralism. His followers have often attempted to show how his critics could be addressed in the same fashion from adjustments to his own framework. Critics, in turn, have often tackled liberalism and the background culture of liberal democratic states via Rawls. The result is rather like an Escher drawing in which each path turns out to be the same as one which begins as an ascent, only to find oneself back at the start again.

Criticisms of Rawlsian liberalism have often tended to either define themselves within Rawls' terms or in stark opposition to them. Some of those who were sympathetic to Rawls' rehabilitation of a right-orientated contractual account of liberalism and the distributive requirements of egalitarian justice had their doubts about the depth of Rawls' commitment to them—and, perhaps, the depth of his understanding of them.⁷³⁸ One of Rawls' early critics was quick to argue that the two principles of justice were incompatible with one another and undermined the very status of individuals as distinct right-bearers. His Harvard colleague Robert Nozick, in his *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, argued from the position of a Lockean state of nature that the redistribution of goods would be a violation of personal right and that only a minimal state could be justified on the basis of contractual principles.⁷³⁹ That being said, Nozick recognised the value of Rawls' project, suggesting that: 'political philosophers now

⁷³⁷ 'I am not in the first instance interested in the details of Rawls' view here but wish to treat him merely as a representative of a particular style of theorising about politics', Raymond Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 70.

⁷³⁸ See, for example, Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974); Ronald Dworkin, *Taking Rights Seriously* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977); Robert Paul Wolff, *Understanding Rawls* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977); H. L. A. Hart, 'Between Utility and Rights', *Columbia Law Review* 79, no.5 (1979): 828-846; Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice* (New York: Basic Books, 1983); Thomas Pogge, *Realizing Rawls* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1989); Susan Moller Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1989); Martha Nussbaum, 'Rawls and Feminism' in *The Cambridge Companion to Rawls*, 488-520; & G. A. Cohen, *If You're an Egalitarian, How Come You're So Rich?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

⁷³⁹ See Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, ch.2.

must either work within Rawls' theory or explain why not'.⁷⁴⁰ Whilst *A Theory of Justice* gained a large influence in academic circles, Rawls' account of liberalism was relatively less influential than the popularisation of Nozick's libertarianism and neo-liberalism more broadly under the guise of the New Right in the 1970s and 80s in Britain and America, the latter in particular.⁷⁴¹ Rawls' response, to both Nozick and the broader popularisation of American libertarianism, was to suggest that the basic liberties alone are 'purely formal', and that as such libertarianism is 'an impoverished form of liberalism'.⁷⁴² Rawls' counter to Nozick, in essence, was an attempt to show that libertarianism was not really liberalism at all, restating the basic assumptions of justice as fairness and showing how political liberalism was the culmination of a liberal democratic culture and the liberal tradition.

Those sympathetic to Rawls' project tended to emphasise the 'liberal egalitarianism' of *A Theory of Justice*, rather than the significance of pluralism and the conditions of consensus for Rawls' liberalism which became more apparent in the revised aims of *Political Liberalism*—and which goes some way to explaining the tepid response to the latter work. What Rawls' followers tended to see as central to the project was not always in line with how Rawls himself revised his liberalism. Not all critiques of Rawls' project could, however, be so easily reconciled from within the project itself. One line of criticism levied against Rawls challenged not only what these contracting subjects would hypothetically agree to, but the very status of those individuals and the nature of their agreement, attempting to strike at the root of this line of thinking. Michael Sandel's *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* set out to counter a Kantian variety of deontological liberalism to which Rawls was said to be heir.⁷⁴³ The problem of this deontological liberalism was that it presupposed 'an antecedently individuated subject standing always at a certain distance from the interests it has'.⁷⁴⁴ The hypothetical contract between agents presumed an account of the individual that was ungrounded by the contingent features of the societies in which they live; but 'to imagine a person incapable of constitutive attachments such as these is not to conceive an ideally free and rational agent, but to imagine a person wholly without character, without moral depth'.⁷⁴⁵ For Charles Taylor, like Sandel a modern admirer of Hegel, a similar line of criticism applied: the problem was not

⁷⁴⁰ *ibid.*, 183.

⁷⁴¹ See Daniel Stedman Jones, *Masters of the Universe: Hayek, Friedman, and the Birth of Neoliberal Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

⁷⁴² Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, lvi, 262-5.

⁷⁴³ Michael J. Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 1-7, 15.

⁷⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 62.

⁷⁴⁵ *ibid.*, 179.

only that Rawls posited an abstracted self, distinct from the social world, but the supposed neutrality that came from such an abstracted self; 'we don't actually spell it out, but we have to draw on the sense of the good that we have in order to decide what are adequate principles of justice', if we don't, and Rawls says we can't, then this leads to the 'cramped theories of modern moral philosophy' of which Rawls' was only the most illustrious.⁷⁴⁶

This line of criticism would be taken further still. Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* challenged the basic credentials of the Rawlsian project by placing that project at the end-point of a breakdown in the Enlightenment project. MacIntyre identified as the decisive problem in the hypothetical contract that 'the identification of individuals' interests is prior to, and independent of, the construction of any moral or social bonds between them', which subsequently lacks the context of community and the space in which community and shared goods support justice as a virtue.⁷⁴⁷ This not only revealed the particularity of the Rawlsian project, for MacIntyre, in attempting to rationally determine the principles of justice to regulate the basic structure of society, but the limitation of moral justification for rational individuals outside of any particular context; 'modern politics cannot be a matter of genuine moral consensus. And it is not'. There could be no external rationality by which competing moral claims between individuals could be 'weighed' or balanced.⁷⁴⁸ For Richard Rorty, similarly, there was a particular contingent context to moral disagreement, where our allegiances to social institutions were no longer able to be justified and each as arbitrary as the next from a certain point of view; in effect, we must then surrender 'the idea that liberalism could be justified, and Nazi or Marxist enemies of liberalism refuted, by driving the latter up against an argumentative wall - forcing them to admit that liberal freedom has a "moral privilege" which their own values lacked'.⁷⁴⁹

Whether or not Rawls accepted the full force of such criticisms, the terms of his project was revised in an attempt to meet some of them following the publication of *A Theory of Justice* with *Political Liberalism* and in the work that followed, suggesting that Rawls had moved closer to an awareness of the historical contingency and particularity of his own argument and the assumptions it relied upon. Rawls moved away from the stated aspiration to achieve 'a kind of moral geometry' between reasonable individuals and away from Kant towards a 'political' liberalism, as discussed, that recognised both the contingency and limits of moral agreement

⁷⁴⁶ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge; Harvard University Press, 1989), 89. See also, Michael J. Sandel, 'Political Liberalism', *Harvard Law Review* 107 (1994): 1765-1794.

⁷⁴⁷ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (London: Duckworth 1981), 250-1.

⁷⁴⁸ *ibid.*, 218-9, 221, 246.

⁷⁴⁹ Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 53-4.

within the particular context of modern liberal democracies and competing conceptions of the good. Rawls later clarified the 'claims [he] should like to avoid, for example, claims to universal truth, or claims about the essential nature and identity of persons'. Rawls' political conception of justice, or so he averred, did not rely on controversial moral and metaphysical commitments. It is a 'moral conception worked out for a specific kind of subject, namely, for political, social, and economic institutions' and it is not derived from a 'comprehensive doctrine'. As such, it 'tries to elaborate a reasonable conception for the basic structure alone and involves, so far as possible, no wider commitment to any other doctrine'.⁷⁵⁰ Its political character is, as a matter of definition, established by the presence of an absence. The question for Rawls' critics, however, was whether much was left of Rawls' liberalism by making this move and what this meant for the 'reasonableness' of political liberalism in its assumptions about the political culture of liberal democratic societies and in the extent to which it had provided an overlapping consensus within contemporary political thought.

Unimpressed by this attempt to assert the political character of the revised theory, one reviewer of *Political Liberalism* remarked that 'the most striking feature of "Political Liberalism" is its utter political emptiness'.⁷⁵¹ John Gray, an apostate of neo-liberalism at the time, emphasised the apparent silence in Rawls about the political concerns of the 1990s—or rather, the concerns that Gray took to be significant for liberalism rather than the ones that Rawls did for finding consensus given the fact of reasonable pluralism. Other critics disliked the idea of metaphysical abstinence and the related assertion that the political was the not-metaphysical. That move, they replied, results in a crucial question being begged: 'by saying that what is under discussion is what *ought* to be political; as far as that goes, the Rawlsian account of justice is merely one voice among the multitude'.⁷⁵² For Bonnie Honig, Rawlsian liberalism seemed to lack some crucial elements in how it conceived of politics, for 'politics consists of practices of settlement *and* unsettlement, of disruption *and* administration, of extraordinary events or foundings *and* mundane maintenances. It consists of the forces that decide undecidabilities *and* of those that resist those decisions at the same time'.⁷⁵³ For Chantal Mouffe, Rawlsian discourse neglected 'the role played by conflict, power and interest' as it 'takes for granted the existence of a common rational self-interest on which citizens

⁷⁵⁰ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 11-3. Whether Rawls actually managed to achieve this is another question.

⁷⁵¹ John Gray, 'Can We Agree to Disagree?', *The New York Times* 16th May (1993).

⁷⁵² Glen Newey, *After Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 175-7.

⁷⁵³ Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (London: Cornell University Press, 1993), 205.

acting as free and equal moral persons can agree and ground principles of justice'.⁷⁵⁴ It often appears to critics of his work as though 'Rawls stands at the head of the tradition which writes about political philosophy without mention of politics'.⁷⁵⁵ This line of criticism suggested that the Rawlsian project, despite its appearances and output, has not moved us much beyond the death of *political* thought after all. Yet, one of the problems here is much like Bloom's criticism of Rawls' engagement with the tradition—a particular criteria of the 'political' being used to judge another. The problem is often the status obtained by Rawlsian liberalism for determining the realm of reasonable disagreement within political thought rather than the project per se or liberalism itself.

A different line of criticism was the suggestion that not only was political liberalism insufficiently 'political'—by whomsoever's criteria—but that Rawls' liberalism could only recognise a particularly narrow account of pluralism in the 'real world'. One of Raymond Geuss' central criticisms was, in essence, that Rawls never truly broke with Kantian moral geometry by continuing to insist on moral agreement as the foundations of political society. Despite accepting a certain level of contention and disagreement within society in the assumption of pluralism, what was taken as foundational and universal by him was not the inevitability of disagreement, but rather a sense that consensus is, and always is, the foundation of legitimacy, and that a politics of consent between rational actors captures liberalism's essential characteristics and its most powerful truth.⁷⁵⁶ Those in Rawls' original position are tasked with the construction of the political structure of society within a space that is 'pure of contamination by the facts of history, psychology, economics and sociology'. If this way of putting things certainly succeeds in carrying the traditional theory of the social contract to a higher order of abstraction, it leaves it unclear that a foundation of agreement would or could ever be achieved—let alone such an agreement in a polity that resembles the modern United States or any modern state marked by large scale immigration and emigration—or what the meaning of any hypothetical agreement would be in the political world that we inhabit.⁷⁵⁷ Rawlsian liberalism, on this view, was unable to do much more than issue vague

⁷⁵⁴ Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* (London: Verso, 1993), 49.

⁷⁵⁵ James Alexander, 'Notes Towards a Definition of Politics', *Philosophy* 89, no.2 (2014): 276n. See also Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics*, 90.

⁷⁵⁶ Geuss, 'Liberalism and its Discontents' 17.

⁷⁵⁷ *ibid.*, 22 & 'Neither History nor Praxis' in *Outside Ethics*, 32-3. See also John Dunn, 'Contractualism' in *The History of Political Theory and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 39-65. For 'realism', see Bernard Williams, *In the Beginning was the Deed* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005). On the relationship of 'realism' and 'liberalism', see Matt Sleat, 'Liberal Realism: a liberal response to the realist critique', *Review of Politics* 73, no.3 (2011): 469-496; Katrina Forrester, 'Judith Shklar, Bernard Williams, and Political Realism', *European Journal of Political Theory* 11, no.3 (2012):

moral prescriptions to a world that was itself historically located and marked by war, cruelty, poverty, and injustice.⁷⁵⁸

Whatever the merits of these criticisms, the revised aims of Rawls' liberalism and the particular way in which Rawls positioned his liberalism as part of the liberal tradition is important for that assessment. Rawls came to reflect in *The Law of Peoples* that 'our hope for the future rests on the belief that the possibilities of our social world allow a reasonably just constitutional democratic society living as a member of a reasonably just Society of Peoples', which is an essential step toward being 'reconciled to our social world'.⁷⁵⁹ The principles directed toward the basic structure do involve 'more than a conception of justice; [they express] a social ideal'.⁷⁶⁰ Whilst Rawls moved away from the comprehensive elements of *A Theory of Justice*, one conviction remained in *Political Liberalism*, that the overlapping consensus is not merely a 'modus vivendi', as it is a social aim based on moral grounds in order to buttress the political culture of liberal democracies and to orientate the self-understanding of citizens in their social world.⁷⁶¹ As the dual processes of reconciliation and orientation had become a more prominent theme, so had Rawls come to engage more closely with Hegel, presenting his legacy as part of the liberal tradition—a 'moderately progressive reform-minded liberal' and an 'important exemplar' in the 'liberalism of freedom' alongside Kant, Mill, and *A Theory of Justice*.⁷⁶² In his engagement with Hegel, Rawls was keen to emphasise that 'the concept of person and society fit together, each requires the other and neither stands alone', and that 'as a scheme of free institutions, the basic structure of liberal institutions provides for the achievement of final aims' of all the different kinds that individuals may hold as private individuals and as citizens—'this what makes the state rational and an end in itself'.⁷⁶³ All this was needed if, as Hegel had realised, 'we are to accept and affirm our social world positively, not merely to be resigned to it'.⁷⁶⁴

What Rawls supplied was an attempt to balance the competing values of the liberal tradition that reconciled citizens to the fact of liberal democracies and aimed to find the stable grounds

247-72; & Paul Sagar, 'From Scepticism to Liberalism? Bernard Williams, the Foundations of Liberalism and Political Realism', *Political Studies* 64, no.2 (2016): 368-384.

⁷⁵⁸ Geuss, 'Neither History nor Praxis', 38.

⁷⁵⁹ John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 124.

⁷⁶⁰ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 9.

⁷⁶¹ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 147.

⁷⁶² Rawls, *History of Moral Philosophy*, 330.

⁷⁶³ *ibid.*, 366, 368.

⁷⁶⁴ Rawls, *History of Moral Philosophy*, 331-2; *Justice as Fairness*, 3. For Rawls' relationship to Hegel, see Bercuson, *John Rawls and the History of Political Thought*, ch.2 & Ragip Ege and Herrade Igersheim, 'Rawls with Hegel: The Concept of 'Liberalism of Freedom'', *The European Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 15, no.1 (2008): 25-47.

for consensus given the fact of reasonable pluralism. When the institutions and the grounds for consensus appeared to be breaking down, Rawls' project certainly had some difficulty in maintaining any firm political footing as his critics suggested. Even for Rawls' critics, though, it was unclear where liberalism began and his project ended, when most if not all comprehensive values were potentially balanced on the liberal scales and liberalism had become its own kind of totality in the twentieth century. Rather than there being an underlying historical process of liberalism, or the recognition that tensions are always present, or even a moral geometry for all times that genuinely could fit all claims together, Rawls' liberalism seemed to occupy an awkward space for those critical of it, occupying the background culture of liberal societies as little more than a highfaluting reminder to citizens of the need to play fair lest they become playthings of alien force beyond their control, but nonetheless a grand totality that determined the grounds for reasonable disagreement.⁷⁶⁵

Hegel had remarked that 'it is just as foolish to imagine that any philosophy can transcend its contemporary world as that an individual can overleap his own time'. If the philosophy of such an individual 'does indeed transcend his own time, if it builds a world *as it ought to be*, then it certainly has an existence, but only with his opinions—a pliant medium in which the imagination can construct anything it pleases'.⁷⁶⁶ This seemed to reflect the space in which Rawls' liberalism ended up, as a reflection of its own time in the post-war consolidation of liberal democracies, whilst attempting to move beyond it by reconciling and affirming the competing claims of liberal values in a scheme for the self-understanding of reasonable persons as those conditions changed and shifted. *A Theory of Justice* had attempted to transcend its historical context, but as some critics have suggested, 'it is, after all, one thing to be a modernist who is committed to formal theories; it is entirely another thing to ignore the historical context of one's own modernism'.⁷⁶⁷ *Political Liberalism's* turn to history, as other critics have suggested, has been 'deradicalizing' by limiting the ambition of political thought and has defanged the radical alternatives to Rawlsian liberalism by turning to the contingency and the fragility of liberal consensus.⁷⁶⁸ The dissatisfaction with each of these sides of Rawls' liberalism has often looked past the other, such that the merit and particularity of Rawls' liberalism which lies in-between these two lines of criticism has been overlooked. *A Theory of Justice* and *Political Liberalism* together represent an attempt to reconcile both pluralism and consensus for liberalism from within an account of the liberal tradition. That attempt,

⁷⁶⁵ Rawls, *History of Moral Philosophy*, 369-371.

⁷⁶⁶ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 22.

⁷⁶⁷ Bevir and Gališanka, 'John Rawls in Historical Context', 724-5.

⁷⁶⁸ Forrester, *In the Shadow of Justice*, 267-9.

however, is but one revision in the terms in which the liberal tradition and its relationship to liberalism more broadly has been understood in the twentieth century.

Conclusion

A Theory of Justice was not only said to have been a revival of political thinking in Anglo-American circles in relation to the post-war consolidation of liberal democracies, it was also a reimagining of liberalism and the liberal tradition for the self-understanding of citizens in those liberal democracies. The social contract tradition, as one line of descent through Locke, Rousseau, and Kant, was prioritised as having laid the foundations of justice as fairness by basing the institutions of liberal democracies on the consent and consensus of their members. Though *Political Liberalism* differed in some important aspects when it came to the fact of reasonable pluralism and the explicit defence of liberalism as a historical tradition, the liberal tradition understood in terms of the social contract provided the means through which a reasonable pluralism could be recognised whilst competing claims were reconciled together as part of an overlapping consensus. Rawls' liberalism reversed Berlin's earlier attempt to cast Rousseau—and Kant's 'kingdom of ends'—out from liberalism's gallery of worthies. Similarly, compared to some other mid-twentieth century liberals, Rawls placed less emphasis on liberalism as distinct form of individualism—though it retained a clear commitment and preference in that regard with the lexical priority of liberty—instead seeing liberalism through the consensus and reconciliation of individuals to one another and the social order. Most important of all, instead of antagonism, Rawls' liberalism sought reconciliation.

Rawls' liberalism not only attempted to reconcile the conflicting lines of descent within the liberal tradition, such as the legacies of Locke and Rousseau, as well as the individual to the social order; it also extended that framework to include some of liberalism's critics. On the one hand, critics of liberalism who remained on the periphery, such as Marx and Nietzsche, were domesticated and their criticisms declawed. On the other hand, critics such as Hegel were brought back into the liberal fold—after being banished to the margins by the likes of Hobhouse and later Berlin—in order to recognise the very processes of reconciliation between the individual and the social order. The liberal tradition, as Rawls presented it, was capable of meeting its critics and reaffirming our faith in the background culture of liberal democratic institutions, to such an extent that it was sometimes unclear what stood inside and outside of it to Rawls' critics, and what its own claims to 'reasonableness' amounted to. Revising

liberalism in terms of the social contract may have neither moved liberalism much beyond the 'death of political philosophy' nor any closer to the moral agreement that such a revision required in practice if it were to carry any obligatory force for individuals who were not already committed to the idea that voluntary agreement was the only appropriate standard to govern political and social institutions. There has nonetheless been a broad consensus over the way in which the Rawlsian project has come to be synonymous with 'liberalism'. Whilst critics of Rawls challenged the moral and political presuppositions of his project, Rawls' fashioning of the liberal tradition has remained influential in Anglo-American thinking, often for those very critics as well by shaping the terms in which they characterise their intended target. In this way, liberalism's defenders and its critics have coalesced around one particular meaning of 'liberalism' and an image of 'the liberal tradition', which, as this chapter has shown, was just one more contingent revision of the liberalism in the twentieth century.

Whilst Rawls came to revise the terms in which he construed the ideal of consensus, placing less emphasis on its more Kantian manifestations, justice as fairness aimed to reconcile competing claims as part of a single whole. In doing so, this reflected the broader trend of the mid- to late- twentieth century in which 'liberalism' came to be spoken of in more abstract terms as a historical tradition, as did the very idea of 'liberalism', which removed any self-conscious historical expression and underlying dynamic processes, though the historical positioning of political liberalism was later emphasised. Without an underlying historical process to liberalism, the future seems more precarious with the onset of dusk. This perhaps reflects the limits of a tradition that had faded into the implicit assumptions of 'Western' political life. Whether and how far those assumptions continue to govern it in the twenty-first century is another matter.

5. Conclusion: Liberalism and Three Histories of Liberalism

I

In this thesis, I have explored the history of the history of liberalism. I have focused on three particular histories that were written in three particular contexts; liberalism according to L. T. Hobhouse, Isaiah Berlin, and John Rawls. Each of these histories provides a different account of liberalism, its history, and the liberal tradition. What they demonstrate, collectively, is that as liberalism has changed over time, so too has the liberal tradition; as the liberal tradition has changed, so too has liberalism; and yet it nevertheless makes sense to speak of liberalism as one thing, one determinate subject, abiding across time. Their relationship to one another and the way in which they relate to one another has shifted and altered over time through the agency of writers who wished to explore its meaning and in doing so contribute to its further development or redaction.

Understanding the complex character of liberalism as a historical phenomenon for these reasons implies a wider perspective than is implied by focusing on the hunt for a compelling stipulative definition or an authoritative single history—one may of course pursue these two enterprises in the effort to capture a particular aspect of liberalism's character but these enterprises, as Butterfield and Oakeshott in different ways lay bare, are not historical enterprises properly speaking. I have examined three different histories of liberalism in order to not only understand the relationship between liberalism, its history, and the liberal tradition but to understand it historically, and at the same time to show the limits of historical understanding: the complex character of liberalism itself, what it was and is, requires a more flexible or at least a more self-conscious approach to the subject before us.

In this section of the conclusion, I will summarise what is most distinctive in each of the three histories I have surveilled and draw out some of the most important similarities and differences between them. The next section offers some concluding reflections on the broader relationship between liberalism and the liberal tradition. The third and final section sets out the research of this thesis in relation to current and potential areas of further research.

For Hobhouse, the positive and negative components of liberalism were part of one dialectical story of liberty in history. Liberalism represented the successive developments of the internal antagonisms of the liberal tradition. Not all oppositions, however, could be reconciled. What

he considered some of the unsavoury aspects of 'Hegelianism' were hard to square with the self-development of individuals and liberty-for-a-community. These aspects became still more knotty as war with Germany approached and hostility to German philosophy became more and more pronounced in Anglophone circles—in ways that frequently masked some of the ambiguities within liberalism itself.

Berlin, who disliked the totalising tendencies he detected in Kant, Hegel, Marx, and Rousseau before them, carried this dislike of intellectual monopolists and monopolism into his discussion of liberalism. Two lineages of liberalism were detected, each illuminating some part of liberalism, neither one embracing the whole of it. Berlin often wrote as if to suggest that these two streams of thought flowed in radically different directions, each towards a different political destination, one congenial to him, the other deplorable but he was clear that both were significant human achievements even if it was no less clear that reconciliation between the two was neither possible or desirable. The two were partners as well as antagonists. They could not easily exist without each other and defined themselves in opposition to one another, developing perpetually in tension with one another. With Rawls, reconciliation returned as an ideal, something formally desirable and possible, and indeed achievable, if not achieved, via his theory of justice as fairness. This theory originally subjected individuals to the constraints of Kantian 'moral geometry' but later sought to find an 'overlapping consensus' given the 'fact of reasonable pluralism'. Later still, he would come to speak, in the manner of Hegel, of liberalism as the project of reconciliation of individuals to the social order from within the background culture of liberal democratic states.

The writing of these histories is discussed historically in the thesis. Each history purports to offer accounts of the development or developments of the liberal tradition that are presented in some moods as accounts of the historical past, but may be better understood as rival versions of the same 'practical' past. 'Rival' may not be quite the right word, for these three accounts of the liberal tradition stand in a dialectical relationship with one another.

Hobhouse's liberalism represents the reconciliation of competing lines of descent within the liberal tradition as he construed them in his own day as part of the dialectical movement of history. Berlin's liberalism represents the liberal tradition as it appeared to him at his day, as fractured, pluralist, and divided, caught or suspended between irresolvable tensions. Rawls' liberalism placed itself in a liberal tradition that was both pluralist, as Berlin had suggested, and capable of reconciliation, as Hobhouse had suggested, but without the assistance of the dialectical movement of history. The extent to which Rawls' liberalism provides a genuine

synthesis is an open question: it is not a stated aim of Rawls' liberalism to bring off such a synthesis and significant doubts arise over the historical plausibility of presenting liberalism and its history as Rawls presents it, but the *usefulness* of presenting it in those terms is certainly arguable, especially if one is trying to persuade the world that our shared political culture is so soaked in liberalism and so widely agreed to be so that we can assume it as the ubiquitous background of our ongoing public deliberations.

All three writers were liberals. All three understood, liberalism to be a clearly definable subject, something that was what it was and not something else. Each found it useful to distinguish liberalism from what they deemed to be antithetical to liberalism and in doing so defined liberalism in opposition to that something else and the something else by its opposition to liberalism. In making that distinction, they sought to give liberalism some kind of primacy or superiority over its rivals as a tradition. Liberalism, as they construed it, was the 'true' heir to the heritage of liberty and of 'Western' values more broadly; not those alternatives that spuriously claimed that title for themselves while constructing the nightmarish totalities of the twentieth century. The distance between liberalism and the alternatives was not always as great as they suggested. Claims of a distinct intellectual heritage often masked ambiguities at the heart of liberalism and the faith that it had some kind of unchallengeable entitlement to be the inheritor of the future only made that primacy more doubtful, especially as the complexity, variation, and conflict internal to it was amplified and strained by the existential threats—both internal and external—with which it had to reckon over the twentieth century.

These threats, and perceptions of their urgency, shifted over time and from place to place, and the accounts of liberalism and of the liberal tradition offered up in reaction shifted too. One might choose, for one's own present purposes, to find rupture and wreckage; these writers, as I do, preferred to see continuity as well as change, similarity as well as difference.

One similarity flows from the supposition that for Hobhouse, Berlin, and Rawls, liberalism is tied to some foundational commitment to the 'individual' and their capacity to choose. That individual is understood in different ways, so too are their relationships to other individuals and the social order. But in contradistinction to the world-views that each member of this triumvirate perceived to imperil that commitment, liberalism's significance resided for them in some aspect of the value attributed to the individual in relation to the social order, and, in particular, in relation and in contradistinction to the state. They also attempted to fuse this commitment with aspects of democratic egalitarianism and humanitarian socialism, whilst also

attempting to soften some of liberalism's more extreme individualist and elitist tendencies and their imperialist and perfectionist manifestations. Some versions of this high-wire act were more convincing than others. Similarly, in their differing accounts of the liberal tradition, the historical figures who they found to have upheld that commitment in an exemplary way were endowed with canonical status in opposition to others who either failed to do so or who actively conspired to subvert it. So, the commitment to the 'individual' in relation to the social order plays a pivotal role in the stories told of liberalism's emergence into, significance for, the modern world in the shifting political circumstances of the twentieth century.

John Dunn once remarked that there are two slightly different meanings of individualism, and as a result, two lines of thought within liberalism: 'one is rationalist and inclined towards transcendence, much preoccupied with the aesthetics of consciousness. The other is mechanical and reductive, with a strong propensity to reduce human nature to a stream of intrinsically meaningless and self-referential desires'.⁷⁶⁹ What we might call a 'positive' liberalism and a 'negative' liberalism are being juxtaposed to another; one devoted to the self-development of individuals, the other defending the self-sovereignty of individuals. I do not think that it is helpful to regard them in the end as rival liberalisms.⁷⁷⁰ Rather, I prefer to argue that liberalism *is* the tension between them and the ongoing Sisyphean attempt to resolve them once the 'liberal' tradition of the nineteenth-century, which was elitist in inspiration and character, was forced to make terms with democracy or risk being eclipsed altogether.

It was noted in the Introduction that Mill marks a turning point in a number of senses. He stands at the point where 'liberal' history merges into 'liberalism', and at which reflections on the meaning of liberty in the modern world merge into attempts to define liberalism's principles and its origins and trajectory. In his writings it is possible to discern similar tensions regarding the individual which, through those writings and reflection upon them, were transfused into later conceptions of liberalism down to today. In Mill we find appeals to both the self-sovereignty of individuals *and* the self-development of individuals. We also find an attempt to curb the excesses of unrestrained democratic forces, an appreciation for socialism's cause, and a defence of one form of colonialism over another. Hobhouse, Berlin, and Rawls (to some extent) each looked to Mill and the legacy he bequeathed to assist their own understandings of the inner workings of liberalism, and the best way of reconciling the 'rightness', or as Voegelin put it, the 'timelessness' of liberal values, with shifting political circumstances. As Voegelin said, the 'picture of liberalism changes because liberalism itself

⁷⁶⁹ Dunn, *Western Political Theory*, 34.

⁷⁷⁰ See, for example, John Gray, *The Two Faces of Liberalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).

changes in the process of history', and its 'political opinions and attitudes which have their optimal truth in the situation which motivates them', and are 'overtaken by history and required to do justice to new situations.' The aim of the thesis has been to explain the deep truth in that claim, just as its manner of organization is intended to answer to it. With liberalism, the past has continually been looked to and written over as circumstances has changed, in the attempt to demonstrate that liberalism survives, prevails, persists through change, as one living 'tradition'.

II

Liberalism, Alasdair MacIntyre tells us, was 'born of antagonism to all tradition'.⁷⁷¹ Yet, liberalism has often been understood as a tradition. Indeed, as the thesis has argued, certain features of traditions are central to the very development of liberalism as a distinctive historical phenomenon. I have set out in this thesis to explore the history of three histories of liberalism, but a few words more may be in order about the liberal tradition *qua* tradition as it features in my central argument.

At its most basic, a tradition is the historical conveyance of received notions or practices: something or a set of things is transferred through time from generation to generation in an unbroken sequence. In other words, traditions have continuity. They may also, though not necessarily, have canons and a core, either a body of written commentary upon and in response to the past or some particular 'truth' that has been handed down. When appeal is made to the liberal tradition, appeal is being made to one or more of these features: continuity, canon, and core. Liberalism, we are being told, is something that has been passed down through multiple hands while retaining an identity through time, perhaps undergoing development in the process of being passed down, perhaps not. In the various tellings of the tale, a particular intellectual lineage is often privileged, and a sequence of thinkers and thought is identified as decisive in shaping the ideas and ideals of liberalism into its present form. That form is hallowed by and freighted with the authority of the thinkers who, it is now said, shaped it into that form—even as liberalism positions itself as the inheritor of the future and as a break from a past characterised by retrograde ideas and structures which needed to be swept away for human liberty to reign. Its essence may not only be of historical

⁷⁷¹ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 10.

significance, but potentially of divine or transcendent significance, because it is one and it is true.⁷⁷²

Liberalism has the outward appearance of a tradition and has often been presented as emerging in distinction to other traditions. I argued in the Introduction that there is at least one important sense in which this is true, as what the twentieth-century knew as liberalism was invented at the end of the nineteenth century in opposition to earlier understandings of it and to rival ideologies of a peculiar modern kind, not least conservatism. For MacIntyre, the transformation of liberalism into a tradition was something more portentous than that: the acknowledgement that modernity was broken, a scrabbling around amongst the ruins to make sense of a world that no longer made sense—the Enlightenment project had failed to provide an objective rational form of justification independent of tradition, while mounting a deadly attack on all existing traditions. The 'facts of tradition' are the presuppositions of our activities and enquiries. It is often when those presuppositions are failing, disintegrating, or being challenged, MacIntyre suggests, that they become consciously acknowledged.⁷⁷³ The peculiarity of liberalism lay in its unwillingness to recognise its own patricidal origins or its parasitic character, presenting itself as an escape from tradition; from locally determined rationality; from competing conceptions of the human good; and from incompatible forms of justice while at the same time helping itself to all the advantages that tradition conferred—such as authoritatively common presuppositions, mutually recognised criteria for the resolution of arguments, and so forth. What began as an 'appeal to alleged principles of shared rationality against what was felt to be the tyranny of tradition, has itself been transformed into a tradition whose continuities are partly defined by the interminability of the debate over such principles'.⁷⁷⁴ On MacIntyre's analysis, the commitment to the individual was the crucial weapon in this movement of 'cosmopolitan modernity' against tradition.⁷⁷⁵

MacIntyre represents this movement as part of a wider passage from order to chaos.⁷⁷⁶ Whatever we make of the wider story he wishes to tell about the history of 'Western' moral thought, there is, I think, some truth to his observations about the transformation of liberalism into a tradition. There was an attempt to canonise something like the movement MacIntyre perceives as a form of tradition in the late-nineteenth and twentieth century, whose continuities have in part been defined by the interminability of the debate over its core

⁷⁷² Alexander, 'A Systematic Theory of Tradition', 10, 24.

⁷⁷³ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 7-8.

⁷⁷⁴ *ibid.*, 335.

⁷⁷⁵ *ibid.*, 327.

⁷⁷⁶ See MacIntyre, *After Virtue*.

principles, and the ambiguities which followed in relation to the language and structure of tradition are the result of this process. Liberalism, like any other tradition on MacIntyre's account, is a 'contingently grounded and founded tradition', an 'articulation of an historically developed and developing set of social institutions and forms of activity' yet peculiarly prone to present itself as a body of timelessly valid scientific propositions about political reality. Interestingly, MacIntyre read Rawls' career as the gradual coming to consciousness of this propensity, one which the move from *A Theory of Justice* to *Political Liberalism* personified and dramatized.⁷⁷⁷

The notion of 'the liberal tradition', I have assumed, and I have endeavoured to show, is something that has evolved over time. That evolution was traced in the three central chapters of the thesis via the historical reconstruction of the construction of the sort of wrong histories required to sustain the notion of liberalism *as* a tradition. That is one reason why my thesis differs from MacIntyre's. I have tried, I suppose, to have my cake and eat it too, by arguing on the one hand that there is such a thing as liberalism as a historical phenomenon; and on the other, that there is liberalism as a tradition which sustains itself by abridging that history and putting it to highly selective use for present purposes first at this time, then at that, and then at that. Oakeshott's distinction between the historical past and the practical past has helped me to distinguish between these two phenomena philosophically and to clarify the relationship between liberalism, its history, and the liberal tradition by means of it, but in practice, when it comes to recounting the history of liberalism, 'right' history and 'wrong' history are and have been entangled with one another in all the accounts of liberalism and the stories told of its emergence we have met with in the thesis. Rather like Skinner's distinction between 'history' and 'historical semantics', it dissolves as soon as you try to write about something that is not only a word and a concept but a regime and a tradition.

III

I want to finish by suggesting how and where the argument of the thesis opens up avenues for further research, as this will help to underline, with suitable finality, what the thesis has and has not attempted to do.

First, the thesis does not attempt to provide a comprehensive account of all the different meanings of 'liberalism' from its earliest use to the present day. My account of the history of

⁷⁷⁷ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 345-6.

the history of liberalism has been selective in such a way that some histories have been discussed more than others and some histories have been discussed at the expense of others. The selection has been selective, but not arbitrary, because it has been made with a view to vindicating a certain view—my view—of liberalism and its history. Just as the thesis has not attempted to write *the* history of liberalism, I have not attempted to write *the* history of the history of liberalism, but *a* history of that history. I have selected three particular histories which have allowed me to explore the relationship between liberalism, its history, and the liberal tradition. In choosing which accounts to survey, my selection has been driven partly by considerations of status within the citadels of liberal thought and partly by the representative qualities of the positions chosen. The central figures of the three central chapters of the thesis—Hobhouse, Berlin, and Rawls—each gave an account of the liberal tradition that bears distinct similarities and differences to the others, and each not only conditioned what came afterwards but also, in a sense, what came before; they influenced the ways in which the liberal tradition was discussed and the crucial elements that were understood to compose it.

Each chapter is a snapshot of the trends in liberal thinking at a certain point in time and a sketch of a particular thinker in a certain situation, personal and political, whose views are elucidated with reference to a range of other thinkers with whom they shared a context. Each chapter also attempts to situate these three histories in comparison with one another as part of a broader story about the development of liberalism and the liberal tradition over the long twentieth century. I do not see this as exhaustive by any stretch of the imagination; alternatives could be explored, other lineages followed out.

Second, in tracking the shifts in the accounts of the liberal tradition that have been surveyed, I have followed the example of my central characters, and embraced the intrinsically whiggish tendencies of any story of an 'ism', in picking out various figures in the history of political thought as 'proto-liberals', a slightly weaselly label that announces that I am smudging over the distinction on which I am otherwise insisting, between the historical and the practical past. Other 'proto-liberals', and their antagonists have been mentioned only in passing or left out. I have tended to focus, in each case, on those who have exerted the greatest gravitational pull on the liberalisms of Hobhouse, Berlin, and Rawls, and then, to sharpen the contrast, noted when and where these figures have reappeared, transformed, in other settings.

Recent work, from which I have drawn a significant amount of inspiration, has drawn attention to the gap between the historical Locke and the Locke of historical significance.⁷⁷⁸ As I said in the Introduction, this is the gap which opens up the conceptual space for thinking about liberalism and the perpetual motion that I found so hard to capture to begin with. Within this space, other approaches besides the one I have adopted might be adopted. For example, Locke and like figures such as Mill, Kant, Rousseau, Hegel and Constant, have featured in this thesis incidentally, when I have noted shifts in the characterisation of these figures between different accounts of liberalism and related efforts to articulate liberal 'canon'. It might be illuminating to make such figures central to the story and to show the formation and shifts not only in the canon of liberalism, but also the counter-canon, and to patrol the borders with an eye to interlopers and exiles. If one was so inclined, a comprehensive map of the shifting characterisations of all 'liberal' and 'non-liberal' figures could be made to show a kind of time-lapse adumbration of the development of the liberal tradition. One might also attempt to plot out a comprehensive account of how Locke, in particular, was transformed into the *ur*-liberal during the twentieth century by mapping all of his appearances in sundry accounts of the liberal tradition.

This is beyond the scope of this thesis, where such matters have been treated, where they have been, in broad strokes. However, there is space for research complementary to, rather than incompatible with, my own thesis, which explores the ways in which figures besides Locke were subjected to the same processes of transformation to meet the needs of liberalism's self-image.

The final note on which to end is that my thesis aims to make a critical and comparative point that is both historical and philosophical in nature in relation to the different 'pasts' of liberalism. Recent work has attempted to show the disjunction between what liberalism was and what liberalism became, focusing on the historical tradition of 'liberality' that preceded the dominant accounts of liberalism that developed over the long twentieth century.⁷⁷⁹ My research has attempted to complicate this binary narrative by exploring an alternative hypothesis through the differences and similarities between three histories of liberalism. On the one hand, I have tried to show the wide range of developments over the long twentieth century and without depicting them all, in whig style, as parts of a single line of development;

⁷⁷⁸ See Bell, 'What is Liberalism?', 692-705; Stanton, 'John Locke and the Fable of Liberalism'; & John Dunn, 'Measuring Locke's Shadow' in *John Locke: Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. Ian Shapiro (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 257-85.

⁷⁷⁹ Rosenblatt, *The Lost History of Liberalism* & Alexander, 'A Conjectural History of Liberalism'

yet I maintain they are all concerned with the same thing, the same determinate subject. On the other hand, I *have* shown, or tried to show, in whig style, the different ways in which the past has been retrospectively shaped over the long twentieth century. Whether this thesis is judged to have made a contribution to recovering the 'lost historiography of liberalism'⁷⁸⁰, or to have succeeded in its ambition to say something novel, interesting, and historically respectable about what liberalism is and was, must, I think, depend in the end on the point of view of those examining it. For it is a crucial implication of my approach that every attempt to think or speak about liberalism and the liberal tradition, however scrupulous one aspires to be as an historian or a scholar, wittingly or not, bespeaks a certain point of view, namely our own.

⁷⁸⁰ Jeffery R. Collins, 'The Lost Historiography of Liberalism', *The Review of Politics* 81, no. 4 (2019), 673-88.

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