



# THE AFTERLIFE OF IDEALISM

The Impact of New Idealism on  
British Historical and Political  
Thought, 1945-1980

**Admir Skodo**



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Admir Skodo

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## Introduction

### NEW IDEALISM AND BRITISH INTELLECTUAL LIFE

Even though R.G. Collingwood's and Michael Oakeshott's lasting contributions to the philosophy of history and political theory have been registered, their impact on British post-World War II historical and political thought has been seen as marginal.<sup>1</sup> It is symptomatic that Christopher Parker's *The English Historical Tradition*, the only systematic study to seriously consider idealism as a tradition informing British historical thought, dismisses the new idealism from the theory and practice of British postwar historiography: 'Of course, most historians concerned themselves not at all with either Oakeshott or Collingwood.'<sup>2</sup> The ever perceptive Perry Anderson has noted the absence of this type of idealism in discussions on postwar British ideologies: 'Anglo-Scottish Idealism of the early years of this century [...] has become one of the least recollected episodes of the native past.'<sup>3</sup>

This book argues that the new idealism of Collingwood, Oakeshott, and to a lesser extent their Italian counterpart, Benedetto Croce, had an unmistakable impact on the historical and political thought of the leading British historians and public figures E.H. Carr, G.R. Elton, Isaiah Berlin, Peter Laslett, Henry Pelling, George Kitson Clark, Oliver MacDonagh, Asa Briggs, and Maurice Cowling.<sup>4</sup> These historians are major representatives of what I will call (new idealist) revisionist historiography.<sup>5</sup> Most of these revisionists may be forgotten today, but they held prominent places

in British academia and public life in the first three decades of the postwar era. More importantly, with their emphasis on the plural and contingent forms of social and political life, and their discussions on the nature of history, the revisionists helped shape the historical profession in a way that is recognizable even today. The impact of the new idealism and revisionism extended even to Marxist-inspired historiography, which made a point of incorporating culture and agency as historical categories in response to the pressure created by the idealists and revisionists to acknowledge the contingent and pluralistic quality of social life and historical interpretation.<sup>6</sup> But while Marxism, a nineteenth-century tradition, is today considered a significant intellectual force in postwar British historical and political thought,<sup>7</sup> idealism is not. This book argues that unless we consider new idealism as a major tradition in the postwar era, our understanding of the origins and content of postwar British historical and political thought will remain incomplete and lopsided.

The postwar period in British historiography has been surprisingly little studied.<sup>8</sup> This shortage of studies is striking since the period was, according to David Cannadine, the ‘Golden Age’ of British twentieth-century historiography,<sup>9</sup> reflecting, in Eric Hobsbawm’s oft-cited words, the broader Golden Age of the European twentieth century.<sup>10</sup> This was a time ‘when Clio never had it so good’ owing, in material terms, to the massive university expansion issuing from the educational reforms of the early postwar welfare state.<sup>11</sup>

Cannadine has made a very perceptive observation regarding the logic of Golden Age (including revisionist) scholarship. The logic of this scholarship lies in radically revising or strongly modifying liberal-whig<sup>12</sup> historiography by drawing on the nascent social sciences and political norms from postwar British society.<sup>13</sup> Golden Age historians viewed the English past as a non-linear process of fractures, breaks, and discontinuities that are too complex to be conducive to a belief in a unitary English political culture able to withstand, even harness, rebellious social discontent and political opposition. In this context, Christopher Hill argued for the ‘Puritan revolution’ as a disjunctive break in English history; Elton spoke of the ‘Tudor revolution’ in English government; Laslett recovered an early modern world that ‘we have lost’; E.P. Thompson unearthed the ‘making’ of the English working class; George Kitson Clark spoke of the ‘making’ of Victorian Britain; and Oliver McDonagh championed the ‘administrative revolution’ of the nineteenth century.<sup>14</sup>

These examples—which include historians of various ideological and methodological casts—clearly show that postwar historiography was informed by a variety of theoretical and ideological traditions. We should therefore reject the reductionism of professional historiography, as seems to be the prevailing trend, to that supposedly value-neutral, strictly empirical, and technical historical method that was established by the Rankean School in the early nineteenth century. William Stubbs, F.W. Maitland, and T.F. Tout purportedly imported this method to Britain at the end of Victorian period, and it has been the mainstay of historiography ever since. Michael Bentley—perhaps the foremost student of the historians that this book examines, which he calls ‘modernists’—thus argues that early postwar historiography is defined by a persistent Rankeanism: ‘Rather than find itself attracted to the idealism of Collingwood and Oakeshott [...] the [historical] profession largely ignored them *et hoc genus omne* and forged a common-sense notion of truth and factuality out of a daily engagement with historical sources.’<sup>15</sup> What modernist historians—such as Elton, Butterfield, Clark, Namier, and Trevor-Roper—above all wanted to achieve, according to Bentley, was ‘a Rankian process of self-dissolution’ through which the past in its nakedness would emerge to posterity.<sup>16</sup> Only this process would be conducive for ‘a modernized past’ to emerge which ‘would contain no “bias” and allow only judgments that aimed for “objectivity”’. Peter Novick has made a similar argument regarding the history of modern American historiography,<sup>17</sup> an argument that has been accepted wholesale in later accounts of the intellectual history of the American historical profession.<sup>18</sup>

These accounts have persistently attempted to fend off idealism from the history of postwar historiography and political thought. Another clear example of this type of account is a recent history of Anglo-American constitutional historiography written by Anthony Brundage and Richard Cosgrove. These two historians go so far as to argue that Collingwood, despite his idealism, ‘held views of a decidedly Stubbsian nature’. Indeed, he often ‘held positions more like Stubbs’s than Hegel’s’.<sup>19</sup> Placing Collingwood in the same fold as Stubbs, who is often considered a, if not *the*, founding father of modern British scientific history, signals an attempt to reduce the new idealism to modernist historiography. But in doing so, it suggests that Collingwood and new idealism *did* have a part to play in the manifold making of modern British and American historiography.<sup>20</sup>

There is some truth to this reductionist interpretation, but it is lopsided. Brundage and Cosgrove, for example, rightly point out that the

new idealists happily embraced the strictures of technical and empiricist historical scholarship. However, they wrongly bring their interpretations to a close there, since for the new idealists, numerous problems stemming from both the past and the present prompted an approach to the past that was faithful to the evidence, but remained underdetermined by the evidence since there is more than one supporting pillar in the architecture of historical knowledge acquisition. Among these other pillars are, most importantly, the ‘historical imagination’ and an irreducible methodological pluralism and perspectivism.

\* \* \*

At this point, it may be useful to introduce the new idealism and British revisionist historiography in more precise terms. The new idealism was an interwar philosophical movement in Italy and Britain which arose in opposition to the historical, but not political, thought of the ‘absolute’ idealism that had dominated British intellectual life during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. British absolute idealism—the leading figures of which were T.H. Green, Edward Caird, Bernard Bosanquet, and F.H. Bradley—drew heavily on Hegel in conceiving all reality as spiritual and intellectual activity, the individual expressions of which are fundamentally united in an ‘Absolute Mind’ or ‘Absolute Spirit’, the highest historical stage of which was the nation-state, and the final historical goal of which was the God of Christian theology. History, for the absolute idealists, was the teleological process through which the Absolute Mind overcomes its internal divisiveness and historico-logical contradictions to achieve the metaphysical unity from which it ultimately originates. This optimistic and absolutist conception of mind and history lost its hold over many British historians and philosophers following the trauma of World War I, the rise of totalitarianism, the coming of an irreducible plurality of contending social groups and ideologies on the national-political main stage, and the emergence of anti-metaphysical scientific and technocratic expertise within culture and politics.

The new idealists were reared in the language of absolute idealism and accepted its analysis of reality as mind and history. In light of the socio-political changes just mentioned, however, they conceived of mind, and thereby human reality, as essentially concrete and contingent experience, and history as obeying only the direction that concrete minds, or ‘agents’, provide for it, intentionally and unintentionally, consciously and unconsciously, as individuals and as social groups. H. Wildon Carr, the British new idealist philosopher, explained in 1924 the meaning of the new ideal-

ism: ‘The new idealism of which I wish to speak is the view of those who hold that philosophy is wholly concerned with the actual world of experience, and not, directly or indirectly, with a transcendental world.’<sup>21</sup> The historian James Patrick is one of the few scholars that have vaguely registered the differences between new and absolute idealism:

‘The [British] new idealism differed from the old in its moderation of the Hegelianism of Green and Bradley; in its acknowledged debt to the Italian idealists Benedetto Croce and Giovanni Gentile; and in its interest in history and the philosophy of history.’<sup>22</sup>

The new idealists rejected the metaphysical unity and teleology that were of central concern to absolute idealism. Their philosophy of history was, in this move away from metaphysics and the concept of progress, wedded to developments in professional historiography, and so their philosophy was geared toward developing a methodology of history more attuned to their interwar present.

‘Revisionism’ has become a much-discussed concept in historical theory in the last decade or so.<sup>23</sup> As a historical category, however, thus far revisionism has mainly been employed to make sense of the Marxist and socialist revisionism of the 1950s and the 1960s. The introduction to the 1962 collection of essays entitled *Revisionism* gives weight to revisionism as a new movement in the socialist tradition: ‘We seem to have reached a point when Marx’s spiritual heirs, legitimate or otherwise, can truly say: “We are all revisionists now.”’<sup>24</sup> Marxist revisionists—which included prominent European intellectuals such as Leszek Kolakowski, E.P. Thompson, Anthony Crosland, and Milovan Djilas—had become disillusioned with what they perceived as an autocratic, bureaucratic, and ideologically rigid ‘real socialism’. They championed alternative readings of Marx and allowed for ideological change sensitive to the requirements of individual autonomy in modern industrial and bureaucratic society. However, for those Marxists who remained committed to real socialism, that is, the Soviet system, revisionism marked the masked return of bourgeois ideology, since revisionism rejected revolutionary politics (on account of its seemingly predestined perversion into Soviet-style oppression). For Eric Hobsbawm, thus: “‘Revisionism’ in the history of socialist and communist movements illustrates the dangers of an isolated history of ideas particularly well, because it has always been almost exclusively an affair of intellectuals.”<sup>25</sup>

The revisionist historians studied in this book were neither revisionist nor orthodox Marxists, although the Fabian strand within British social-

ism inspired them. They were neither a school nor a group in the strict sociological sense of these terms.<sup>26</sup> They were far too dispersed ideologically and intellectually to be able to be compared, for instance, to the Communist Party Historians Group, or the New Left historians, or the ‘Peterhouse Tories’ at Cambridge, which was a loose conglomerate of conservative historians, including Herbert Butterfield, Maurice Cowling, and John Vincent.<sup>27</sup> Thus, the thought of the revisionist historians was in many ways similar to that of other elite Oxbridge historians of the early postwar era, such as E.P. Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm, Jenifer Hart, J.H. Plumb, David Knowles, Hugh Trevor-Roper, and Herbert Butterfield. All of these historians, and others, will feature in this book, but it is the new idealist revisionists to which most attention will be devoted.

Even if they cannot be reduced to a sociological or ideological type, this book demonstrates that the new idealist revisionists followed a similar conceptual trajectory in terms of their *philosophy*, their *histories*, and their *political thought* (themes introduced in more detail in the following section). What allows us to understand this apparently unlikely conceptual convergence—not excluding the revisionists’ originality, indebtedness to other traditions, and departures from the new idealism—is the revisionist historians’ original and multifarious appropriations of new idealist thought. But even where the appropriations of the new idealism are not directly evident in revisionist texts, their thought intimately parallels that of the new idealism. In that respect, the new idealism in this study acts as a ‘clarifier’, an exceptionally clear conceptual exemplar of what the revisionists were trying to do in their various interpretive undertakings in various intellectual fields.<sup>28</sup>

This book, in other words, reveals that the new idealism underpinned some, but by no means all, of the most influential and most original non-Marxist historical and political revisionist perspectives between World War II and the end of the 1970s. The study ends in the late 1970s because even though some of the revisionist historians lived well beyond this politically and intellectually transitional decade, they could not adhere to the new developments in cultural and political life that were taking place since the late 1970s. These developments include neoliberalism, the influx of post-Marxist and poststructuralist theory in British historiography, and, relatedly, the decisive rejection of nationalist concepts such as ‘English character’, which still had currency among the revisionists.

A passage from Carr’s best-selling and widely read *What is History?* can serve to illustrate the argument of this book. Carr suggested in this passage that a new form of idealism informed British post-World War II

historiography. Carr argued that there is a distinctively European tradition that permeates contemporary philosophy of history. This tradition was initially forged in the fusion between German historicism and idealism. In the early twentieth century, ‘the torch passed to Italy, where Croce began to propound a philosophy of history which obviously owed much to the German masters’. Carr hastened to add that ‘Croce was an important influence on the Oxford philosopher and historian Collingwood, the only British thinker in the present century who has made a serious contribution to the philosophy of history’.

Carr believed that this new form of philosophical idealism was essential to the historical discipline. The new idealism mirrored and made an attempt to come to terms with a post-World War I Europe defined by socio-political, intellectual, and moral plurality, historical ruptures, irrationality, and contingency, while the whiggish idealism of the Victorian era mirrored an optimistic belief in individual liberty and progress, projected onto the past in the form of national teleology. Thus, wrote Carr, it was ‘not perhaps because Croce was a subtler thinker or better stylist than his German predecessors, but because, after the First World War, the facts seemed to smile on us less propitiously than in the years before 1914, *and we were therefore more accessible to a philosophy which sought to diminish their prestige* [emphasis added].<sup>29</sup> This book takes Carr’s ruminations seriously and unearths the afterlife of idealism in postwar British intellectual life in the seemingly unpromising domain of historiography.

\* \* \*

This book is not a *Rezeptionsgeschichte* or study of ‘influence’, setting out to reveal how the revisionists intentionally and referentially used new idealist concepts, though that will be established in a number of cases. The approach of this study looks at concepts as ideological and conceptual *resources* in concrete social fields of practice, ranging from interpretive labor to political opinion making. As resources in such fields, concepts do not possess a unitary meaning which is impervious to contextual particularities and creative modifications and reformulations. New idealist concepts, just like revisionist concepts, were primarily formulated to address the problems of the present as dispersed among various fields of practice.<sup>30</sup> In the words of Quentin Skinner, ‘I take it that political [or other social] life itself sets the main problems for the political [or historical] theorist, causing a certain range of issues to appear problematic, and a corresponding range of questions to become the leading subjects of debate’.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, the world wars, socio-economic and political fragmentation in Britain, and the rise of totalitarian and authoritarian ideologies, rather than simply revealing the ‘true’ nature of absolute idealism, instead posed problems serious enough to propel the new idealists to radically rework absolute idealism.<sup>32</sup> The new idealist conceptual themes that emerged from this complex state of affairs include an emphasis on mind as essentially concrete; a historicist-pluralist conception of thought, morality, and action; a belief in the inherently perspectival yet rationally comprehensible nature of conceiving and ordering the human world; human agency as the irreducible object of historical knowledge; and a humanist corrective with socialist leanings to a technocratic and scientific society. As historically situated resources, these themes were rigid enough to constitute a fairly consistent and recognizable tradition, but malleable enough to allow different and competing moves within that tradition, some of which would go on to constitute another tradition (revisionist historiography) with the aid of still other traditions in different fields.

When thinkers use conceptual resources, they are not always conscious of or choose to avow their sources, which can obscure the origin of these resources. And because such thinkers employ concepts from a tradition to address certain problems on the one hand, but are forced to creatively refashion or add to or depart from this tradition owing to the emergence of qualitatively new contexts and problems on the other, they can put those resources to use in a way that was unintended or unforeseen by the original source. Revisionist historiography, therefore, marks a continuation of as well as a departure from the new idealism. It is thus imperative to disclose both these aspects of revisionism.

This book’s interpretive frame can be stated from another angle. The interpretive strategy of this study is no more forced, and no less useful, than studying ways in which theories and traditions in Anglo-American and French sociology, anthropology, and philosophy acted as resources in postwar social and cultural historiography, or other disciplines in the human and social sciences.<sup>33</sup> For instance, histories of the use of Marxist thought or Heidegger’s philosophy in French postwar philosophy have yielded crucial insights into the character of French philosophy’s theoretical and political character.<sup>34</sup> Another example is J.G.A. Pocock’s study on the impact of Machiavelli’s political thought on the Atlantic early modern republican tradition.<sup>35</sup> Jan-Werner Müller has shown, to take yet another example, that the anti-liberal thought of Carl Schmitt proved attractive to a range of ideologically, philosophically, politically,



and morally heterogeneous postwar European intellectuals.<sup>36</sup> As a final example, the study by François Cusset on the appropriations of French post-structuralism by US human scientists has shown how the former provided the latter with resources for dealing with the problems of an identity politics specific to the post-1968 USA.<sup>37</sup> In all these cases, the conceptual resources provided by traditions such as post-structuralism could easily be overlooked if the focus remained solely on the, admittedly, vast differences and discrepancies between, for example, Foucault's avowed intentions and political and methodological elusiveness on the one hand, and the conscious intentions and approaches of Foucauldian cultural and intellectual historians, on the other.<sup>38</sup>

The Wittgensteinian lesson here is that usage and appropriations of concepts cannot be *reduced* to generic models of explanation, whether these are cultural, ideological, philosophical, or social, and that we therefore should remain open to connections and crossings which defy established interpretations and explanations.

That, needless to add, applies to the relations between new idealism and postwar historical and political thought. The cases mentioned above reveal how thinkers on the margins of the academy, and with fluid disciplinary and methodological identities, such as Foucault, Derrida, and Thomas Kuhn, have often provided professional historians with a sense of new directions, directions which these historians have then developed in reforming their discipline, both institutionally and conceptually. It is more in this sense—rather than through institutional politics or influence—that postwar revisionist historians appropriated the thought of the new idealists, who were also unorthodox in their disciplinary identities, and eccentric in their institutions.<sup>39</sup>

The fruitfulness of this book's approach to postwar British intellectual life is evinced in histories of the impact of British idealism on social thought. These studies have demonstrated that though it is true that by the 1930s British idealism had lost the institutional dominance it had possessed in the time of T.H. Green and Edward Caird, it is nevertheless unmistakable that idealism continued to influence academic social thought. Thus, Jose Harris has argued that idealism offered British social thinkers of the 1940s a more comprehensive vision of social welfare and active citizen participation than that offered by the technocratic and scientific strands of social planning. That partly explains why the British absolute idealists continued to resonate in democratic and welfare state British intellectual culture after World War II.<sup>40</sup>

PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY, REVISING THE ENGLISH PAST,  
AND WELFARE STATE HUMANISM: THEMES IN POSTWAR  
REVISIONISM

How more precisely did the new idealism impact postwar revisionist historical and political thought? How does the new idealism clarify revisionism? The chapters of this book seek to answer these two questions. It may, however, be useful to briefly state the argument that will be fleshed out in the pages to follow.

The new idealists were well attuned to the changes in philosophy, politics, and society that Europe was undergoing in the first half of the twentieth century. They sought to devise historical and political theories to capture and address those changes. Since these changes carried over into the early postwar era, new idealist thought was potentially germane to postwar thinkers. The fact that a revisionist historian like Carr, in the passages quoted above, could embrace parts of the new idealism in the postwar era owes much to what I will call the *revisionist potential* of new idealist thought.

Three entangled conceptual themes comprise this revisionist potential, corresponding to three pertinent problem areas for the revisionist historians in the postwar era. The first theme that rendered the new idealism useful to postwar historiography is new idealist philosophy of history, explored in Chap. 2<sup>41</sup>. The central tenet of new idealist philosophy of history is that history is an autonomous science in possession of conceptual presuppositions that are unique to it. The presuppositions of history render it a sympathetic, evidence-based, imaginative, methodologically pluralist and perspectivist, and radically historicist science of human agency. Though not opposed to the social sciences, new idealist philosophy of history is skeptical toward the interpretive value of approaches that reduce thought and action to either more general socio-historical causes or mechanisms, or more general sub-conscious drives.

As I show in Chap. 3, from being an academic profession that cared little for the conceptual presuppositions of its own discipline, British historians began in the 1950s, almost excessively and with great fervor, to address and evaluate the philosophical foundations of history—such as objectivity, explanation, understanding, method, relativism, meaning, causality, progress, and moral judgment. Even if some historians proclaimed that they had no philosophy of history, or that they saw no use for it, they still felt compelled to address the philosophical issues of the day.<sup>42</sup> An important

reason for this re-orientation can be found in the rapid rise and increased influence of the social sciences in the postwar era, which threatened both the conceptual autonomy of history, and the significant public influence historians still enjoyed in the early postwar period.

If we look at the development of the European human sciences in the 1950s and the 1960s, especially West Germany and France, it is certainly the case that the ‘philosophy of history’ seems to be the ‘other’ through which the immediate traumatic and violent past is understood, critiqued, rejected, or reworked. As Stefan-Ludwig Hoffman writes regarding German intellectuals: ‘The common opponent here was the philosophy of history with its totalizing explanatory claims, which, according to both Koselleck and Arendt, had been transformed politically in the twentieth century into the totalitarian idea of history-making.’<sup>43</sup> To those revisionist historians examined in this book, in contrast, new idealist philosophy of history, derided by the likes of Arendt and Strauss, proved a useful resource in restating the nature of history from a postwar perspective.

The second theme that allows us to recognize the impact of new idealism on revisionism is the former’s explicit and systematic anti-whiggism, which led the new idealists to strip historical inquiry away from that ideological and teleological form, grafted onto nationalist and imperialist histories, that had dominated it since the late Victorian era.<sup>44</sup> As Chap. 4 demonstrates, this aspect of the new idealism overlapped with and fed into the desire among postwar historians to revise, not without irony and paradox, pervasive liberal-whig interpretations of the English past, and so the revisionist potential of new idealist historical theory informed seminal postwar historical revisions of modern England, from the Tudors to the Victorians.

This task of revision found urgency in light of the revival and many reinventions of whiggish narratives during and after World War II.<sup>45</sup> For instance, in an effort to foster civilian morale, the Ministry of Information and Home Intelligence propagated a nationalist image of ‘Deep England’ that reverberates even in today’s romanticized representations of England and the English: the rolling hills, village greens, parish churches, a consensual social order, strong and enduring national traditions, and essentialist notions of English character.<sup>46</sup> This imagery was disseminated through a range of new and old cultural vehicles, thus perhaps for the first time in history reaching out to all social classes in an attempt to discursively construct and disseminate a ‘classless’ sense of Englishness.<sup>47</sup> The government especially seized on the cinema as an effective tool for propaganda.<sup>48</sup>

A subtle example of reinvented whiggism is the academic politics of analytic philosophy, which came to dominate British philosophy departments after World War II.<sup>49</sup> Postwar analytic philosophy in Britain fashioned itself as a homegrown tradition, resting on British empiricism in the new form of ‘ordinary’ (English) language analysis. After the war, analytic philosophers portrayed British idealism, old and new, as a continental intruder inimical to British empiricism and attendant common-sense political values.<sup>50</sup>

Even the one-time anti-whig historian Herbert Butterfield found himself attributing England’s successful resistance against Nazism to the safeguarding effects of a long and unique history through which a constitutionally safeguarded individual freedom and toleration were the bearing principles. For other historians, such as Richard Titmuss, A.J.P. Taylor, Arthur Marwick, and Angus Calder, the war was the beginning of a new national narrative, signaling social and political consensus, and ushering in state planning, the wartime forerunner of the welfare state.<sup>51</sup> Daniel Ritschel has demonstrated that most accounts of the postwar political consensus, the welfare state, and the ‘Keynesian revolution’ follow the ‘pattern of a Whiggish interpretation’,<sup>52</sup> where the planners replace the Whigs, and Keynes takes on the role of a John Locke or a Charles James Fox.<sup>53</sup> This form of whiggism heavily influenced the autobiographies of leading postwar politicians, such as Michael Joseph, Denis Healy, and Roy Jenkins.<sup>54</sup>

The revisionist historians were forced to respond to these new versions of whiggism. The new idealism, in its emphasis on the plurality and contingency of social and political change, provided them with the conceptual weapons to do so. The revisionists adamantly rejected liberal-whig historiography—which stressed the English constitution and parliament as the organic carriers of English liberty—thereby forfeiting the Victorian right to posit a teleological model or apply scientific laws to the past. However, their histories reveal a ‘revisionist whiggism’, premised on a radical modification of the assumptions of liberal whiggism, and animated by the perceived achievements of the welfare state.

The third, and final, theme of the new idealism’s revisionist potential is its humanism with socialist leanings, the uptake of which by the revisionists is explored in Chap. 5. Much attention has been given to the rehabilitation in the 1950s and the 1960s of humanist concepts such as agency and culture in the works of scholars such as E.P. Thompson, Alasdair MacIntyre, F.R. Leavis, and Charles Taylor. Their responses to the post-1956 crisis

of Communism in western Europe, to the ‘scientific socialism’ of intellectuals such as J.D. Bernal, to the coming of the nuclear age, and to the inroads of a ‘dehumanizing’ technocratic–bureaucratic politics, are well established.<sup>55</sup> Thompson, for instance, expressly sought to construct a ‘socialist humanism’ after 1956,<sup>56</sup> a project he shared with Taylor and MacIntyre.<sup>57</sup> However, most scholars have failed to take note of new idealist and revisionist thought in this broader re-orientation in the human sciences. This is somewhat strange, since Taylor sought to rehabilitate a broadly speaking idealist philosophy of human science, and MacIntyre drew on Collingwood in his historicist approach to ethics and politics.<sup>58</sup>

New idealist philosophy of history had a political edge in that it was wedded to a fairly distinctive prewar humanism and pluralism. This explains the attractiveness of new idealist political thought to postwar British intellectuals responding to the making and use of the atomic bomb, the disillusioning events of 1956, and amidst the increasing hostility of scholars in the humanities directed toward an increasingly technocratic and technological society, which threatened what the revisionists saw as the great, even if contingent and flawed, achievements of the welfare state.

The humanism which the new idealists articulated rested on an anti-technocratic, anti-positivist, and anti-metaphysical approach to politics. The historian David Edgerton has shown that the ‘new men’ of the 1930s, that is, the scientists and technocrats, devised ‘anti-histories’, narrating the English past as ridden with social and scientific opportunities lost due to the over-absorption of Oxbridge arts students into national life. But, adds Edgerton, the new men were ‘looked-down on by old-style elite intellectuals’, not least Collingwood.<sup>59</sup> In these debates between the ‘old’ and ‘new’ men, ‘humanism’ became a conceptual weapon for all parties concerned. Humanism was as potent a concept as culture would come to be from the 1950s and onward. We thus find multiple and opposing meanings of this concept in the first half of the twentieth century. For instance, Julian Huxley argued that ‘scientific humanism’ is the real humanism, J.H. Oldham that ‘Christian humanism’ holds that position, and Gilbert Murray that ‘classical humanism’ best fulfills the hopes of humanity.<sup>60</sup> Croce’s ‘new humanism’, to take a new idealist example, could thus be appropriated in these debates, which spilled over into the postwar era.

The revisionist historians were among the last representatives of the type of Oxbridge historian who was trained to conduct historical research, but also to work in government or the civil service as what was then known as a ‘generalist’, as opposed to a ‘specialist’ or ‘expert’. Consequently,

the revisionist historians were not professional historians in the sense that defines today's historical profession. They commuted between positions in government, the university, and various other positions in public institutions, such as publishing and broadcasting. They were, for the same reason, comfortable writing on topics that were not historical in a direct sense, not least on political matters, including topics in political philosophy.

In this capacity, the revisionists' defining feature was their commitment to the welfare state. Here too the humanism of the new idealism, along with the political philosophy of British absolute idealism, especially its insistence on the necessary connection between strong state intervention and the development of 'positive' freedom, resonated with the revisionists. Idealist language informed the revisionists' defense of the welfare state, but also their humanist critique of the welfare state's undesirable tendency toward technocracy and the rule of experts.

Finally, new idealist historicism—the conception that any metaphysical system is meaningful and effective only in contingent historical contexts—underpinned the revisionists' participation in the debate on the death or decline of political philosophy in the 1950s and the 1960s, including the nascent discourse on human rights. In this debate, the revisionists were willing to pick up where 'classic' political philosophy had left off by insisting on the essentially plural and contingent nature of politics and political thought.

## NOTES

1. There are works that purport to reveal Oakeshott's 'legacy' and place him alongside his 'contemporaries', but these do not study the actual impact of Oakeshott's thought on postwar thinkers. See e.g. *The Intellectual Legacy of Michael Oakeshott*, ed. Corey Abel and Timothy Fuller (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2005); Wendell John Coats, *Oakeshott and His Contemporaries: Montaigne, St. Augustine, Hegel, et al.* (Selinsgrove, Pa.: Susquehanna University Press, 2000). And although there exists a journal entitled *Collingwood and British Idealism Studies*, there are to date few, if any, articles therein that trace the impact of Collingwood's thought on postwar intellectual life.
2. Christopher Parker, *The English Historical Tradition Since 1850* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1990), 216.
3. Perry Anderson, 'The Intransigent Right at the End of the Century', *London Review of Books*, September 24 1992, 7–11, 7.
4. See the Appendix for biographies of these figures.

5. From now on, when I discuss ‘revisionism’, ‘revisionist historians’, or ‘revisionist historiography’, I will refer to these historians, unless otherwise qualified. I do not mean to restrict the category ‘revisionism’ to these historians, which is why I speak of ‘new idealist revisionism’, thereby allowing for a plurality of revisionisms, informed by different theoretical and ideological traditions.
6. On the importance of considering non-Marxist traditions in postwar British historiography, see Jim Obelkevich, ‘New Developments in History in the 1950s and 1960s’, *Contemporary British History*, 14 (2000), 125–142.
7. See e.g. Denis Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain: History, the New Left, and the Origins of Cultural Studies* (Durham, N.C. and London: Duke University Press, 1997); Harvey J. Kaye, *The British Marxist Historians: An Introductory Analysis* (New York: Polity Press, 1984); and *Historiography and the British Marxist Historians*, ed. Willie Thompson (London: Pluto Press, 1995).
8. Studies on British Edwardian and interwar historiography are more common. See e.g. P.B.M. Blaas, *Continuity and Anachronism: Parliamentary and Constitutional Development in Whig Historiography and in the Anti-Whig Reaction between 1890 and 1930* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978); Doris S. Goldstein, ‘The Professionalization of History in Britain in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries’, *Storia della storiografia*, 3 (1983), 3–28; Peter Snee, *Learning a Liberal Education: The Study of Modern History in the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge, and Manchester, 1800–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986); Reba N. Soffer, *Discipline and Power: The University, History, and the Making of an English Elite, 1870–1930* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994); Victor Feske, *From Belloc to Churchill: Private Scholars, Public Culture, and the Crisis of British Liberalism, 1900–1930* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).
9. David Cannadine, ‘British History: Past, Present – and Future?’, *Past & Present*, 31 (1986), 169–191.
10. Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century. 1914–1991* (London: Michael Joseph, 1994), in particular ‘Part Two: The Golden Age’, 225–403.
11. Noel Annan, *Our Age: The Generation that Made Post-war Britain* (London: Fontana, 1991), 486–508.
12. To distinguish between the political party of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the historical perspective connected, but not necessarily so, to that party, I will spell the former as ‘Whig’, and the latter as ‘whig’. For one of the first self-conscious discussions of whig history from

- a whig perspective, see H.A.L. Fisher, 'The Whig Historians', in *Pages from the Past* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939), 40–93.
13. These challenges were often, though not always, different from the 'anti-whig paradigm' in legal and constitutional historiography that rested on the archival discovery of 'facts'. This 'paradigm', according to some historians, has entirely shaped British professional historiography: Blaas, *Continuity*; Michael Bentley, *Modernizing England's Past: English Historiography in the Age of Modernism, 1870–1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
  14. Cannadine, 'British History', 171, 178; David Cannadine, 'Historians in the "Liberal Hour": Lawrence Stone and J.H. Plumb Re-visited', *Historical Research*, 75 (2002), 316–354; David Cannadine, *Making History Now and Then: Discoveries, Controversies and Explorations* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2008). For valuable studies on the Golden Age historians, see *Recent Historians of Great Britain: Essays on the Post-1945 Generation*, ed. W.L. Arnstein (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1990); Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism*; J.P. Kenyon, *The History Men: The Historical Profession in England Since the Renaissance* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983); R.J. Evans, 'Afterword', in G.R. Elton, *The Practice of History: Second Edition* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2002), 165–204; Miles Taylor, 'The Beginnings of Modern British Social History?', *History Workshop Journal*, 43 (1997), 155–176. Guy Ortolano, 'Human Science or a Human Face?: Social History and the "Two Cultures" Controversy', *Journal of British Studies*, 43 (2002), 482–505; Reba N. Soffer, 'British Conservative Historiography and the Second World War', in *British and German Historiography 1750–1950*, ed. Benedicht Stuchtey and Peter Wende (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 373–401.
  15. Bentley, *Modernizing*, 209.
  16. Bentley, *Modernizing*, 211.
  17. Bentley, *Modernizing*, 198; Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The 'Objectivity Question' and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
  18. See e.g. the introduction and the chapters on history in *The Politics of Method in the Human Sciences: Positivism and its Epistemological Others*, ed. George Steinmetz (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005).
  19. Anthony Brundage and Richard A. Cosgrove, *The Great Tradition: Constitutional History and National Identity in Britain and the United States, 1870–1960* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007), 74–75.
  20. Novick acknowledges that Collingwood and Croce did have an impact on the American historical profession, but is unable to analyze that impact. See Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 154–156, 400.



21. H. Wildon Carr, 'The New Idealism', in *The Scientific Approach to Philosophy* (London: Macmillan, 1924), 27–50, 31.
22. James Patrick, *The Magdalen Metaphysicals: Idealism and Orthodoxy at Oxford, 1901–1945* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1985), xxii.
23. See e.g. Ronald Hutton, 'Revisionism in Britain', in *Companion to Modern Historiography*, ed. Michael Bentley (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 377–395; Marnie Hughes-Warrington, *Revisionist Histories* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013); Robert Perry, *Revisionist Scholarship and Modern Irish Politics* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013); Sheila Fitzpatrick, 'Revisionism in Soviet History', *History and Theory*, 46 (2007), 77–91; Ethan Kleinberg, 'Haunting History: Deconstruction and the Spirit of Revision', *History and Theory*, 46 (2007), 113–143; Giorgos Antoniu, 'The Lost Atlantis of Objectivity: The Revisionist Struggles Between the Academic and the Public Spheres', *History and Theory*, 46 (2007), 92–112.
24. Leopold Labedz, 'Introduction', in *Revisionism: Essays on the History of Marxist Ideas*, ed. Leopold Labedz (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1962), 9–31, 9.
25. E.J. Hobsbawm, 'Revisionism', in *Revolutionaries: Contemporary Essays* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), 130–136, 130, 131. See also Dora Scarlett, 'Revisionism in East Germany: A Case History', *The New Reasoner*, 2 (1958), 131–136.
26. Many of the same categorization problems that Miles Taylor and others have identified regarding the revisionist Asa Briggs apply to the other revisionists as well. See *The Age of Asa: Lord Briggs, Public Life and History in Britain Since 1945*, ed. Miles Taylor (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
27. Stefan Collini, *Common Reading: Critics, Historians, Publics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 143.
28. The intellectual historians Fritz Ringer and Anthony La Vopa have, inspired by Pierre Bourdieu, and to great effect, used the concept 'clarifier' in showing that some thinkers are worthy of study because they clarify the intellectual field to which they belong. See Fritz Ringer, *Max Weber: An Intellectual Biography* (Chicago, Ill.: Chicago University Press, 2004); Anthony J. La Vopa, 'Doing Fichte: Reflections of a Sobered (but Unrepentant) Contextual Biographer', in *Biographie Schreiben*, ed. Hans-Erik Bødeker (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2003), 109–171.
29. E.H. Carr, *What is History: The George Macaulay Trevelyan Lectures Delivered in the University of Cambridge January-March 1961: Second Edition*, ed. R.W. Davies (London: Macmillan, 1986), 15–16. Though very rarely, some historians have observed connections between

- Collingwood and Carr. See e.g. Richard J. Evans, *In Defense of History* (New York: Norton, 1999), 79.
30. The principle that concepts, or linguistically expressed beliefs, are intended to address contingent dilemmas is subtly analyzed in Mark Bevir, *The Logic of the History of Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
  31. Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought: Volume I, The Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), xi.
  32. See, for instance, R.G. Collingwood, 'Can the New Idealism Dispense With Mysticism?', in *Relativity, Logic, and Mysticism: Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society: Supplementary Volume III* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1923), 161–176.
  33. See e.g. Peter Burke, *History and Social Theory* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005); Peter Burke, *Varieties of Cultural History* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997); Allan Megill, 'The Reception of Foucault by Historians', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 48 (1987), 117–141.
  34. See e.g. Stefanos Geroulanos, *An Atheism That is not Humanist Emerges in French Thought* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2010); *French Interpretations of Heidegger: An Exceptional Reception*, ed. David Pettigrew and François Raffoul (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2008); Tom Rockmore, *Heidegger and French Philosophy: Humanism, Antihumanism, and Being* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).
  35. J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975).
  36. Jan.-Werner Müller, *A Dangerous Mind: Carl Schmitt in Post-war European Thought* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2003).
  37. François Cusset, *French Theory: How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, & Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States*, trans. Jeff Fort, Josephine Berganza, and Marlon Jones (Minneapolis, M.N.: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).
  38. On this point, see especially Megill, 'The Reception'.
  39. Croce never even held an academic position.
  40. Jose Harris, 'Political Thought and the Welfare State 1870–1940', *Past & Present*, 135 (1992), 116–141. For another example, see Peter Gordon and John White, *Philosophers as Educational Reformers: The Influence of Idealism on British Educational Thought and Practice* (London, Boston, Mass., and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), especially Chap. 10.
  41. In this study, 'philosophy of history', 'theory of history', and 'historical theory' are synonyms and will be used interchangeably.

42. See the interviews with leading British historians of the 1960s in Ved Mehta, *Fly and Fly Bottle: Encounters With British Intellectuals* (Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, 1965). For a concrete example, see George Kitson Clark, *The Critical Historian* (New York: Basic Books, 1967).
43. Stefan-Ludwig Hoffman, 'Koselleck, Arendt, and the Anthropology of Historical Experience', *History and Theory*, 49 (2010), 212–236, 233.
44. The literature on whig historiography is vast. For some key studies, see J.W. Burrow, *A Liberal Descent: Victorian Historians and the English Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Rosemary Jann, *The Art and Science of Victorian History* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1985); Parker, *The English Historical Tradition; British and German Historiography 1750–1950: Traditions, Perceptions, and Transfers*, ed. Benedicht Stuchtey and Peter Wende (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Ann Rigney, *Imperfect Histories: The Elusive Past and the Legacy of Romantic Historicism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2001); Ian Hesketh, *The Science of History in Victorian Britain: Making the Past Speak* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2011).
45. Herbert Butterfield, *The Englishman and His History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1944).
46. Mark Donnelly, *Britain in the Second World War* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 83; Mark Connelly, *We Can Take It! Britain and the Memory of the Second World War* (Harlow and New York: Pearson, 2004).
47. Robert Mackay, *Half the Battle: Civilian Morale in Britain during the Second World War* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002); Jörn Weingärtner, *The Arts as a Weapon of War: Britain and the Shaping of Morale in the Second World War* (London and New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2006); Anthony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards, *Britain Can Take It: British Cinema in the Second World War* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007).
48. 'Ministry of Information, Program for Film Propaganda', in *Writing Englishness 1900–1950: An Introductory Sourcebook on National Identity*, ed. Judy Giles and Tim Middleton (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 141–146.
49. Thomas Akehurst, *The Cultural Politics of Analytic Philosophy: Britishness and the Spectre of Europe* (London and New York: Continuum, 2010).
50. Edward Skidelsky, 'The Strange Death of British Idealism', *Philosophy and Literature*, 31 (2007), 41–51.
51. Mackay, *Half the Battle*, 3–5.
52. Daniel Ritschel, *The Politics of Planning: The Debate on Economic Planning in Britain in the 1930s* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 4.
53. For postwar studies on the historical 'origins' of the welfare state that bear whig traits, see e.g. David Roberts, *Victorian Origins of the British Welfare*

- State* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1960); Bentley B. Gilbert, *The Evolution of National Insurance in Great Britain: The Origins of the Welfare State* (London: Joseph, 1966); Larry Patriquin, *Agrarian Capitalism and Poor Relief in England, 1500–1860: Rethinking the Origins of the Welfare State* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).
54. Becky Conekin, Frank Mort and Chris Waters, 'Introduction', in *Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain 1945–1964*, ed. Becky Conekin, Frank Mort and Chris Waters (London and New York: Rivers Oram Press, 1999), 1–22, 5.
  55. Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism*; Guy Ortolano, *The Two Cultures Controversy: Science, Literature, and Cultural Politics in Postwar Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Madeleine Davis, 'Reappraising British Socialist Humanism', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 18 (2013), 57–81; P. Blackledge, 'Freedom, Desire and Revolution: Alasdair MacIntyre's Early Marxist Ethics', *History of Political Thought*, 26 (2005), 696–720.
  56. E.P. Thompson, 'Socialist Humanism: An Epistle to the Philistines', *The New Reasoner*, 1 (1957), 105–143. See also *Socialist Humanism: An International Symposium*, ed. Erich Fromm (New York: Doubleday, 1965).
  57. Charles Taylor, 'Marxism and Humanism', *The New Reasoner*, 2 (1957), 92–98.
  58. Alasdair MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics* (New York: Macmillan, 1966).
  59. David Edgerton, *Warfare State: Britain, 1920–1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 194.
  60. See the three BBC talks in Julian Huxley, Gilbert Murray, and J.H. Oldham, *Humanism* (London: Watts & Co., 1944).

## Revisionist Potential: Historical Thought from Absolute to New Idealism

### METAPHYSICAL HISTORY: THE HISTORICAL THOUGHT OF THE BRITISH ABSOLUTE IDEALISTS

Understanding what place the late Victorian absolute idealists (most notably T.H. Green, Edward Caird, Bernard Bosanquet, F.H. Bradley, William Wallace, Henry Jones, D.G. Ritchie) accorded to historical knowledge in their philosophy has proved to be a non-starter. For some scholars, these idealists' belief in abstract principles and concepts, such as 'Absolute Mind', as the metaphysically necessary forms for the self-realization of individuals has occluded an interest in the contingency and cultural plasticity surrounding the lives of humans. This, in turn, has constrained the development of any serious historical theory, much like it has constrained the development of British sociology.<sup>1</sup> Thus, Stefan Collini writes: 'Bosanquet and the English Hegelians for the most part ignored the historicity of phenomena, a failing for which they were later castigated by Collingwood, the one English Idealist to repair this omission.'<sup>2</sup> This chapter examines the shift from a metaphysical absolute idealism to a historicist new idealism, teasing out the implications thereof for postwar revisionist historiography.

Even though the Victorian idealists 'looked always for historical explanation', they did so in a distinctively Hegelian fashion,<sup>3</sup> which conceives the past as an evolutionary process through which the Absolute Mind in a self-corrective effort seeks to overcome the errors of past ideas, which are the essence of all social and institutional life, while maintaining and

furthering their truths. This historical process is teleological insofar as it tends toward ‘increasing adequacy or completeness’<sup>4</sup>; theological as it posits the disunity of God as the beginning of history, and man’s unity in God as the final destination of history<sup>5</sup>; liberal-whiggish as it sees the origins of English liberty in the constitutional and religious struggles of the seventeenth century, which led Green to formulate the concept of ‘Protestant constitutionalism’<sup>6</sup>; and racist as it identifies certain European races as the makers of history, while relegating non-European races to a lower stage in the development of the Absolute Mind.<sup>7</sup> In this process, the development of philosophical ideas signals the course of human history as a whole.<sup>8</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the new idealists did not have much sympathy with the way in which the late Victorian idealists coupled history to their philosophy. Collingwood famously castigated Bosanquet in *The Idea of History* for having ‘treated history with open contempt’.<sup>9</sup> It is true that the new idealists gave the concept of history a meaning distinct from that of absolute idealism. We should, however, not accept the new idealist verdict that the late Victorian idealists were removed from the discourse on history in their own time. We should not fault historical misunderstandings on this topic too much. On the positive side, these misunderstandings allow us to gauge the pronounced differences between Victorian and new idealism, a point worth emphasizing, since most historians today equate idealism with the metaphysical versions of the Victorian period, thereby reifying a historically contingent tradition. In reifying this tradition, it is hardly surprising that it has been marginalized in the discussions on the intellectual history of British historiography.

The crucial fact about late Victorian idealist historical thought, in the context of the argument of this book, is its minimal revisionist potential. Victorian idealism, therefore, had little to say on matters of history that resonated among post-World War II British historians—it simply did not envisage the need for historical revisions. The reason for this is fairly straightforward. Victorian idealist historical thought was inseparable from the structures, beliefs, ideals, and problems of late Victorian Britain. These have, since World War I, given way to radically different ways of thought, dialectically interlocked with broader shifts in mid-twentieth-century society. Indeed, for the same reason, there are even profound differences between early and late Victorian historical thought informed by idealism. To take a salient example, the Liberal Anglican historians of the early nineteenth century, such as Thomas Arnold, Richard Whateley, H.H. Milman,

and J.C. Hare, developed a pessimistic philosophy of history. This philosophy of history was an admixture of organic nationalism, an organicist form of explanation, German Romantic philosophy rendered palatable through Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and a Vichian concept of cyclical time. The Liberal Anglicans developed this approach in response to the dominance of philosophical radicalism, which was put on the mettle by the perceived harmful social effects of science and industrialization.<sup>10</sup>

A closer look at the three most sustained analyses of the concept of history by the late Victorian idealists clearly reveals how context-specific their thought was to the late Victorian period. W.R. Sorley and D.G. Ritchie wrote two of these, respectively, for the collection of essays in honor of T.H. Green, published in 1883.<sup>11</sup> The third is F.H. Bradley's *The Presuppositions of Critical History* from 1874.<sup>12</sup> Ritchie unmistakably referred to the Liberal Anglicans when he proclaimed that one of the few philosophies of history before Hegel worthy of the name stemmed from Giambattista Vico, and was subsequently appropriated by 'theologians, poets, and in general literature'. The theologians, poets, and writers were the Liberal Anglicans: Whateley was the Archbishop of Dublin, Hare the disciple of Coleridge, and Milman professor of poetry. Ritchie inveighed against the cyclical notion of time which they had taken from Vico. It may have been suitable for an age of pessimism, opined Ritchie, but at the end of the nineteenth century, in light of the two Reform Acts, and booming industrial development, such a notion was likely to be 'a creed of political and social despair'.<sup>13</sup>

Sorley and Ritchie assumed that history is a 'science', and as such the way it studies the past is logically distinct from the way in which the 'philosophy of history' conceives of it. Ritchie explained the difference between history as science and philosophy of history:

Using Aristotelian phraseology, we may say that the scientific historian and the sociologist are occupied with the material and efficient causes of events and institutions, while the philosopher or philosophic historian is occupied with their formal and final causes—i.e. with the spirit and meaning of them, as shown by the end to which they are tending. The philosophy of history implies a teleological view of phenomena.<sup>14</sup>

The noteworthy feature of this distinction is, ironically, its complementarity; that is, philosophy of history simply extends the reach of historical science deeper into grasping the all-encompassing teleological process that governs the movement of factual reality.

This conceptual complementarity is not surprising, given that in Victorian Cambridge and, especially, Oxford, historical and philosophical scholars were often complementing each other's narratives, analyses, and ideologies. This state of affairs can be attributed to the fluidity of disciplinary boundaries on the one hand,<sup>15</sup> and shared religious, political, and social structures and sensibilities, on the other. Most Victorian historians and philosophers at Oxford, for example, would have studied either *literae humaniores* (classical history and philosophy) or modern history, and by doing so, they were set either on a course to become teachers at Oxford, Cambridge, or an elite preparatory school such as Eton or Rugby; or to join the Civil Service, Anglican Church, Parliament, the Bar,<sup>16</sup> or the Foreign Office.<sup>17</sup>

An historical survey of Oxford University explains that the dominant position of classics at Oxford extended well into the twentieth century: 'students of classics provided the intellectual élite of the university in 1914 and many years afterward.'<sup>18</sup> The sociologists of education A.H. Halsey and M.A. Trow summarize well the triadic relationship between state, society, and the ancient universities in the nineteenth century: 'Oxford and Cambridge were national universities connected with national élites of politics, administration, business and the liberal professions offering a general education designed to mould character and prepare their students for a gentlemanly style of life.'<sup>19</sup>

The historians and philosophers of Victorian Britain were not, in any formal or strict sense, professionals, nor did they necessarily make a living as historians or philosophers. The preparation for several potential careers meant that students who went on to become historians were taught a wide range of subjects, from Latin and Greek language to jurisprudence, constitutional history, political thought, and philosophy. F.M. Powicke, thus, related, somewhat nostalgically, in his 1929 inaugural lecture as Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford: 'Indeed, if we remember that the traditions beginning with Maine and Bryce and T.H. Green were combined with those of Stubbs and Freeman and Froude, the Oxford of thirty years ago would seem to have been the natural home of those more philosophical studies of our national life in which the influences of history, jurisprudence, and political thought are combined.'<sup>20</sup>

More importantly, both historians and philosophers at Oxford and Cambridge in the late nineteenth century saw themselves as explicators of national culture, and educators of national character. Competing visions of, and discord between, what the nation was, what it had been, and



what it could be, existed owing to the nascent trade unions and socialist movements of the late nineteenth century and the Catholic revival from the mid-nineteenth century, following the Roman Catholic Relief Act of 1829.<sup>21</sup> But there also existed a belief in social cohesion, owing much to the fact that the working, business, and industrial classes were hardly present at the ancient universities, nor were members of dissenting churches until the 1850s.<sup>22</sup> Oxbridge dons projected the cohesion they experienced in their college life onto the national, and even imperial scene. Late Victorian idealist philosophy ought to be understood in this context, for it offered ‘a more satisfactory conceptualization of existing Victorian attitudes’, especially that of ‘character’ as the moral backdrop of the nation, and the means and end of social reform. The great irony in these endeavors is that character was used as a means to reform precisely what had begun to be perceived as inadequate to these Victorian idealists and social reformers, that is, character.<sup>23</sup>

I would add to this another important aspect: the sense of unity which pervaded the academic elite in Britain was conducive to the public spread of a systematic, totalizing, metaphysical-religious, and teleological philosophy (idealism) as something akin to the philosophy of the nation. It is, thus, not entirely accurate to argue, as some leftist historians have, that empiricism has been the main British philosophical ideology legitimating state practices, techniques, and apparatuses, and in so doing hindering oppressed and underprivileged groups of people from recognizing these practices by means of other, critical and empowering philosophies and histories, marginalized as ‘speculative’ or ‘metaphysical’.<sup>24</sup> The latter type of theories could do that as well.

We find a type of totalizing philosophy of the nation in all three works under discussion here. To take a clear example, though respectful of unbiased and empirical ‘scientific history’, which seeks irreducible complexity behind events and tries to understand the past as its actors understood it, Ritchie ultimately rejected it, and his reasons for doing so clarify the historical discourse as embedded in late Victorian culture. Scientific history, argued Ritchie, does not speak to the character of the ‘ordinary man’, nor the ‘public man’, nor the ‘private citizen’, nor the ‘statesman’. All these types of men, in an act of ‘healthy spirit’, understand, on some level of consciousness, that ‘history is the work of reason’, that it is the ‘the plan of Providence’, and so from the viewpoint of providence actors of a specific time might have failed to grasp the rationality of their actions and institutions, which can only become clear in the scheme of providence by a history

that goes beyond the self-understandings of the time. Moreover, history supports a consensus view of itself, according to Ritchie, for ‘History [...] presupposes that a people has a unity, we might also say a personality, and it is not a mere aggregate of individuals.’ And even though it is ‘*great men*’ that transform history, they do so as symbols of a ‘whole movement’, and as members of a social organism.<sup>25</sup>

True historical knowledge, for Sorley and Ritchie, involves identifying the principled pattern of history and contributing to its progress toward greater concrete unity almost in a formulaic dialectical fashion, the logic of which is ‘*Progress by antithesis*’, governed by ‘the struggle for freedom’. This progressive conception of history reflects not only late Victorian domestic optimism but also the faith-like belief British imperialism had instilled in Oxbridge intellectuals, and so for Ritchie: ‘That some people are “elect” to carry on the civilisation of the world, and that others are unable to assert themselves and are rejected, is an indisputable fact.’<sup>26</sup>

\* \* \*

Even though late Victorian idealism had minimal resonance among historians after World War II, we should not fail to take note that its developmental explication of character, nation, race, liberty, law, and society exerted considerable influence over the first generations of British professional historians. In other words, late Victorian idealist historical thought was a conceptual resource for maintaining and reproducing ideological, political, and social structures. For instance, F.W. Maitland had studied philosophy under idealist teachers,<sup>27</sup> and was ‘concerned with the historical and theoretical justification of entities related to, but not by any means identical with, the nation-state’, such as constitutional law, a concern he could appease with the aid of idealist philosophy.<sup>28</sup> Another example is that idealists contributed both articles and reviews to the *English Historical Review* in its early years,<sup>29</sup> while some of their philosophical works were reviewed in the same journal.<sup>30</sup>

Arguing that late Victorian idealism had minimal revisionist potential is not to say that it had none. First, the late Victorian idealists acknowledged that history was a scientific endeavor, the presuppositions of which were different from those of the natural sciences, as the object of historical knowledge was the life of mind as expressed in thoughts, actions, and institutions. Bradley was the most pronounced idealist on this point, but received hardly any contemporary attention for this aspect of his thought. By studying certain works by the first generations of German professional

historians—such as Ferdinand Baur, Heinrich von Sybel, and Johann Gustav Droysen—Bradley arrived at the conclusion that history had reached a stage where its practice was in need of philosophical explication of its own ‘absolute presuppositions’, which render history a distinct body of knowledge. Thus, for instance, Bradley argued that ‘cause’ is an absolute presupposition in history, but the character and objects of historical knowledge determine the specific sense and function of causality in historical explanation.<sup>31</sup> With this move, Bradley at one fell swoop gave history scientific legitimacy, while not reducing it to any other type of science.

The second example of the revisionist potential of late Victorian idealism has been clearly brought out, even if exaggeratedly, by scholars such as Forbes, Collini, and Parker.<sup>32</sup> It consists of a specific type of methodological individualism. Collini describes well this individualism in discussing Bosanquet’s theory of the state:

[...] what distinguishes human actions from natural events is that they are “the products of mind,” that is, they spring from purposes and intentions, beliefs and values, which themselves exist within the individual’s perception of his world. [...]. Human action, as the Idealist characteristically puts it, is to be understood rationally not causally. [...] he takes action to embody some, not necessarily conscious, intention and thus that a necessary condition of understanding it is the recovery of the agent’s own description of what the action meant to him.<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, according to Collini: ‘The similarity of these claims to those of the anti-positivistic strand of much recent writing in the philosophy of the social sciences, especially the philosophy of history, is far from accidental given the common Idealist sources of the Weberian and the Collingwoodian traditions.’<sup>34</sup> This is a correct observation. However, insofar as it traces the roots of anti-positivist philosophy of the social sciences in late Victorian idealism *alone*, it cannot answer *why* late Victorian idealism resonated in the postwar British human sciences.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, it cannot answer why late Victorian idealism could *potentially* act as a conceptual resource in postwar British historiography, if we assume that historiography both shapes and is shaped by the wider and shifting concerns, conventions, possibilities, and limitations of moving historical times. Taken alone, therefore, this minimal revisionist potential did not perform well as a conceptual resource in the second half of the twentieth century, and so we may conclude that the argument that late Victorian idealist historical

thought lies behind some of the of postwar approaches to history has been overstated.

### THE VARIETIES OF ITALIAN NEW IDEALISM

The first internal break away from the absolute idealism of the nineteenth century and toward the new idealism occurred in Italy. Italian new idealism was expounded in the interwar years by the southern Italian thinkers Guido de Ruggiero, Giovanni Gentile, and Benedetto Croce. In Italian new idealism, we find versions of idealism very different in style and content from the Victorian variants, in Britain and elsewhere.<sup>36</sup> Beginning in the 1890s, but in particular after World War I, the Italian new idealists were self-consciously attempting to regenerate and unify the Italian ‘people’ in a time of deep political divisions, socio-economic problems, and dissatisfactions with regnant intellectual traditions. They all shared the belief that a re-constituted idealism, guided by present historical realities, and disseminated by intellectuals through cultural vehicles and educational settings, was best suited to overcome the flaws haunting the Italian nation. As evidence for this need, they marshaled facts showing that the *Risorgimento*, the Italian unification, had degenerated into the clientelist party politics known as *trasformismo*, revealing Italy’s debilitating political and social divisions, and exposing certain intellectual traditions for being barren in the new times—above all positivism, classical liberalism, and historical materialism.<sup>37</sup>

Ruggiero saw the solution to these problems in his social liberalism (*liberalismo sociale*), which drew heavily on British liberal politics and the British new liberals T.H. Green and L.T. Hobhouse<sup>38</sup>; Croce saw it in his version of new idealism which he called absolute historicism (*storicismo assoluto*),<sup>39</sup> constructed as a metapolitical theory transcending all social and political cleavages; Gentile, finally, found his actual idealism (*idealismo attuale*) politically expressed by the Fascist state, of which Gentile became the chief philosopher.<sup>40</sup> And while Ruggiero and Croce united against Gentile and other Fascists in 1925 (the year of their ‘Manifesto of Anti-Fascist Intellectuals’ in response to Gentile’s ‘Manifesto of the Fascist Intellectuals’),<sup>41</sup> in the postwar era, Ruggiero, with other left-wing progressives drawing on Antonio Gramsci’s thought, came to see Croce’s liberalism as too old-fashioned and far too complacent to act as a philosophical ground for postwar political practice.

Given these shifts, intricacies and differences, and the fact that all three thinkers were ministers of education in the Italian state, it is not surprising that scholarly eyes have fallen on their social and political thought. Nor is it surprising, given this focus, to find the judgment that even Croce's historical thought, which was the most discussed, even if not the most developed, 'has borne little fruit among practicing historians'.<sup>42</sup> It is certainly true that Italian new idealist historical thought was related to and circumscribed by the social and political issues of the first half of the twentieth century. But it is precisely because Italian new idealism adapted its historical thought to the salient problems of the interwar years that the verdict above seems to have missed a vital point. The author of the judgment means by 'practicing historians' those social historians on the political left who write history from below, which is but one, variegated, strand in historiography that arose in the 1960s in tandem with the politics of the New Left.<sup>43</sup>

If we look closer at the features of new idealist historical thought, we find that it had considerable revisionist potential. I will turn primarily to Croce's historical thought, for even though Ruggiero,<sup>44</sup> and Gentile up until the early 1920s,<sup>45</sup> provided British intellectuals food for thought as well, their thought was not as far reaching as Croce's.<sup>46</sup>

### CROCE'S PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

Three dialectically related aspects of Croce's thought are germane to the argument of this book. The first aspect is Croce's resolute and explicit rejection of metaphysics, theology, positivism, and partisan history. The second aspect follows conceptually in the wake of the first: the construction of a new approach to history (absolute historicism) which argues that all reality is the activity of the human mind,<sup>47</sup> and that mind is essentially concrete, contingent, and historical. This argument, however, asserts that within such an immanent or secular frame, reality possesses a certain 'bounded' rationality and universality, and so does the study of this reality; as such, reality can be explicated by philosophy as historical methodology. The third aspect is the extension of the second in a broader cultural sphere, namely Croce's 'new humanism'.<sup>48</sup>

Croce explained one of the historically situated reasons for the first aspect of his historical thought in his *Teoria della storia e storiografia* (*Theory of History and Historiography*) from 1917:

And when, without looking back on the past, we consider only the multitude of anxious inquiries raised on every side by the present war—concerning the state, concerning history, right, the duties of people, civilization, culture, barbarism, science, art, religion, the end and ideal of life, and so forth—we see clearly how it behoves philosophers to come out of the theologico-metaphysical circle, in which they remain shut up even when impatient with the very mention of theology and metaphysics, since, notwithstanding the new concept they have adopted and professed, their mind and intellect are still orientated toward the old ideas.<sup>49</sup>

In 1948 Croce would find more historical reasons—above all World War II and the experience of totalitarianism—conducive to a break with ‘a predetermined history that has a beginning, middle, and end’.<sup>50</sup> Such positivist, metaphysical, and theological histories—Croce listed those of Condorcet, Vico, Hegel, the Liberal Anglican historians, Cousin, Comte, Spencer, and the Catholic Church—posited a priori necessary developmental laws, principles, or ends of human history—either material or spiritual, progressive, regressive, or cyclical. When the coherence of these beliefs was shattered by the experience of the world wars and the breakdown of liberal democracy, Croce was among the first to systematically articulate an alternative to them. These beliefs did not, for Croce, square up with the reality and mindset of the present state of Italian and European history. For this reason, institutions like the Catholic Church, and the educational proposals from positivist intellectuals, were bound to fail in creating what they aimed for: a national culture.<sup>51</sup>

Thus, Croce asserted in his 1938 *La storia come pensiero e come azione* (translated as *History as the Story of Liberty* in 1941, but a more accurate translation would be more literal: *History as Thought and Action*) that metaphysics, theology, and positivism had, on the one hand, been decidedly knocked down by present historical reality; and, on the other, that this intellectual displacement unveiled the essential historicity of theology, metaphysics, and science.<sup>52</sup> Croce drew three principal conclusions from this critique: first, that historical reality has no finality, such as utopia, or the classless society; nor can its content be determined by a priori conditions, such as absolute values, concepts derived from natural science such as ‘causality’,<sup>53</sup> or empirically static and reified concepts such as ‘nation’, ‘class’, or ‘race’.<sup>54</sup> Second, that historical reality, understood as the individual active mind in history, is the only reality.<sup>55</sup> And third, that philosophy must forgo its ontological, theological, and scientific ambitions, and assume the form of historical methodology, which means that

philosophy must be directed by the concepts that constitute and direct historical interpretation.<sup>56</sup>

Since the intelligibility and efficacy of all purely abstract concepts and theories had been demolished by historical contingencies, the only foundation and source for thought and action that remained were historical contingencies and the conceptual forms inherent to them. Thus, Ruggiero argued that one key difference between natural science and history is that the former treats the existence of objects in the epistemic modality of the possible or hypothetical event, while the latter in its attempt at rational explanation of events must face ‘an insuperable element of contingency, which colours the whole of historical thinking and writing’. Moreover, history, in holding on to contingency, is ‘tending towards multiformity and diversity’ when it attempts to render the past comprehensible, and so embeds and explains past events in a ‘dynamic progression in time’.<sup>57</sup> Philosophy must become a historical methodology because it can never start out from anything else, or end in anything else, than historical reality. Accordingly, philosophy is a systematic reflection on the methodology appropriate to a life in an everlasting history.<sup>58</sup>

Croce rejected partisan histories as well—whether founded on moral judgments, political ideologies, or political programs—but for different reasons. As an Italian senator in 1910, and minister of education between 1920 and 1921, Croce was well acquainted with the deep-rooted and structural problems of the Italian state in the liberal period. As one historian has observed, ever since its unification the Italian state has endured an almost ‘permanent legitimization crisis’.<sup>59</sup> The party system established after the *Risorgimento* did not provide the political structure Italian intellectuals of various casts hoped it would.<sup>60</sup> Structures of clientelism, patronage, corruption, the economic divide between the industrial and commercial north and the predominantly rural south, and the Holy See’s injunction to Catholics not to participate in elections, all came to permeate intellectuals’ assessments of the state. The rhetoric issuing from the state and the parties assuring reform in view of popular unification was hard to swallow for intellectuals.

For much of the period between unification and the Fascist takeover, Italian party politics were governed by the logic of *trasformismo*, the most adept politician of which was Giovanni Giolitti, five-time prime minister between 1892 and 1921. The publisher and author Giulio Bollati explained, no doubt hyperbolically, *trasformismo* in these terms: “A gap between declared intentions and actual behaviour; the ability to make the

themes and words of one's adversary one's own, to empty them of significance; the willingness to be let oneself won over; disagreement in public—and agreement behind closed doors [...] its [transformism's] aim is power for its own sake."<sup>61</sup>

In the period 1919–1921, the Italian state effectively lost control over entire areas of society, such as public order and violence, which made it all the more easier for Mussolini's Fascists to take power. One of the first legal measures undertaken by the Mussolini regime was an electoral reform in 1923, rendered vacuous by the outlawing of opposition parties in 1926. An electoral law followed suit in 1928 where a single national list provided the basis of voting. The Italian state's legitimization crisis made it easier for the Fascists to gain one-time adherents, including for a brief period Croce, who viewed the Fascists as transient regenerators of a thoroughly defective state and culture.

For Croce, if Italian party politics, and Italian liberalism,<sup>62</sup> was not adequate to the task of a healthy civic life, then neither was partisan history, in which category Croce included nationalist and racist histories, which in his view had been revealed to be horrendous partisan histories propelled onto the international stage through World War I.<sup>63</sup> The rejection of partisan histories marked a major shift in western historical consciousness, according to Croce, since the 'most popular and renowned' European historians, from ancient to modern times, were partisan historians. Just surveying the nineteenth century, in Germany, Croce found the most eminent historians writing history from the perspective of a political party, or advocating for Prussian supremacy and military power, or else propagating visions of *kleine* or *grosse Deutschland* (Gervinus, Treitschke, Droysen, von Sybel, and others); in France, they wrote as monarchists, republicans, socialists, and conservatives (Guizot, Taine, Michelet, Blanc, Thiers, to name a few); in Italy, as propagandists of the *Risorgimento*; even in England which

by reason of its long and constant political tradition and the uncontested liberty which it has enjoyed for centuries, was in a position [...] to enjoy a more spatial and serene contemplation of history because of its wide experience in world policy, yet England, too, displayed various party tendencies in the histories of Macaulay, Grote, Carlyle, and others.<sup>64</sup>

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According to Croce, the difference in historical context between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries led not only to the rejection of partisan



histories but to philosophical arguments justifying that rejection as well. One important argument of this kind that Croce devised countered the belief that a politician might be in a better position to understand political history than a historian, since his special knowledge penetrates deeper into political reality than the aloof historian ever could, since he or she is limited by an external observation of those documents that are available to him or her as a non-participant. For Croce, it is precisely in the ‘specialization of aptitudes and habits’ differentiating politics and historical research that renders the latter in a better position to understand the past. Even though both the politician and the historian exercise ‘judgment’, that judgment is different in kind in the two modes of knowledge and action. Political historical judgment sets off from either a political program or a moral judgment intended to bolster only present political concerns, and this is ‘incompatible with the logic of historiography’. The historical judgment, by contrast, being ‘extraneous to conflicting parties’, can better appreciate and explain the purposive mindsets behind past actions and institutions.<sup>65</sup>

Croce believed in the interwar years that there was ‘too much philosophy’, and too much improper history, in Italian and European culture.<sup>66</sup> More appropriate to the times as the incubator for a new liberal society was absolute historicism, the fundamental premise of which is that the only context for human reality and thought is history. Croce was not shaken by the crisis of historicism in Germany, as theorized by intellectuals such as Ernst Troeltsch and Friedrich Meinecke.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, he saw at as an opportunity for its revival.

History, for Croce, is the ground of philosophy, and contains all its possible and actual forms and content. Philosophers, therefore, ought to become historians.<sup>68</sup> But they can contribute to history as philosophers by clarifying the criteria and conceptual character of concrete reality.<sup>69</sup> Croce believed that philosophy should *only* concern itself with such an elucidation, that is, philosophy should become the methodology of history.<sup>70</sup>

The concepts ‘philosopher’ and ‘historian’ Croce did not exclusively identify in terms of professional identities. To some degree, every adult human being is both a historian and philosopher since history and philosophy are two fundamental modes immanent to the human mind through which the human being orients itself in the world. One important implication of this meaning is that a historian can in principle be a good philosopher, and vice versa. It is clear, however, that Croce drew substantially on the advances in historical research that stemmed from nineteenth century

German historians such as Leopold von Ranke and, especially, Johann Gustav Droysen.<sup>71</sup> These advances, premised on scientific criteria determining the authenticity and reliability of unpublished documents, shaped to a considerable extent the epistemic values of the nascent professional historical discipline in most, if not all, western countries.

For Croce too, historical research and writing must be based on philologically verified ‘documents’. More to the point, for Croce, ‘documents’ entail more than unpublished and published political texts; they include texts of various genres and functions, pictures, architecture, sculptures, technical equipment, indeed any material product of human mind. When utilizing these sources, according to Croce, factual ‘exactitude is a moral duty’. Croce went as far as to say that: ‘Each single sort of historiography is based solely on this.’<sup>72</sup> We can understand why Croce would go to this extreme once we grasp that source criticism had proven essential in dissipating the types of history that Croce had deemed morally and conceptually surpassed, and so it had done invaluable work in ‘ruthlessly dealing with false documents, chronicles and histories’, including fabrications and forgeries regarding national, religious, and family histories.

In doing so, philology had revealed its proper instrumentality. Since philology is premised on the principle that any remnant from the past is the product of only the contingent situation and culture of which it was part, and since philology accepts an uncertainty principle in the procedure of uncovering the meaning of any document, ‘philology when it demonstrates errors always allows of revision, and this *unlimited possibility of revision* gives force and authority to these demonstrations [emphasis added]’.<sup>73</sup> The facts uncovered by source criticism, then, though necessary for historiography, are not sufficient as they are inherently open to a variety of interpretations. Croce’s main problem with ‘pure’ philology was, thus, its unnecessary dogmatic principle that only certain types of documents harbor objective atomic facts (such as diplomatic documents, minutes, and secret treaties) which are purportedly conducive to one objective and true historical narrative for each corresponding historical event or set of events. For Croce, every document, insofar as it is a product of human mind, is a narrative, and so historical interpretation, though based on verifiable sources, is, in effect, an interpretation of interpretations. This is why, in principle, any human-made product can act as a historical document amenable to historical interpretation; and it is why Croce argued that the history of culture, religion, science, philosophy, and historiography ought to be part and parcel of historical research.<sup>74</sup>

The existence of documents alone does not mean anything unless someone addresses them in the present. This is where Croce's famous (or infamous) principle that all history is contemporary history takes front stage. Another linguistic guise of this principle, which is more informative, states that historical knowledge 'is the act of comprehending and understanding induced by the requirements of practical life'. Croce's concept of practical requirement is capacious: the 'practical' requirement can be moral, economic, aesthetic, or intellectual. All four types of requirements are admissible insofar as they are, on the one hand, based on documents (understood in the broad sense above), and, on the other hand, aimed at 'solving a scientific question by correcting and amplifying information about its terms through lack of which one had been perplexed and doubtful'.<sup>75</sup> So by 'practical' and 'contemporary', Croce did not mean partisan and subjective. Indeed, such histories stand in opposition to the kind of history that Croce had in mind:

If an historical treatise excludes an event by condemning it as irrational and negative, the irrationality and the insufficiency of the treatise and not of the event is thereby demonstrated; for the reason and the strength of historiography lies in being able to find the reasons behind every event and in being able to assign a place and office to each event in the drama or the epoch which is being considered, and which is history.<sup>76</sup>

This is, in effect, the type of contextualized, problem-oriented and sympathetic form of understanding of past actions that we found at the margins of Victorian idealism, but which in the Crocean version of new idealism is given the center stage.

Croce was in full agreement with Droysen when Droysen stated that historicism is "to construct an implement for historical thought and research."<sup>77</sup> Ruggiero placed a difference emphasis, thereby demonstrating that there is a variety in Italian new idealist historical thought. For Ruggiero, historical understanding is a form of scientific explanation, but it differs from natural science in presupposing the non-natural concept 'intentional causality', or 'individualized causality', where the causes are the 'conscious acts' of agents in historical time, and the effects are events knowable through recorded facts. Being underdetermined by these causes, the effects can differ from what the agents intended with their actions. In such cases, the historian tries to understand how the agents responded to such effects with further acts. And for Ruggiero, as for Croce, agency entails both *individual* and *collective* agency:

as long as there is a context of several agents interacting with their environment and with one another, and for which there is recorded evidence, the historian can come to know them.<sup>78</sup> Thus, for instance, nation-states can be seen as agents, and so can corporate boards, publishing houses, governments, cities, political parties, social movements, and so on.<sup>79</sup>

Croce, in contrast to Ruggiero, did not favor the concept of cause in historical understanding. Instead, he held the concept of liberty as the ‘explanatory principle of the course of history’. Being ‘the moral ideal of humanity’ as well, absolute historicism was, thus, crucial for morally orienting oneself in the present.<sup>80</sup> But historicized liberty meant that morality too is historical: studying it in the past will reveal its content to be both plural and contingent to particular contexts of action, and that study will aid in the present by infusing the historian (whoever is thinking historically) with a sense of the bounded nature of his or her own liberty and morality.<sup>81</sup> Perennial philosophy (*‘philosophia perennis’*) and perennial religion (*‘religio perennis’*) cannot act as templates for liberty and morality, for they presuppose transcendental concepts such as ‘humanity’. In an important passage, Croce countered the transcendental Enlightenment idea of humanity: ‘The correct thought is that the wholeness of humanity is not present to itself, and has no being except in the making of it, and the making is never a making in general, but a determinate and historical task.’<sup>82</sup>

Croce’s histories did not fully own up to his principles. His historical accounts of the divide between the north and the south in books, such as *Storia del regno di Napoli* (1925) and *Storia d’Italia dal 1875 al 1915* (1928), attest to his unfulfilled revisionist potential. On the one hand, Croce rejected any reductivist explanation of southern poverty (for instance, race and climate), and so looked to contingent agency as the explanatory factor. But ‘agency’ in Croce’s histories, in contrast to his philosophy of history, was restricted to mean ethically minded political elites, conceived as the real driving force and craftsmen of the historical process. As such, they revealed that southern Italians, far from being radically different than northern Italians, were the prime movers in the unification of Italy. With this interpretation, Croce intended to instill in contemporary Italian elites a historical sense of their present duties and responsibilities: to always strive for unity by always working through transient, almost irrelevant, moments of disunity. Indeed, Croce’s curious refusal to acknowledge the historical significance of the ‘losers’, errors,

and marginalized groups of the past did not do his thought any service in the postwar era.<sup>83</sup>

### CROCE'S NEW HUMANISM

The belief that humanity in its totality is never present to the concrete mind is the core of Croce's new humanism.<sup>84</sup> Indeed, for Croce, absolute historicism was the 'true humanism', the heir of Renaissance humanism, but modified to be 'adequate to modern times'. Two observations informed Croce's belief. First, Croce intended the new humanism to act as a resource in the sphere of education, where he opposed the idea of a new humanist 'school' to what he schematically called 'the real or technical school', insofar as the latter instills in students a determinist, materialist, and techno-redemptive utopianism that hails from Enlightenment rationalism. However, Croce believed humanism to be complimentary to a technical or vocational training as long as the latter teaches students practical skills and methods that provide the material capacities and conditions for the exercise and development of their liberty. It did not pan out as Croce, and his fellow new idealist Ruggiero intended, but the Italian education system has ever since the Fascists (owing to Gentile's educational reform) included a great deal of mandatory history of philosophy in the curriculum.

In the early post-World War II period, Croce expressed a similar disbelief in technocrats and scientists. Croce opined that experts were being hailed as the dispassionate saviors and directors of the world.<sup>85</sup> When the atomic bomb entered the scene of war and international relations, Croce publically expressed his fear that its advent signaled the looming possibility of such an elevated place for scientific experts.<sup>86</sup> According to Croce, scientists and technocrats did not err as long as they directed their efforts at solving particular technical problems appropriate to concrete situations. The radical contingency of problems and requirements was such that it allowed for a variety of methods and approaches as long as these acted for the promotion of liberty, and so

this is the criterion which should, according to circumstances, lead us to be revolutionaries or conservatives, bold experimentalists or cautious traditionalists. Private property in industry, in land, in housing, or its communal holding in the State, is not to be judged or approved or disapproved morally or economically in itself, but only in relation to that perpetual problem with

its ever fresh forms, while it is clear, and for the rest history proves, that these forms come and go subject to the most various changes.<sup>87</sup>

Croce attempted to deploy his new humanism in international politics. He critiqued the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights for promoting an abstract concept of humanity in the Enlightenment natural law tradition. Instead, he proposed to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, after being solicited along with numerous other prominent intellectuals for a comment, that a discussion should be held between the major political actors of the world, and that they should produce a brief list of human rights and needs according to the historical reality of the present.<sup>88</sup>

The second observation that informed Croce's belief in humanism is that since liberty thrives first and foremost in the context of culture, and not the state—which had in Germany and Italy proven to arrogate supreme power and authority over liberty—Croce's humanism was, at least since the late 1930s, non-statist, as 'culture and civilization are always superior to the state'.<sup>89</sup> The state, whether totalitarian, authoritarian, socialist, conservative, or liberal, is ridden with a partisan historical consciousness. While Croce saw partisan history an inescapable way of thinking historically for statesmen, he put great hope that 'cultured people will disdain the play of optimism and depression which such works produce by making use of the images of the past'.<sup>90</sup> He would hold on to this hope until his retirement from politics in 1947.

## NUOVA RIVISTA STORICA: CROCE AND PROFESSIONAL ITALIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

Before ending the analysis of the Italian new idealism, I wish to briefly unveil the fact that Croce's thought found an audience among Italian professional historians of the 1920s. The southern Italian historian Corrado Barbagallo, co-founder and first editor of the academic journal *Nuova Rivista Storica*, founded in 1917,<sup>91</sup> wrote in the very first volume of *The Journal of Modern History* (1929) a written assessment of Croce's influence on Italian historians. Barbagallo argued that philological 'experts' had dominated the shape of historiography until Croce 'gradually undermined' them. He explained this shift in historical sensibility by referring to the impact of World War I.<sup>92</sup> As Barbagallo related in a passage worth quoting at length:

The war confronted us with many problems—serious historical problems—for which an answer was anxiously sought; but the historians could not give any. How and owing to what causes had the world run headlong into that abyss of fire after so long a time spent in peace? [...] What conflicting forces had caused that furious upheaval of peoples? What racial problems or interests were then stirring Europe? How and in what measure was the present an outcome of the past, and how would it influence the future? All these problems distressed men's hearts and now for the first time racked even the brain of some of the recognized historians. Of course it was necessary to shape a new historical mind fit to devise a suitable answer.<sup>93</sup>

Accordingly, the articles in *Nuova Rivista Storica* were to be guided by an imperative to always uncover the physical material necessary to arrive at knowledge of the past. But this was a preliminary step toward, on the one hand, the interpretation of social facts on their own historical terms; and, on the other hand, the investigation of historical problems that bore on present conditions. Barbagallo himself started out as a historian of antiquity, but was to take a profound interest in the history that had led to a world mired with wars, and an Italy ruled by Fascists.<sup>94</sup> Barbagallo mentioned with despondency the educational reform issued in 1923 by Gentile, then minister of public instruction, transforming, according to Barbagallo, all philosophy teachers into teachers of history.<sup>95</sup> This Gentilian form of 'idealistic' philosophy funded and disseminated only that history which was authorized by Fascist ideologues and officials. Thus, if philology constrained the development of an attitude toward history appropriate to modern times from one end, Fascist history and educational reform hindered it from the other.

For Barbagallo, Croce's alienation from his former idealist colleague, which cemented Croces' dissociation of history from partisan uses, showed signs of hope.<sup>96</sup> He, thus, praised Croce's histories of Naples and Italy. Barbagallo was more cautious in appraising Croce's philosophy of history. Croce's 'ethico-political' conception of history, in seeing all social phenomena as outcomes of an ethical activity that takes place in a multitude of non-reductive contexts—such as the state, religious institutions, revolutionary factions, feelings, habits, and myths—was sound, albeit hardly original according to Barbagallo. Being a historical materialist, Barbagallo would have preferred to see Croce put more emphasis on social and economic factors in the determination of thought or action. But the very fact that a materialist historian was applauding Croce and Crocean history,

notwithstanding that historian's asides, testifies to the Protean uses of Croce's thought by historians.

PROFESSIONALIZATION, TECHNOCRACY, AND WHIGGISM:  
THE FIRST USES OF ITALIAN NEW IDEALISM IN BRITISH  
HISTORIOGRAPHY

In the few but significant British debates on Italian new idealist historical thought in the 1920s, the teaching and uses of history provided a crucible. By this time—in Oxford, Cambridge, Manchester, and London, at any rate—a professional and scientific ethos had come to contend with a literary and whiggish mode of teaching, writing, and disseminating history that hailed from Victorian times.<sup>97</sup> Training in specialized technical and archival research was beginning to define historical education at the universities. *The English Historical Review*, founded in 1886, was coming into its own as the leading British professional journal of history. Lewis Namier's interpretation of eighteenth century English parliamentary politics as a thoroughly localized set of personal power struggles, driven by unconscious drives, was setting a standard for research.<sup>98</sup> Finally, the Institute of Historical Research was founded in 1921. All of these developments pointed to a narrower readership of history books,<sup>99</sup> and signaled new social and political functions for historians and history.

The type of critical and minute study advocated by the likes of H.A.L. Fisher, T.F. Tout, Charles Firth, F.W. Maitland, Mandell Creighton, and William Stubbs, may have challenged the literary perspective from which the grand narratives of the English past, written by historians, such as Trevelyan and Macaulay, had been constructed. This change in methodological outlook, however, did not lead to a radical and comprehensive change in historiographical viewpoint and educational reform, that is, to revisionism. Fisher, for instance, believed that new 'special histories' were needed simply because the 'great outlines' were already known. Macaulay's *History of England* was, in Fisher's view, the best introduction to English history in 1848—and it remained so in 1928. More than that, Fisher contended that Macaulay and other whig historians had risen over all party interests and possessed the 'ability to take a large and balanced view of the facts of human progress', on the one hand, and the capacity to understand all past thought and action strictly on its own terms, on the other.<sup>100</sup> The new critical method at the universities, thus, dovetailed the old whig historiography.<sup>101</sup> The new



method left intact the whiggish focus on individual liberty and character, the constitution, the parliament, a periodization based on reigns, and a view of historical education as the training ground for a national elite that was sent up to Oxford and Cambridge predominantly from middle—and upper-class families.<sup>102</sup> As Butterfield aptly put it:

It is true that this tendency [the whig interpretation] is corrected to some extent by the more concentrated labours of historical specialists, but it is remarkable that [...] the result of detailed historical research has been to correct very materially what had been an accepted Protestant or whig interpretation.<sup>103</sup>

The spread of the scientific ethos in history, which was scientific in the sense that history was a science as rigorous as but separable from natural science, though local in the peculiarities of its development, was entangled with wider developments in post-World War I British society and politics. The admixture of whiggish historical discourse and calls for the professionalization and specialization of history was connected to the discourse on ‘national efficiency’ in early twentieth-century Britain.<sup>104</sup> Many, on both ends of the political spectrum, viewed the inefficiency of the British army in the Boer War, the obsolescence of the Poor Law, the diminishing social returns of laissez-faire capitalism, and rising levels of the urban population and working classes, as clear signs of the need to overhaul the administrative, economic, social, and indeed biological structure of Britain.<sup>105</sup>

Some advocates of national efficiency, not least the Fabians Sidney and Beatrice Webb, justified their policy proposals in part by recourse to histories that were purportedly based on the same scientific ethos—excavating previously unknown facts in a hitherto unknown systematic and comprehensive manner so as to know the ‘real’ past—that could solve the question of efficiency in the hands of dispassionate and non-partisan administrators who had the welfare of the entire nation in their interest. Gradual reform through scientific and technocratic expertise would ensure the survival, through radical modification and *not* dissolution, of traditional English practices and traditions. A revisionist historiography, in the non-idealist sense of the term, could give historical weight to these present reformist demands. For instance, in the hands of the Fabian historian Sidney Webb, the English feudal landlord became ‘a benign local authority performing essential community tasks as policeman, soldier, judge, and administrator’, with an ethos similar to a ‘modern civil servant’.<sup>106</sup>

Most professional British historians did not discuss the Fabians' historical revisions seriously in the 1920s (in contrast to the 1950s and the 1960s), not because of their failure to abide by scientific method, but because they threatened that strand of academic liberal whiggism that privileged parliamentary and constitutional continuity. The professional historians' use of the critical method proved useful in justifying historical research in a society increasingly demanding more science and efficiency on the one hand; but on the other hand, that justification served to epistemically refashion liberal-whig narratives in the language of scientific objectivity.

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It is in this web of debates and positions that the new idealism was first publically discussed among professional historians in Britain. I will fasten on the debate that took place in the pages of *History* between 1922 and 1923 when Ernest Barker, once a teacher at the Oxford School of Modern History and now Principal of King's College in London, took it upon himself to defend a Crocean approach to history.<sup>107</sup> A.F. Pollard retorted with an 'Apology for Historical Research'.<sup>108</sup> Pollard had been Barker's teaching colleague at Oxford,<sup>109</sup> but had since become the founder and director of the Institute of Historical Research, editor of *History*, and Professor of Constitutional History at University College London. Clearly this debate involved some of the most prominent historians of the time and touched on some important issues of the day, as historians both in Britain and abroad, including Croce and the editors of the first journal of scientific history, the German *Historische Zeitschrift*, felt pressed to comment on it.<sup>110</sup>

Historians were ready to take issue with Croce and the new idealism, because it purported to transform the foundations of historical research and education. In the 1920s, Barker had come to view with skepticism the rise of scientific expertise and technocracy.<sup>111</sup> Even though a shift from a national life governed by gentleman-scholars, whom Barker believed had historically moved Britain forward,<sup>112</sup> was 'inevitable' due to the conditions of modern society, it was not always for the better.<sup>113</sup> The 'technological specialization' that had introduced into British higher education programs in brewing (Birmingham), textile studies (Leeds), journalism (London, Manchester, Leeds), and 'Schools of Business Administration' (several universities), 'may reduce their system of instruction to a system of mechanical mass-production; it may lower their standard of examination to the standard of mere mechanical attainment'. At worst, the graduates

from these new programs would become ‘an unemployed, or uncongenially and inadequately employed, intellectual proletariat; and an intellectual proletariat is the seed-bed of revolutionary movements, political and economic’.<sup>114</sup>

It was thus with disconcertment that Barker perceived the new developments in history teaching and research at the universities since the supreme value of ‘research’ had led to a practice in ‘machinery—a sort of testing machine for those who desire some higher degree’.<sup>115</sup> The research student was encouraged to probe ‘unprinted material in order to discover new facts’, in the belief that there is a ‘magic’ to them that unlocks the past as it exactly happened.<sup>116</sup>

To challenge this modern approach to the past, and offer an alternative, Barker saw fit to use Croce’s theory of history in a lecture before professional historians, subsequently published as an article.<sup>117</sup> The most significant and paradoxical aspect of that appropriation is that it implies, indeed even seems to encourage, thoroughly revisionist approaches to the English past, while it refashions whiggism by contrasting it with its scientific versions. What adds to this paradox is Barker’s commitments to pluralism. Pluralism was a political theory that arose in the early twentieth century, advocating the primacy of diverse groups, corporations, and churches over the state, due to the formation and societal influence of groups such as the Labour Party, the suffragettes, the trade unions, the Workers Education Association, and cases such as the Taff Vale and the Free Church of Scotland Case.<sup>118</sup>

The revisionist potential in Barker’s theory of history resides in his refusal, based on Croce’s critique of philology, to privilege facts as the sole or final arbiter of the objectivity of a historical narrative and of the soundness of historical method. To uncover facts was necessary for any good historical work, according to Barker. But several factors of historical thinking and writing were even more important determinants. First, due to the ‘economy’ of human records, there is always only partial evidence for any phenomenon to be studied. Second, a historian inevitably selects not only his research topic and period but also what he or she believes is significant and of interest in the past. In that sense: ‘A historian is like an artist—like the painter of a portrait or a landscape: he selects what has significance and interest.’<sup>119</sup> This means, in Croce’s words, that all history is contemporary history, and that it finds an impulse or drive from a present perspective engaged in addressing a particular problem. Third, history is the activity of concrete and historically situated human minds. As such, the historian must own up to the fact that he or she, any version of history, and any

part of the past are relative to particular worldviews. For instance, the histories of Herodotus makes sense only if we understand that they depend on a worldview where Gods are believed to exist and behave in a certain manner toward humans; and the ‘Middle Ages’ take on radically different meanings in the thought of Enlightenment philosophical historians compared to their usage by Romantic historians. Thus, the past is ‘a Protean thing which can change from shape to shape’.<sup>120</sup> What this, in turn, holds in store is the principle: ‘There is no final philosophy, just as there is not, and never will be, any final history of any age or movement.’<sup>121</sup> Fourth, the historian ought to understand any aspect of the past in a sympathetic mode, attempting to unearth the logic of thought and action inherent to the minds of the people he or she is studying.

This sympathetic mode does not ensure true and objective accounts since both the ‘fragments of mind’ the historian is studying and the narratives he or she is producing stem from and are geared toward some practical and contingent activity in the present.<sup>122</sup> As inherent as the sympathetic approach to the human past is, so too is the contemporaneity of historical consciousness.

These principles, Barker argued, ought to be applied in the ‘curriculum of the various schools of history’. The school that best approximates to them, in Barker’s view, and unsurprisingly given his belief that ancient Greece was the best analogy for modern times, was the school of *literae humaniores* at Oxford.<sup>123</sup> It is paradoxical that Barker himself did not systematically apply these principles in his own teaching at Oxford and Cambridge, and in his own histories. Barker was too committed to, and constrained by, Victorian liberal-conservative beliefs to own up to the consequences of his commitment to pluralism and new idealist historical theory.<sup>124</sup> Although Barker readily accepted the new idealist philosophy of history, in his historical writing and teaching, he was much more inspired by late Victorian absolute idealism. Indeed, Barker historically situated British absolute idealism in a liberal-whiggish narrative, by hailing Green for having extracted modern German idealism from its ties to ‘reason of state’ theories, and molded it in the tradition of the ‘liberty of the subject’ and in that sense of ‘caution’ ‘which marks all Englishmen’.<sup>125</sup>

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Barker’s article did not fall on deaf ears. Pollard, a leading constitutional historian and institutional powerhouse in the interwar years,<sup>126</sup> did not appreciate the implications of Barker’s proposals, though he welcomed

in principle a dialogue between history and philosophy. Using his own cultural capital as an examiner at the Final Honors School in Oxford as a conceptual weapon, Pollard mentioned how teachers with a philosophical bent, those in Political Science and Political Economy, proudly claimed that their subjects were the only ‘thinking’ subjects in the School. To this, Pollard replied that Stubbs’s *Charters*, the companion to his *Constitutional History of England*,<sup>127</sup> were even more demanding on the mind than philosophy since they tasked the student with detailed and specific knowledge, and not only abstract concepts and principles.<sup>128</sup> Philosophy, for Pollard, was ultimately a purely abstract method with no applicability to historical research and teaching. And new idealist philosophy, especially as used by Barker, was at best a ‘sermon’ or a ‘treatise in moral philosophy’.<sup>129</sup>

Pollard viewed Barker’s theory as a reduction of historical study and teaching to fictional, moral or aesthetic norms, indeed to something like what historians after the linguistic and cultural turn call constructivist history.<sup>130</sup> The threat Pollard and his ilk saw in this kind of history was curiously coupled to wider liberal and conservative fears of ‘the masses’. Gilbert Murray, a leading interwar university liberal, stated that modern psychology had shown that the masses are moved ‘not by fact, not by reason’, but by ‘subconscious prejudices and instincts’, tending toward ‘vices, slight cravings or obsessions’.<sup>131</sup> For Pollard, Barker’s theory of history justified precisely these kinds of sentiments, and thus harbored the subversion of social and political order, since these purportedly natural ‘instincts’ were the targets of Communist and Fascist propaganda, or else historical literature exalting the socially sinful consumption of alcohol and tobacco while encouraging sexual and political frivolity.<sup>132</sup>

This, however, was not the only way in which Barker’s theory was interpreted. Alice Gardner was one of those countless gifted young women who graduated in history from Oxford or Cambridge (the latter in this case) in the early twentieth century. She was a historian of the Byzantium who served in the history department of the Foreign Office in World War I, and became head of the history department at Bristol University in 1915. She reacted to what she took to be Pollard’s unfair interpretation of Barker.<sup>133</sup>

For Gardner

‘the large and human view which he [Barker] took of the whole subject was immensely to be preferred to that of some modern teachers who had been bred on partial and special studies [...] and to whom public affairs with diplomatic shiftings and military decisions were the all-in-all of historical studies’.<sup>134</sup>

Barker's approach was attractive to Gardner, and others who shared her outlook, partly because she had been a pluralist in matters of religious education since the early twentieth century,<sup>135</sup> and partly because she believed that World War I had caused a 'change in our general mental perspective', forcing a generation to rethink its entire mode of life, locally, nationally, and internationally. This development, though tragic, harbored great promise. It was conducive to questioning the value and uses, especially military and economic uses, of 'modern scientific measures and efficient organization'.<sup>136</sup>

Equally importantly, it was conducive to reappraising the public role of women since the war provided an opportunity for women to engage in public life due to the shortage of men. This opportunity, fuelled by the new outlook, could and should act as a stepping-stone for a different and better postwar future for women.<sup>137</sup> For Gardner, Barker's theory, thus, portended an entire shift in history education from a technical and narrow preoccupation with high politics to a broad and humanist study of the past that includes the history of historiography, and the re-evaluation of the public role of women. Such a history, Gardner contended, is not 'an attack on research conducted on reasonable lines', even if it does question 'the slight and piecemeal work which sometimes goes by this name'.<sup>138</sup>

As far as Pollard was concerned, Gardner's intervention was to no avail. For Pollard, Barker's kind of historical theory had contributed to the spread of nationalism and chauvinism just as much as historical writing, and so, writing after the anti-German sentiments that arose after World War I, Pollard related that 'Hegel and Nietzsche had as much to do with the perversion of German patriotism as had Ranke or Treitschke'.<sup>139</sup> According to Pollard, there was no other foundation for historical education, research, and writing than the discovery and critical examination of facts. Such a foundation acted as a bulwark against nationalism and chauvinism. It even led works ensuing from 'the M.A., the least pretentious of research degrees' to be 'printed by the university presses at Oxford, Cambridge, London and Manchester, [...] approved by scholars in two hemispheres, and become part of the revisions in which historical learning largely consists'.<sup>140</sup>

But from Barker's and other like-minded idealists' viewpoint, this argument against new idealist philosophy was unconvincing. To them, there was idealism and then there was idealism. Andrew Seth Pringle-Pattison was a prominent advocate of personal idealism,<sup>141</sup> which was distinct from the new idealism, but related to it in that it rejected the metaphysical

and transcendental approach of Victorian absolute idealism, and analyzed mind only in biological, historical, social, and personal contexts. Pringle-Pattison made that evident in a 1923 lecture and subsequent pamphlet entitled *The Philosophy of History*.<sup>142</sup> According to Pringle-Pattison, it was no longer possible to assume that the task of the philosophy of history is the discernment of a providential or law-like pattern that encompasses all humanity. In an important passage, Pringle-Pattison pointed out that if all of humanity is part of such a grand developmental scheme—as Hegel or Green would have it—then why does that scheme tend to exclude non-European people and non-Christian religions; why does it culminate in European civilization and Christianity; and why must all history be moved by certain European nation-states and the Christian faith? Absolute idealists of the nineteenth century answered these questions by simply saying that there must be such a scheme, and used it to justify nationalist and imperialist doctrines. But Pringle-Pattison hastened to add, drawing on Ernst Troeltsch, that today: ‘The linear conception of world-history, in short, will not bear dispassionate reflection. Humanity as a whole, says Troeltsch, has no spiritual unity and therefore no unitary development. Thus, whatever we do in the present for the future “will be as we make it,” and God’s only advice is “Work out your own salvation.”’<sup>143</sup>

What we may call the academic politics of interwar historical revisionism were at stake in the debate between Barker, Pollard, and Gardner. Given that a third of all Oxford undergraduates between 1900–1925 studied history, a number comparable to the Cambridge History Tripos, the stakes were high, for these were the young people that were being educated to lead Britain.<sup>144</sup> To both sides, a revisionist approach to the past was of the utmost importance since it would teach these students how to orient themselves in an ever-changing world. For Barker, the new idealism, as we saw, could inform a revisionist agenda. By contrast, for Pollard, historical revision must rest solely on critical research, for it is only critical research that can secure objective knowledge of the real past. Moreover, only critical research can distinguish truth from fiction: ‘One must be able to tell the false from the true and the fact from the fiction; and there is no means to do that except by training in historical research.’<sup>145</sup>

Barker, as we saw, did not fulfill the revisionist potential that he found in the new idealism, and neither did Pollard in the potential he found in critical research. Though he set out to revise even the great constitutional history of Stubbs himself, in *The Evolution of Parliament* (1920), Pollard ultimately found himself arguing that the origins of English liberty

were ensured by the parliament that had grown during Henry VII and Elizabeth I. At best, this was intra-whiggish revisionism, as it simply displaced the origins of Englishness from the Middle Ages (as Stubbs would have it) to the Tudors.<sup>146</sup> Moreover, Pollard's whiggism is on display when he proclaimed that the biases to which every historical narrative is liable are no longer a real issue, *not* because of dispassionate research, but because contemporary histories are written from the viewpoint of the English public. This public, in Pollard's view, is not ridden with conflicts, and not comprised of radically different groups and movements: 'It may be that historians still write history too much from the point of view of the patrons who pay them; but the patron is no longer a private person, or a limited class of plutocrats, but a public which is a fair sample of the community.'<sup>147</sup>

#### BRITISH NEW IDEALISM, SOCIO-POLITICAL PLURALISM, AND PROFESSIONAL HISTORIOGRAPHY

What the foregoing section serves to show is that when, from the 1920s and onward, R.G. Collingwood and Michael Oakeshott began propounding new idealist philosophies of history from Oxford and Cambridge, they could rest assured that historians would listen.<sup>148</sup> British historians were becoming accustomed to debating the merits and demerits of the new idealism. In 1934, the Oxford School of Modern History introduced a course on the 'development and methods of historical writing'.<sup>149</sup> Far from being removed from the salient debates and problems of inter-war and immediate postwar British historiography and history teaching, Oakeshott and Collingwood constructed their approaches to the past in reference to these, with the aim of redirecting the professional study of the past, while being respectful to some of the key epistemic elements of non-philosophically inclined scientific historiography. Indeed, Collingwood in particular seems to pick up from where Butterfield left off his call for an anti-whig historiography that pivots on 'imaginative sympathy', capable of arriving at an 'interpretive truth' inclusive of human diversity.<sup>150</sup>

Whatever hopes, then, both Oakeshott and Collingwood placed in modes of doing history informed by new idealist philosophy, those hopes both drew on and extended a hand to professional historiography. Oakeshott was a member of the Cambridge Junior Historians Society in the 1920s, and a history teacher at the Cambridge Faculty of History between 1932 and 1949, where he taught the history of political



thought.<sup>151</sup> Collingwood taught the history of Roman Britain at Oxford, and delivered at least one paper to the Stubbs Society, the oldest historical society in Oxford, founded in 1882 as the Oxford Historical Seminar, modeled on the German research seminar.<sup>152</sup> Since its inception, the Society has hosted paper presentations by, among others, E.A. Freeman, Charles Firth, G.R. Elton, Christopher Hill, and Hugh Trevor-Roper. Oakeshott and Collingwood were not institutional powerhouses, but it is clear that the historical profession did not institutionally ostracize them, as most historians of historiography seem to believe.<sup>153</sup> Partly because of their institutional access to the world of professional history; partly because of their sustained engagement, through a number of publications, with problems in historical thought, writing, and research; and partly because of their intense engagement with contemporary social and political problems, Oakeshott and Collingwood exponentially increased the revisionist potential of the new idealism.

The shared dimension of this revisionist potential in Oakeshott and Collingwood resides in their overt anti-whiggism. Indeed, Oakeshott was privy to the debate over whig historiography initiated by Butterfield. Butterfield, as is well known, honed the discontent of professional historians regarding whiggism in a now famous lecture published as *The Whig Interpretation of History* (1931). Oakeshott had been friends with Butterfield since the 1920s, when they were both members of the Cambridge Junior Historians Society.<sup>154</sup> In 1951, Oakeshott revealed his sympathy with the positions of *The Whig Interpretation of History*, a title Oakeshott found animated by ‘paradoxical parochialism’.<sup>155</sup> Even though Butterfield in no uncertain terms rejected the philosophy of history as having any relevance to his attempt at correcting the errors of whiggism, he nonetheless phrased himself in terms which suggest both that whiggism rested on a philosophy of history, and that a philosophy of history could be of aid in the avoidance of a whig attitude: ‘This whig version of the course of history is associated with certain methods of historical organization and inference—certain fallacies to which all history is liable, unless it be historical research.’<sup>156</sup>

Whiggism, for both Oakeshott and Butterfield, did not make sense as a historical mode of knowledge in their contemporary world.<sup>157</sup> As Oakeshott explained regarding the whig historian Lord Acton: ‘Acton observes: “Expressions like: the growth of language, physiology of the State, national psychology, the mind of the Church, the development of Platonism, the continuity of law—questions which occupy half the mental

activity of our age—were unintelligible to the eighteenth century—to Hume, Johnson, Smith, Diderot.” But’, Oakeshott hastened to add, ‘it is not less true to say that the last eighty years have seen the rejection of most, if not all, of these concepts; they have again become unintelligible.’<sup>158</sup> These kinds of concepts were invoked by a history geared toward what Oakeshott called the history of the ‘practical past’, which ‘looks to the past in order to explain his [the historian’s] present world, to justify it, or to make it a more habitable and a less mysterious place’.<sup>159</sup> History, for Oakeshott, could not perform that function any longer.

Collingwood, in his lectures on the idea of history from the 1930s, inveighed against whig historiography, and he did so by vesting whig historiography with the more capacious terms ‘patriotic history’ and ‘partisan history’.<sup>160</sup> But Collingwood was equally keen to present his attack on whiggism in terms more familiar to Oxford and Cambridge historians, who were challenging the public-moralist aspects of liberal whiggism.<sup>161</sup> Thus, much like Butterfield, Collingwood proclaimed that in history ‘We are not called upon to pass moral judgments at all’.<sup>162</sup> Moreover, to think that historical education is only meant to offer instruction in moral and political affairs is to think in terms of outdated Renaissance and Victorian history education.<sup>163</sup>

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There were specific reasons why Oakeshott and Collingwood felt that whiggish historiography was ill suited for the times. Several problems in academic, domestic, and international society compounded a reason for a break with a unitary and teleological national history that posited a transcendental individual liberty as the means and end of history. As far as the situation at Oxbridge is concerned, by the time Oakeshott, Collingwood, and Butterfield had matriculated into Cambridge or Oxford, the ancient universities had seen the entry of nonconformists (Butterfield himself was a Methodist), Catholics, working class students, and in the 1930s, would see that politicization of the student body which led many students, including Butterfield’s, to become Marxists.

Let us see what it was about the national political scene that led Collingwood and Oakeshott to reject whiggism, beginning with Collingwood. In the first place, inspired by Ruggiero’s liberal socialism,<sup>164</sup> and similar to his fellow Oxonian A.D. Lindsay,<sup>165</sup> Collingwood believed that Marx’s analysis of the capitalist system was applicable to Britain. Collingwood argued that capitalists clearly exploited workers under the guise of the legal ideological superstructure, that same legality held sacred

by whiggish constitutional historians. This existing cleavage between two social groups, workers and capitalists, was for Collingwood conducive to socio-political reform and a pluralist concept of British society.<sup>166</sup> In the second place, the admiration Collingwood extended to the social reforms of Liberal Prime Minister H.H. Asquith, who had studied under Green at Balliol College, turned to disillusion when Collingwood proclaimed, exaggeratingly to be sure, the subsequent Liberal Prime Minister David Lloyd George's government utterly corrupt.<sup>167</sup> The Liberal Party under Lloyd George had shown itself as a party of narrow material interests, and had thus questioned the whig belief that the British executive is a bastion for the promotion of liberty.

We should not fail to note that Collingwood adhered to a consensus interpretation of English history as applicable to pre-Second Reform Bill Victorian England. Before the Bill, opined Collingwood in his last major writing *The New Leviathan*, only England had been a 'consciously dialectical' body politic, because Liberals and Conservatives realized that they had to discuss with each other in view of moving from non-agreement to agreement.<sup>168</sup> The culmination of English dialectical politics was the 1867 Second Reform Bill. Though the claim to widen the voting franchise, and so liberty, was Liberal to begin with, it was through dialectical discussion that the Conservatives realized that they were in agreement on the matter, and it is for that reason that the Conservatives under Disraeli effected laws which in various ways and degrees increased the welfare of the middle and working classes.

But something went wrong when the Liberals regained power in 1868. The Liberals had repressed the dialectical principle that there must be a party of reaction, thus falling prey to 'self-deception', ensuing in 'eristical' discussion, where 'each party tries to prove that he was right and the other wrong'.<sup>169</sup> Incidentally, Oakeshott too lamented, for very different reasons, post-1867 developments. For Oakeshott, the post-1867 government by the rule of law, intended to ensure individual liberty, was pushed aside by the government of the 'redistribution of wealth', and with this narrowing of political interests, Oakeshott believed he was retrospectively 'foreseeing the corruption of the English character'.<sup>170</sup>

This ambivalent relationship to whiggism might appear as a minor aspect in Collingwood and Oakeshott. It is not, as it reveals how haphazardly and paradoxically even the staunchest anti-whigs rejected whiggism. Luke O'Sullivan has fruitfully called this 'inverted whiggism', thereby signaling that whiggism, in some form or other, is evident even in anti-whiggism.<sup>171</sup>

In the third place, developments in European politics had led Collingwood, along with numerous other intellectuals and students of the interwar and early postwar years, to reject optimistic grand narratives and moralizing philosophies. There were, first, the world wars, and especially World War II.<sup>172</sup> Next, there was the appeasement policy toward Hitler, and Britain's involvement in the Spanish Civil War. Collingwood's position on these issues in foreign policy was usually to the left as well, to such an extent that he was labeled a communist by some commentators. And indeed, Collingwood believed that British non-intervention in the Spanish Civil War was a sophisticated diplomatic ruse for intervention. In line with the policy of appeasement, by not intervening the government de facto intervened on the side of the fascists. To make matters worse, the government engineered a 'careful war-scare' to justify this repugnant policy.<sup>173</sup> In his famous *English History*, A.J.P. Taylor expressed bafflement over the vehemence of Collingwood's anti-fascism.<sup>174</sup> Collingwood went, oddly enough, as far as to condemn the institutionally rising 'realist' and analytic philosophers, along with the psychologists, in Oxford and Cambridge. Both the philosophers and the psychologists, according to Collingwood, relied on a faith in the methods of modern natural science and modern techniques of national efficiency,<sup>175</sup> and were, therefore, deemed 'the propagandists of a coming Fascism'.<sup>176</sup>

Oakeshott invoked what he saw as the five radically different ideologies of the 1930s—Fascism, Catholicism, National Socialism, Representative Democracy, and Communism—as a sufficient reason to discard any idea of unity or teleology. Because these ideologies comprise 'at least five separate and distinct ways of conceiving the fundamental character of society, and, by implication, five separate and distinct ways of conceiving the nature and earthly destiny of man [...] it would be foolish to attribute to our civilization a unity which it has lost, merely on the ground that these doctrines are to some small extent complementary'.<sup>177</sup> The co-existence of these ideologies thoroughly undermined the idea which was able to create a sense of whiggish unity prior to World War I, and that was the idea of 'crude and negative individualism', with the attendant 'moral ideal' and metaphysical history of liberalism.

Oakeshott confidently asserted: 'Liberalism in that sense is perhaps dead', and what rose from its ashes, representative democracy, has most to learn from Communism.<sup>178</sup> Around the same time Oakeshott published these passages, Butterfield had published an article entitled 'History and the Marxian Method' (1933), in which he iconoclastically argued that Marxism, which was influencing more and more history students at

Cambridge, was a welcome addition to historical science as it debunked 'the kind of history which hankers after some logical development, and sees men moving step by step towards some expanding purpose, freedom broadening down from precedent to precedent'.<sup>179</sup> G.R. Elton, following his fellow conservative historian Maurice Cowling, has suggested that Butterfield's assessment came at a time when his students were being drawn to Marxist forms of analyses.<sup>180</sup>

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We will recall that Croce saw in the philological aspect of scientific historical research an unlimited revisionist potential since it could be employed in debunking partisan narratives. Collingwood too argued that technical source criticism and the unearthing of new facts was a necessary condition of proper historical research. However, both Oakeshott and Collingwood, but especially Collingwood, also argued that there were potential hazards in holding technical research as the necessary *and* sufficient condition of historical practice. Much like Barker and Gardner, Collingwood worried about the future of humanistic culture in an increasingly scientific, materialist, and technocratic society.<sup>181</sup>

Historical research was being drawn into this new society by two related, but distinct, perspectives. One perspective was positivist scientific history defended by historians such as J.B. Bury, who argued, according to Collingwood, that 'it is the business of the scientific historian to discover the universal laws connecting cause and effect'.<sup>182</sup> Even though Bury's thought, in recognizing the contingency of past events, had taken a turn toward idealism, Collingwood was still alarmed by the political undertones of his lingering positivism, embodied in his activities in the Rationalist Press Association. Collingwood was especially worried that a positivist history would be employed in the service of a universal scientific scheme that purports to solve all social and political problems, and so claim to be conducive to the unidirectional progress of humanity.

The other perspective was different from, though potentially amenable to, positivist historiography. This was the technical scientific perspective, represented best by Stubbs (the 'greatest master of detail') and Maitland. It sought to unearth as many facts about a given part of the past as possible, and with those facts alone build up an objective account, presented in the form of the 'monograph'. The discovery of atomistic facts as the warrant of objective knowledge is certainly in line with the positivist theory of science. But for positivist historiography, the ascertaining of facts 'was only

the first stage of a process whose second stage was the discovery of laws', whereas for technical historiography, the first stage immediately leads to objective knowledge of particular events.<sup>183</sup> Implicit in Collingwood's account is that for positivism the second stage in turn leads to a third stage, which is the application of these laws to social and political problems, and that stage too is absent from technical scholarship. Technical scholarship alone, therefore, is at a loss about wider issues concerning historical knowledge and its uses: 'there was a certain uneasiness about the ultimate purpose of this detailed research.'<sup>184</sup> This, for Collingwood, justified further explorations into the presuppositions of historical knowledge that were compatible with this second non-positivist strand of scientific history.

### OAKESHOTT'S PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

What, then, did Oakeshott and Collingwood propose as a proper approach to the past? Here major differences between the two emerge, interestingly paralleling some of the political and conceptual differences between Ruggiero and Croce that we noted in a previous section. William Dray has correctly noted that while for Collingwood, the past is a living past, that it can be instructive in the present, and that there is a causality of a special kind at work in historical explanation, for Oakeshott, the past is a dead past, it has no bearing on present practices, and causality has no role to play in historical investigation.<sup>185</sup> To these differences, I would add the political left-leanings of Collingwood, and the political right-leanings of Oakeshott (perhaps we can speak of 'left new idealism' and 'right new idealism').<sup>186</sup> But since the new idealism is a wide range of conceptual resources, a paradoxical and polyvalent tradition, this inconsistency need not cause any alarm about this tradition. Just the opposite, along with the similarities, these differences and paradoxes are crucial in understanding why the new idealism appealed to a number of postwar historians with both converging and differing agendas.

Oakeshott's philosophy of history is arguably less developed than Collingwood's, but is fairly straightforward. Having rejected both whiggism, or the 'practical' approach to the past, and positivist historiography, Oakeshott proposed several presuppositions as defining the activity of being what he called a 'historical' or 'scientific' historian. The first of these presuppositions states that the historian neither judges morally nor looks for 'origins'. Second, the historian collects and judges evidence for a past reality according to the criteria of 'appropriateness and completeness',

thereby unearthing the relevant totality of events that historically situate the event, process, structure, or thinker studied.<sup>187</sup> Third, the historian seeks to understand neither accidents nor necessities, but the meaningful and contingent ‘convergence of human choices and actions’.<sup>188</sup> In his lectures at the London School of Economics from the 1960s, Oakeshott maintained: ‘The question the historian is out to answer is: What is the significance of this event, or action, or belief in the context of events and beliefs in which it appears?’ assuming that ‘the point of view here is that nothing which men have thought or done is intelligible except in its own context or circumstances’. More specifically: ‘What we are seeking to understand are political utterances in their place in what might be called the political culture of a people.’<sup>189</sup>

The contingent occasions and cultural backgrounds to thought are, thus, the stage where the drama of human agency unfolds. But this means, as Oakeshott acknowledged, that the past the historical historian arrives at is knowledge of *practice* in the past. This implies, in turn, that the historian must assume that what he or she is studying, even a seemingly pure philosophical concept, was governed by the logic of contingent, changing, practices, and traditions. Though a ‘wide sympathy’ is necessary for historical understanding, it is not sufficient since it only entails conscious impartiality to historical conflict, faction, or disagreement.<sup>190</sup> Sympathy alone cannot explain *change* in a tradition. Explaining change is a crucial task for a historian since a ‘tradition is not something which is merely conformed to, nor is it anything fixed and finished’.<sup>191</sup>

The *only* thing that can account for change, and this is the fourth presupposition, is the concept of ‘historical individual’ or ‘character’, which takes on a meaning different than the one found in Victorian discourses on character. The concept of the historical individual can explain change because it is a concrete universal, or that which, on the one hand, originates change through capacities such as ‘memory [...] reflection [...] opinion, prejudice, habit, knowledge’, which are ‘implied in every actual experience’. On the other hand, the concept of the historical individual can explain change because it remains permanent through change.<sup>192</sup> Historical explanation, thus, according to Oakeshott, resides *only* in the meaningful patterns evidenced by the remnants of traditions, occasions, and the practices of historical individuals.<sup>193</sup> In a passage worth quoting in full, Oakeshott explains how a loss of belief in cultural and political unity led to this kind of approach to the past, and this kind of revision of the concept of character:

It is a complicated world, without unity of feeling or clear outline: in it events have no over-all pattern or purpose, lead nowhere, point to no favored condition of the world and support no practical conclusions. It is a world composed wholly of contingencies and in which contingencies are intelligible, not because they have been resolved, but on account of the circumstantial relations which have been established between them: the historian's concern is not with causes but with occasions.<sup>194</sup>

### COLLINGWOOD'S PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

Collingwood's philosophy of history is noticeably different from Oakeshott's.<sup>195</sup> Its first aspect is Collingwood's thesis that all history is, as a matter of fact, written from a particular point of view. For Collingwood, the pressing issue is not whether there can be a history utterly detached from contemporary practical concerns, as Oakeshott would have it, but what limitations and conditions of knowledge are inherent to these ineluctable historiographical refractions. This is an important point. For Collingwood, thus, the whig Macaulay is not faulted for being a historian with political beliefs, but rather for being a historian who committed something like a category mistake by allowing political interests to completely override the epistemological strictures of proper historiography.<sup>196</sup>

According to Collingwood, historians must come to terms with the fact that the best history is always grounded in a specific perspective (artistic, ideological, philosophical, scientific, religious, and so on), prophesying that the best history the near future has in store will come from a specific ideological perspective: 'I rather suspect that the next really great history will be an anti-capitalist history inspired by the mythology of socialism.'<sup>197</sup> It is reasonable to argue that Collingwood arrived at this belief, on the one hand, from what every Oxford don must have perceived in the 1930s—namely, the sudden emergence of students with Communist sympathies, who at some later point in their careers would likely make scholarly contributions. On the other hand, the social histories of the 'private scholars', Sidney and Beatrice Webb, and Barbara and J.L.L. Hammond, were signaling that serious and original socialist historical scholarship was on the rise, and may come to fruition in professional historiography, once the socialist students had become academic scholars.<sup>198</sup>

The second aspect of Collingwood's philosophy of history is an attempt to philosophically demonstrate that historiography is *by necessity* perspectival in this sense. One reason for this necessity resides in the fact that historical



knowledge cannot take the form of pure perception, since an immediate sensory access to a reality extraneous to the knowing and historically situated mind is inconceivable. Historical knowledge, then, is mediated knowledge, and so historical knowledge ‘depends on our present interests and attitude towards life’.<sup>199</sup> In a paper delivered to the Stubbs Society, Collingwood appropriated Stubbs’s thought to bolster this argument. According to Collingwood, ‘Stubbs wanted to be judicious, fair-minded, and objective. But dedication to truth and justice was often mediated by his unexamined theological, psychological, ethical, and political commitments.’ Eventually, ‘the great Stubbs, said that no historical work could be done without an element of spite in it. In short: we may take it as an axiom that the unprejudiced historian does not exist’.<sup>200</sup> Collingwood went as far as to argue that:

‘History, to be, must be seen, and must be seen by somebody, from somebody’s point of view. And doubtless, every history so seen will be in part seen falsely. But this is not an accusation against any particular school of historians; it is a law of our nature.’<sup>201</sup>

Another reason for this necessity was established by the Romanticist critique of the Enlightenment, according to Collingwood. For a modern view of history, to have emerged, ‘the conception of human nature as something uniform and unchanging had to be attacked’. The Romantics, in particular Herder, initiated such an attack, and as such their contribution to the development of historiography is invaluable. Crucially, they ‘did not disguise the gulf separating it from the present but actually presupposed that gulf, consciously insisting on the vast dissimilarity between present-day life and that of the past’.<sup>202</sup> Collingwood conceptualized this gap in his theory of ‘absolute presuppositions’, which is effectively an attempt to historicize metaphysics. Absolute presuppositions are the logical and unconscious ground for the most fundamental beliefs humans hold about reality. In other words, they are the unquestionable foundation of systems of metaphysical propositions. Their practical function for the historian, according to Collingwood, is to reveal the historical contingency and plurality of statements about the fundamental nature of reality. For Collingwood, thus, it became clear ‘that metaphysics [...] is no futile attempt at knowing what lies beyond the limits of experience, but is primarily at any given time an attempt to discover what the people of that time believe about the world’s general nature’.<sup>203</sup> At best, the historical study of metaphysics yields an understanding not of pure being, but of the ‘characteristics of a historical milieu’.<sup>204</sup>

The third aspect of Collingwood's theory of history is his attempt to epistemologically circumvent the extent to which our knowledge of the past is infused by practically oriented beliefs and desires. As he wrote: 'The historian's duty is surely not to pick and choose: he must make every point of view his own, and not condemn the lost cause merely because it is lost.' In this respect, Croce's theory is problematic. Croce revealed a transcendental bent and 'vulgar optimism' in the Enlightenment tradition when he refused to grant 'error' and 'otherness' the status of fact since in the progress of history, only truths materialize, and only truths provide the foundations of progress.<sup>205</sup> Croce's philosophy, in other words, fell prey to the whiggism and Enlightenment universalism it was combating. For Collingwood, it was precisely what from the historian's present perspective appears erroneous, or unintelligible, or alien, or foreign, or upsetting, or radically different, that stands in need of interpretation without reconciliation. This is made evident a long and critical passage on Bradley's theory of history:

The crux arises when our witness alleges a fact wholly without analogy in our own experience. Can we believe him or must we reject that part of his testimony? Bradley's answer is that if in our own experience we encountered a fact unlike anything we had encountered before, we should think ourselves entitled to believe in its reality only when we had verified by "the most careful examination often repeated." These then are the only terms on which I can believe such a fact or testimony: I must be assured that the witness is as conscientious an observer as myself, and that he, too, has verified his observation in the same way: in that case "his judgement is to me precisely the same as my own." In other words, he must not be such a man as to allow his beliefs about what has happened to be influenced by a religious or other view of the world which I do not share; for if so, his judgement cannot be to me the same as my own; and he must have taken the same amount of trouble to ascertain the fact which I should myself take. But in history these conditions cannot possibly be fulfilled; for the witness is always a son of his time, and the mere progress of human knowledge makes it impossible that his point of view and standard of accuracy should be identical with my own. [...] All we can do in cases where it tries and fails to do this is to conclude that the witness has made a mistake, and to treat his mistake itself as an historical fact that has to be explained. Sometimes we can infer the fact which was thus mistakenly reported; sometimes this cannot be done [emphasis added].<sup>206</sup>

Clearly, then, for Collingwood neither immediate reference to the past through the philological verification of evidence, nor a frame of interpretation that arises only through present rational forms of knowledge

acquisition, provides the conditions for historical knowledge that both remains within and transcends the bounds of practical and partisan interests. Certainly, historical knowledge is necessarily based on evidence; indeed, it is the ‘interpretation of evidence’.<sup>207</sup> The problem is that ‘evidence’ of human affairs is already imbued with meaning that arose in a specific time and place, and that meaning differs from the meaning the historian attributes to the world around him or her in the present. The historian *cannot* bridge this gap in meaning and knowledge acquisition by means of philology, or, as many commentators have believed Collingwood to be arguing, through ‘re-enacting’ past human experience as it was in its temporal immediacy.<sup>208</sup> What the gap between the past and the present insinuates, seen from the historian’s point of view in reference to the available evidence, is two necessary conditions of historical knowledge: the a priori ‘historical imagination’ on the one hand, and specific a posteriori *problems* that emerge in the historian’s imaginative encounter with the remnants of the past, on the other.

The historical imagination ‘does the work of historical construction’ and ‘supplies the means of historical criticism’.<sup>209</sup> The historical imagination is the structural feature of historical knowledge acquisition. It makes possible viewing and assessing something as evidence, making inferential or conceptual connections between distinct pieces of evidence, and providing an account of the meaning of the human activity embodied in the interconnected web of evidence. Neither perception, nor artistic demands, nor the self-ascribed authority of historical sources, nor pure reason, can determine what is to count as evidence, and how that evidence is to be used in a historical account.<sup>210</sup> The historical imagination determines that. Two crucial revisionist consequences follow from the primacy of the historical imagination. First: ‘The enlargement of historical knowledge comes about mainly through finding how to use as evidence this or that kind of perceived fact which historians have hitherto thought useless to them.’<sup>211</sup> Second:

The principles by which this evidence is interpreted change too: since the interpreting of evidence is a task to which a man must bring everything he knows: historical knowledge, knowledge of nature and man, mathematical knowledge, philosophical knowledge; and not knowledge only, but mental habits and possessions of every kind: and none of these is unchanging.<sup>212</sup>

The historical imagination is key to Collingwood’s philosophy of history, for with the historical imagination, ‘the historian is enabled, not

indeed to “know” the past as it actually happened, which he neither can do nor wants to do, but to solve with accuracy the particular historical problems, in terms of the evidence at his disposal’.<sup>213</sup> These particular problems have to do with past human thought and action in their various contingent contexts. In this sense, Collingwood’s philosophy of history is similar to that of Oakeshott in insisting that historical science studies human agency in the past. Collingwood also comes close to Oakeshott in extending the concept of ‘context’ beyond its whig meaning, which is restricted to constitutional, government, and parliamentary politics, and so ‘political developments should be conceived by the historian as integrated with economic, artistic, religious, and philosophical developments and [...] the historian should not be content with anything short of a history of man in his concrete actuality’.<sup>214</sup>

Embedding past human agents in relevant contexts means that the historian’s task is to unearth how the agent himself or herself envisaged the particular situations and problems he or she faced, how that agent navigated and negotiated possible courses of action or interpretation in a consistent or inconsistent manner, and how, finally, he or she decided on a specific course of action or interpretation.<sup>215</sup> This emphasis on understanding agents in their own terms and contexts underpins, needless to add, Collingwood’s procedural, or methodological, concept of sympathy. That, in sum, is the meaning of Collingwood’s famous dictum that historical science understands events from the ‘inside’. Even though the objects of history that is, events as actions, are ontologically made of the same ‘things’ as the objects of natural science, the presuppositions of historical science entail epistemological conditions which are inaccessible to natural science.<sup>216</sup> There is no ‘inside’, that is mind, to the objects of natural science.

To practically aid the historian in this task of understanding, Collingwood proposed what he called ‘the logic of question and answer’.<sup>217</sup> This logic makes evident, according to Collingwood, that every proposition anyone makes is an answer to a question within a ‘question-and-answer complex’. Answers are ‘right’ only insofar they move forward the question and answer process. To understand a proposition, historians have to fathom the question to which it was an answer, and in doing so, they can sidestep the issue whether the proposition in itself is true or false, whether it is coherent, and whether it is useful. For Collingwood, ‘the question “To what question did So-and-so intend this proposition for an answer?” is a historical question, and cannot be settled except by historical methods’.<sup>218</sup> This means that by attending to questions and answers, the historian is

gaining access at one fell swoop to historical problems, and the manner in which human agents concretely interpreted and acted on these problems.

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None of Collingwood's presuppositions of historical thought were intended to lead to final narratives of the past. The significance of Collingwood's belief that historical knowledge or research is a science is that it attempts to fuse the intractability of different perspectives on the past with a set of presuppositions that allows them to co-exist with each other in a pluralist society. For Collingwood and Oakeshott, and Butterfield for that matter,<sup>219</sup> Oxford and Cambridge, their immediate social settings, were pluralist societies. Given such a position, Collingwood's view on finality is hardly surprising: 'The work of collecting sources is as endless as is the work of interpreting them, and therefore every narrative that we can at any given moment put forward is an interim report on the progress of our historical inquiries. Finality in such a matter is absolutely impossible.'<sup>220</sup>

It is on this that Collingwood's view of the practical and educational uses of history is founded. Oxford Victorian historians and philosophers sought to instill in their students a sense of organic ties and duty to serve the British state, church, and empire. Collingwood, in contrast, saw the educational and practical use of historical knowledge in teaching students that to think historically is to extend one's repertoire of how to interpret the world and how to appreciate the requirements of concrete situations in terms of the wide variety of conventions and rules to which one is exposed, and have to choose either to conform to or rebel against. Indeed, the key insight in historical education, according to Collingwood, lies in recognizing the diversity of the ways in which people have thought and acted in the past. Therefore: 'If he [the student of history] is able to understand, by rethinking them, the thoughts of a great many kinds of people, it follows that he must be a great kinds of man.'<sup>221</sup>

Collingwood and Oakeshott, just like the Italian new idealists before them, apart from writing on historical theory, wrote histories as well. Their histories are another aspect in which they differ substantially. As Luke O'Sullivan has made clear, Oakeshott's histories fulfill none of criteria of scientific history that Oakeshott himself had devised. Instead, they are clear products of a practical attitude to the past. In particular, Oakeshott emphasized a tradition that he called 'Rationalism' as responsible for all the ills of modern society.

Collingwood's histories, on the other hand, were much more sophisticated and nuanced. He was deemed such an authority on Roman Britain that he was asked to contribute to the *Oxford History of England* book series, edited by G.N. Clark, economic historian and future Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford. Thus, Collingwood co-authored, with J.N.L. Myres, *Roman Britain and the English Settlements*.<sup>222</sup> He was keen to emphasize in his autobiography that his histories were not founded on 'original' research, 'not by discovering fresh evidence, but by rediscovering questions of principle'.<sup>223</sup> This, arguably, was Collingwood's way of showing the practical value of his philosophy of history. The reviews of Collingwood's works on Roman Britain by professional historians show that some historians appreciated the revisionist potential of a history informed by new idealist philosophy.

A look at the review of *Roman Britain* by Peter Hunter Blair will bring this to light. Collingwood, according to Blair, has two virtues as a historian. First, he has the virtue of solving particular problems in the history of Roman Britain. For example, Collingwood convincingly argues that the Claudian invasion of Britain in AD 43 'was the fulfilment at the first opportunity of an intention which had been before the minds of the Roman rulers for almost a century'.<sup>224</sup> Collingwood also convincingly revises some crucial elements of Roman strategy and fortification: 'Dr. Collingwood offers a new and brilliantly conceived theory on the purpose of the Antonine wall.' Collingwood's second virtue is his focus, which reveals a critique of and challenge to political history and the liberal-whig concept of continuity. In Blair's words, Collingwood's general interests are said to lie more in 'the state of the country and its people than with military and political history', and he is especially concerned to infer 'factors which lead to change'.<sup>225</sup> It is entirely fitting that Collingwood's work on Roman Britain was seen as one of the 'best' accounts in a 1926 article in *History* that was part of the series 'Historical Revisions'.<sup>226</sup>

## NOTES

1. The literature on the Victorian idealists' social and political thought is extensive. For major studies, see e.g. David Boucher and Andrew Vincent, *British Idealism and Political Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000); Sandra M. den Otter, *British Idealism and Social Explanation: A Study in Late Victorian Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

2. Stefan Collini, 'Hobhouse, Bosanquet and the State: Political Idealism and Political Argument in England 1880–1918', *Past & Present*, 72 (1976), 86–111, 106.
3. James Bradley, 'Hegel in Britain: A Brief History of British Commentary and Attitudes', *Heythrop Journal*, 20 (1979), 1–24, 163–182.
4. W.J. Mander, *British Idealism: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 39.
5. See e.g. Henry Jones, *Idealism as a Practical Creed* (Glasgow: Maclehouse, 1909), 246.
6. Duncan Kelly, *The Propriety of Liberty: Persons, Passions, and Judgement in Modern Political Thought* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010), 230.
7. Bernard Bosanquet, *The Civilization of Christendom and Other Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1893), 64.
8. W.H. Walsh, 'Kants's *Critique of Pure Reason*: Commentators in English, 1875–1945', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 42 (1981), 723–737, 724.
9. R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History: Revised Edition*, ed. and intro. Jan van der Dussen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 143.
10. Duncan Forbes, *The Anglican Idea of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952).
11. W.R. Sorley, 'The Historical Method', in *Essays in Philosophical Criticism*, ed. Andrew Seth and R.B. Haldane (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1883), 102–126; D.G. Ritchie, 'The Rationality of History', in *Essays in Philosophical Criticism*, ed. Andrew Seth and R.B. Haldane (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1883), 126–159.
12. F.H. Bradley, *The Presuppositions of Critical History* (Oxford: James Parker and Co., 1874).
13. Ritchie, 'The Rationality', 126, 134–135. Sorley and Bradley's accounts find no place for pessimism and cyclical time either.
14. Ritchie, 'The Rationality', 129; see also Sorley, 'The Historical', 113–114.
15. Ritchie e.g. taught political philosophy at the School of Modern History: D.G. Ritchie, 'The Teaching of Political Science at Oxford', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 2 (1891), 85–95, 94–95.
16. R.G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 17; Sheldon Rothblatt, *The Revolution of the Dons: Cambridge and Society in Victorian England* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1968).
17. Richard J. Evans, *Cosmopolitan Islanders: British Historians and the European Continent* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 7.
18. Robert Currie, 'The Arts and Social Studies, 1914–1939', in *The History of the University of Oxford: Volume VIII: The Twentieth Century*, ed. Brian Harrison (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 109–139, 110.

19. A.H. Halsey and M.A. Trow, *The British Academics* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), 40; see also James Campbell, 'Stubbs, Maitland, and Constitutional History', in *British and German Historiography 1750–1950: Traditions, Perceptions, and Transfers*, ed. Benedicht Stuchtey and Peter Wende (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 99–123, 102; Reba Soffer, 'Nation, Duty, Character and Confidence: History at Oxford, 1850–1914', *The Historical Journal*, 30 (1987), 77–104, 103; but for some healthy correctives to Soffer, and by extension to Campbell, see Peter Slee, 'Professor Soffer's "History at Oxford"', *The Historical Journal*, 30 (1987), 933–942.
20. F.M. Powicke, *Modern Historians and the Study of History: Essays and Papers* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979), 167, see also 172.
21. For ways in which socialists and Catholics complicated nationalist narratives in Victorian Britain see e.g. Michael Tomko, *British Romanticism and the Catholic Question: Religion, History, and National Identity, 1778–1829* (Houndmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Mark Bevir, *The Making of British Socialism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011).
22. Halsey and Trow, *The British*; Rothblatt, *The Revolution*, 268.
23. Collini, 'Hobhouse', 92; C.J. Dewey, "'Cambridge Idealism': Utilitarian Revisionists in Late Nineteenth-century Cambridge', *The Historical Journal*, 17 (1974), 63–78; Stefan Collini, 'Idealism and "Cambridge Idealism"', *The Historical Journal*, 18 (1975), 171–177.
24. See e.g. Gareth Stedman Jones, 'History: The Poverty of Empiricism', in *Ideology in Social Science: Readings in Critical Social Theory*, ed. Robin Blackburn (Glasgow: William Collins & Co. Ltd., 1975), 96–119.
25. Sorley, 'The Historical', 114.
26. Ritchie, 'The Rationality', 132, 144, 139, 136, 151, 146.
27. Noel Annan, *The Dons: Mentors, Eccentrics and Geniuses* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2000), 84, 89, 90, 97.
28. Campbell, 'Stubbs, Maitland', 114; see also Doris Goldstein, 'The Professionalization of History in Britain in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', *Storia della Storiografia*, 3 (1983), 3–28, 16–18.
29. See e.g. D.G. Ritchie, 'Review of *The Political Theory of the Schoolmen and Grotius*', *The English Historical Review*, 12 (1897), 171.
30. W.G. Pogson Smith, 'Review of *The Philosophical Theory of the State*', *The English Historical Review*, 15 (1900), 133–136.
31. Bradley, *The Presuppositions*, 16.
32. Forbes, *The Liberal Anglican*; Collini, 'Hobhouse'; Parker, *The English*.
33. Collini, 'Hobhouse', 93.
34. Collini, 'Hobhouse', 93 n 25.



35. Collingwood, who otherwise looked up to the Victorian idealists, was dismayed at their historical thought: R.G. Collingwood, 'The Limits of Historical Knowledge', *Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 3 (1928), 213–222.
36. H. Wildon Carr, 'The New Idealism', in *The Scientific Approach to Philosophy: Selected Essays and Reviews* (London: Macmillan, 1924), 27–50.
37. Richard Bellamy, 'Idealism and Liberalism in an Italian "New Liberal Theorist": Guide de Ruggiero's *History of European Liberalism*', *The Historical Journal*, 30 (1987), 191–200, 192, 197; Richard Bellamy, *Modern Italian Social Theory: Ideology and Politics from Pareto to the Present* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1987), 1–9; David D. Roberts, *Benedetto Croce and the Uses of Historicism* (Berkeley, Calif., Los Angeles, Calif., London: University of California Press, 1987), 213.
38. This influence is nicely detailed in Bellamy, 'Idealism'.
39. See e.g. Benedetto Croce, 'Il concetto della filosofia come storicismo assoluto', *La Critica*, 37 (1939), 253–268.
40. For a time in the early 1920s, Croce supported the Fascists, as long as they sought, in Croce's undoubtedly too optimistic opinion, only to revitalize national culture and prepare the scene for a genuinely liberal political culture, different in kind from that of the 'liberal period'. In the 1890s, under the influence of the Marxist Antonio Labriola, Croce flirted with Marxism. The former commitment, especially, has left his legacy an ambivalent one: Denis Mack Smith, 'Benedetto Croce: History and Politics', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 8 (1973), 41–61; Chester McArthur Destler, 'Benedetto Croce and Italian Fascism: A Note on Historical Reliability', *The Journal of Modern History*, 24 (1952), 382–390.
41. For Gentile's repudiation of Croce's historicism, see Giovanni Gentile, *Introduzione alla filosofia* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1958), 260–270.
42. Roberts, *Benedetto Croce*, 19, see also 17.
43. Roberts, *Benedetto Croce*, 18.
44. E.L. Woodward, 'Review of *History of European Liberalism*', *The English Historical Review*, 43 (1928), 442–444.
45. See e.g. R.G. Collingwood, 'Can the New Idealism Dispense with Mysticism?', in *Relativity, Logic, and Mysticism: Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society: Supplementary Volume III* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1923), 161–176.
46. Ruggiero, in an article written for the British journal *Philosophy*, averred that among those Italian philosophers to attract the interest of the British, Croce stands out: Guido de Ruggiero, 'Science, History and Philosophy',

- Philosophy*, 22 (1931), 166–179, 166. Croce had a special affinity with Oxford, the bastion of British idealism, and visited Oxford numerous times in the 1920s and the 1930s: G.R.G. Mure, ‘Croce and Oxford’, *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 4 (1954), 327–331.
47. I follow the English new idealist H. Wildon Carr in translating Croce’s *spirito* as ‘mind’, which is a similar strategy adopted by British idealists when translating Hegel’s *Geist* as ‘mind’.
  48. I borrow the term ‘new humanism’ from Roberts, *Benedetto Croce*, 5–7.
  49. Croce quoted in Carr, *The Philosophy*, 22.
  50. Benedetto Croce, ‘Esperienze storiche attuali e conclusioni per la storiografia’, in *Filosofia e storiografia*, ed. Stefano Maschietti (Napoli: Bibliopolis, 2005), 306–312, 306.
  51. See e.g. Croce’s inaugural lecture at the opening of the *Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Storici* in Naples on February 16, 1947: Benedetto Croce, ‘Il concetto moderno della storia’, in *Filosofia e storiografia*, ed. Stefano Maschietti (Napoli: Bibliopolis, 2005), 331–347, 335–338. For a descriptive history of the *Istituto*, which includes founding statutes, and inaugural addresses, see the essays in *L’Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Storici nei suoi primi cinquant’anni: 1946–1996*, ed. Marta Herling (Naples: Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Storici, 1996).
  52. Benedetto Croce, *History as the Story of Liberty*, trans. Sylvia Sprigge (New York: W.W. Norton and Inc., 1941), 34–35.
  53. Croce, *History*, 28–30; Carr, *Benedetto Croce*, 20; Roberts, *Benedetto Croce*, 125–126.
  54. Croce, ‘Il concetto’, 259–260.
  55. Croce, *History*, 65; Richard Bellamy, ‘A Modern Interpreter: Benedetto Croce and the Politics of Italian Culture’, *The European Legacy: Toward New Paradigms*, 5 (2000), 845–861.
  56. Benedetto Croce, ‘Filosofia e metodologia’, *La Critica*, 14 (1916), 308–315; Carr, *Benedetto Croce*, 20.
  57. Ruggiero, ‘Science’, 172, 176.
  58. Croce, ‘Il concetto’, 253.
  59. In what follows I draw on John Foot, *Modern Italy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 55–59, 161, 193–199; and Paul Corner, ‘State and Society, 1901–1922’, in *Liberal and Fascist Italy: 1900–1945*, ed. Adrian Lyttelton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 17–44.
  60. These hopes are explored in Bellamy, *Modern Italian*.
  61. Bollatti quoted in Foot, *Modern Italy*, 161.
  62. According to Croce, the dissolution of European liberalism, best exemplified by England and Germany, in favor of force, constitutionalism, and nationalism had begun with Bismarck and the German Empire in 1870: Roberto Vivarelli, ‘1870 in European History and Historiography’, *The Journal of Modern History*, 53 (1981), 167–188, 171.

63. Benedetto Croce, 'Intorno alle condizioni presenti della storiografia in Italia: I: Introduzione', *La Critica* 27 (1929), 1–11, 3–5.
64. Croce, *History*, 181.
65. Croce, *History*, 47–48, 179.
66. Benedetto Croce, 'Troppa filosofia', *La Critica*, 21 (1923), 61–64.
67. For an account of the crisis, see Charles R. Bambach, *Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1995).
68. Croce, 'Troppa filosofia', 63.
69. Croce, 'Intorno', 5–6.
70. Croce, 'Filosofia'.
71. See e.g. *Leopold von Ranke and the Shaping of the Historical Discipline*, ed. Georg G. Iggers and James M. Powell (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1990); Johann Gustav Droysen, *Outline of the Principles of History (Grundriss der Historik)*, trans. E. Benjamin Andrews (Boston, Mass.: Ginn and Company, 1893).
72. Croce, *History*, 16, 114.
73. Croce, *History*, 112.
74. Croce, *History*, 114.
75. Croce, *History*, 17–18. Croce's own histories, all written in the interwar period, fall short on many of his own principles: Roberts, *Benedetto Croce*, 104, 267, 280–281.
76. Croce, *History*, 184–185.
77. Croce, *History*, 138.
78. Benedetto Croce, 'Sul concetto d'"individualità" nella storia della filosofia', *La Critica*, 26 (1928), 474–476.
79. Ruggiero, 'Science', 171–176.
80. Croce, *History*, 59–60.
81. For Croce's pluralism, see Roberts, *Benedetto Croce*, 107, 122, 240.
82. Croce, *History*, 280; see also Carr, *Benedetto Croce*, 38, 200–201; and Bellamy, 'A Modern Interpreter', 845–861, 849–850.
83. Roberts, *Benedetto Croce*, 280–281.
84. Croce's philosophy was recognized as humanist by the most astute English Croce scholar of the interwar period: Carr, *Benedetto Croce*, 22.
85. Croce, *History*, 318–320; Benedetto Croce, 'Conoscenza storica e costruzioni tecniche e scientifiche', in *Filosofia e storiografia*, ed. Stefano Maschietti (Napoli: Bibliopolis, 2005), 103–113, 112; Benedetto Croce, 'L'umanità e la natura', in *Filosofia e storiografia*, ed. Stefano Maschietti (Napoli: Bibliopolis, 2005), 234–236, 235; Benedetto Croce, 'Il ricorso ai "competenti" nelle crisi storiche', in *Filosofia e storiografia*, ed. Stefano Maschietti (Napoli: Bibliopolis, 2005), 312–318.
86. Ernesto G. Caserta, 'Croce's Liberalism in the Last Postwar Period', *Italian Culture*, 5 (1984), 77–96, 87.

87. Croce, *History*, 244; Roberts, *Benedetto Croce*, 231, 240.
88. Caserta, 'Croce's Liberalism', 86–87; Benedetto Croce, 'The Future of Liberalism', in *Human Rights: Comments and Interpretations*, ed. UNESCO, intro. Jacques Maritain (Paris: UNESCO, 1948), 81–85.
89. Croce, *History*, 167.
90. Croce, *History*, 186.
91. For a history of the *Nuova Rivista Storica* in the interwar years, see Antonio Casali, *Storici italiani fra le due guerre: La 'Nuova Rivista Storica' (1917–1943)* (Napoli: Guida, 1980).
92. Corrado Barbagallo, 'The Conditions and Tendencies of Historical Writing in Italy Today', *The Journal of Modern History*, 1 (1929), 236–244, 237–238.
93. Barbagallo, 'The Conditions', 239.
94. See e.g. Corrado Barbagallo, *Le relazioni politiche di Roma con l'Egitto dalle origini al 50 a.C (saggio sulla politica estera dei Romani)* (Rome: Loescher & Co., 1901); *Contributo alla storia economica dell'antichità* (Rome: Loescher & Co., 1907); *L'Italia dal 1870 ad oggi* (Milan: Treves, 1918); *Napoli contro il terrore Nazista: 28 settembre-1 ottobre 1943*, ed. Sergio Muzzupappa (Naples: La città del sole, 2004). On Corrado as a historian, see *Ricerche storiche ed economiche in memoria di Corrado Barbagallo: 3 voll.*, ed. Luigi de Rosa (Naples: Edizioni scientifiche italiane, 1970).
95. For a study of Gentile's educational philosophy and politics, see Jean-Yves Frégné, *Les conceptions éducatives de Giovanni Gentile: Entre élitisme et fascisme* (Paris: Harmattan, 2006).
96. Barbagallo, 'The Conditions', 242.
97. Peter Slee, *Learning a Liberal Education: The Study of Modern History in the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge, and Manchester, 1800–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), Chapter 7; Victor Feske, *From Belloc to Churchill: Private Scholars, Public Culture, and the Crisis of British Liberalism, 1900–1930* (Chapel Hill, N.C. University of North Carolina Press, 1996).
98. Lewis Namier, *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III* (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1929); Linda Colley, *Lewis Namier* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1989).
99. As one historian aptly phrased it: 'The new professionalism placed the demands of the discipline over those of the public at large.' See Rosemary Jann, 'From Amateur to Professional: The Case of the Oxbridge Historians', *Journal of British Studies*, 22 (1983), 122–147, 126.
100. H.A.L. Fisher, 'The Whig Historians', in *Pages from the Past* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939), 40–93, 65.

101. For an elaboration of this point regarding the literary and ‘amateur’ character of history in both the pre- and post-professional era, see Jann, ‘From Amateur’.
102. Institutionally, this continued focus on liberal education over professional research was made possible by the dominance of college tutors, focused on teaching, over university professors, focused on research.
103. Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1951), 5.
104. Christopher Parker, *The English Historical Tradition Since 1850* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1990), 88–89.
105. See e.g. G.R. Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency: A Study in British Politics and Political Thought, 1899–1914* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1971); G.R. Searle, *Eugenics and Politics in Britain, 1900–1914* (Leiden: Nordhoof International Publishers, 1976); Admir Skodo, ‘Eugenics and Pragmatism: F.C.S. Schiller’s Philosophical Politics’, *Modern Intellectual History*, CJO2015 (to appear in print).
106. Feske, *From Belloc to Churchill*, Chapter 2, quote on 78.
107. Ernest Barker, ‘History and Philosophy’, *History*, 7 (1922), 81–91.
108. A.F. Pollard, ‘An Apology for Historical Research’, *History*, 7 (1922), 161–177.
109. Barker was a co-examiner for the Oxford School of Modern History in the first decades of the twentieth century along with both Pollard and Fisher: Ernest Barker, *Age and Youth: Memories of Three Universities and Father of the Man* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), 28–29.
110. See Benedetto Croce, ‘Ernest Barker, *History and Philosophy*’, A.F. Pollard, *An Apology for Historical Research*, *La Critica*, 25 (1927), 115–116; and Croce, ‘Intorno’, 7 n3.
111. Julia Stapleton, *Englishness and the Study of Politics: The Social and Political Thought of Ernest Barker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 160–162.
112. Ernest Barker, *Britain and the British People* (London, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1942).
113. Ernest Barker, *Universities in Great Britain* (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1931), 29.
114. Barker, *Universities*, 49.
115. Barker, ‘History’, 90.
116. Barker, ‘History’, 89, 83.
117. In his 1941 review of Croce’s *History as the Story of Liberty*, Barker lauded Croce as the greatest man alive, and his theory of history as nothing but inspirational: Stapleton, *Englishness*, 9, 217.
118. For historical accounts of pluralism, see e.g. the chapters in *Modern Pluralism: Anglo-American Debates Since 1880*, ed. Mark Bevir

- (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Marc Stears, *Progressives, Pluralists, and the Problems of the State: Ideologies of Reform in the United States and Britain, 1909–1926* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); and Cécile Laborde, *Pluralist Thought and the State in Britain and France, 1900–1925* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2000).
119. Barker, 'History', 83.
  120. Barker, 'History', 85.
  121. Barker, 'History', 88.
  122. Stapleton, *Englischness*, 35.
  123. Barker, 'History', 89.
  124. Stapleton, *Englischness*, 59.
  125. Ernest Barker, *Political Thought in England: From Herbert Spencer to the Present Day* (New York and London: Henry Holt and Company and Williams and Norgate, 1914), 58.
  126. A.F. Pollard, *The Claims of Historical Research in London* (London: University of London Press, Ltd., 1920).
  127. For the persistence of Stubbs' histories among English historians, see for instance Helen Cam, 'Stubbs Seventy Years After', *Cambridge Historical Journal*, 9 (1948), 129–147.
  128. Pollard, 'An Apology', 162.
  129. Pollard, 'An Apology', 165. For another instance where Pollard voiced his dislike of the new idealism, see A.F. Pollard, 'History and Progress', *History*, 8 (1923), 81–97.
  130. For the similarities between English idealist historical thought to, broadly speaking, postmodernism, see Christopher Parker, *The English Idea of History: From Coleridge to Collingwood* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 217–231. Bellamy makes an interesting point in situating the new idealism between modernism and postmodernism: Bellamy, 'A Modern Interpreter'.
  131. Gilbert Murray, 'The Historic Present', *History*, 18 (1934), 289–306, 293. Interestingly, on page 294, Murray attributes to Croce and Gentile, along with Henri Bergson, Bertrand Russell, Léon Brunschwig, Samuel Alexander, and A.N. Whitehead the greatest recent advances in speculative philosophy. But though these philosophers have debunked 'comparatively simple' philosophies, such as those of Mill, they have failed where Mill and his ilk succeeded i.e. in 'being a guide to life', a failure which has led to the re-birth of 'old superstitions' and myths.
  132. Murray, 'The Historic', 293; Jann, 'From Amateur', 130.
  133. Alice Gardner, 'History and Philosophy', *History*, 7 (1922), 279–280.
  134. Gardner, 'History', 279.
  135. Alice Gardner, *The Conflict of Duties* (London: T.F. Unwin, 1903).

136. Alice Gardner, *Our Outlook as Changed by the War: A Paper Read in Newnham College, on Sunday, 25th October, 1914* (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, Ltd., 1914), 5.
137. Gardner, *Our Outlook*, 9.
138. Gardner, 'History', 279.
139. Pollard, 'An Apology', 167.
140. Pollard, 'An Apology', 176.
141. For a historical account of personal idealism, see Jan-Olof Bengtsson, *The Worldview of Personalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). For a representative collection of essays propounding personal idealism, see *Personal Idealism: Philosophical Essays by Eight Members of the University of Oxford*, ed. Henry Sturt (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1902).
142. A.S. Pringle-Pattison, *The Philosophy of History* (London and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923).
143. Pringle-Pattison, *The Philosophy*, 17, 19.
144. Jann, 'From Amateur', 143. How things have changed. In 2009, the percentage of the whole student body at British universities who studied 'humanities', according to one statistic, was 11 per cent for the undergraduates and 9 per cent for the postgraduates: Stefan Collini, *What Are Universities For?* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), 32.
145. Pollard, 'An Apology', 174. For a good analysis of how appeals to a certain and indisputable reality served the contingent discursive techniques of technical constitutional historiography, see James Vernon, 'Narrating the Constitution: The Discourse of "the Real" and the Fantasies of Nineteenth-century Constitutional History', in *Re-reading the Constitution*, ed. James Vernon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 204–239.
146. Michael Bentley, *Modernizing England's Past: English Historiography in the Age of Modernism, 1870–1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 35–37.
147. Pollard, 'An Apology', 173.
148. Both Collingwood and Oakeshott drew on the philosophy of Croce. Collingwood went as far as to say: 'People, intending praise, say "as T.H. Green was to Kant and Hegel, so is R.G.C. to Croce! And Gentile!"' See Letter to Guido de Ruggiero, 24.viii.23, Dep. Collingwood 27. See also Michael Oakeshott, 'Review of *Politics and Morals*', *Philosophy*, 21 (1946), 184; and Luke O'Sullivan, *Oakeshott on History* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2003), 18.
149. Adam Sisman, *Hugh Trevor-Roper: The Biography* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2010), 36.
150. Butterfield, *The Whig*, 95–96.
151. O'Sullivan, *Oakeshott*, 56.

152. Anthony Brundage and Richard A. Cosgrove, *The Great Tradition: Constitutional History and National Identity in Britain and the United States, 1870–1960* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007), 75.
153. See the introduction to this book.
154. Michael Bentley, *The Life and Thought of Herbert Butterfield: History, Science and God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 102.
155. Michael Oakeshott, ‘The Whig Interpretation of History’, in *What is History? and Other Essays*, ed. Luke O’Sullivan (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2004), 202–207; O’Sullivan, *Oakeshott*, 56, 122. See also David Boucher, ‘The Creation of the Past: British Idealism and Michael Oakeshott’s Philosophy of History’, *History and Theory*, 23 (1984), 193–214.
156. Butterfield, *The Whig*, v.
157. However, whiggism was not intelligible according to Butterfield and Oakeshott for different intellectual and personal reasons. I will not go into Butterfield’s reasons, which are explained elsewhere: Michael Bentley, ‘Herbert Butterfield and the Ethics of Historiography’, *History and Theory*, 44 (2005) 55–71. See also Kenneth B. MacIntyre, *Herbert Butterfield: History, Providence, and Skeptical Politics* (Wilmington, N.C.: Lexington Books, 2011).
158. Michael Oakeshott, ‘The Activity of Being a Historian’, in *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (New York: Basic Books Publishing Co., Inc., 1962), 137–168, 152 n 1.
159. Oakeshott, ‘The Activity’, 153; O’Sullivan, *Oakeshott*, 78.
160. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 203–204.
161. Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain, 1850–1930* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).
162. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 402.
163. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 60.
164. R.G. Collingwood, ‘Translator’s Preface to Guido de Ruggiero’s *History of European Liberalism*’, in *Essays in Political Philosophy*, ed. and intro. David Boucher (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 175–177; David Boucher, *The Social and Political Thought of R.G. Collingwood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
165. Julia Stapleton, *Political Intellectuals and Public Identities in Britain Since 1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 63–79, 70.
166. R.G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 154. For a similar contemporary diagnosis, through with a different solution to the problem, see A.L. Rowse, *Politics and the Younger Generation* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1931), 212, 214. Indeed, the then socialist historian Rowse’s attitude toward idealism—exemplified by William Temple, Arnold Toynbee, and R.H. Tawney—was ambivalent. He lauded idealists for directing the younger generation toward pressing



- social problems, but he questioned their emphasis on social service as a means to solve those problems, and wondered whether the idealists' privileging of mind over matter was not conducive to reactionary thought.
167. Collingwood, *An Autobiography*, 156.
  168. R.G. Collingwood, *The New Leviathan: Or Man, Society, Civilization and Barbarism*, ed. and intro. David Boucher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), §27.8.
  169. Collingwood, *The New Leviathan*, §24.59.
  170. O'Sullivan, *Oakeshott*, 122.
  171. O'Sullivan, *Oakeshott*, 122.
  172. Collingwood, *An Autobiography*, 89–91.
  173. Collingwood, *An Autobiography*, 163–166.
  174. A.J.P. Taylor, *English History 1914–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 398.
  175. Joel Isaac, *Working Knowledge: Making the Human Sciences from Parsons to Kuhn* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012), 94–95. I owe this reference to David Hollinger.
  176. Collingwood, *An Autobiography*, 167; R.G. Collingwood, *An Essay on Metaphysics: Revised Edition*, ed. and intro. Rex Martin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 142.
  177. Michael Oakeshott, 'Introduction', in *The Social and Political Doctrines of Contemporary Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939), xi–4, xiv.
  178. Oakeshott, 'Introduction', xvi, xviii, xx.
  179. Butterfield quoted in Stefan Collini, *Common Reading: Critics, Historians, Publics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 152.
  180. G.R. Elton, 'Herbert Butterfield and the Study of History', *The Historical Journal*, 27 (1984), 729–743, 732.
  181. Roberts, *Benedetto Croce*, 322; David Edgerton, *Warfare State: Britain, 1920–1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 194; Richard Murphy, *Collingwood and the Crisis of Western Civilization: Art, Metaphysics and Dialectic* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2008); Stefan Collini, *Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 331–350.
  182. R.G. Collingwood, 'Review of *Selected Essays by J.B. Bury*', *The English Historical Review*, 46 (1931), 461–465, 461.
  183. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 127.
  184. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 127.
  185. W.H. Dray, *On History and Philosophers of History* (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 210–211.
  186. Even though Collingwood and Oakeshott agreed on the general outlook of each other's theories, there were always strong reservations:

- Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 151–159, 289; Michael Oakeshott, ‘Review of *The Idea of History*’, *The English Historical Review*, 62 (1947), 84–86. For Oakeshott’s political thought, see Paul Franco, *The Political Philosophy of Michael Oakeshott* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1990).
187. Oakeshott, ‘The Activity’, 155.
  188. Oakeshott, ‘The Activity’, 157.
  189. Michael Oakeshott, *Lectures on the History of Political Thought*, ed. Terry Nardin and Luke O’Sullivan (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2006), 31–32, 42, 32.
  190. Oakeshott, ‘The Activity’, 161.
  191. Oakeshott quoted in O’Sullivan, *Oakeshott*, 112. See also Michael Oakeshott, *On History and Other Essays* (London: Blackwell, 1983), 97–119.
  192. Oakeshott quoted in O’Sullivan, *Oakeshott*, 99–100.
  193. ‘Change in history carries its own explanation.’ Oakeshott quoted in O’Sullivan, *Oakeshott*, 103.
  194. Oakeshott quoted in O’Sullivan, *Oakeshott*, 166–167.
  195. For a detailed philosophical explication of Collingwood’s philosophy of history, see W.J. van der Dussen, *History as Science: The Philosophy of R.G. Collingwood* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981).
  196. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 146.
  197. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 399.
  198. For good accounts of the Webbs and the Hammonds, see Feske, *From Belloc to Churchill*, Chapters 2 and 3.
  199. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 202–204.
  200. Collingwood quoted in Brundage and Cosgrove, *The Great Tradition*, 75.
  201. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 269.
  202. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 86, 88.
  203. Collingwood, *An Autobiography*, 67; Collingwood, *An Essay on Metaphysics*, 163, 350.
  204. Collingwood, *An Essay on Metaphysics*, 56.
  205. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 278; R.G. Collingwood, ‘Croce’s Philosophy’, *The Hibbert Journal: A Quarterly Review of Religion*, 19 (1920–21), 263–278, 264.
  206. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 137–138.
  207. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 9–10.
  208. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 172.
  209. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 244.
  210. The historical imagination thus conceptually differs from both ‘artistic’ and ‘perceptual imagination’, although it is related to both.

211. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 247.
212. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 248.
213. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 427, see also 312.
214. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 122, see also 310–311.
215. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 283. Some Collingwood scholars argue that this amounts to viewing rational reasons as the explanatory concepts of human actions, which refutes the argument that the human sciences explain by means of the concept of causality as employed in the natural sciences. See W.H. Dray, *Laws and Explanation in History* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979). This reading, however, though warranted in philosophical discussion, does not pay sufficient attention to the historiographical issues involved in Collingwood's theory, which, as I have tried to show in this chapter, give it a distinctive, albeit conceptually looser, character.
216. Some Collingwood scholars view this as evidence of Collingwood's Kantianism. See Giuseppina D'Oro, *Collingwood and the Metaphysics of Experience* (New York: Routledge, 2002).
217. Collingwood, *An Autobiography*, 29–44. See also Christopher Fear, 'The Question-and-Answer Logic of Historical Context', *History of the Human Sciences*, 26 (2013), 68–81.
218. Collingwood, *An Autobiography*, 37, 38, 39.
219. Butterfield, *The Whig*, 113.
220. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 391, see also 248.
221. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 114–115.
222. R.G. Collingwood and J.N.L. Myres, *Roman Britain and the English Settlements* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936). Collingwood authored the first five books, Myres the sixth and last. Collingwood also penned numerous book reviews on this subject in *The English Historical Review*. See for instance R.G. Collingwood, 'Review of *The Last Age of Roman Britain*', *The English Historical Review*, 41 (1926), 113–118; and 'Review of *Prehistoric and Roman Wales*', *The English Historical Review*, 42 (1927), 109–110.
223. Collingwood, *An Autobiography*, 144–145.
224. Peter Hunter Blair, 'Review of *Roman Britain and the English Settlements*', *The English Historical Review*, 52 (1937), 683–687, 683.
225. Blair, 'Review', 684.
226. C.G. Parsloe, 'Historical Revisions: XXXVI.—Roman Britain', *History*, 11 (1926), 321–326, 321.

## The Philosophical Moment in Postwar Historiography

### THE SALIENCE OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY IN EARLY POSTWAR ANGLO-AMERICAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

It is difficult to imagine that the *Journal of the History of Ideas* would today, or even in the late 1970s, publish an article entitled ‘The Idea of Progress in *Recent* Philosophies of History [emphasis added]’.<sup>1</sup> But it did so in 1958. That editorial choice signals, on the one hand, that ‘progress’ was still a salient historiographical topic in the 1950s, and even the 1960s,<sup>2</sup> and on the other hand, that a *historical* journal was willing to address philosophical or theoretical issues on its pages. Accordingly, this was not the only historical journal to address them. For example, in 1962, Hayden White published an article in *The Journal of Modern History* entitled ‘The Abiding Relevance of Croce’s Idea of History’.<sup>3</sup> Moving across the Atlantic, we find that the period between 1950 and 1980 in British historiography witnessed an unprecedented surge in interest among historians in philosophical issues relating to history as a form of knowledge and practice. Numerous articles appeared either by or on leading British historians in prominent British or American magazines and radio programs, such as *The New Yorker*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, *Sunday Times*, *Encounter*, *The New Statesman*, and BBC’s *Third Programme*.<sup>4</sup>

This chapter analyzes the way in which the revisionist potential discussed in the previous chapter impacted the historical theories of G.R. Elton, E.H. Carr, Isaiah Berlin, and, in a less detailed manner, Peter

Laslett and George Kitson Clark, in the context of early postwar academic self-examination at the British ancient universities. Other historians could have been included in the closer scrutiny that follows, but the choice of and focus on Elton, Carr, and Berlin are based partly on the fact that they represent three fairly distinct ways of doing history; partly because they never grew tired of attacking each other, which owes much to their varying ideological affinities (Elton was a conservative, Berlin a liberal, and Carr a socialist); and partly because all three clearly illustrate specific aspects in which the new idealism resonated in postwar historiography.

The educated public was clearly interested in the philosophy of history in the 1950s and the 1960s. So were scholars in the humanities and social sciences, including Friedrich Hayek and Karl Popper. Isaiah Berlin (in Oxford) and Michael Oakeshott (at the London School of Economics) offered courses or seminars in the philosophy of history. Berlin not only attended Collingwood's lectures on the philosophy of history in the 1930s,<sup>5</sup> but cordially invited Collingwood to his own seminars, and to attend the private discussion group he held in his rooms in All Souls College which included J.L. Austin, A.J. Ayer, and Gilbert Ryle. Collingwood declined both invitations without explaining why to his correspondent, though we can assume that the positivist bent of these analytic philosophers did not agree with his beliefs.<sup>6</sup> When Carr began, in the 1940s, to survey works in the philosophy of history in order to combat the 'nonsense' propagated by the likes of Popper, it was to Collingwood that he turned.<sup>7</sup> In the *Festschrift* for Oakeshott's retirement, the editors saw fit to include the following: 'The support of Professor G.R. Elton has been invaluable.'<sup>8</sup>

In Oakeshott's seminar, historians and philosophers would either discuss works-in-progress or else texts by the likes of Collingwood, Gallie, and Butterfield. Quentin Skinner's 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas' was first presented at Oakeshott's seminar, which shows the significance of the seminar as a forum for the philosophy of history.<sup>9</sup> The philosophy of history, however, never became a subject of its own in history departments. But if that is the sole criterion of success, significance, or impact, we reach an absurd conclusion: because approaches such as psychohistory, Foucauldian genealogy, and Derridean deconstruction did not establish themselves institutionally on par with subjects such as cultural and social history, we are forced to conclude that these approaches did not inform cultural and social historiography, which is anything but the case. Similarly, even if the philosophy of history never became a subject of its own, it was part and parcel of historical debate in postwar British historiography. The fact that leading historians as diverse as Hugh Trevor-Roper

and Christopher Hill contributed to the journal *History and Theory*—not accidentally founded in 1960—attests to this fact.

In a lecture on academic history in 1962, the eminent medieval historian David Knowles, the Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge, professed himself an ‘imbecile’ regarding the nature of history, and therefore promised not to venture into philosophical territory. Yet, he spoke of ‘Croce and Collingwood, Professor Karl Popper, Sir Isaiah Berlin and Mr. E.H. Carr [...] with the deepest respect and admiration’, and found it ‘a consolation’ to usually find ‘in the works of any of these philosophers of history a passage of what is commonly called straight historical narrative’.<sup>10</sup> Toward the end of the lecture Knowles found himself unable to keep his promise: ‘We thought at the beginning of this lecture that we were not going to fall into the deep waters of the philosophy of history. May I end by pondering for a moment what, in its simplest terms, is the education that we hope to give to those whom we teach?’<sup>11</sup> What Knowles’ lapse reveals is that no matter how ill prepared historians were to grapple with technical philosophical issues, they were still pressed to engage with it when discussing the conceptual and social nature of their own discipline.

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The prominent role played by the philosophy of history in the early postwar period has strangely escaped the systematic and detailed attention of scholars of postwar British historiography,<sup>12</sup> even though some of the works produced in the 1960s proved highly influential in both secondary and higher education. To take an example, to historians such as Peter Mandler and Richard Evans, Carr’s *What is History?* was ‘the book on the philosophy of history’.<sup>13</sup> If the salience of the philosophy of history in the first two and a half decades of the postwar period has escaped the gaze of today’s historians, it did not escape the attention of contemporary commentators.<sup>14</sup> Noel Annan, for example, relates the partial though significant truth that

‘it was the nature of history, rather than the structures of society, that exercised the minds of Our Age in the years immediately after the war. How should we write history, how do we reconstruct it, what part is played by impersonal forces and what by chance, contingency and people?’

He mentions that these issues preoccupied the British historians ‘Isaiah Berlin, Herbert Butterfield, Geoffrey Barraclough, E.H. Carr, Michael Oakshott, Karl Popper, Hugh Trevor-Roper, J.H. Plumb and

Gordon Leff: and also philosophers such as Patrick Gardiner, W.B. Gallie, P.H. Nowell Smith and J.A. Passmore'.<sup>15</sup> To take another example, the Oxford philosopher W.H. Walsh averred in his only article written for *Encounter*, published in 1962, that the philosophy of history preoccupies as many historians as philosophers, mentioning E.H. Carr, Herbert Butterfield, Geoffrey Barraclough, Alfred Cobban, and Allan Bullock. Though he saw British historians as too empiricist, unreflective, and immune from that intrusion of radically different political visions and challenges from other disciplines that sparks an interest in the presuppositions of history, he nonetheless saw a hope in the fact that '[the] reputation of Collingwood [...] has been rising steadily in recent years'.<sup>16</sup> Nearly half a century later Mandler and Peter Burke noted that the resurgence of the philosophy of history among historians in the 1960s owed much to the works of Collingwood and Oakeshott. As Burke wrote: 'The first and still most important figure in this field is of course R.G. Collingwood.'<sup>17</sup>

A *Times Literary Supplement* review of Carr's *What is History?* stated that even though Carr owes much to Marxist theory and sociology, 'he' nonetheless 'picks up the threads of British philosophy of history where R.G. Collingwood left them about a quarter of a century ago'.<sup>18</sup> And it is no coincidence that one of the major topics in the first decade in the life of *History and Theory* revolved around 'a question of recurring interest: the influence of Benedetto Croce's thought on theories of history in the English speaking countries'.<sup>19</sup> A supposedly staunch Rankean such as Elton acknowledged that at least 'some' articles in *History and Theory* were fruitful. Elton even found an article by the Collingwoodian philosopher of history Louis Mink 'useful' in discussing the presuppositions of history. Moreover, Elton did 'not mean to deny that there are some sensible books on these subjects [philosophical subjects]', referring to W.H. Dray, Patrick Gardiner, and W.B. Gallie.<sup>20</sup>

### UNIVERSITY EXPANSION, THE GROWTH OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES, AND THE PERSISTENCE OF TELEOLOGICAL PHILOSOPHIES OF HISTORY

One major reason which explains why British historians took such a strong interest in the conceptual identity and architecture of their discipline is the increased pressure from the social sciences in the 1960s, urging historians to radically examine historical methodology and epistemology.<sup>21</sup> Historians, to be sure, had little cause to worry about their institutional

and public standing, since the postwar university expansion, instigated by the growing welfare state, benefitted both history and the social sciences.<sup>22</sup> If we, for instance, look at student intake statistics for 1961–1967, we find that ‘undergraduates in faculties of social studies increased by 181.2 per cent and postgraduates by 149 per cent. Comparable increases for the total student body were 62.3 per cent and 65.1 per cent’.<sup>23</sup> Even though the social sciences were clearly either being favored by state funding, or attracted students away from the humanities, or both, disciplines in the humanities equally clearly benefitted from university expansion as well, which can be further observed in the rise of arts students in the decades following World War II.

Still, the rising prominence of the social sciences exerted a pressure on the conceptual identity of history. In particular, historians influenced by various social scientific traditions were showing that ‘theory’ in history was eminently suited for empirical *use*, and not ‘mere’ abstract or conceptual analysis, thus opening up new venues of historical research and fields of investigations. Historians inspired and influenced by the social sciences proved unusually adept at making their case for theory. Keith Thomas’s article ‘The Tools and the Job’ is well known in this respect.<sup>24</sup> Less well known, but equally emblematic, is a special issue of *History and Theory* from 1963 entitled ‘Use of Theory in the Study of History’, including contributions from the political theorist Michael Walzer and the sociologist Charles Tilly, who would add to political theory and sociology, respectively, a historical dimension, and proffer to history a new theoretical foundation.<sup>25</sup>

Those historians who welcomed these innovations and self-examinations, and yet felt that history might possess conceptual qualities worthy of preservation, needed to respond to these developments. The following statement by Elton ought to be understood in this context: ‘history is losing students to such other disciplines as English or the social sciences and must be made more attractive.’<sup>26</sup> The reason why Elton included English in this statement is that the teaching of English at Cambridge in this time was highly popular among students, owing not least to the energies of F.R. Leavis (who conducted most of his teaching from Downing College, Cambridge) and *Scrutiny*, the well-known journal of literary criticism that he edited.<sup>27</sup>

Quite a few prominent historians felt forced to respond to the increase in social scientific research and teaching, but remained confident that history too was expanding,<sup>28</sup> and that it possessed at least a semi-autonomous conceptual identity, confirmed by a large measure of freedom from those ‘accountability’ and ‘measurable performance’ standards that external



managers introduced as steering mechanisms in the 1980s.<sup>29</sup> This partly serves to explain why they turned to the philosophy of history, for the philosophy of history, especially of the new idealist kind, presupposes that history is both a significant cultural force in society, and an autonomous science: new idealism, as we saw in the last chapter, was chiefly concerned to establish the conceptual structure of these two presuppositions.

Social science historiography, however, was not sharply opposed to revisionist historiography, since social science historiography too, on the whole, sought to combat liberal whiggism.<sup>30</sup> Nor was social science historiography a single tradition, free from inner divergences and differences. To simplify matters, there was what we may call the Keith Thomas type, which seemed enthralled by the ‘more demanding techniques of verification’ of the social sciences, since they questioned historical conceptions such as Elton’s “‘Thomas Cromwell’s establishment of bureaucratic government’”, and purportedly demonstrated that it is ‘only statistics’ that enables the historian to ‘objectively’ understand the factual evidence of large group behavior, such as religious activity.<sup>31</sup> But then there was what we may call the E.P. Thompson type, for whom the use of sociology by labor historians ‘does not mean [...] the wooden taking-over of unprecedented terminology and categories from one favoured school of sociology, and imposing these upon existent historical knowledge. Where this is done, it is damaging to both disciplines’. What he called for was rather ‘mutual interpenetration’.<sup>32</sup> Thompson even prophesied that in due time, when it attains institutional dominance, social history may become as whiggish as the liberal-whig historiography it rejects, and in so doing risk ossifying, thereby losing its character as a progressive social force. Many years later, William H. Sewell argued that this is precisely what happened to leftist social historiography.<sup>33</sup>

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Another major reason why Berlin, Carr, and Elton seriously looked to the philosophy of history in general, and the new idealism in particular, to better understand and reshape the practice of history is that teleological approaches to history were still very much alive in the 1950s and the 1960s. To begin with, there were declinist narratives, which had gained in purchase in light of the economic depression and the world wars. Chief among these was Arnold Toynbee’s historical writing, similar in spirit to the histories of Berdyaev, the Durants, and Spengler.<sup>34</sup> Toynbee had published the twelfth and last volume of his *A Study of History* in 1961 (the

first was published in 1934).<sup>35</sup> The one-volume abridgment of the first six volumes sold over 200,000 copies. Its cyclical model of the rise, decline, and fall of world civilizations attracted critiques from a wide variety of scholars, such as Ernest Barker, Lawrence Stone, Hugh Trevor-Roper, W.H. Walsh, Pieter Geyl, Lewis Mumford, and Hans Morgenthau.<sup>36</sup>

Then there was a new form of whiggism in the guise of Marxist historiography. Christopher Hill proclaimed that the “Whig” approach [...] seems to me on the contrary the only possible historical attitude’, and continued to make a historical argument for the ‘making of modern English society’.<sup>37</sup> When Hugh Trevor-Roper aggressively critiqued Hill’s accounts of the English revolution, he saw fit to publish it in *History and Theory*, building his case on exposing the errors of the ‘oblique methods’ with which Hill had constructed his narrative.<sup>38</sup> Hill in turn reviewed Peter Laslett’s *The World We Have Lost* in *History and Theory*, assessing its merits on methodological grounds, and in the process candidly acknowledging the healthy aspects of Trevor-Roper’s review of his own *Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution*.<sup>39</sup>

Older forms of liberal whiggism proved resilient in the postwar period. For instance, the sale of G.M. Trevelyan’s *English Social History* (1944) registered 500,000 copies a decade after its first printing.<sup>40</sup> Ernest Barker was still writing whiggish historical narratives, concomitantly seizing a leading albeit short-lived role in the nascent field of political science.<sup>41</sup> The books of A.L. Rowse,<sup>42</sup> Arthur Bryant, and Winston Churchill that were published in the 1940s bore the imprint of whiggism.<sup>43</sup> Even Friedrich Hayek, in his introduction to *Capitalism and the Historians* from 1954, wrote on ‘Whig history’ thus: ‘Its beneficial effect in creating the essentially liberal atmosphere of the nineteenth century is beyond doubt and was certainly not due to any misrepresentation of facts.’<sup>44</sup> For Hayek, whiggism undoubtedly meant, ideologically, something else than what it did for Hill, but what is more to the point is their common acceptance, however different its appropriations, of whig discourse to advocate for a historiography appropriate to the postwar era.

Finally, a religious but deeply pessimistic historical metaphysic found a forceful voice in Herbert Butterfield, and in other conservative-religious historians such as F.M. Powicke.<sup>45</sup> Seen from the perspective of the post-1980 period, it might seem strange that this philosophy of history proved more popular than that espoused by Hayek, who was speaking for the neoliberal Mont Pèlerin Society. Butterfield believed, following Augustine and in light of the absolute evil he saw in Hitler, Stalin, and World War II, that man’s original sinfulness exceeded any attempt at

human correction and redemption. He drew two principled conclusions germane to the study of history from this religious belief: a universal sympathy is the only proper way of understanding the human past; and God is the fundamental, but fundamentally unknowable, force behind human history. In history, and in our histories, we cannot rely on God through our intellect, but we can hold on to Him in an act of faith.<sup>46</sup>

Coming to terms with whiggism was a salient problem for American historians in the first three decades of the postwar era as well. To take one example, three prominent historians at Berkeley—George Stocking, Joseph Levenson, and David Hollinger—all wrote pieces in the 1960s and the 1970s in which they sought to come to terms with whiggism.<sup>47</sup> Much like the British, they drew on Butterfield to give name and contours to that historiography which sees the past as an inevitable accumulation of progressive events and principles into the culminating present. Butterfield's *The Whig Interpretation of History* had been reprinted in Britain and the USA in the 1950s with considerable success in both sales and scholarly reception.<sup>48</sup>

In contradistinction to the British historians, however, whose targeted whiggism was nearly always political, the Berkeley historians perceived in the historiography of science the most pernicious form of whiggism. With the American military-industrial complex, and heavy investment by government in 'Big Science', both in need of a story of origins that only 'history' can provide, it is no wonder that scientific whiggism became a discursive tool for promoting American greatness in the postwar era. As Stocking argued in 1965: 'However disillusioned we may have become with the idea of progress in other areas, however sophisticated in the newer philosophy of science, most of us take it for granted that the development of science is accumulative ever-upward progress in rationality.'<sup>49</sup> And as Hollinger wrote in one of the first serious discussions among historians of Thomas Kuhn's theory, Kuhn was important to historians since he 'threatened to drive the "Whig interpretation of history" out of its last well-defended enclave, the historiography of the sciences'.<sup>50</sup> Much like the British historians analyzed in this book, the Berkeley historians acknowledged the philosophy of Collingwood as offering not only a critique of whiggism, but also a vindication and explication of the integrity of historical method.<sup>51</sup> This brief look at American postwar historiography evidences that the new idealism clearly lent itself to professional historians as a highly effective conceptual weapon against whiggism.

## THE NEED FOR A NEW PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

The early postwar period, then, was bustling with a plethora of philosophies of history. E.H. Carr, in his famous Trevelyan lectures of 1961, called the teleological philosophies of histories described above—to which he added a ‘cynical’ strand that believed in the arbitrariness of history—‘the most popular views of history today’, and proceeded to spell out an alternative to them.<sup>52</sup> Elton and Berlin shared with Carr this need for an alternative. Berlin, for example, spoke of the need to replace ‘metaphysic-theological theories of history’.<sup>53</sup>

However, both Elton and Berlin placed Carr in the same fold as the whigs,<sup>54</sup> as did other commentators, including Trevor-Roper and Oakeshott.<sup>55</sup> Elton saw Carr’s philosophy of history as similar to that of J.H. Plumb,<sup>56</sup> and wrote: ‘Mr Carr and Dr Plumb are, at heart, “whigs,” looking into the past for reassurance’.<sup>57</sup> In the writings of Carr and Plumb, Elton saw a desacralized ‘religious temperament’, which ‘continues to exist among historians and produces theories of the course of history which seek this prophetic purpose’. Instead of God or freedom, their ‘notion of progress’ posits man’s perfection or the material improvement of life as the ultimate purpose of history.<sup>58</sup>

But these disagreements do not tell the whole story. Berlin, Carr, and Elton had a great deal more in common than their verbal battles have led numerous scholars to believe.<sup>59</sup> Elton and Berlin were nonetheless partially right on one point: Carr readily admitted that he—along with Toynbee and Berlin—belonged to the ‘pre-1914 liberal tradition’, and adopted the “Whig interpretation of history” in his youth.<sup>60</sup> What Berlin and Elton neglected to mention was that Carr saw an urgency in developing a new philosophy of history after the whig tradition, along with laissez-faire liberalism, had been pushed off the precipice of political consciousness by the world wars, the rise of various expressions of collectivism, and the economic depression of the first half of the twentieth century. Carr did phrase this urgency in religious terms: ‘we have known Sin and experienced a Fall; and those who pretend to dispense with a philosophy of history are merely trying, vainly and self-consciously, like members of a nudist colony, to recreate the Garden of Eden in their garden suburb. Today awkward questions can no longer be evaded.’<sup>61</sup> But it is clear that Carr’s language here is ironic if anything: referring to pre-1914 liberalism as a Garden of Eden was intended to reveal the utopian character of that tradition, which Carr had previously argued in *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*.<sup>62</sup>

What I call the revisionist potential of the new idealism offers an interpretive key to understanding the convergences between Carr, Elton, and Berlin, which in other aspects of their thought do, at face value, make strange bedfellows: Carr's socialism is at odds with Berlin's liberalism, which in turn is at odds with Elton's conservatism. Moreover, Elton was, and Berlin was not, a professional historian, while Carr lectured in history along with holding numerous other posts, both academic and non-academic. And yet, in the context of a discipline in need of theoretical justification for its relevance in the postwar world, the new idealism proved attractive to scholars of diverse political, institutional, and scholarly itineraries.

### THE AUTONOMY OF HISTORY

In light of the prominence of the social sciences in the early 1960s, the principles and purposes of history necessitated a 'reformulation' according to Elton.<sup>63</sup> This was an ambition shared by Carr and Berlin, for they too engaged the question 'what is history?' in terms of its differences from, and similarities to, the social and natural sciences, as did numerous other Anglo-American historians in the early decades of the postwar period.<sup>64</sup>

Elton used the distinction between idiographic and nomothetic science, established by the neo-Kantian philosopher Wilhelm Windelband,<sup>65</sup> and revitalized by Collingwood, to express a belief in the 'autonomy' of history: 'To use the terms current among modern philosophers, history is "idiographic," that is, it particularizes, and not "nomothetic," that is, designed to establish general laws.'<sup>66</sup> What Elton did *not* argue, though, is that history held a special status on account of a supposed epistemological incapacity to form general propositions or conclusions. What rendered history an autonomous discipline was its preoccupation with particular 'people, institutions, ideas', 'human sayings, thoughts, deeds and sufferings', in view of understanding how they change over time. In studying these human thoughts and actions, the historian inevitably thinks in terms of general statements. The only proviso is that these statements cannot take the form of general laws.<sup>67</sup>

The works of those historians who purported to discover scientific laws are 'emotionally satisfying', Elton admitted, referring to Toynbee and Spengler—but it cannot be history proper.<sup>68</sup> The types of laws that these historians supposedly discovered bear no relationship to historical knowledge, since their appeal is primarily emotional. The general laws of natural

science, on the other hand, seek to establish knowledge that appeals to reason. But, according to Elton, post-relativity natural science has given up the concepts of truth and falsehood and found epistemological guidance in abstractions derived from the verification of empirical variables in the controlled setting of scientific experiments. History cannot be compared with, and so informed by, these principles, since history, in the first place, still holds to certain concepts of truth and falsehood; in the second place, since history cannot verify its data, because verification entails direct observation, which is out of the historian's reach; and in the third place, since history can neither construct nor control the conditions of its subject matter.<sup>69</sup>

If Elton rejected the laws that natural scientists and determinist historians sought to uncover, the same cannot be said for his views on the social sciences. As he wrote: 'Autonomy is not the same thing as exclusiveness or self-sufficiency.'<sup>70</sup> To this day, most scholars interpret Elton as a thoroughgoing Rankean, who worshipped the 'cult of facts', becoming their willing slave for the sake of a truth that is only uncovered, and never influenced by concepts or theory.<sup>71</sup> This is not the case. For example, Elton argued that the *Annales* School, especially Fernand Braudel and Marc Bloch, 'represents a valuable, perhaps necessary, stage in the development of historical writing', and has deeply questioned the 'ascendancy of Ranke [...] attacked genuine deficiencies and did a good deal to remedy them' through a focus on the social nature of all human activity, and through bestowing epistemic primacy to analysis rather than narrative. The disciplines of sociology, anthropology, and social psychology, which had by this time produced studies on social mobility, class, customs, and developed structural models, were all welcome in Elton's view, for the simple reason that man is a social being whose life extends far beyond the political and diplomatic realms held sacred by the Rankeans. In a review of the historian G.E. Aylmer, for instance, Elton stated that Aylmer's use of 'sociological method' in his study of Stuart government ought to be applied to other periods as well.<sup>72</sup>

Though Elton did state that since the records of the actions of the governing classes and institutions, at least for the period before the year 1800, outnumber those regarding other social groups, living patterns, cultural forms, and mentalities, political history has the best chance of being a compass for other historical sub-disciplines. Nevertheless, Elton immediately proceeded to argue that:

it is perfectly true that mere political history is not enough. A plain tale of wars and treaties, elections and reforms, the fortunes of the great, however

well it may be told, can no longer satisfy our knowledge of it. In order that action may be understood, its setting, circumstances and springs must be made plain, and these are found not only in the psychology of individuals and crowds, but especially in the details of administration, the economy, the intellectual preoccupations of the time, and all other so-called “factors.”<sup>73</sup>

Elton, not unlike Namier, even admitted of virtues in psychology. In particular, Elton viewed non-rational and non-conscious motives as relevant in the understanding of the past, with the rider that the method itself must remain rational.<sup>74</sup> Elton’s problem with the use of the social sciences in history, then, was not their usefulness or legitimacy, but rather that they tended to be ‘regarded as the sole consummation of the historian’s duties’.<sup>75</sup> It was, in other words, not the E.P. Thompsons, but the Keith Thomases that gave Elton cause for concern.<sup>76</sup>

Berlin arrived at conclusions that bear a striking conceptual resemblance to those of Elton. Writing in the first issue of *History and Theory*, Berlin traced the origin of the idea of history as science back to Descartes, in whose hands history received ‘the stigma of the Cartesian condemnation’.<sup>77</sup> The stigma was inaugurated by Descartes, codified by Newton and Darwin, and institutionalized by nineteenth century positivism. Positivist historians such as T.H. Buckle sought to transfer the methods and assumptions of natural science to historical inquiry by treating the human being as an object like any other in nature, the study of which is made possible by his or her material remains. Ultimately, positivist historians hoped that historical events could be explained by the same type of general laws that explained occurrences and patterns in the world of nature. But those hopes were dashed, for ‘[neither] psychologists nor sociologists, neither the ambitious Comte nor the more modest Wundt, had been able to create the new instrument: the “nomothetic” sciences [...] remained stillborn’.<sup>78</sup>

Much like Elton, Berlin did *not* find the natural sciences an inappropriate model for history on account of the latter’s supposed irreverence toward generalizations and classifications. History entails generalizations and classificatory models just like natural science. For Berlin, drawing on his experience as an Oxford analytic philosopher, the crux of the difference resided in the incompatible functions of concepts such as ‘because’ and ‘therefore’ in history and the natural sciences, ‘each performing their own legitimate—and parallel—functions’.<sup>79</sup> Berlin thus drew on the then dominant Oxford analytic philosophy to state the nature of history as an

autonomous idiographic science.<sup>80</sup> Of course, the most articulate philosophy of history combining (Collingwoodian) new idealism and analytic philosophy would have to wait for Quentin Skinner's interventions in the late 1960s and the 1970s.

Berlin approximated Elton in another respect as well—namely, in his recognition of the positive methodological value of the social sciences. For Berlin, 'social scientists' have undeniably demonstrated the great extent to which many individual acts are beyond the individual's control, and

due to heredity or physical or social environment or education, or biological laws or physical characteristics or the interplay of these factors with each other, and with the obscurer factors loosely called psychological characteristics; and that the resultant habits of thought, feeling, and expression are as capable of being classified and made subject to hypotheses and systematic prediction as the behaviour of material objects. And this certainly alters our ideas about the limits of freedom and responsibility.

What social scientists have revealed is that 'the over-confident, too-complacent moral classifications of past historians and of their societies sprang all too obviously from specific historical conditions, specific forms of ignorance or vainglory [...] in the light of our own standards of accuracy and objectivity'.<sup>81</sup>

Perhaps it is not surprising that Berlin and Elton come close to each other on this topic. What is more surprising is that Carr's philosophy of history may with ease be placed in the same fold. Ruminating on the relationship between the natural and human sciences in the second of his Trevelyan lectures, Carr grafted his own arguments onto Collingwood's philosophy: 'Collingwood, when he wrote in the 1930s, was particularly anxious to draw a sharp line between the world of nature, which was the object of scientific enquiry, and the world of history.'<sup>82</sup> Carr then proceeded to critique this distinction for being too sharp, for history, just like science, is concerned with the general, though it seeks the general from the unique, while the sciences apply general propositions to objects of certain types: 'The historian is not generally interested in the unique, but in what is general in the unique.'<sup>83</sup>

There is no point in arguing that Collingwood propounded precisely this argument—as he wrote in the 1920s, history seeks to know 'a concrete fact bristling with conceptual interpretations'<sup>84</sup>—but rather to register that the use of the new idealism by postwar historians was no straightforward



and logically consistent affair, that is, one that can be understood by applying models of influence or reception. This being the case, it is nonetheless clear that Carr, like Collingwood, saw the origins of historical science at a point in time when man began to think of the human world as governed and influenced by consciousness, which marked the birth of a mode of thinking of the world substantially different from thinking of it in terms of natural processes: ‘History begins when men begin to think of the passage of time in terms not of natural process—the cycle of the seasons, the human life-span—but of a series of specific events in which men are consciously involved and which they can consciously influence.’<sup>85</sup>

Of the three historians under discussion here, Carr accorded most value to the social sciences. For Carr, the division between individual and society was misguided, and so history ‘is a social process, in which individuals are engaged as social beings; and the imaginary antithesis between society and the individual is no more than a red herring drawn across our path to confuse our thinking’.<sup>86</sup> For Carr, history is and ought to be about human individuals. But since a study of large numbers of individuals, which is crucial for understanding modern mass society, cannot be achieved by interpreting each and single individual, and since the quantitative kind of study is indispensable to understanding essential (social) aspects of individual life, the historian must admit of the necessity of studying ‘anonymous’, though not ‘impersonal’, individuals. In this respect, Carlyle and Lenin are on the same page: ‘Carlyle’s and Lenin’s millions were millions of individuals: there was nothing impersonal about them.’ Certain human activities, practices, problems, and actions are such to necessitate collective forms of behavior, and that does not remove the element of individuality, but rather socializes it:

‘These nameless millions were individuals acting, more or less unconsciously, together and constituting a social force. The historian will not in ordinary circumstances need to take cognizance of a single discontented peasant or discontented village.’<sup>87</sup>

This position parallels Carr’s political thought, which, as Haslam has shown, centered on modifying and adapting individual liberty to a collectivist age (an endeavor shared by other revisionists as well).<sup>88</sup>

Finally, drawing on Freudian psychoanalysis, Carr accorded to irrationality and the unconscious a place in historical interpretation. However, even though Carr admitted that unconscious and irrational drives are real

sources of human behavior, he argued, in a similar vein as Elton, that the method with which such behavior can be understood must be, as it was in Freud, rational and ultimately geared toward mastering the unconscious.<sup>89</sup> The most significant historiographical precedent to Elton and Carr's forages into the field of psychoanalysis was of course Namier's strong insistence on unconscious drives and mechanisms as the real springboards of political action. Namier may not have established psychoanalysis as an ancillary theory in the historical profession, but he certainly made it more palatable.<sup>90</sup>

Collingwood, interestingly, had a comparable view of psychoanalysis. In the last book he published before his death, *The New Leviathan*, Collingwood turned to psychoanalysis to correct his philosophy of history in light of what he perceived as the twentieth century disasters in a European civilization based only on reason and the conscious. Psychoanalysis proved useful here as its aim is 'bringing into consciousness of the unconscious', and exploring the non-social, aggressive, and exploitative aspects inherent to the political mind of the 1930s and the 1940s.<sup>91</sup>

### METHODOLOGICAL PLURALISM AND PERSPECTIVISM

To many modern philosophers of history and historians, the differences between history and natural science have revealed, in the first place, that history belongs in the same category as 'relativistic' forms of knowledge, such as aesthetic or emotive judgments. The argument, succinctly put, is that since history cannot produce knowledge in the same manner as natural science, which produces objective knowledge, it is bound to produce knowledge that may refer to facts, but is essentially relative and subjective, as the historian's social position, political ideology, morality, or aesthetic sensibility are the prime determinants of his or her accounts. This purportedly shows that a particular historical analysis or narrative is valid only to those who explicitly share its positions and assumptions, or who operate within the same 'pre-figurative' scheme. Scholars may have disagreed over the extent to which history is art or science, or both, but they have more often than not sought to clarify the nature of historical interpretation in these terms.<sup>92</sup>

Neither Carr, nor Berlin, nor Elton, broached this issue in this way, which has escaped a number of commentators, including the otherwise perceptive Haslam, who argues that Carr used Croce and Collingwood to defend a version of relativism, which in turn was trumped by a

‘Rankian, Victorian, or, indeed, Marxist sense of history as some kind of science’.<sup>93</sup> This is a mistaken interpretation. We will recall from the previous chapter that for Croce, Collingwood, and Oakeshott, the salient issue confronting the status of history in the interwar years was the distinctively modern pluralism that permeated all levels of thought and society. Pluralism was perceived as a social fact, to which the new idealists responded by instituting this pluralism, and its companion perspectivism, as absolute presuppositions of both philosophy and history. In consequence, the new idealists did not examine the nature of history in terms of the divide between subjective and objective knowledge, but rather started out from the inescapable plurality and perspectivism inherent to historical interpretation.<sup>94</sup> In effect, they were formulating what I propose to call a ‘pluralist perspectivism’.

This is how Carr, Berlin, and Elton, too, broached the issue of the methodological nature of history. For Elton, perspectivism was inherent in thinking historically, and it went down to essentials, molding the very conditions of historical knowledge. In the first place, for Elton, ‘the past must be sorted into “aspects” to become not only manageable but meaningful’. This condition is sufficient to establish that there is no pre-established hierarchy governing the variety of historical methods: ‘There are, therefore, no ways of dealing with history which are *intrinsically* superior to others. Political history [...] is not necessarily more jejune than social history, the analysis and description of the arrangements by which they [people] have lived together in ordered groups.’ With such an arrangement, the only possible attitude is that of intellectual respect toward plural methodologies and interpretive perspectives: ‘In these matters there are no hierarchies, and mutual respect is the only proper attitude.’<sup>95</sup>

In the second place, explicitly referring to Collingwood, and incidentally to challenge the ‘moderate’ relativism of Carr, Elton signally rejected the assumption that historical knowledge is objective since it rests on atomistic, mind-independent facts, which remain untouchable by the presuppositions of historical knowledge:

In denying the extreme relativism of which Mr Carr is only a recent and *by no means an extreme exponent*, I may well be taken to believe that facts about the past are simple, discrete, knowable entities which need only to be collected in order that a structure called history may emerge. However, *this naïve theory concerning the facts of history, possibly once widely current, has suffered sufficient bludgeoning to require no discussion here*. But while no one will nowadays hold it in its naked simplicity, the time has come to point out

that it has a little more validity than is usually supposed. [...] Its downfall has been largely the work of *philosophers of history*, psychologists and social scientists *who certainly penetrated the weaknesses of the unreflective historian and showed how unsatisfactory his often unconscious presuppositions were*, but who did not as a rule try to write history. When, like R.G. Collingwood, they did, it is not possible to analyse their history in terms of their philosophy: it is just ordinary sound history [emphasis added].<sup>96</sup>

This passage is evidently not consistent with itself, and it is difficult to grasp the logic of its statements. Why are philosophers of history, especially Collingwood, acknowledged as having demonstrated that facts in the Rankean tradition are not the objective foundation they purport to be; that some of these philosophers, again Collingwood, wrote good histories; but that their histories cannot be analyzed ‘in terms of their philosophy’? The last statement does not seem to follow from the first two, if it makes sense at all, since Elton fails to explain what he means by analyzing a history in terms of a philosophy. In any case, what this passage mainly brings to the fore is Elton’s rejection of the naïve empiricist conception of objectivity,<sup>97</sup> and its directly observable basis in new idealist philosophy. This position is evidenced in other passages in *The Practice of History*. Thus, for example: ‘There is no final end to the study of history; the true and complete past can never be described because not enough of it survives and because what survives must be interpreted by human minds.’<sup>98</sup> And: ‘That every generation rewrites history from its own point of view, and that every historian worth reading has a mind filled with attitudes of his own, *are commonplaces, largely true*, which need not be laboured any further [emphasis added].’<sup>99</sup>

If naïve empiricism was an impossible stance due to the plurality of stances—interpretive and methodological—that go into making a historical narrative or analysis, then, according to Elton, whig historiography and certain strands of sociology fail to own up to the plurality of the past for the opposite reason—namely, in privileging one group or dataset as the only determinant of past phenomena. In Elton’s words:

One could make a case for the proposition that the centuries of “whig” historiography in England simply suffered from historian’s uncalled-for will-*ingness to let the lawyers dictate their scheme of argument*. Similarly, the sociologist may provide a system of class structure or evolve theories of voting behaviour which are statistical abstracts *from the multifariousness of real life* [emphasis added].<sup>100</sup>

Here Elton found it useful to defer to Berlin's philosophical argument in *Historical Inevitability* that though there is a measure of necessity in historical processes, no historical events can be proved to be 'truly determined'.<sup>101</sup>

Aimed at the historical theories of Plumb and Carr, Elton proffered empirical examples to the effect that past experiences are too multifarious to be conducive to a unidirectional historical narrative. He addressed developments in the seventeenth century and pointed out that there are no 'obvious' or 'probable' connections between expanding commerce, the rise of capitalist organization, the growth of secular and scientific knowledge, and the 'decline' in liberties among certain social strata of the population. And if non-European countries are brought into this narrative, as they must in a narrative of civilizational progress, the connections purportedly revealing a linear progress are attenuated further.<sup>102</sup> And yet, for Elton, the histories of both Carr and Plumb are perfectly sound: 'Where they err is *not in their history* but in their propaganda, in their insistence that *only their kind of interpretation will do* [emphasis added].'<sup>103</sup>

In this context of arguments, Elton invoked the unmistakably Oakeshottian principle that the past must be studied strictly for its own sake and on its own terms. Such a principle, according to Elton, ensures *not* objectivity in the Rankean sense, but rather a historical attitude that increases the possibility of a fair and accurate treatment of conflicting parties in the past, that is, it promotes pluralist perspectivism: 'avoiding anachronism both in interpretation and judgment, devoting attention to the *defeated as well as to the victors*; it involves, above all, the deliberate abandonment of the present.'<sup>104</sup> Finally, and here Elton invoked the article by Mink referred to earlier, if there are truths to be ascertained regarding the past, these are not absolute but 'experimental truths'.<sup>105</sup>

From the foregoing, it is evident that Elton, in *The Practice of History*, did not set out to destroy the credibility of Carr (or Plumb) as historians, even if he attributed to Carr beliefs Carr did not hold. It also shows that Elton was not, as Haslam suggests, a 'true positivist, to the point of dogmatism'.<sup>106</sup> Indeed, on the topic under discussion here, Elton's position approximates that of Carr.

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Turning now to Carr, a crucial feature of his philosophy of history is the rejection of the opposition between society and individual, subject and object, and past and present. Historical knowledge, for Carr, is an 'unend-

ing dialogue between the present and the past', a living past and a living present.<sup>107</sup> Carr averred in a series of 1951 BBC talks that were published as *The New Society*: 'among recent writers on the subject, I find myself most indebted to Collingwood, who has insisted most strongly on this continuity and on this process of interaction.'<sup>108</sup> To these two temporal dimensions, past and present, Carr added a third: the future. This addition has baffled commentators, most of whom have read it as a temporal extension of his imputed whiggish outlook, suited to an age of forward-looking technical and scientific optimism. But as we will see shortly, by invoking the future, Carr was extending the inherent plurality of historical interpretation into another temporal mode.

Carr endlessly searched for conceptual resources to build his case for a middle position both in politics and in theory. Apart from the new idealism, another source Carr tapped into for both purposes was the sociologist of knowledge Karl Mannheim. Mannheim was a Hungarian German-speaking Jewish scholar who was forced—as were so many of those intellectuals who shaped the postwar Anglo-American human and social sciences—to flee Germany in the early 1930s, after being labeled a dangerous intellectual by the Nazi regime.<sup>109</sup> He immigrated to England with the aid of the Academic Assistance Council (from 1935 the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning), founded in 1933 by William Beveridge.<sup>110</sup> While in England, where he would spend the remainder of what proved to be a short life, Mannheim was able to lecture at Oxford, Cambridge, and the London School of Economics, forging relationships with leading churchmen, civil servants, and academics. Coincidentally, Elton, with his family, which was German-Jewish (Elton is the Anglicized version of Ehrenberg), was also assisted by the Society in fleeing the Nazis from Prague in 1939.<sup>111</sup>

From Mannheim, who Carr read as a historicist sobered by the lessons of Marxism, thus sidestepping the interwar crisis of historicism in Germany, Carr learned that '[reality] consists in the constant interaction of subject and object, of man and his material environment'. What especially struck Carr about Mannheim was that his 'searching attempt to find a sort of middle ground between a no longer tenable absolutism and an intolerably negative relativism is designed to offer a way out from many of the dilemmas of our time'.<sup>112</sup> Mannheim's great contribution to contemporary thought, according to Carr, was his *Ideologie und Utopie* (published in 1929, and translated into English as *Ideology and Utopia* in 1936), where he laid down a 'sociology of knowledge' which traced the sources of social cohesion, conflict, and change not in economic determinants, but in historically varying, and incommensurable, perspectives or

‘styles of thought’, through which students of both the past and the present can understand the formation of social phenomena.<sup>113</sup>

It is not by chance that Peter Laslett was another postwar revisionist historian who used Mannheim’s sociology of knowledge in his studies. As I have argued elsewhere, Laslett used Mannheim’s explanatory concepts from *Ideology and Utopia*, especially the concepts ‘styles of thought’ and ‘total personality’, to revise entrenched whig interpretations of early modern English political thought.<sup>114</sup> Moreover, Oakeshott and Barker were Laslett’s history teachers in Cambridge in the 1930s and the 1940s.<sup>115</sup> Laslett drew on the philosophy of history of Oakeshott alongside the sociology of Mannheim to critique whiggism by means of historical revisionism.<sup>116</sup>

In Britain, thus, Mannheim found an audience not primarily among sociologists, but among historians.<sup>117</sup> This has partly to do with the fact that Mannheim, as Carr pointed out, was a historicist, and turned to history to trace those changes in social organization and social knowledge that could explain the peculiarities and problems of modernity.<sup>118</sup> But Mannheim’s impact also owes to the fact that his sociology can easily be read as directed against whig interpretations of history<sup>119</sup>: in the first place, because Mannheim called the sociology of knowledge a historical discipline, which can uncover the essential perspectivism of knowledge by studying the historical periods to which they correspond; in the second place, because the sociology of knowledge eschews moral, ideological, and political judgments, and understands social knowledge ‘without regard for party biases’<sup>120</sup>; and in the third place, because Mannheim’s ‘sociologically oriented history of ideas is destined to provide modern men with a revised view of the whole historical process’.<sup>121</sup> Seen in this light, the use by revisionist historians of both Mannheim and the new idealism is neither perplexing nor inconsistent.

For Carr, the epistemological status of historical knowledge did not rely exclusively on facts. He readily admitted that there were ‘objective facts of history’ and that in historical interpretation there are ‘facts which need to be established, tested and verified; the historian must not be caught using shoddy material’. Ruminating on Butterfield’s argument that both the Marxist and the Jesuit historian will agree on certain facts, and so ensure a level of inter-ideological objectivity, Carr found that though they certainly can agree on facts, Butterfield fails to consider that their *perspective* plays an equally important role in their respective interpretations.<sup>122</sup> For Carr, it is the perspective that makes mere facts into ‘facts of history’.<sup>123</sup> The perspective guides the ‘choice and arrangement of facts’, and, more

importantly, it indicates the ‘indispensable categories of thought’ the perspective harbors, such as a certain ‘view of cause and effect’. These categories—strongly echoing not only Mannheim, but Collingwood’s theory of absolute presuppositions as well—will leave an imprint on the conclusions arrived at using facts.<sup>124</sup> For this reason, history consists of nothing but a ‘provisional selection of facts and a provisional interpretation.’<sup>125</sup> In other words, history consists of endless revisions, an epistemological stance that can, again, be formulated as a pluralist perspectivism, which is not reducible to subjectivism or relativism.

The development of Butterfield’s own thought revealed, in Carr’s opinion, that perspectival shifts are immanent even to individual thinkers. Butterfield’s rally cry against the whig interpretation of history, which was a response to the decline of liberal values and the Liberal Party in the 1930s, stands in stark contrast to his vindication of whiggism in the 1940s, which mirrored the British government’s attempt to represent the war as a defense of constitutional liberties, and in doing so successfully drew on the whig interpretation of history. For Carr, these shifts in Butterfield’s thought do not suggest that what Butterfield argued from either perspective ought to be abhorred. It was rather to suggest that all good historians irrevocably meet the contingent dilemmas of their present, an encounter which contributes to shaping historically distinctive perspectives, and so: ‘The serious historian is the one who recognizes the historically conditioned character of all values, not the one who claims for his own values an objectivity beyond history.’<sup>126</sup>

That Carr’s epistemological colors were decidedly pluralist and perspectivist is evinced in other passages of *What is History?*. For example, no society, Carr asserted, is socially homogenous. There will always be rebels and dissidents, for society is an ‘arena of social conflicts’. This fundamental social divisiveness is such that those who are against ‘society’ (presumably meaning regnant laws, moral standards, political regimes, and forms of economic organization) reflect it as much as those who uphold it. Carr adduced the Russian serf rebellion led by Pugachev and Nietzsche as testimony to the historical significance of the dissidents and the rebels.<sup>127</sup> For Carr, even on the vindicatory view of history—to which he did not profess to adhere—one would have to acknowledge that at least certain immediately unsuccessful actions and forms of thought have proved to be more successful in the long term than those that were successful in the short term. Thus, the historian does not have the privilege to refuse to study a group, individual, and philosophy, because he or she feels that they have had no causal or functional or moral part to play in the short term.



Carr therefore hastened to add that a good historian criticizes a colleague *not* because that colleague's interpretation is false in any absolute sense, but rather for being lopsided, or holding on to a unitarian interpretive perspective, such as attributing the cause of the Russian Revolution to the political stupidity of Nicholas II or the political genius of Lenin.<sup>128</sup>

In light of these positions, we may revisit Carr's externally ascribed naïve commitment to the idea of progress and his invocation of the future as a necessary temporal category in historical consciousness and development. If progress is taken to mean that history is comprised of, and judged in terms of, only 'successful' actions, institutions, actions, moral values, laws, and social and political forms of organization, then Carr was decidedly not committed to the idea of progress. He invoked in this context a talk by none other than Berlin—'Political Judgment', a BBC talk from 1957—agreeing with Berlin that historical judgments cannot rest on principles of universal validity.<sup>129</sup>

As Carr explicated in *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, those who attempt to project the realization of such principles onto the *future* are utopian; their cast of mind is that of the 'intellectual', symbolized by Woodrow Wilson, who according to Carr was a Victorian free-trade liberal in an age of nationally imposed trade restrictions and collectivism. The realist, exemplified by the 'bureaucrat', the best example of which is the Machiavelli who served the Florentine ruling family Medici, makes the same mistake as the utopian, only from the other temporal end. The realist only looks to the *past* to guide his principles, which take the form of purely pragmatic considerations, ingrained into the realist's mind by the gritty contingencies of past policies. Realist and utopian alike err since they both abide by the 'absolute standard', the only difference being the different temporalities in which they find this absolute standard.<sup>130</sup> For Carr this was, needless to add, a wrong attitude.<sup>131</sup> The future was yet another concept Carr invoked to break free from the inhibitions of the realist and utopian, both of which were essentially whiggish modes of interpretation. The future, for Carr, did not substitute a future transcendentalism for a past one. It rather suggested another dimension to the radical changeability and plurality of humans as historical beings; it suggested that the plurality of the present and the past have a future.

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Turning now, and finally, to Berlin, I will not labor here on a well-known aspect of Berlin's liberal political theory—namely, his value pluralism.<sup>132</sup>

Here my aim is to show that Berlin's analysis of the methodological nature of history resembles those of Carr and Elton. Compared to Elton and Carr, however, Berlin's pronouncements on this issue are scarce, and not directly conversant with the tradition of new idealism. Nevertheless, those passages where Berlin does reflect on the issue reveal strong conceptual affinities with new idealist philosophy of history, and so the latter can clarify Berlin's position. A passage from Berlin's *Historical Inevitability* is indicative in this respect. Discussing the histories of Gibbon, Macaulay, Treitschke, and Belloc, Berlin faults them only secondarily for their factual inaccuracy, and primarily for their inability to acknowledge as worthy of understanding those sides of an argument, conflict, dispute, and policy, which do not agree with their own outlook and values:

It may be (and doubtless has often been said) that Gibbon or Macaulay or Treitschke or the late Mr. Belloc fail to reproduce the facts as we suspect them to have been. To say this is, of course, to accuse these writers of serious inadequacy as historians; but *that is not the main gravamen of the charge*. It is rather that they are in some sense not merely inaccurate or superficial or incomplete, but that they are unjust; that *they are seeking to secure our approval for one side, and, in order to achieve this, denigrate the other; that they cite evidence and use methods of inference or presentation in dealing with some, which, for no good reason, they deny to others; and that their motive for doing this derives from their conviction of how men should be, and of what they should do; and sometimes also that these convictions spring from views which* (judged in terms of the ordinary standards and scales of value which prevail in the societies to which they and we belong) *are too narrow; or that they are inapplicable to the historical period in question* [emphasis added].<sup>133</sup>

Later on in *Historical Inevitability*, Berlin re-emphasized that it is 'salutary' to write histories evading the absolute truths of ideologies, the conceptual absolutism of sciences such as sociology, and binary moral judgments, for these are widely used in propagandist aims with deleteriously effective political force.<sup>134</sup> Even though Berlin is well known for criticizing Carr for holding the 'big battalion' view of historical development—that is, emphasizing the significance of only those historical agencies that wielded superior force—he nonetheless did not exclude such agencies from the purview of historical understanding. The historian, according to Berlin, ought—in addition to plunging beneath the surface and seeing the sense, intelligible motives, and rationality of the 'gratuitous, stupid, wicked', and 'unintelligible'—'strive to remain fair even to the big battalions'.<sup>135</sup>

## THE TRINITY OF HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION: SYMPATHY, IMAGINATION, REVISION

In the foregoing section, we saw that for Carr, Berlin, and Elton, history is irreducibly plural and perspectival in terms of both the past and the historian's interpretations of the past. If that is the case, what conceptual character must historical knowledge acquisition take for it to retain these two features, and yet form definite—as opposed to both purely objective and final, and purely subjective or relative—descriptions, analyses, and conclusions regarding the human past? The answer to which all three can be said to subscribe is that of *revisionist interpretation*.<sup>136</sup>

The Elton historians are accustomed to encountering is the high priest of empiricism, one that exalted facts as the entry and exit points of past reality, to the point of deeming as idolatrous every other posited foundation of historical knowledge. Contextualizing Elton in the new idealist tradition serves to dispel this ingrained interpretation. For Elton, there are two logically distinct stages of interpretation. Regarding the first stage, Elton did seem to argue along the lines of hard empiricism. He asserted that 'true' facts are utterly indispensable for the interpretation of the past, even to the point of saying that the historian must become 'the servant of his evidence'.<sup>137</sup> The historian must submit to the authority of the evidence, for ultimately the questions he or she poses 'are questions suggested by the evidence'.<sup>138</sup> And in another move, resembling an Oakeshottian principle, Elton argued that '[ideally] the student should never consider less than the total of the historical material which may conceivably be relevant to his inquiry'.<sup>139</sup>

In this context of arguments, Elton took the opportunity to criticize what he understood as Carr's view of evidence. In the first of his Trevelyan lectures, Carr invoked a historical event mentioned in the 1960 Ford lectures delivered by George Kitson Clark, published as *The Making of Victorian England*. Clark was a revisionist Cambridge historian who invited Carr to deliver the Trevelyan lectures in 1961. The event in question occurred in 1850 in Stalybridge Wakes. The keeper of a gingerbread stall had fallen into a petty dispute with a group of miners wearing iron-tipped clogs. The dispute, related in the memoirs of a 'Lord' George Sanger, found its dissolution when the miners beat the keeper to death, thus infusing an element of violence and social conflict into a supposedly 'respectable' and 'civilized' age.<sup>140</sup>

According to Carr, in 1959, a year before Clark redeemed this fact in his revision of Victorian Britain, no historian viewed it as historical evidence, and so it was Clark who turned this fact into a 'historical' fact. This proves, according to Carr, that historical facts are inseparable from the historical imagination.<sup>141</sup> Elton took this to mean that, for Carr, facts do not bear witness to the very *existence* of the actions that brought them about, and that facts *only* exist in the imagination. Elton countered by arguing that the imaginative interpretation of a factual event has 'nothing whatsoever to do with its existence'.<sup>142</sup>

Critics usually seize on these and similar passages in Elton's works.<sup>143</sup> In doing so, they are attacking a straw man, for they fail to consider Elton's second stage of interpretation, which radically alters the conventional understanding of Elton's theory of history and, more importantly, the conceptual makeup of revisionist historiography. That Elton viewed historical interpretation as comprised of two stages is evidenced in the following passage: 'it is not enough to have seen everything; a mere accumulation of pebbles does not make a building, or even a highway. It is certainly even more important that everything should have been looked at in the proper light.'<sup>144</sup> Even when he spoke of 'independent' and 'real' facts which are conducive to an undisputable body of historical knowledge, Elton hastened to add that these do not constitute historical interpretation: 'though this body of knowledge *may not by itself provide a sophisticated interpretation of the past* it is entirely indispensable to the study of it [emphasis added].'<sup>145</sup>

Most facts in historical interpretation are, according to Elton, 'complex or private facts', such as the course of the Battle of Hastings, or the 'meaning of Hobbes's view of human psychology'. They are of such a nature that 'the problem of the observer does arise', for the observers 'see differences in the facts', in particular since 'in many cases that evidence is not clear-cut'.<sup>146</sup> These observations have far-reaching consequences for the nature of historical interpretation, and they led Elton to advocate for revisionism as the only appropriate form of historical interpretation. Facts themselves, Elton admitted, allow for revision: 'the observer's understanding of his evidence will alter his historical knowledge, and increasing knowledge may also lead to a *revision of supposedly established facts* because facts do not occur in isolation [emphasis added]'.<sup>147</sup> As a general conclusion, Elton argued: 'History is an unending search for truth, with *the only certainty at each man's end* that there will be more to be said and that, before long, others will say it [emphasis added].'<sup>148</sup>

It is only within the conceptual limits of revisionism, thus, that professional historical interpretations can have a claim to legitimacy, which of course means that they must contend with other such interpretations. In doing so, and in continuing the endless labors of research, historical interpretations must always allow themselves to be revised. How, then, do they reach this ever provisional knowledge? To answer this question, Elton drew on Collingwood to a great extent.

The first aspect which echoes Collingwood's philosophy is Elton's insistence on the dual purpose of professional history to study past events from the 'inside', and to study only those events that pose problems: 'The purpose and ambition of professional history is to understand a given problem from the inside.'<sup>149</sup> Historical events, in contrast to natural events, must be understood from the inside since their character arises from the participation of 'a variety of people and circumstances', acting in concrete situations as 'agents'. Generalization and categorization in historical interpretation are imposed on such agents.<sup>150</sup> Agents' actions are problematic from a historical point of view because agents' motives and reasons for action, thought, and speech are the outcome of contingent practices, which, from the historian's perspective, embedded as it is in different contingent practices, do not emerge as meaningful by the study of evidence alone.

The historian, therefore, must strive to 'beyond the facts' comprehend the 'setting, atmosphere, possibility, probability—all those tenuous compounds in the lives of men which we call the spirit of an age'.<sup>151</sup> Not all of these compounds, however, are amenable to historical interpretations. To evade this limitation, the historian must choose those questions which allow themselves to be answered. As examples, Elton brought to the fore the questions: why did the American colonies rebel against the British Crown? Why and how did cattle farming spread across the Argentinean grasslands? What was the influence of Aristotelian philosophy on Christian thought in the Middle Ages? In asking questions, however, the historian may 'select his problems to suit himself'. Moreover, 'he may, and probably will, include himself in the equation when he explains, interprets, even perhaps distorts'. For this reason, any historian's questions to any piece of evidence 'can also, as a rule, yield answers to other equally legitimate questions'.<sup>152</sup>

Once the historian has chosen the questions he or she wishes to answer, the presuppositions by which he or she must abide in order to answer them, and arrive at sound historical interpretations, are those of sympathy

and imagination. Sympathy, for Elton, is the historian's 'most rare' but also 'most dangerous' gift: 'To achieve as secure a judgment as possible, the historian here requires his most rare and also most dangerous gift: an all-embracing sympathy which enables him, chameleon-like, to stand with each man in turn to look upon the situation.'<sup>153</sup> To exemplify the necessity of sympathy, Elton revisited a historical episode that has shown the limitations of partisan histories, in this case Protestant and Catholic ones—namely, the Catholic conspiracies against Elizabeth I. Protestant historians have assumed that Catholics always justified the means (plotting to overthrow the Protestant queen) by the end (re-instating a sovereign of the Catholic faith). Catholic historians, on the other hand, highlighted the Machiavellian character of Elizabethan statesmen, arguing that these statesmen carefully engineered the purported discoveries of treason to further the anti-Catholic interests of the government.

Against these biased whiggish, and equally biased Catholic anti-whiggish, interpretations of the Protestant statesmen and the Catholic plotters, Elton proposed a sympathetic analysis that 'would treat them both as humans of a more familiar kind; it would quickly discover that neither side was invariably "Machiavellian" or invariably incapable of deceit. Genuine plots did exist, but the queen's agents fostered them further to exploit them to maximum'. On a sympathetic, and indeed perspectivist, reading:

Both sides behaved as a reasoned reflection would expect them to behave: one, despairing of overthrowing a Protestant queen in any other way, sought to organize subversive violence, while the other, convinced that such dangers existed, magnified them and even encouraged the more inept plotters in order to squash them more successfully. This case demonstrates well how all-round sympathy and understanding (a form of impartiality) can unravel the problems of the evidence.<sup>154</sup>

Often, however, the evidence is insufficient for a sympathetic understanding. There will be gaps, but that should not stop the historian from attempting to reach conclusions and discover truths, for he or she has at his or her disposal the capacity for 'imaginative reconstruction and interpretation'. When the historian reaches an impasse which cannot be resolved by interpreting the evidence, since the evidence is missing, 'his imagination recreates the circumstances and interdependencies within which the evidence has arisen'.<sup>155</sup>

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Compared to Elton, Carr did not make an initial distinction between fact and interpretation. Separating the two, according to Carr, entails a view that belongs to the nineteenth century—namely the ‘fetishism of facts’ or ‘fetishism of documents’.<sup>156</sup> For Carr, it was Namier’s view of history that lucidly revealed the dead-end to which such a fetish leads. For all his prodigious and revolutionary mapping of the personal affiliations and backgrounds of British eighteenth century parliamentary politicians, the proverbial bricks with which he sought to construct a house of history, Namier failed to produce historical accounts, for though bricks ‘are important [...] a pile of bricks is not a house’. In this respect, the unfinished encyclopedia of British Members of Parliament that Namier initiated in the postwar era is the best example of his gifts as ‘a historian who has written no history’.<sup>157</sup>

Facts on their own are not conducive to historical interpretations, because they are themselves the outcome of, and so imbued with, interpretation: ‘No document can tell us more than what the author of the document thought—what he thought had happened, what he thought ought to happen or would happen.’<sup>158</sup> Carr’s reasons for holding this view of facts, and rejecting the fetish of facts, are surprisingly best spelled out in *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*, in a passage discussing the pitfalls of ‘consistent’ realism. Consistent realism denies that there is ‘purposive or meaningful action’ and is therefore logically forced to conclude that only ‘passive contemplation’ lies underneath the reality of political action. That is why realism exalts ‘raw’ facts as the only sound foundation for the understanding of human action. But this view is ‘plainly repugnant to the most deep-seated belief of man about himself. That human affairs can be directed and modified by human action and human thought is a postulate so fundamental that its rejection seems scarcely compatible with existence as a human being’. A human being always believes that ‘his thought and action are neither mechanical nor meaningless’.<sup>159</sup> The artifacts that man leaves behind, therefore, are neither mechanical nor meaningless. Here Carr unveiled another major problem in Namier’s view of history—namely, that Namier “‘took the mind out of history’”, an epigram coined by A.J.P. Taylor.<sup>160</sup>

Over Namier, Carr posited Marx. In a distinctively humanist reading of Marx—not uncommon in the late 1950s—Carr endorsed ‘without qualification the comment of Marx’, that “‘*History* does nothing, it possesses no immense wealth, fights no battles. It is rather *man*, real living *man* who does everything, who possesses and fights’”.<sup>161</sup> In other words,

according to Carr, man as agent is the object of historical interpretation. To lay down the presuppositions of such an interpretation, Carr turned to Collingwood and, to a lesser extent, Oakeshott, since their ‘searching critique, though it may call for some serious reservations, brings to light certain neglected truths’. Where Oakeshott and Collingwood stand near each other is their principle that all history is the history of thought resting on ‘empirical evidence’, on the one hand, and the principle that the interpretation of the present fuses with the reality of the past in the middle ground that Collingwood called the historical imagination.<sup>162</sup> In that sense, Collingwood is credited for having shown that the past must be ‘the key to the understanding of the present’.<sup>163</sup>

The fundamental principle for understanding agency, the historical imagination, Carr thus took from Collingwood, as Collingwood stressed the ‘historian’s need of imaginative understanding for the minds of the people with whom he is dealing, for the thought behind their acts’. However, this imaginative aspect of historical interpretation may bring the historian closer to the minds he is studying, but it does not entail personal agreement or disagreement with anything they thought or did. Carr’s work as a Soviet historian had revealed to him the profound value of this principle, since in most contemporary Soviet scholarship, according to Carr, ‘the words and actions of the other are always made to appear malign, senseless or hypocritical’. Such a perspective is not much different than that of a nineteenth century whig historian who, looking only to defend and exonerate his own religion, ‘cannot enter into the state of mind of those who fought the Thirty Years War’, for that would require seeing the situation and courses of action from the perspective of Catholic counter-reformers, assuming their perspective, and analyzing ways in which it interacted with other perspectives.<sup>164</sup>

When the historian follows these new idealist presuppositions and constructs analyses or narratives of the past, he or she trumps the whig or partisan historian by always being faithful to the evidence, and by being aware that his or her interpretation is fused with his or her present historical situation and perspective. A history appropriate to the postwar era, then, is a history that always allows for revisions. Carr stated this clearly when inverting Clark’s dictum that history is a ‘hard core of facts surrounded by a pulp of disputable interpretations’ into “‘a hard core of interpretation surrounded by a pulp of disputable facts’”.<sup>165</sup>

Though Carr fully subscribed to this ‘Collingwoodian view of history’, he proceeded to argue that ‘pressed to its logical conclusion’ it seems to



‘rule out any objective history at all’ and encourages ‘total skepticism’, or ‘the theory of an infinity of meanings, none any more right than the other’, or a ‘purely pragmatic view of the past’, akin to that of Nietzsche.<sup>166</sup> The extreme Collingwoodian view attempts to retain the practical use inherent to whiggism in a society in which the latter’s monopoly over meaning and value has been broken, and in which no single and overarching system of values or meanings has replaced it.

For Carr, ‘in the middle of the twentieth century’, the historian is pressed to redefine his or her ‘obligation’ to the facts. He or she does so, first, by unearthing the totality, and not just accuracy, of all relevant facts given the situation and perspective. For example, if the historian desires to analyze the ‘Victorian Englishman as a moral and rational being’, he or she must reckon not only with concepts such as ‘character’, ‘conscience’, ‘social station’, ‘duty’, and ‘respectability’, but also with contradicting facts, such as the Stalybridge Wakes episode of 1850.<sup>167</sup> Second, the historian ought to assume that there are multiple causes at work in any historical process or event, necessitating a plurality of methods. Taking the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 as an example, Carr argued that it must be explained in terms of ‘a random jumble of economic, political, ideological, and personal causes, of long-term and short-term causes’, such as the successive military defeats prior to 1917, the Tsarist government’s inability to deal with the agrarian problem, the fact that there was a concentration of workers in Petrograd, the effectiveness of Bolshevik propaganda, and the political genius of Lenin. Attempting to reduce this ‘jumble’ of causes to one cause would be to commit a whig error, since a salient feature of whig historiography is precisely privileging only one cause, one perspective, and one method.<sup>168</sup>

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Based on the account of the new idealism in Chap. 2, we may safely assert that the nihilism, skepticism, and pragmatism Carr found in Collingwood are far from evidenced in Collingwood’s, or any other new idealist’s, philosophy. Why did Carr ascribe such beliefs to Collingwood?

The answer lies in the two conflicting intellectual currents in which post-war intellectuals placed the new idealism. Thus, Carr was swayed *both* by the new idealism *and* the strong anti-idealist winds that had gained momentum among many postwar philosophers, historians, and political theorists.<sup>169</sup> In the early twentieth century, analytic philosophy—heralded by philosophers such as Bertrand Russell, G.E. Moore, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Gilbert Ryle, and Rudolf Carnap—had emerged in direct opposition to

the idealist philosophy that was still present at the ancient universities (e.g. J.M.E. McTaggart in Cambridge, and F.H. Bradley in Oxford).<sup>170</sup> To combat the influence of idealism, the British analytic philosophers created the journal *Analysis* in 1933. The name itself can almost be seen as a speech act, marking the gulf separating the new philosophy from idealism in that the former concerned itself with conceptual or logical *analysis* as opposed to idealism's concern with religious or metaphysical *synthesis*. In the opening lines of the first issue of *Analysis*, Moore and Russell wrote that philosophy is essentially comprised of "limited and precisely defined philosophical questions about the elucidation of known facts, instead of long, very general and abstract metaphysical speculations about possible facts or about the world as a whole"<sup>171</sup> This was a problem for the new idealists, and so in the 1930s, when analytic philosophy was institutionally on the rise, and idealism on the wane, Collingwood sought to persuade some of the new philosophers that the new idealism was not the metaphysical bogey man it was alleged to be, and that its philosophy of history could hold its own even in the arena of technical conceptual analysis.<sup>172</sup>

The development of the philosophy of history in Oxford in the early postwar period is a monument to the fact that Collingwood was partly successful, and that his partial acceptance of analytic philosophy may have rendered the new idealism more palatable to postwar scholars. Collingwood's philosophy of history attracted a fair amount of professional postwar philosophers, such as W.H. Walsh, Patrick Gardiner, Alasdair MacIntyre, and W.H. Dray. These postwar philosophers of history, except for MacIntyre who was not a philosopher of history, all drew on Collingwood to construct a philosophy of history that they believed delineated the necessary conceptual conditions of historical knowledge. However, what these thinkers took from Collingwood were only some principles they believed were worthy of developing. Collingwood, apparently, had failed to develop them, a fault the postwar philosophers attributed to his indebtedness to the worldview of idealism. Walsh, for instance, abhorred the later works of Collingwood for 'fostering the cause of irrationalism' or, what to Walsh was the same as irrationalism, 'historicism'.<sup>173</sup>

Collingwood's concept of re-enactment fared no better. To be fair, Walsh viewed it as potentially the fundamental principle of historical knowledge, but in Collingwood's version, it was, according to Walsh, an 'intuitive act', a 'single act of intuitive insight'.<sup>174</sup> Gardiner, following Ryle, wrote that for Collingwood re-enactment, 'an everyday occurrence begins to look very mysterious'.<sup>175</sup> Thoughts, for Collingwood, he continued, are 'timeless entities which can be revived in his own mind by the

historian'.<sup>176</sup> For these analytic philosophers of history, the only way in which Collingwood's philosophy could be saved was if it passed through the rigorous methods of analytic philosophy, and so the 'real' problems which preoccupy the philosophy of history 'are the sort of difficulty with which analytic philosophers traditionally deal', which supposedly makes them 'genuine difficulties', and not the pseudo-difficulties of idealism.<sup>177</sup>

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Much like Carr, Berlin exhibited an ambivalent attitude toward Collingwood. Dubnov, in his recent biography of Berlin, explains that Berlin did not turn to Collingwood prior to the 1940s due to the strong association between idealism and fascism in the 1930s. Berlin, thus, did not make use of Collingwood's philosophy because Collingwood and idealism were 'accused of proto-totalitarianism and of sympathy with fascism', which the idealists sought to mask through a 'defense of positive liberty', the concept that Berlin was to hold responsible for the conceptual justification of totalitarianism and authoritarianism in his famous lecture "Two Concepts of Liberty".<sup>178</sup>

And yet, again similar to Carr, in the postwar era, Berlin used Collingwood's concepts to analyze the fundamental principles of historical interpretation. In a little known review of Russell's *A History of Western Philosophy*, Berlin posited two dominant approaches to the history of thought, one represented by Russell and analytic philosophy, and the other by Collingwood:

Russell is situated at the exact opposite pole to, say, the late Prof. Collingwood, who came near to saying that truth and falsehood—our notions of them—were irrelevant criteria to apply to thinkers of the past—our task was rather to try by a great imaginative effort to see their problems as they saw them, remembering always that their solutions could not *ex hypothesi* answer the questions of our own time, or consequently be true or false, or indeed possess clear meaning, in terms of these latter.<sup>179</sup>

Berlin continued: 'No better example of the application of the anachronistic methods so harshly denounced by the late Mr. Collingwood could well be imagined than Russell'.<sup>180</sup> We should, Berlin concluded, not study Russell's *History* for the sake of historical understanding, since Russell's history is prefigured by an 'unhistorical rationalism'.<sup>181</sup> We should rather approach the book as a historical document, written by a man who already

at that time was considered a leading public intellectual, and a thinker who had revolutionized philosophy.

In the foregoing passage, Berlin suggested that Collingwood's philosophy, premised on historicism and the imagination, is more germane to historical interpretation than is analytic philosophy. As Bernard Williams has shown, philosophical method itself, for Berlin, came to resemble Collingwood's theory of absolute presuppositions, in that philosophy was taken to task for unearthing the fundamental concepts and categories through which human experience is made possible and changes through contingent historical processes.<sup>182</sup> In subsequent writings, Berlin developed a view of the acquisition of historical knowledge that echoes that of Collingwood. However, Berlin's position in regard to this aspect is not as detailed as those of Carr or Elton. Indeed, while Elton and Carr were overtly concerned to establish the character of revisionist interpretation, Berlin rested content to state principles without connecting them to wider conceptual or historiographical problems and debates. He was apparently satisfied by arguing that the production of historical knowledge is best expressed in the form of those specialized and detailed studies called 'monographs' that are prevalent in professional historiography, and against which he posited the all-encompassing philosophies of history written by the likes of Toynbee and Hegel, as well as books in natural science which tend to revolve around abstract models.<sup>183</sup>

Even though he believed that modern professional historians came closest to writing the history that Berlin advocated, and so grafted his own theory of history onto selected presuppositions he found therein, Berlin's institutional remove from the world of professional historiography provided the luxury of choosing only those aspects of historiography that suited his own view. And yet, Berlin, as we will see later, was sufficiently versed in the strictures of postwar historical debate to merit the attention of historians engaged in a prominent historiographical debate regarding the Victorian period.

For Berlin, unmistakably using Collingwoodian language, historical interpretation was 'the inside view' of events, necessarily based on verified facts. What the historian studies are 'active beings willing, creating, pursuing ends, shaping their own and others' lives, reflecting, imagining, in constant interaction with other human beings, engaged in all the forms of experience that we understand only by being ourselves involved in them, and not as external observers. It is by cultivating the capacity for sympathy and imagination inherent to all human minds that the historian can hone his or her 'ability to "enter into" their [agents'] motives, their principles,

the “inward movement” of their spirit (and this applies no less to the behaviour of masses or to the growth of cultures)’. Facts, thus, are only the necessary entry point into these inward movements of the mind, and so the ‘historian’s primary need is the knowledge that is like knowledge of someone’s character or face, *not like knowledge of facts* [emphasis added]’. In that respect, though history arrives at knowledge of reality, since it is founded on facts, it is, in being imaginative, procedurally more ‘akin to moral aesthetic analysis’.<sup>184</sup>

There is no direct evidence that Berlin championed a revisionist agenda with this analysis of the presuppositions of historical interpretation. What we may gather from his writings on the subject is that he seemed rather adamant to distinguish history from natural science, an endeavor that he shared with postwar analytic philosophers of history at Oxford. In other words, Berlin was primarily concerned to establish that historical knowledge cannot possibly be analyzed in terms that govern natural science. Perhaps the main argument for this division rests on what Berlin calls ‘common sense knowledge’, by which he means the inescapable web of beliefs and assumptions on the basis of which humans understand and judge the world of human affairs. One cannot possibly make a model or discover a set of general laws by analyzing these beliefs and assumptions, since they constitute a ‘total texture’ of our fundamental knowledge of the world. This texture, therefore, does not possess an ‘Archimedean point outside it whence we can survey the whole of it and pronounce upon it’. While this texture allows for change in *parts*, it cannot change as a *whole* into an essentially different whole. This is the reason why the historian does not primarily interpret facts, or why he or she cannot abstract from them, because facts are the entities that only manage to suggest the total texture that is human agency.<sup>185</sup>

In placing this strong emphasis on the difference between history and natural science, Berlin arguably lagged behind other theorists of history such as Elton and Carr, for even though this topic was very much alive in the postwar era, the desire to construct theories that established the necessity and viability of revisionist historiography was even more prominent.

## NOTES

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  15. Noel Annan, *Our Age: The Generation That Made Post-war Britain* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991), 364.
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87. Carr, *What is History?*, 44.
88. Haslam, *The Vices*, 75.
89. Carr, *What is History?*, 129.
90. Lewis Namier, ‘Human Nature in Politics’, in *Personalities and Powers* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955), 1–18.
91. R.G. Collingwood, *The New Leviathan: Or Man, Society, Civilization and Barbarism*, ed. and intro. David Boucher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), §13.47 for the quote; see also §10.61, §21.5, §33.18. Collingwood had undergone a full psychoanalytical treatment in 1937–1938: Fred Inglis, *History Man: The Life of R.G. Collingwood* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009), 65.
92. For two contrasting examples, see J.B. Bury, *An Inaugural Lecture: Delivered in the Divinity School, Cambridge, on January 26, 1903* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903); and G.M. Trevelyan, *Clio, a Muse and Other Essays Literary and Pedestrian* (New York: Longman’s Green and Co., 1913), 1–56. For an example of a dialectic approach to the issue, see H. Stuart Hughes, *History as Art and as Science* (Chicago, Ill.: The University of Chicago Press, 1975). A recent debate premised on these terms took place between Hayden White and Georg G. Iggers: Georg G. Iggers, ‘Historiography Between Scholarship and Poetry: Reflections on Hayden White’s Approach to Historiography’, *Rethinking History*, 4 (2000), 373–390; Hayden White, ‘An Old Question Raised Again: Is Historiography Art or Science? (Response to Iggers)’, *Rethinking History*, 4 (2000), 391–406.
93. Haslam, *The Vices*, 193.
94. At least some American historians seem to approximate to this position as well. See e.g. John Higham, ‘Beyond Consensus: The Historian as Moral Critic’, *The American Historical Review*, 67 (1962), 609–625.
95. Elton, *The Practice*, 15–16.
96. Elton, *The Practice*, 58. In the first Sir Herbert Butterfield Lecture in 1983, Elton said of Butterfield’s insistence on the ‘essentially relativist character of historical interpretation’ that it, along with a range of other principles Butterfield devised, ‘cannot be repeated too often, in Butterfield’s time or our own’. See G.R. Elton, ‘Herbert Butterfield and the Study of History’, *The Historical Journal*, 27 (1984), 729–743, 731.

97. For a similar point, made by another Cambridge revisionist historian, see George Kitson Clark, 'A Hundred Years of the Teaching of History at Cambridge, 1873–1973', *The Historical Journal*, 16 (1973), 535–553, 540.
98. Elton, *The Practice*, 96.
99. Elton, *The Practice*, 103.
100. Elton, *The Practice*, 36.
101. Elton, *The Practice*, 45.
102. Elton, *The Practice*, 43–44.
103. Elton, *The Practice*, 45. For an overview of Plumb's thought, see Robert C. Braddock, 'J.H. Plumb and the Whig Tradition', in *Recent Historians of Great Britain: Essays on the Post-1945 Generation*, ed. Walter L. Arnstein (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1990), 101–121.
104. Elton, *The Practice*, 48.
105. Elton, *The Practice*, 27.
106. Haslam, *The Vices*, 192, 204.
107. Carr, *What is History?*, 24.
108. E.H. Carr, *The New Society* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1951), 10.
109. Charles Jones, 'Carr, Mannheim, and a Post-positivist Science of International Relations', *Political Studies*, 45 (1997), 232–246.
110. David Zimmerman, 'The Society for the Protection of Science and Learning and the Politicization of British Science in the 1930s', *Minerva*, 44 (2006), 25–45.
111. Jeremy Bennet, 'A Memoir of Professor Sir Geoffrey Elton', [available at <http://www.clarealumni.com/s/845/1col.aspx?sid=845&gid=1&pid=857>, accessed November 19, 2013].
112. E.H. Carr, 'Karl Mannheim', in *From Napoleon to Stalin and Other Essays* (London: Macmillan Press, 1980), 177–184, 180–181. The piece was first published in 1954 as a review of Mannheim's *Essays in the Sociology of Knowledge*.
113. On the history of the sociology of knowledge, see David Frisby, *The Alienated Mind: The Sociology of Knowledge in Germany, 1918–1933* (New Jersey, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1983).
114. Admir Skodo, 'Idealism, the Sociology of Knowledge and Revisionist History of Political Thought: Peter Laslett's Reappraisal of Whig Historiography', *History of Political Thought*, 35 (2014), 538–564. See also Peter Laslett, 'Introduction', in Robert Filmer, *Patriarcha and Other Political Works*, ed. and intro. Peter Laslett (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1949), 1–49, 46.
115. Laslett\_1948\_Candidate\_Summary: Archives D93 file 63, St John's College's Archives, Cambridge. It is certain that Oakeshott examined Laslett's application to a fellowship in Cambridge in 1948: Michael

- Oakeshott, 'Report on Evidence Submitted by Mr. P. Laslett', in Laslett\_1948\_Fellowship\_Reports-1: Archives D93 file 79, St John's College's Archives, Cambridge; Ernest Barker, 'Report of Professor Barker on Mr. Laslett's Dissertation', in Laslett\_1940\_Fellowship\_Reports: Archives D93 file 79, St John's Colleges Archives, Cambridge, 1-3.
116. Skodo, 'Idealism'.
  117. Peter Novick has shown that Mannheim had an impact on American interwar historians as well. See Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The 'Objectivity Question' and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 159.
  118. David Kettler and Volker Meja, *Karl Mannheim and the Crisis of Liberalism: The Secret of These New Times* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1995); Charles F. Gattone, *The Social Scientist as Public Intellectual* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), Chapter 4.
  119. For a perceptive review essay on the impact of Mannheim on Anglophone histories of utopia, see Mark Goldie, 'Obligations, Utopias, and their Historical Context', *The Historical Journal*, 26 (1983), 727-746.
  120. Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), 3, 243, 246.
  121. Mannheim, *Ideology*, 69.
  122. A similar point is made by Clark, 'A Hundred Years', 549.
  123. Cf. Clark, *The Critical*, 34-38.
  124. Carr, *The New Society*, 76, 9-10.
  125. Carr, *What is History?*, 24.
  126. Carr, *What is History?*, 36, 38, quote on 78.
  127. Carr, *What is History?*, 45-46.
  128. Carr, *What is History?*, 122.
  129. Carr, *What is History?*, 122-123.
  130. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, 12.
  131. Paul Howe, 'The Utopian Realism of E.H. Carr', *Review of International Studies*, 20 (1994), 277-294.
  132. See e.g. John Gray, *Isaiah Berlin* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996); Joshua Cherniss, *A Mind and Its Time: The Development of Isaiah Berlin's Political Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Dubnov, *Isaiah*; Duncan Kelly, 'The Political Thought of Isaiah Berlin', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 4 (2002), 25-48; and, the most critical, Perry Anderson, 'England's Isaiah', *London Review of Books*, December 20, 1990, 3-7.
  133. Berlin, *Historical*, 29.
  134. Berlin, *Historical*, 63.
  135. Berlin, *Historical Inevitability*, 63-64.

136. A conceptually similar position seems to be taken by C. Vann Woodward, 'The Age of Reinterpretation', *The American Historical Review*, 66 (1960), 1–19.
137. Elton, *The Practice*, 56, 65.
138. Elton, *The Practice*, 62.
139. Elton, *The Practice*, 66.
140. George Kitson Clark, *The Making of Victorian England: Being the Ford Lectures Delivered Before the University of Oxford* (New York: Atheneum, 1969), 62.
141. Carr, *What is History?*, 6–7.
142. Elton, *The Practice*, 51.
143. Skinner, 'Sir Geoffrey'; Evans, 'Afterword'; John Kenyon, *The History Men: The Historical Profession in England Since the Renaissance* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983), 201–214.
144. Elton, *The Practice*, 73.
145. Elton, *The Practice*, 59.
146. Elton, *The Practice*, 60.
147. Elton, *The Practice*, 60.
148. Elton, *The Practice*, 63.
149. Elton, *The Practice*, 18.
150. Elton, *The Practice*, 101–102.
151. Elton, *The Practice*, 19.
152. Elton, *The Practice*, 92, 54.
153. Elton, *The Practice*, 80.
154. Elton, *The Practice*, 80–81.
155. Elton, *The Practice*, 84, 86. A similar view, including the principle that past events must be understood from the 'inside', is taken by Hugh Trevor-Roper in *History and Imagination* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980); and 'Historical Imagination', *The Listener*, February 27, 1958, 357–358.
156. Carr, *What is History?*, 10.
157. E.H. Carr, 'Lewis Namier', in *From Napoleon to Stalin and Other Essays* (London: Macmillan Press, 1980), 184–191, 188.
158. Carr, *What is History?*, 10.
159. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, 92, 93.
160. Carr, 'Lewis', 188.
161. Carr, *What is History?*, 43.
162. Carr, *What is History?*, 16.
163. Carr, *What is History?*, 20.
164. Carr, *What is History?*, 18–19.
165. Carr, *What is History?*, 18.
166. Carr, *What is History?*, 20–22.

167. Carr, *What is History?*, 22.
168. Carr, *What is History?*, 83–84.
169. For the historians and political theorists, see, respectively, Plumb, ‘The Historian’s Dilemma’, 28–29, 34; and Leo Strauss, ‘On Collingwood’s Philosophy of History’, *The Review of Metaphysics*, 5 (1952), 559–586.
170. See for instance G.E. Moore, ‘The Refutation of Idealism’, *Mind*, 12 (1903), 433–453.
171. Quoted in John Passmore, *A Hundred Years of Philosophy* (London: Penguin Books, 1966), 363.
172. See e.g. R.G. Collingwood, *An Essay on Metaphysics. Revised Edition*, ed. and intro. Rex Martin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).
173. W.H. Walsh, ‘R.G. Collingwood’s Philosophy of History’, *Philosophy*, 22 (1947), 153–160, 153.
174. W.H. Walsh, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of History* (London: Hutchinson’s University Library, 1951), 57–58.
175. Patrick Gardiner, ‘The “Objects” of Historical Knowledge’, *Philosophy*, 27 (1952), 211–220, 213.
176. Gardiner, ‘The “Objects,”’ 213.
177. Walsh, *An Introduction*, 24.
178. Dubnov, *Isaiah*, 74.
179. Berlin, ‘Review of *A History of Western Philosophy*’, 154.
180. Berlin, ‘Review of *A History of Western Philosophy*’, 155.
181. Berlin, ‘Review of *A History of Western Philosophy*’, 158.
182. Williams, ‘Introduction’, xiii.
183. Berlin, ‘The Concept’, 13–14.
184. Berlin, ‘The Concept’, 24–25; see also Berlin, *Historical Inevitability*, 76.
185. Berlin, ‘The Concept’, 10.

## Revisionist Whiggism: Revisions of the English Past from the Tudors to the Victorians

### REVISIONIST WHIGGISM: PLURALIST, REDEEMING, AND DEFEATIST

In addition to being used in the development of a new philosophy of history, the new idealism was concomitantly appropriated in prominent revisionist histories and historiographical debates of the first three and a half decades of the postwar era. Written mainly, but not exclusively, by historians from Cambridge and Oxford, these histories invite historical scrutiny because they for the first time systematically challenged the liberal-whiggish idea of a unitary English national history, while simultaneously erecting influential alternative narratives in its stead.

This chapter unearths the revisionists' project of constructing alternative interpretive frameworks of modern English history, from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. In particular, the revisionists placed great emphasis on revising three periods: the sixteenth century Tudor period; the Civil War and the Glorious Revolution of the seventeenth century; and various topics in the social, religious, and political history of Victorian England. The very choice of these periods is replete with meaning. As Peter Mandler suggests, the Tudors begged for attention since among the whig historians, there was 'an acceptance that English liberty in any recognizable sense could not be traced back much further than the sixteenth century'. More specifically:



If there was one seedbed that was generally acclaimed as the source of English nationality by Victorian liberals, it was not the primeval soup of the Aryans nor the misty forests of the Teutons nor the folkmoot of the Anglo-Saxons but rather the dawning of post-feudal order under the Tudors. The Whig's traditional hostility to the Tudors as authoritarians who tried to do without Parliament could be ignored if, far beneath Parliament, the rule of law and the sway of free discussion could be seen to be brewing amongst the people.<sup>1</sup>

Regarding the seventeenth century, Oakeshott argued in 1955 that 'there is much to be said for the belief that the seventeenth century past of England, and perhaps the Norman past of Ireland, are, at the present time, less easy for us to insulate from a practical (political or religious) attitude, and more difficult for us to view "historically," than almost any other period of our past'.<sup>2</sup> In line with Oakeshott, Elton wrote that the seventeenth century 'which is still by many regarded—with some reason—as the crucial and transforming age in the history of English society, has been much studied, but no one has so far attempted to rethink the meaning of this much disturbed century afresh'.<sup>3</sup> Behind these statements, we find, of course, the ubiquitous presence of the Civil War and the Glorious Revolution in both English and non-English narratives of the making not only of modern British democracy, but global capitalism, religious freedom, and secular politics as well.<sup>4</sup>

The nineteenth century, finally, was important to examine not only because the most prominent whig historians were Victorian men, whose influential self-understandings of the age obscured its plurality of world-views, forms of action, radical changes, injustices, sufferings, and social conflicts, but also because it was the historical period closest to the social and political problems and realities of the national present—namely, the welfare state and its vicissitudes. When Trevor-Roper proclaimed in 1974 'we are all relativists now',<sup>5</sup> he could have added, during a period of effective political consensus, and thus without sounding as a traitor to conservatism: 'we are all welfare statist now'.<sup>6</sup>

To detail the conceptual character of revisionist histories, this chapter focuses on G.R. Elton's analyses of the 'Tudor Revolution', J.H. Plumb's studies on the origins of political stability in seventeenth century England, Peter Laslett's revisions of John Locke and Sir Robert Filmer, and the reinterpretations of the Victorian age by George Kitson Clark, Henry Pelling, Oliver MacDonagh, Asa Briggs, and Jenifer Hart. These revisions can be clarified by invoking the new idealism and the revisionists' appropriations of the new idealism.

The revisionists' relationship to whiggism was complex. Many, if not all, revisionist historians unmistakably used whig concepts, such as 'the English people', 'national history', and 'national character'. These concepts were occasionally dovetailed with politically laden principles in explaining the making of English history, including the principle that social progress is conditional on gradual and consensual reform derived from socially conscious private entrepreneurs, dissenters, and voluntary associations. To give a short example, in Asa Briggs's synthesis of nineteenth century social history, *The Age of Improvement*, Briggs claimed that it was the Irish 'temper' or 'national character' which ensured Ireland's place on the English national agenda in 1867.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, many revisionist historians wrote books in a public moralist key that would have easily found a readership in the first three decades of the twentieth century, when public moralism still comfortably reigned, though not uncontested, in the discourses of cultural and political elites.<sup>8</sup> Examples of such writings, excluding obvious wartime tracts written by leading historians,<sup>9</sup> are G.R. Elton's *The English*, George Kitson Clark's *The English Inheritance*, and David Knowles' *The Historian and Character*.<sup>10</sup>

Should we conclude, then, that postwar revisionist historiography was for all intents and purposes grafted onto whig historiography? That would be a premature conclusion. Revisionist historiography differs significantly from whiggism in that it radically transforms its main assumptions, under the strong ideological and institutional permeation of the welfare state, and so conceptually explodes the liberal-whig framework from within. Occasionally, it debunked the notion of organic and imperialist Englishness as mere chicanery, a form of vulgar nationalism.<sup>11</sup>

\* \* \*

Butterfield laid down the following prophesy in the closing pages of *George III and the Historians*: 'If there is to be a Whig interpretation in the future it is likely that it will possess a new shape, a new framework, altogether.'<sup>12</sup> One of those shapes was *revisionist whiggism*. Revisionist whiggism in postwar British historiography can be divided into three, interweaving, conceptual types: the first type proffered a belief in the past origins of present society, above all the welfare state, by means of multiple agencies, conflict, revolution, or radical change, thereby subverting the linear development model of whiggism. I propose to call this type *pluralist whiggism*.<sup>13</sup> The second type brought to the fore unduly marginalized historical possibilities, traditions, and practices that could

serve to constitute present society in some manner, thus subverting the whig belief in a unitary national culture. I propose to call this *redeeming whiggism*.<sup>14</sup> And the third type centered on a belief in the publicly unregistered yet importunate and principally detrimental effects of certain historical traditions or practices, subverting the whig doctrine of inevitable progress. I propose to call this *defeatist whiggism*.<sup>15</sup> Revisionist whiggism, along with new idealist concepts and themes from Fabian historiography, structured the histories here under examination.

Moreover, the establishment of new professional societies, research groups, journals, and book series in the postwar era signals a fundamental change toward a breakup of whiggish historiographical unitarianism. These include The Standing Conference for Local History (1948), The Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure (1964), Social History Society (1976), *Past & Present* (1952), *Victorian Studies* (1961), *The Historical Journal* (1958),<sup>16</sup> *A History of England in Ten Volumes* edited by W.N. Medlicott, *Turning Points in British History* edited by Geoffrey Barraclough, *Studies in Social History* edited by Harold Perkin, and *A History of England* edited by Christopher Brooke and Denis Mack Smith.

Equally important is the fact that there was after 1945 no obvious political party, ideology, or social movement through which a whig historiography of the prewar kind could gain public assent and political currency. On the level of theoretical epigrams, which were becoming fashionable among postwar historians who often possessed the sensibilities of a literary critic, one would be hard pressed to find a prewar whig historian writing what Hugh Trevor-Roper wrote in 1973: 'We are all relativists now.'<sup>17</sup>

### PREWAR AND POSTWAR REVISIONISM

Revisionist professional historiography is not a singularly postwar phenomenon, insofar as revisionism is defined as narratives or analyses of the English past that set out, based on modern techniques of historical scholarship, to overthrow some established orthodoxy regarding some particular problem in historical research. Defined thus, modern revisionism originates in an article series entitled 'Historical Revisions', published in the Historical Association's journal *History* between World War I and the mid-1950s.<sup>18</sup> It featured articles by historians as diverse as A.F. Pollard, T.F. Tout, Trevor-Roper, Eileen Power, and Alfred Cobban. The preface to the first 'Historical Revisions' article stated that the series will consist of

*‘notes on historical subjects which modern research has shown to be most widely misunderstood, with a view to bringing the teaching of History in schools and elsewhere more closely into touch with historical scholarship’.*<sup>19</sup>

Even though there is no direct evidence for it, it is tempting to infer that it was these specialized studies that the Butterfield of *The Whig Interpretation of History* saw as portending a shift in historical consciousness: ‘The whole process of specialised research which has in so many fields revised the previously accepted whig interpretation of history, has set out bearings afresh in one period after another, by referring matters in this way to their context, and discovering their unlikeness to the world of the present-day.’<sup>20</sup>

Trevor-Roper’s 1945 revision of Archbishop Laud, significant for his role in the English Reformation, highlights the key aspects of postwar revisionist whiggism. Trevor-Roper’s article begins by pointing out what by 1945 apparently seemed obvious to British historians—namely, that three distinct historical schools have endeavored to portray the ‘real’ significance of Laud: the whig school, exemplified by S.R. Gardiner and Macaulay; the Catholic school, which originated in the pre-Catholic J.H. Newman and the Oxford Movement<sup>21</sup>; and ‘the Fabian school of English historians’, which has attacked ‘[on] all sides the solid-seeming dogmas of the classical whig school’, and in particular that aspect of the whig interpretation that sees Laud as ‘constitutionally retrograde and intellectually obscurantist’.<sup>22</sup>

Trevor-Roper followed the Fabians in their analysis of the Reformation. According to the Fabian analysis, constitutional development was second to the shift from feudal to capitalist society. During this shift, the Reformers, especially the Puritans, played a leading role through their acceptance of secular politics, which was inevitably conducive, according to the Fabianized Laud, to social and moral divisiveness, since secular politics a priori subordinates the socially universal church to particular political interests.<sup>23</sup> This is the shift that Laud sought to hinder, which explains why the whig historians saw him as a historical aberrant in the march of constitutional progress. According to Trevor-Roper, the Fabian historians, and the Catholics profitably following suit, pointed out that Laud perceived the socially disruptive effects of the ‘fearful agrarian dislocation’ that led to a century of social suffering.<sup>24</sup> Even though he accepted Henry VIII’s break from Rome and an absolute monarchy, Laud, according to Trevor-Roper, sought to preserve the independence of the church, which would ensure the unity and well-being of English society as a whole. Had it not been for his far too reactionary temper, his narrowly instrumentalist

view of action, and his inability to create an institution to carry on where he would leave off after his death, Laud might have been successful, and therefore deserves to be redeemed.

There are two aspects of Trevor-Roper's sinuous and politically mischievous revision that capture well the peculiarities of the postwar revisionism here under scrutiny. First, Trevor-Roper fastened on to a human agent that has been derided by liberal-whig interpreters, and countered that interpretation by employing the kind of sympathetic method, firmly tied to a particular perspective, which lies at the heart of the new idealism. Second, that particular perspective is, as paradoxical as it may sound, a Fabian-inspired conservative social history. In other words, Trevor-Roper, an anti-clerical conservative and seemingly traditional political historian, turned with ease to a socialist-inspired social history for the purpose of revising liberal-whig interpretations.

Eric Hobsbawm, in his critique of Fabianism, may serve to provide an explanation for why socialist histories of the Fabian cast proved attractive to the new idealist revisionist historians analyzed here. Fabian ideas, wrote Hobsbawm, comprise a 'socialist theory' which is 'both non-Marxist and non-liberal', viewing 'laissez-faire Cobdenite capitalism' as its main enemy.<sup>25</sup> By accepting this definition of capitalism, historians of a conservative, or indeed an idiosyncratic bent, could appropriate Fabian historiography, much in the same manner as they appropriated the new idealism—namely, on account of its conceptual and political plasticity.

Indeed, if the new idealism was the interwar philosophical and methodological origin of postwar revisionism, then Fabian historiography—along with the histories written by the Hammonds, and George Dangerfield's *The Strange Death of Liberal Britain*—developed some of the concrete historiographical themes that were explored by revisionists through new idealist categories such as agency, sympathy, and the historical imagination.<sup>26</sup> After all, Collingwood, the foremost new idealist, did prophesy in the 1930s that the next great history would be informed by socialist mythology.

This historiographical socialism of the postwar revisionists jarred a group of postwar liberals comprised by Friedrich Hayek and his fellow members of the Mont Pèlerin Society, who were in the early process of theoretically and historically reformulating economic liberalism. In his introduction to *Capitalism and the Historians*, Hayek argued that conservative historians had taken over the socialist 'political legend', concocted by the Webbs and the Hammonds, regarding the history of capitalism and industrialization in their relation to freedom and the standard of liv-

ing. Interestingly, Hayek deemed worthy of mentioning the social liberal and new idealist Guido de Ruggiero among those intellectuals who had succumbed to these detrimental socialist histories.<sup>27</sup> The Marxist moment among some British intellectuals of the 1930s—notably conservatives such as Trevor-Roper, Oakeshott, and Butterfield—may not have developed into full-blown Marxist historiography, but it did open the door for a historiography permissive of historiographical crossbreeding.<sup>28</sup>

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Even though a few of the revisions undertaken in *History* shared family resemblances with the revisions that surfaced in the late 1950s and the 1960s—in particular, an anti-whiggism concomitant with a lingering commitment to writing the history of the nation—the dissimilarities are nevertheless more pronounced. Most notably, prewar revisionism seems to have been much more restricted in thematic scope and in institutional spread than postwar revisionism. Additionally, in prewar revisionism, including Namierite revisionism, there is, on the whole, no attempt to rethink a whole ‘age’ and its complex changes; there are no sustained attempts to venture into social or intellectual history; and there are no signs of discontent regarding the dominance of constitutional history in the research and teaching of history at the universities.<sup>29</sup> In the end, most of *History’s* ‘Historical Revisions’, with the notable exception of Trevor-Roper’s article, were ‘notes’, which pronounced either on matters of constitutional history, or topics related to it, such as battles and diplomatic episodes.

What accounts for the differences between prewar and postwar professional revisionism, and the desire among postwar historians to look at the English past afresh? A key condition was doubtlessly the shift in outlook induced by the experience and memory of World War II. Most historians under study in this book saw active service, often engaging in intelligence work at Bletchley Park, the Secret Intelligence Service, or in the Foreign Office, which is the case for Carr, Laslett, Berlin, Trevor-Roper, and Plumb.<sup>30</sup> Others saw heavy combat action, as for instance Oakeshott, who was member of an irregular unit; Laslett, who served in the Murmansk convoy; and Pelling, who partook in the Normandy offensive and the assault on Berlin. The deep crisis of liberalism that World War II and its prehistory occasioned warranted the revisionists in looking for an entirely new perspective on the national past.<sup>31</sup> Fascism in large part premised British professional historians’ defense of Englishness during World War II. Fascism was an external threat carefully constructed by

historians and propagandists as the greatest evil that had befallen western civilization. Once this barbaric ‘other’ maintaining a powerful image of national unity was defeated, that unity was not very forthcoming. Elton, with critical acceptance, expressed the cultural and social consequences of these experiences:

We are all today the product—if we are the product of anything at all—of the 1930s and the 1940s, and that was not a good time to be born and bred in, as we all know; the age bears consequences, the scars, the terrible mental scars, which those two decades left. Scars heal up to a point, and we must allow them to heal and try to rise above such things, but we are no longer patriots, we are no longer parochial. We are more ready to believe in China and Peru than in Runcorn and Southampton.<sup>32</sup>

This search for a new past to historically anchor a new present is articulated in the few book series mentioned above. In the preface to the *A History of England in Ten Volumes* series, which includes Briggs’s *The Age of Improvement*, the general editor, W.N. Medlicott, explained that ‘the effects of the two world wars and of fifty years of ever-accelerating industrial and social revolution’ have led to ‘the growing interest of the citizen in the story of this land’ and in a new focus on the ‘interaction of the various aspects of national life’.<sup>33</sup> In the preface to the *A History of England* series—which includes volumes written by Lawrence Stone, Henry Pelling, Christopher Hill, and Derek Beales—a statement to the same effect was made to justify its novel character.<sup>34</sup>

David Knowles, in a lecture from 1962, related the following: ‘[with] the last half-century and particularly within the past twenty years, the cosmos round us has changed its aspect with a swiftness and on a scale unparalleled in the experience of mankind.’ Knowles averred how ‘[today] we feel—however foolishly—that the Bill of Rights and Trafalgar and Robert Clive have no more actuality for us than the struggle between the Orders or the Battle of Cannae in ancient Rome. Russia, China, India and Africa are lords of the ascendant’.<sup>35</sup> Geoffrey Barraclough pronounced in 1955 that ‘we stand at the end and outside of the traditional history of the schools and the universities, the history which has western Europe at its centre’, and ‘people of all classes and persuasions’ are demanding a ‘new history’.<sup>36</sup> As a final example, Plumb, in his polemical introduction to the equally polemical 1964 collection *Crisis in the Humanities*, begrudgingly acknowledged that just ‘twenty years ago’ everything was different.<sup>37</sup> Given this discourse, it is hardly surprising that British political historians

were acutely perceptive of the international turn in British politics: Carr and Butterfield were in the vanguard of that eclectic discipline that came to be called international relations<sup>38</sup>; Plumb made an attempt to edit a series on global history; and Laslett led projects on the comparative history of social structures in Asia, Europe, and North America.<sup>39</sup>

Knowles together with Clark conveyed another crucial precondition for the emergence of new interpretations of the English past, closely entwined with the first—namely, the waning of constitutional historiography. ‘Now at least the claims of constitutional history have been challenged’, wrote Knowles in 1962.<sup>40</sup> Clark expressed a similar sentiment in 1973. By then, the academic establishment had heeded calls by the younger generation of historians for more non-European and non-constitutional history. Partly going with the grain of this generation, Clark wrote of the inadequacies of that constitutional historiography whose fathers were Stubbs and Hallam, and for whom constitutional history was ‘the legend of an ideal, the legend of English freedom broadening down from precedent to precedent, developing the protection of the rule of law and realizing itself in Parliamentary government’.<sup>41</sup> Briggs, for instance, had shown that the eighteenth century constitution, extolling political freedom for ‘the people’, was a Whig legend, issuing from the pen of Charles Fox, hiding the uncertainty and conflicts of the ‘mixed Constitution’, along with the fact that ‘only property-owners had a “stake” in the Constitution’.<sup>42</sup>

Clark, much like Briggs, believed as late as 1973 that the whig legend had value *qua* a political ideal in what he called the postwar ‘fluid society’, but he readily admitted, in a seemingly defeatist but surprisingly sober mode, that such an ideal cannot be built on sound history, nor transform the fluid society into a solid one.<sup>43</sup> He was well aware that his commitment to this ideal made his standing ambivalent both with the generation of historians who reformed the Historical Tripos in the 1960s, and the older generation of conservative Cambridge historians.<sup>44</sup>

Still, in 1961, Kitson Clark unambiguously forwarded a motion before the Cambridge Faculty of History for the creation of a review committee looking into the reform of the Historical Tripos, after an aborted attempt immediately after war’s end. Initially, that committee consisted of Plumb, Oakeshott, and Butterfield, all of whom shied away from the wide-ranging reforms Clark promoted. In response, Clark sought out others, more open to such changes.<sup>45</sup> He found himself seconded by Carr, who was charged with leading an unofficial reform group with the historian of science Joseph Needham, who had long advocated for change. Their labor



resulted in a cautiously written report, meant to appease even the staunchest opponents of reform, including Elton. The report came up for debate in 1966, urging the faculty members and the Senate of the University of Cambridge to come to terms with the fact that Britain was no longer an empire or world power; that it no longer possessed the unity imagined by constitutional history; and that present realities called for knowledge of non-European as well as non-constitutional history. The report clearly recognized the desires of the younger, in the main leftist, historians,<sup>46</sup> who by the 1960s had begun to claim more space in the governance of the university and the shape of higher education.

According to Plumb, even though Clark was ‘just as conservative in politics as Oakeshott and as deeply Christian as Butterfield’, he ‘could not see, as they did quickly and realistically, that his proposed changes would create opportunities for the expansion of the radical Left’.<sup>47</sup> This episode in the academic politics of Cambridge history is significant as it underscores not only the educational radicalism of at least some conservative revisionist historians, but also the pronounced differences that existed within conservative revisionist historiography on the one hand, and the shared reform ambitions of a group of ideologically heterogeneous historians, on the other.

### POSTWAR REVISIONISM: ANTI-SOCIALIST AND IRRATIONALIST TORYISM?

J.W. Burrow, the eminent intellectual historian of nineteenth century British social and political thought, wrote in an unpublished essay that the year 1688 is still part of ‘our political heritage’, but hastened to add the curious fact that ‘High Tory revisionists’ do not share this sentiment.<sup>48</sup> Burrow was no stranger to the new idealism or Tory revisionism, since his teachers at Cambridge in the 1950s were Duncan Forbes, Laslett, and Clark, the last of whom, a Tory, became Burrow’s research supervisor. Furthermore, although Oakeshott had become a professor at the London School of Economics while Burrow was a student, he remained a presence in the Cambridge History Faculty, as is attested by his involvement in the reform of the Tripos. Oakeshott, in fact, acted as a ‘sympathetic’ external examiner of Burrow’s Ph.D. thesis on evolutionary thought, published as the seminal *Evolution and Society* (1966).<sup>49</sup>

From his teachers at Cambridge, and Butterfield’s *The Whig Interpretation of History*, Burrow learned that intellectual historiography,

the nascent historical sub-discipline in which he had chosen to specialize after an abortive attempt at political historiography, ought to be 'anti-whiggish'. When, in the late 1960s, Burrow began teaching a course on the history of the social sciences at the University of Sussex, he was guided by an anti-whiggish stance. Burrow's rejection of whiggism also rendered his Cambridge pupil Quentin Skinner's philosophical articles from the 1960s most welcome in Burrow's opinion, for they brought a higher level of philosophical sophistication to anti-whiggish intellectual historiography.<sup>50</sup>

Burrow, however, did not connect the name of Oakeshott with the project of Tory revisionism. Those who brought the affinities between conservative historiography and the new idealism into the open were British historians on the political left, which is evident in a number of early articles of *Past & Present*. Written polemically, the editors' introduction to the very first issue looked to distance itself from approaches to the past it deemed unsatisfactory. Among these were, on the one hand, and surprisingly, 'academic anthropology, sociology, psychology and economics', charged for being considerably 'less advanced than Victorian physics or biology, and much more directly charged with politics' masked by a veneer of 'technical sophistication'. On the other hand, the introduction rejected 'irrational', 'subjective', and 'providential' histories. Regarding the irrational perspective, the editors wrote: 'We dissent from it even when presented, by Benedetto Croce and his disciples, in the more sophisticated dress of philosophical idealism.'

Pitted against this idealist irrationalism, the editors extended a promise that *Past & Present* would feature articles that utilize 'rational' methods, following the great Arab-Muslim historian Ibn Khaldun, who by the 1950s was perceived as an *annaliste avant la lettre*. Interestingly, Ibn Khaldun did not lend the editors, at least not explicitly, historical weight for the justification of a total or global history, but rather the early Marx-sounding principle that men 'are active and conscious makers of history, not merely its passive victims and indices'.<sup>51</sup> A 1956 article, following the introduction's admiration of Victorian scientific historians, made an effort to revive the theory of the Victorian positivist T.H. Buckle, for 'in the present age of make-believe, when Croce and Collingwood pass as great thinkers, some attention might profitably be given to a man like Buckle [emphasis added]'.<sup>52</sup> Even as late as 1980, we find articles in *Past & Present* inveighing against the popularity of Collingwood among historians.<sup>53</sup>

The idealist irrationalism was strongly associated with the new postwar histories of the Victorian era, produced among others by MacDonagh and Clark, the latter dubbed the chief ideologue of what the Oxford historian and prominent civil servant Jenifer Hart named the ‘Tory interpretation of history’. With the passing of the whig interpretation of history, argued Hart, the Tory interpretation, the institutional estuary of which was Cambridge, had risen to prominence. What this Tory interpretation above all did was ‘belittle the role of men and ideas’. It saw historical change in the nineteenth century, and the underpinnings of social reform in the present, as the result of impersonal phenomena or blind forces. The philosophy underlying this interpretation Hart unequivocally attributed to Oakeshott.<sup>54</sup> The debate over this Tory interpretation reverberated in the world of postwar British historiography. For example, in his 1974 essay on the political principles of Bolingbroke, Quentin Skinner suggested a new explanatory scheme for political history, and argued that such a scheme, which emphasizes the causal role of ideas in political action, could be ‘directly applied’ to the debate of which Hart’s article quickly took on a synecdochical function.<sup>55</sup>

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It was these critiques against the new idealism that Miles Taylor famously marshaled, and bolstered with additional sources, in his 1997 article on the beginnings of leftist British social historiography, including ‘history from below’. Taylor sought to demonstrate that one of the origins of this historiography resides in that postwar ‘anti-rationalism’ and ‘anti-collectivism’, the theoretical and ideological beacon of which was Oakeshott and his *Cambridge Journal*.<sup>56</sup> Those inspired by Oakeshott were Briggs, MacDonagh, Pelling, Plumb, Vincent, and Clark. Deeply suspicious of postwar state intervention, and the very concept of ideology, these historians sought to show, according to Taylor, that nineteenth century changes in government and society can be explained not by recourse to ideology, philosophy, and systematic transformations of governmental techniques. Rather, they can be explicated by the role of values such as ‘respectability’ and ‘individualism’, conceived as organic elements of a deep-rooted, irrational, and tacit ethical code, which ensured both a ‘consensus value system’ and social progress.<sup>57</sup> These values explain the revisionists’ insistence on, and real motivation behind, the importance of studying unconscious, irrational, and unspoken patterns of thought and behavior, including various forms of social discipline, such as prisons and the police.

What emerged was a conservative social historiography of the nineteenth century that quietly removed the radical content of the Victorian past by constructing 'state intervention without the state, group behaviour without group solidarity, and class awareness without class consciousness'.<sup>58</sup>

This reading associates the new idealism *exclusively* with a politically reactionary postwar conservative historiography, the underlying aim of which is to decontaminate the Victorian past of all those social conflicts and threats to the traditional social and political system which might have caused a revolution. Leftist social and cultural historians, according to Taylor, have kept lapsing back into these conservative routes.

This chapter challenges this reading. To be sure, the new idealism was in large part appropriated by postwar conservative historians from the ancient universities, especially Cambridge. Yet, their revisions of the English past were far more nuanced and open to other perspectives—including socialist historiography and welfare state anachronisms—than this particular leftist reading allows for.

This shortcoming of a certain strand in British leftist historiography can mainly be attributed to two failures: first, the failure to register the profound disenchantment with liberal-whig historiography that permeated conservative revisionist thought, and which led conservative revisionists to embrace not only socialist *questions* of a certain kind,<sup>59</sup> but socialist *interpretations* as well. And second, the failure to register that there is nothing unholy about leftist social historians being informed, and not merely duped, by these conservative historians.

This indictment stems from the anti-Fabian socialist historiography that began as the Communist Party Historians Group (CPHG), and transformed into New Left historiography after 1956. While the New Left distanced itself from the materialist reductivism of the CPHG, it retained its anti-Fabian attitude. Postwar socialist historians, most notably E.P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm, saw Fabian historiography as outright denigrating of any segments of the working class movement that did not belong to what came to be called the 'labor aristocracy', composed of members belonging to trade unions for skilled workers. In the very first issue of *Past & Present*, for instance, Hobsbawm sought to rescue the 'machine-breakers' in English labor history from the interpretive marginalization by 'Fabians and Liberals', the latter of whom included Plumb, who saw the machine-breaking workers as men of violence, symbolic of an early working class movement that did not 'know what it was doing', and simply reacting to misery 'as animals in the laboratory react to electric currents'.<sup>60</sup> Thompson's now classic *The Making of the English Working Class*,

published little over a decade after Hobsbawm's article, expressly sought to combat the 'Fabian orthodoxy, in which the great majority of working people are seen as passive victims of *laissez faire*, with the exception of a handful of far-sighted organisers (notably, Francis Place)'.<sup>61</sup>

It is clear that both the new idealists and the appropriators of the new idealism encompassed more than political conservatives at the ancient universities. Though he will not be analyzed here, for the simple reason that he did not write on English history, it is worthwhile mentioning Carr's fourteen-volumed *History of Russia* as an example of a socialist history informed by Collingwoodian new idealism. As Haslam explains: 'There are indeed even within the *History of Russia* some traces of Collingwood. There Carr aimed to place his mind "in sympathetic communion with the minds of the actors in his drama, to reconstruct the process of their thought, to penetrate their conclusions and the motives which dictated their action."' <sup>62</sup>

#### THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY: G.R. ELTON'S TUDOR REVOLUTION AND THE CONSERVATIVE ORIGINS OF WELFARE STATE ADMINISTRATION

There is no shortage of 'Tudorism' in today's popular culture. Annually held 'renaissance fairs', popular especially in the USA, often featuring an 'authentically' clad Henry VIII surrounded by an obsequious court, invite crowds of visitors to interact with the King himself.<sup>63</sup> The TV series *The Tudors* (2007–2010), centered on Henry VIII, Anne Boleyn, Cardinal Wolsey, and Thomas Cromwell, received high viewer ratings, owing to its emphasis on archetypical intrigue and will to power, spruced with exuberant erotic and violent content. A myriad of films about Henry VIII have lit up the big screen ever since the early days of cinema.<sup>64</sup> There is little in these appropriations that hark back to the professional Tudor historiography here under analysis. No script was, understandably given the viewers' expectations, ever based on Elton's histories of the Tudors—though his student David Starkey did go on to produce TV series on the Tudors for British television channels.

Nor do most of today's professional Tudor historians accept Elton's analyses, with some notable exceptions.<sup>65</sup> And yet, even those historians who rejected Elton's framework for the study of the sixteenth century readily granted that his concept of 'Tudor revolution' denotes both a

period in the sixteenth century *and* a moment in professional historiography.<sup>66</sup> Elton's histories were, to be sure, always contested, but between the 1950s and the 1980s, these histories undoubtedly changed the historiography of Tudor England and, in one historian's opinion, were 'establishing a new orthodoxy'.<sup>67</sup>

Though Elton proved intractable on a number of issues, he was neither unwilling to revise his interpretation, nor deny other histories interpretive value. That attests to his practical commitment to his philosophy of history, derived from the new idealism. The state of Tudor studies in the postwar era, wrote Elton in the 1970s, contrasts with the orthodoxy of A.F. Pollard's view, which saw the Tudor period as a 'a coherent age, growingly "modern"'. This growth into modernity was assured by the evolution of Parliament, while bolstered by the culture of humanism and the religion of Protestantism. In contrast, 'Today, little of it [this view] survives and debate rules everything'.<sup>68</sup> In response to the above charge of orthodoxy, which occurred in a famous 1960s debate over Elton's work in *Past & Present*, Elton replied: 'I cannot but experience some unease at a review of my work which seems to treat it as concluded'.<sup>69</sup> Accordingly, Elton revised his interpretation on a number of issues, both 'general' and 'particular' following these critiques.<sup>70</sup> For instance, Elton diminished the role of Cromwell and was ready to accept a measure of continuity from late medieval to Tudor government.<sup>71</sup>

Debate did not, in Elton's eyes, seem to rule everything at the time he wrote and published *The Tudor Revolution* (1953), his first and most important book. On the very first page, Elton inveighed against the hegemony of whiggism in Tudor studies:

The sanctions of that stability—the safeguards against despotism—have long been understood and often described; the other side of the matter—strong rule preventing anarchy and preserving order—requires still much exploration. Our history is still much written by whigs, the champions of political freedom; to stress the need for controlling that freedom may even today seem not only not Liberal but even illiberal.<sup>72</sup>

If a historian does not accept the whig narrative of the Tudors, Elton is here implying, then that historians is seen as by default justifying authoritarianism in a historical pitch. The choice of Thomas Cromwell as the key figure of the sixteenth century seemed, thus, to symbolically confirm Elton as an authoritarian.

Elton's Cromwell is portrayed in a similar frame as Trevor-Roper's Archbishop Laud and, as we will see below, Laslett's Sir Robert Filmer. Elton's critics in *Past & Present* happily accepted his destruction of the 'evolutionary concept' guiding Tudor historiography, erroneously holding on to 'a single and constant line of change, with no false starts and blind alleys; it tends to forget that institutions are human beings in action, and are thus the product of ambitions, rivalries and decisions, rather than of some evolutionary logic'.<sup>73</sup> Whatever the other issues of contention between Elton and his critics were, the methodological legitimacy of the revisionist approach was not one of them.

To carry out his revision of Tudor England without appearing as an authoritarian, Elton portrayed Cromwell in new idealist fashion, that is, from a sympathetic and imaginative anti-whig perspective that sought to unearth the problems to which Cromwell's agency can be said to have been a solution. In this undertaking, Elton was pressed to find a way to connect Tudor England to welfare state England. As the perceptive Knowles explains, in the hands of Elton, '[the] "image" of Cromwell gradually grew in stature and bulk as the work proceeded; he was no longer the brutal, opportunist agent of the royal tyrant, but *the positive creator of social reform*, drastic and pitiless when necessary, but no persecutor or Machiavellian [emphasis added]'.<sup>74</sup>

Elton's revisionist whiggism of the redeeming and, somewhat ambiguously, pluralist type provides one crucial means of explanation for why he did *not* continue to exert influence over British conservative historians post-Thatcher, such as his pupil Starkey. Starkey, a conservative historian who described himself as 'middle-of-the road Labour until the end of the 1970s',<sup>75</sup> would in the 1980s reject Elton's scheme of explanation in terms redolent of post-Thatcher anti-welfare state rhetoric:

Elton, it might be said, saw Tudor governmental reform rather as an eighteenth-century deist perceived the universe: as the orderly creation of the divine artificer, Cromwell. For this we have substituted the chaotic twentieth-century cosmos that followed the "death of God." Cromwell is dethroned; governmental change (we had better not call it reform) is rarely the result of long-term planning; rather it is the outcome of the most complex interplay of circumstances, over which chance and the luck of political game presides as often as reason or will.<sup>76</sup>

This passage shows clearly how far removed Elton's type of conservative historiography is from the one we are used to today, and insists that

historians be more sensitive in interpreting the conceptual content of the history of British conservative historiography.

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Elton's revisionist histories are centered on administrative changes during one decade in the sixteenth century: the 1530s. For Elton, administrative historiography partook in the same revisionist project as intellectual and social historiography. Indeed, he went as far as to argue that administrative historiography took a lead in revisionism:

[...] research on topics of intellectual and economic history, tackling questions of which the previous generation had not even been aware, has done much to dissolve certainties; but it is interesting to note that the revision really started at the point where Pollard seemed best armoured—in the analysis of policy, government and administration. Fortunately, the revisionist interpretation has not ossified into a new orthodoxy.<sup>77</sup>

Upon his appointment in 1968 to the Cambridge Chair of English Constitutional History, which is a title Elton himself chose during the *annus mirabilis* of the student protest movement, Elton was as concerned with both reformulating and continuing the tradition of constitutional historiography. Cromwell seems to have acted as a model in Elton's endeavor, for according to Elton, Cromwell had instated revolutionary shifts under the semblance of formal constitutional and semantic continuity. If Cromwell could do this for the English state by means of his ministerial powers, Elton reasoned by means of analogy that surely Elton could do it for British historiography through professorial clout. There is another semblance between Elton and Cromwell that may have dawned on the former at the end of his life: much like (Elton's) Cromwell, Elton had failed to entrench his new approach to history through institutional reform.

Elton announced in his inaugural lecture that his reformulation entailed, in the first place, an emphasis on administration, rather than law and legal precedence. In the second place, that the new constitutional history is 'like every other form of history, a form of social history, a form of the history of society. But it takes particular note of the question of government'. It is a form of social history because it aims 'to study government, the manner in which men, *having formed themselves into societies, then* arrange for the orderly existence, through time, and in space, of those societies [emphasis added]'. Administration and the constitution, for Elton as for all the conser-



vative revisionist historians, are causally dependent on social arrangements: 'You have to see it as a machine and as a thought, and as a sequence of legalisations, and all those things, *but in the main you have to see it, as the product of social life* [emphasis added].' In the closing pages of *The Tudor Revolution*, Elton conceded that: 'In its time, the Tudor revolution in government also coincided with changes in the structure of society and of politics.'

These changes included the scientific revolution, a statement Elton based on Butterfield's *The Origins of Modern Science* (1957).<sup>78</sup> Together with the administrative revolution, the scientific revolution gave birth to modernity. The outstanding feature of modernity, according to Elton, was the advent of individuality and the ascription of personal responsibility. With the birth of the modern individual arrived the conditions of modern historical knowledge, for it is during the Tudors that documents bearing information on identifiable individuals systematically emerged, in contrast to the bureaucratic veil over individuality that limits medieval sources.<sup>79</sup> That is why Elton's new constitutional history insisted that primary 'weight' must 'be given to individuals, identifiable men and women'. In the third place, and strongly echoing the perspectivist and pluralist commitments spelled out in *The Practice of History*, the new constitutional history is comprised of a 'multiplicity of views'.<sup>80</sup>

There is no doubt that Elton believed in the virtues of social and intellectual historiography, as is evident on the pages of *Modern Historians*. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*, for instance, Elton deemed 'impressive' and 'distinguished' in both substance and passion.<sup>81</sup> It is paradoxical, therefore, that Elton, who was a voracious reader, did not refer to the first attempt to unearth a 'Tudor Revolution'. The historian R. Liddesdale Palmer sought, in his 1934 *English Social History in the Making: The Tudor Revolution*,<sup>82</sup> to portray the revolutionary shifts in social organization that occurred during the Tudors. The prominent economic historian Eileen Power, Professor of Economic History at the University of London, wrote in the preface to this book that such a perspective was most welcome as it provided a historical analogue to the social and economic shifts and upheavals of the early twentieth century. Much could be learned by those who live in modern mass society from the Tudor monetary revolution, the slow-moving agrarian revolution where large landowners emerged turning peasants into landless laborers, and the rise of England as a commercial and colonial power.<sup>83</sup>

Elton did, however, venture directly into intellectual history, or rather the history of political thought, which has a long pedigree in British historiography,<sup>84</sup> as Elton himself acknowledged.<sup>85</sup> In particular, Elton

sought to link Tudor elites to the humanist ‘Ciceronian tradition’.<sup>86</sup> Once introduced to England, this tradition changed the content of education for the lay leaders of society. It became ‘a training-scheme for a ruling class’, which included Cromwell. Education, in this humanist moment, shifted emphasis away from theology and toward rhetoric, which in the long run meant the ‘training of accomplished gentlemen serving the state’. Elton even spoke of this as a ‘standard theory’.<sup>87</sup> Humanist arguments and concepts were thus made available to Tudor elites, and would, according to Elton, eventually be deployed in the formulation of an anti-papal theory of secular sovereignty during the English Reformation, not least by Cromwell.<sup>88</sup>

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Why did Elton place such high hopes in the revisionist potential of studying administrative developments? Though nowhere rendered explicit in Elton’s writings, it is clear that the appeal of administrative history was directly connected to a wider social and political development—namely, the exponential postwar growth of the administrative state. However, Elton was fully aware and appreciative of the revisionist historiography of the nineteenth century, much of which pivoted around tracing the origins of modern administration and the welfare state in surprising periods and contexts. For example, Maurice Bruce’s *The Coming of the Welfare State* (1961) Elton credited for the imaginative thesis that the Poor Law of 1834 provides a starting point for the welfare state, thereby revising the view that the law epitomizes the ‘faith of *laissez faire* and self-help’.<sup>89</sup> In fact, after the Tudor Revolution, England would have to wait until the nineteenth century for a ‘much greater administrative revolution’, according to Elton, since it was during that century that ‘an administration based on departments responsible to parliament—an administration in which the crown for the first time ceased to hold the ultimate control’ was created.<sup>90</sup>

In 1923, a number of societies for local and national civil servants had formed the Institute of Public Affairs and *The Journal of Public Administration* (from 1926 *Public Administration*),<sup>91</sup> which Elton read,<sup>92</sup> and to which some revisionist historians of the nineteenth century contributed articles. In the 1920s, however, governmental support for the Institute was hardly forthcoming. In an attempt to garner an endorsement from Sir Russell Scott, Director of Establishments at the Treasury, the leaders of the Institute were dismayed at his negative response. Essentially, wrote Scott, ‘it [the Institute] seems to me to be

a glorification of the bureaucracy'.<sup>93</sup> Fear of Fabian influence fuelled this response, as the Fabians proved to be a political force to be reckoned with through their 1909 Minority Report on the reform of the Poor Law, proposing a shift in control of poor relief from Boards of Guardians to Public Assistance, which came into effect in the later 1920s. The Institute was nonetheless formed, under the leadership of Viscount Haldane, as both a learned and professional society. The Institute soon attracted prominent, or would be prominent, intellectuals and politicians, such as Harold Macmillan, William Beveridge, J.M. Keynes, Neville Chamberlain, and Ernest Bevin. After 1945, once Labour's landslide victory legitimized the ideas of Fabianism in government, and it became clear that the building of the envisioned welfare state would require a continued expansion of experts, technicians, and administrators, even Scott changed his mind and supported the Institute.<sup>94</sup> It was estimated that 'by the end of the war one in every twenty-five adults in this country was a government official'. The consequence of this statistic was evident: 'bureaucracy is a part and an essential part of our whole social organisation.'<sup>95</sup>

By 1945 the Institute had established its research policy under Beveridge's direction including, among other things, the study of personnel efficiency. The Institute had also set up a Diploma in Public Administration, which soon spread to Oxford, Leeds, Sheffield, Liverpool, and London.<sup>96</sup> The members of the Institute did not fail to register this massive shift in governmental 'machinery', a concept which became fashionable in this period, and which Elton used as a historical category.<sup>97</sup> One member thus wrote in 1948: 'The real Government of this country, the great and growing Government of this country, is the Civil Service.'<sup>98</sup> Three years earlier, another member had made a similar statement: 'The form of government which exists in this country to-day may be described with substantial accuracy as parliamentary bureaucracy.'<sup>99</sup>

The members of the Institute often pointed out that professional administration originated in the nineteenth century, in particular the system constituted by the administrative, executive, and clerical classes, overwhelmingly recruited from the ancient universities, in particular Oxford. But it was precisely this structure which stood in need of a radical make-over in the postwar era, for the old system prided itself on being directed by 'generalists', who studied arts subjects, especially modern history and classics, and so lacked formal training or experience in specialized and technical government work: 'What is essentially *new*, however, and related to *new* needs will come from the specialists.'<sup>100</sup>

Parliament, the monarchy, and later the executive, the trinity of English politics and identity in whig historical mythology, seemed in the eyes of many postwar commentators overshadowed by the Civil Service and an ever increasing number of scientific experts in the span of a mere two decades. It could be, and appears to have been, viewed as a peaceful and silent revolution in government, but a revolution nonetheless.<sup>101</sup>

Elton's conceptualization of the Tudor Revolution bears striking resemblances to this postwar administrative revolution. Indeed, Elton's histories, on his own account, provide the early modern origins of this modern revolution. Elton was effectively including conservatism among the ideologies that historically shaped the present, for the Tudor Revolution was 'essentially conservative'.<sup>102</sup> As such, it showed that conservative reform could take revolutionary proportions without violent upheaval on the one hand, and survive moments of national exigency, such as the Civil War or the two world wars, on the other.

The 1530s were pivotal, for Elton, because it was during that decade that the 'medieval conception of the kingdom as the king's estate' crumbled under social pressures spawning the need for 'bureaucratic organization' and 'national management'.<sup>103</sup> The 1530s were decisively moving 'in the direction of greater definition, of specialization, of bureaucratic order'.<sup>104</sup> The Tudor Revolution created national departments and rule by parliamentary statute, both of which were still accountable to the Crown, as the Crown's loss of power in this domain would have to wait until the nineteenth century. This post-revolutionary administrative system was 'more efficient than the old', because its agents 'believed it to be so'. Human agency, Elton is arguing here, is the effective cause of modern human history. Tudor government does not differ from welfare state government in this respect: 'government always depends on personality, as we can see to this day.'<sup>105</sup>

That personality, during the Tudor Revolution, was Cromwell. The reason why Cromwell took front stage in Elton's interpretation, Elton tried to assure his readers and critics, was that documents ascribable to him have survived in abundance, much more so than for any other relevant figure. This, however, was both a blessing and curse. Blessing because Cromwell's papers have left to the historian evidence of the workings of an indisputably significant historical figure. Curse since, in Elton's researches at any rate, documents from other figures were scant, which posed a real dilemma: 'Cromwell appears to dominate his age so much because his papers have survived.' Elton drew a revisionist conclusion

from this undesirable state of affairs: though Cromwell was the major figure in the revolution, the historian must bear in mind that his documentative hegemony conceals ‘the activities and minds of others’.<sup>106</sup>

Elton’s Cromwell is not exactly the inculpable hero found in liberal-whig histories. He rather resembles a ‘revisionist hero’, fit for an age of redeeming and pluralist whiggism, since he is a character derided by the whigs, and rescued by a sympathetic approach conjoined to a revisionist methodology. There is, then, both past and present in Elton’s Cromwell, for Cromwell embodies two conflicting ages, the early modern and the modern, which in personality-political terms translates into Cromwell the autocrat and the bureaucrat: ‘Cromwell was an autocrat as well as a bureaucrat in office, concerned with both the development of the weapons of government and his own unrestricted use of them.’<sup>107</sup> Elton’s Cromwell thereby comes remarkably close to resemble Trevor-Roper’s Laud: both were viewed sympathetically and in an anti-whig key; both effected changes that presaged twentieth century political or social exigencies; both, however, left their tasks not only incomplete, but outright hindered their intended development in the short term by being swayed by autocratic impulses; and both, finally, were agents that performed actions that were rational for them to perform in their various contexts.

Elton’s redeeming revision of Cromwell has not been received well. Placing him in the center of the Tudor Revolution has led many historians to see Elton as a defender of authoritarianism. Even Knowles, who on the whole lauded Elton’s achievement, could not suppress his negative judgment. In ‘the last resort’, wrote Knowles, ‘his [Elton’s] sympathies seem to lie with Henry and Cromwell rather than with their victims. These had transgressed statutes and must pay the penalty. Reasons of state have the last word’.<sup>108</sup>

#### THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY I: J.H. PLUMB AND THE VIOLENT ORIGINS OF POLITICAL STABILITY

Much like Elton, Plumb, as we saw above, was no shy opponent to the widening of the Historical Tripos in Cambridge. Inspired by the late Victorian edifying ideals of historical education, bequeathed to him by his Ph.D. supervisor G.M. Trevelyan, with some justice called the last whig historian,<sup>109</sup> Plumb adhered to the lofty ideal that a Cambridge education in history ought to inculcate students with guides for social and political action. Yet, apart from rejecting those Marxist, Christian, and

pessimistic philosophies of history which were furnishing the educated public with such guides in the 1950s and the 1960s, Plumb found himself in a quandary when explaining what a practically oriented historical education should look like.

The obvious preemptive solution to this dilemma would have been a whig stance, and there are certainly traces thereof in Plumb's writings. Plumb's whiggism is on display in his insistence, in the context of the two cultures debate between Snowites and Leavisites, and in Plumb's support for Labour's modernizing Prime Minister Harold Wilson,<sup>110</sup> that the industrial revolution unquestionably, and rapidly, brought material progress to all social classes. A self-described inheritor of the whig tradition, Plumb's works on the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries nevertheless betray a revisionist attitude.

Though Plumb took a strong interest in the philosophy of history, he rejected the new idealism of Collingwood and Croce in a strikingly similar vein as the editors of and contributors to *Past & Present*, that is, by accusing the new idealism of nihilism and relativism.<sup>111</sup> A historian such as Plumb is nonetheless an instructive example in demonstrating that the new idealism clarifies even those revisionist historians of the seventeenth century who did not directly appropriate the new idealism. Plumb was similar to the new idealist revisionists in that he was a scholar for whom neither whiggism nor the technical type of scholarship developed by Namier sufficed as models for a postwar historiography of the English seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In explaining what other tradition may plausibly be said to have unconsciously allowed Plumb to transgress the strictures of these two traditions, the new idealism is the best contender.

Whoever ventured into researches of the seventeenth century in the early postwar period needed to come to terms with whiggism nearly by default, for it was during the seventeenth century that 'the most venerable of all events in Whig mythology' occurred—namely, the Glorious Revolution of 1688, the halcyon year which secured 'a permanent Parliament and a docile monarchy',<sup>112</sup> effectively dashing the Olympian hopes of resurrected despotism and sectarian violence. As a specialist on eighteenth century English politics, Plumb was bound to cross paths with Namier, and the type of technical scholarship over which Namier presided as high priest. Plumb had much admiration for Namier's destruction of the whig mythology surrounding the early years of the reign of George III, in which the Whigs of Burke and Rockingham, on the whig account, entrenched constitutional monarchy and enabled the continuation of the

politics of high principles, after George III's infelicitous attempt to bolster the Royal Prerogative. Namier was a virtuoso destroyer, especially of the English party system as a historical framework, but he was not an accomplished architect of an interpretive matrix, which Plumb witnessed as a short-lived and aloof participant in Namier's History of Parliament project, tasked by Parliament with providing biographies of all members of the House of Commons from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century. Much like Namier's *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III* (1929), this project did not own up to promises signaled in the title. *The structure of politics* sounded hollow given Namier's exclusion of the House of Lords, his static analysis of only the year 1761, and, above all, the lack of a new interpretive frame for the eighteenth century, save the structure of psychic mechanisms and drives flowing from repressed unconscious complexes.<sup>113</sup> The History of Parliament undertaking, likewise, excluded the House of Lords, and was nowhere near completion after decades of work.<sup>114</sup>

The definite rejection of Namier and the Namierites, especially R.R. Walcott, came in Plumb's Ford Lectures of 1965, published as *The Growth of Political Stability in England: 1675–1725*. Plumb lambasted Walcott in the very first lecture: Walcott 'too frequently mistook genealogy for political history, and creates factions out of family relationships without even considering the political actions, ideas, or attitudes of the men in question.'<sup>115</sup> Namier and Namierism had been rejected, and no one in the British community of professional historians seemed to mind.<sup>116</sup>

In ruminating on Winston Churchill and Trevelyan as historians, Plumb made clear the attractions, dangers, and his own ambivalent view of whiggism. Churchill, according to Plumb, was the consummate whig historian,<sup>117</sup> and his 'unthinking acceptance of the traditional beliefs of his class was to temper his strength as a statesman and, indeed, was to enable him to lead his country through its darkest and most desperate hours in the exceptionality of the English people.' Here, then, was the strength of the 'curious ideology' of whiggism, its 'half-truth' and 'half-noble' recto, to its 'half-fiction' and 'half-base' verso.<sup>118</sup> This strength of whiggism was all the more remarkable in light of the curious ideological effeteness of conflicting 'Tory' histories.<sup>119</sup> Whiggism worked hand in glove with the war effort, in which professional historians resigned themselves to lend professional sanction to whig narratives as their contribution to the war effort. Churchill was eminently suited to become the writer and propagator of such narratives, which Plumb deftly showed by pointing to Churchill's

residence at Blenheim Palace, the geographical heart of the ‘Whig legend of that past which the English had manufactured in order to underpin their Imperial ambitions and in which Winston Churchill had implicit belief’. Whig assumptions colored Churchill’s tactics, decisions, and views on India and Europe, to the point where he wished Hitler would read English history and its unfailing successes against enemies, thus saving the German war machine a lot of trouble.<sup>120</sup>

Churchill’s consensus historiography, the prime example of public history, reached its nadir in the postwar era, according to Plumb. In the postwar context, whiggism revealed its now all but vanished condition of possibility: a historical period governed by a common outlook provided by the governing classes, but shared for material purposes by the aristocracy, industrial, commercial, and financial elites, and even the working classes. This Victorian whiggism, the socio-economic and political origins of which lay in the Whig oligarchy, as Plumb explained in *The Growth of Stability*, assuaged the public as long as the plurality of competing socio-economic groups and ideologies could be kept at bay, as in the wartime coalition government. By the end of the war, discord resurfaced: ‘The past in which he [Churchill] intensely believed’, Plumb wrote in Oakeshottian-sounding language, ‘has been shattered by the 1950s and the 1960s. [...] It no longer explains our role or our purpose.’<sup>121</sup>

Trevelyan’s whiggism is superior to Churchill’s, opined Plumb, for Trevelyan, unlike Churchill who was Macaulayesque in this respect, had realized that ‘the Whig world of benevolent grandeur was about to pass into oblivion’, with the Liberal Party disappearing from parliamentary politics and technocratic governance trumping constitutional rule by political parties and gentlemanly amateurs. In due time, Trevelyan’s realistic insights found their way into the structure of his histories, and gave that structure, in words that insinuate new idealist concepts, ‘an extra dimension, an imaginative sympathy for the losers’, and the whigs had by 1945 become the losers.<sup>122</sup>

The waning of whiggism in the postwar era thus opened up for ‘imaginative sympathy’, a concept central to the new idealism, and the extension of historical study into non-constitutional and non-parliamentary domains, such as administrative history, social history, and the history of thought—again, an extension that we saw was philosophically justified by the new idealism.<sup>123</sup>



*The Growth of Political Stability* is a work which embodies this expansion of political historiography into revisionism, by weaving in intellectual, social, economic, even demographic and geographical contexts. Plumb, however, was not in the business of ‘total history’, as practiced by the French *Annales* School, since his extensive utilization of social historiography, whose institutional and literary growth was exponential in the 1960s, served to give weight to human agency as the cause of both political stability and revolution: ‘There are, of course, deep social causes of which contemporaries are usually unaware making for the *possibility* of political stability. But stability becomes actual through the actions and decisions of men, as does revolution.’ Moreover, Plumb argued that political stability can be achieved rapidly, ‘as suddenly as water becomes ice’, and that is precisely what happened between 1675 and 1725 in England. What had, on his own account, convinced Plumb of his unconventional approach to political change was the incredible and often unsuspecting speed of twentieth century historical change: Mexico underwent generations of turbulence before achieving stability in the 1930s; Russia had to undergo half a century of political, economic, and social chaos before coming together in the 1950s; France was ridden by catastrophes in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, until the Republic under de Gaulle harmonized society.<sup>124</sup> Such developments intimated for Plumb enough historical precedents to question the entire whiggish temporal framework.

Plumb’s multi-dimensional approach—faithful to both agency and structure—undergirds his asides about two other fellow Cambridge revisionists: Elton and Skinner. Skinner, heavily indebted to Collingwoodian new idealism, was criticized for overstating the extent of the impact of philosophically inflected ideology, even though Plumb drew on Skinner’s anti-whig and anti-Namierite analysis of the historical ideology of the seventeenth century Whigs, revealing that ideology’s paradoxes and pointing out contesting ideological uses of the past.<sup>125</sup> In that sense, Plumb’s revisionism differed from what is perhaps the best known (non-idealist) revisionism of the seventeenth century—namely, Conrad Russell’s histories of the Civil War, emphasizing the near absence of ideological differences between Royalists and Parliamentarians, and so undermining liberal and Marxist forms of whiggism from that angle, which had become fashionable in the much vaunted ‘end-of-ideology’ value-neutral social engineering era.<sup>126</sup> Noel Annan, a leading British intellectual and public figure in the early postwar era, thus wrote, echoing the likes of Daniel Bell in the USA and Karl Popper in Britain: ‘Yes, policies had to be formed, but not

according to some ideology: we had had enough of ideologies in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union.’<sup>127</sup>

Elton’s histories fared worse than Skinner’s, for, according to Plumb, ‘in many ways the developments in administrative efficiency between 1660 and 1715’ were ‘far more fundamental in moulding both the nature of our constitution and our politics than the schemes of Thomas Cromwell’.<sup>128</sup> In criticizing Elton’s Tudor Revolution, Plumb was demonstrably attempting to challenge a contender for a new whiggish framework, a contender who also argued that major transformations can and do occur rapidly—but apparently not in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, for we will remember that, for Elton, the Tudor Revolution was succeeded by the nineteenth century revolution.

Attempting to write what we today call ‘interdisciplinary’ history, but with no clear model or method, renders *The Growth of Political Stability* both original and cumbersome. The arc of the analysis is, however, clear. The year 1688, the object of desire of the ‘Burkeian fantasy’, had sharpened a process stretching back to the time of the Magna Charta, governed by conspiracy, plot, and rebellion, such that by 1688 ‘violence in politics was an Englishman’s birthright’, nearly spelling ‘anarchy and ruin to the English nation’. Yet, by 1720 political stability was clothed in ‘an air of historical inevitability’.<sup>129</sup> This whig interpretation served as a contrast to Plumb’s own argument for the rapid emergence of political stability cum Whig oligarchy, through a single-party government, the dominance of the executive over the legislative, and a hard-won socio-economic convergence between conflicting power groups. Given the often-violent conflicts, time and again over property, between Whigs and Tories, Whigs and Whigs, Whigs and aristocrats, aristocrats and aristocrats, there was nothing predestined about this Whig oligarchy which provided the conditions for political stability.<sup>130</sup> It is in studying these conflicts, from all perspectives and multiple methodologies, that we may understand the origins of political stability, proclaimed Plumb.

The upshot of Plumb’s labyrinthine analysis is a revision centered on the transition from the instability that attended the seventeenth century, to the stability that emerged by 1725. The constitutional revolution of 1688, which gave a complicated birth to Whigs and Tories, both vying for political power through a massive number of elections up to 1715, was not delivered to the English on the wings of an immemorial customary law and constitutional monarchy. The constitutional revolution did not confirm political stability, just the opposite. Stability, rather, had

‘a solid economic and social basis’.<sup>131</sup> Over the span of the seventeenth century, the landed gentry, both urban and rural in influence, had risen in prominence owing to its exploitation of a growing and more accessible internal economic market, leading to that diversification of the economy that the Whig Bolingbroke called a ‘commercial revolution’. Because of their economic expansion, the landed gentry were the winners of 1688, extending to politics the power they had amassed in urban, rural, and economic society. Yet, in the 1688 constitution, their right to rebel was implicit, thus showing the volatility of their victory. But rather than leading to a new civil war, this volatility found an outlet in parliamentary elections, which became ever more expensive, and ever more conducive to widespread powers. Thus, between 1689 and 1715, twelve general elections were fought, only one less than for rest of the eighteenth century.<sup>132</sup> To win an election required an amount of money only the Whigs could afford, and that is why they could, after 1725, secure Parliament, which had become the most powerful governmental organ after the Revolution.

Very much as in Elton’s histories, in *The Growth of Stability* we see, apart from the influence of economic and social historiography of a distinctly leftist origin, the rising importance of intellectual historiography, or rather the history of political thought. The answer to why the history of political thought mattered to seventeenth century revisionism can be summarized in two words: John Locke.<sup>133</sup> Locke’s *Two Treatises of Government*, according to Plumb, was *the* book of those freeholders, landowners, and merchants, those men of property who constituted ‘the necessary nerves and sinews of the State’.<sup>134</sup> The political ideas of the Whigs, and of liberalism, were best expressed in the works of Locke—hence the incessant historiographical and political interest in Locke ever since his own time.

THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY II: PETER LASLETT,  
THE DEMYTHOLOGIZING OF JOHN LOCKE,  
AND THE REVIVING OF SIR ROBERT FILMER

Among the revisionists, it was Laslett, another Cambridge historian, who swept away the historical Locke from the aegis of whig mythologies, and concomitantly extended a sympathetic understanding to a thinker long derided by Whig propagandists and whig historians: the patriarchalist writer Sir Robert Filmer. Both of these interventions impressed Elton and earned Laslett a place in Elton’s critical bibliography. ‘Filmer’, wrote Elton, ‘champion of patriarchal despotism, receives from Laslett the kiss of

life, after long neglect and contempt'. And Laslett's revolutionary edition of Locke's *Two Treatises*, demonstrating that that it was a revolutionary pamphlet and not a post facto justification of the Glorious Revolution, marked 'at last a definitive text and also at last a reliable history of its origin'. Laslett's histories had direct import for the project of revisionism: 'That the new editions and all this work may well have succeeded in moving Locke, too, from the agreed to the controversial sector would appear to be the message of a recent collection of essays on him.'<sup>135</sup>

Oakeshott, as was shown in the previous chapter, was Laslett's undergraduate teacher in history, and Laslett avowed an intellectual debt to him in his writings.<sup>136</sup> Another teacher was Ernest Barker who was one of the first defenders of Croce in England. Together with the sociology of Karl Mannheim, which Laslett duly acknowledged as a source of intellectual inspiration,<sup>137</sup> Oakeshott's philosophy of history furnished Laslett with the conceptual resources to revise the place of Locke and Filmer in the English seventeenth century. These revisions did not go over well with Barker and Oakeshott, however, which reveals the historiographical limitation and irony of Oakeshottian new idealism, eager to promote revisionism in theory, but prone to disregard it in practice. Hardly surprisingly, neither Barker nor Oakeshott believed that Laslett held much promise as a historian, refusing to support his applications to various fellowships in the 1940s.

In 1940, for instance, Barker stated the reasons for Laslett's ineptitude for a fellowship: Laslett 'hardly does justice to Locke' in his work on Filmer, and 'is prone to exaggerate the importance and the profundity of Filmer's thought'. Laslett's work is full of 'pretentiousness' and 'obscurity', owing not least to the use of Mannheim's un-English concepts.<sup>138</sup> Even Laslett's detailed knowledge of Filmer's and Locke's unpublished manuscripts,<sup>139</sup> and their intellectual and socio-political settings,<sup>140</sup> meant, for Barker, that Laslett had 'something of the specialist's passion'.<sup>141</sup> For Laslett, this knowledge was imperative, taking Filmer as an example, due to the 'complete obscurity surrounding the life and writings of Sir Robert' that has led to widespread abuses and misinterpretations of Filmer.<sup>142</sup>

Eight years later, Oakeshott, reviewing Laslett's application for another fellowship, wrote that it 'lacks substantial promise'.<sup>143</sup> Paradoxically, Oakeshott, in his review of Laslett's introduction to *Two Treatises*, argued that the introduction represented both a whig and an anti-whig reading of Locke. On the one hand, Oakeshott acclaimed Laslett for showing empirically that *Two Treatises* belongs to a specific time and place, and so

cannot be used in perennial debates or present political mythologies. On the other hand, Laslett was reproached for ‘*praising* Locke’s attention to policy instead of merely observing it’ and for ‘asking us to approve Locke’s opinions merely because they have become the accepted commonplaces of a certain political attitude’.<sup>144</sup> Needless to add, Laslett would go on to have a distinguished career in Cambridge, overturning whig dogmas regarding seventeenth century political thought.

That Laslett intended to challenge whiggism is evidenced in several places: first, in an unpublished overview of Laslett’s introduction to Filmer’s *Patriarcha* from 1948 he wrote: ‘Filmer’s character and capacity has been falsified by the Whig interpretation of history. He was not a great man and his reputation should rest on his capacity as a critic. He was far more versatile and far less of an intolerant fanatic than has been recognised.’<sup>145</sup> Second, Laslett wrote in 1956 that the standard interpretation of Locke’s *Two Treatises* was that the text rationalized and rendered coherent the post-1688 constitution, coevally crystallizing the Glorious Revolution’s social and political beliefs. But, interjected Laslett, that interpretation was nonetheless ‘quite untrue’ in ‘its most useful [whig] form’. The lack of empirical basis for this interpretation of Locke had led to a ‘minor mythology’ in modern political culture and historical scholarship,<sup>146</sup> a verdict soon shared by Philip Abrams.<sup>147</sup>

Accordingly, Laslett rejected the three contexts in which whig historians and liberal political theorists had situated the thought of Locke and Filmer: the realm of perennial ideas,<sup>148</sup> political history informed by liberal ideology,<sup>149</sup> and a blind acceptance of Locke’s description of Filmer, informed by Whig political strategy (i.e. by the first Earl of Shaftesbury, Locke himself, Algernon Sidney, and James Tyrell) around the time of the Exclusion Campaign (1678–1681).<sup>150</sup> In their stead, Laslett interpreted Filmer and Locke as human agents in two rival and conflicting cultures. Both cultures had distinctive perspectives, or styles of thought, an explanatory concept Laslett imbibed from Mannheim. These perspectives were constituted by contingent situations, beliefs, values, institutions, and unconscious prejudices. Laslett confined the analysis of Filmer and Locke’s actions and the meaning of their thought strictly within these cultures and styles of thought. In light of his strong emphasis on sociological explanation, Laslett’s shift toward social history and demography in the 1960s, and the founding of the Cambridge Group for the Study of Population and Social Structure, does not seem at a remove from his career as an intellectual historian.

Filmer's culture was the patriarchal style of thought governing the gentry of Kent under Queen Elizabeth and the early Stuarts.<sup>151</sup> Thus, on the one hand, Filmer's *Patriarcha* reveals 'the strength and persistence in European culture of the patriarchal family form and the patriarchal attitude to political problems'.<sup>152</sup> *Patriarcha* unconsciously codifies this culture in detail and that renders patriarchalism 'a condition of all political thinking; a limitation on the ideas which might come into any thinker's head, as much as a source of social conceptions'.<sup>153</sup> On the other hand, Filmer intended *Patriarcha* to be read only by the gentry of Kent in the late 1630s or early 1640s. Though understood as extremely conservative by the Kentish gentlemen who read it, *Patriarcha*'s political intentions were in fact local in scope, directed only at the gentry of Kent and not at the Royalist cause in the Civil War. Filmer's intended actions during the Civil War complicate his conservatism further, for he made little effort to aid Charles I against Parliament. Even when his own son became the local Royalist leader, Filmer himself preferred neutrality. Laslett even suggested 'disloyalty to his own [Filmer's] cause'.<sup>154</sup> Filmer, then, contributed neither to the 'evils' of authoritarian and absolutist patriarchalism, as the modern whig moral judgment would have it, nor was he a muddle-headed and vulgar thinker, as the Whigs portrayed him in the Exclusion Crisis.

Locke, according to Laslett, belonged to a multitude of cultural contexts, which turn out to complicate both his political thought and personality. Locke inherited both an authoritarian patriarchalist tradition and a more recent 'radical' or 'liberal' tradition, represented by the likes of Hugo Grotius and Samuel Pufendorf. The growth of rationalism and 'bourgeois culture' shored up the latter tradition, which opposed patriarchalism.<sup>155</sup> Inheriting both traditions led Locke in 1669 to paradoxically identify both *Jus Paternum* (a patriarchalist principle) and *Consensus Populi* (a liberal principle) as the 'Two Fundamentals of Politics'. Laslett's interpretive move was, again, pointed at the unitary whig interpretation of Locke, for Locke's paradoxical position meant that he 'could have proceeded either in the authoritarian or in the liberal direction'.<sup>156</sup> Much like Elton's Cromwell, Laslett's Locke embodied the governing mental assumptions of two conflicting cultures, which obviates the possibility of a coherent agent and a coherent age.

Laslett even suggested, by examining Locke's private diary, that Locke *was* an authoritarian when 'in solitude', polemically gesturing that any postwar liberal theory that rests on Locke's political thought might harbor authoritarian elements as well. While Shaftesbury exploited the Popish

Plot to persuade Charles II to exclude his brother James from the throne, Locke, living by himself in France, wrote in 1678 that men's obligation to their fathers is a natural law. Yet, a mere year later, when Shaftesbury had called for Locke to come back to England to aid the Whigs in the Exclusion Crisis, Locke began writing *Two Treatises* on the same theme (political obligation), only this time it was 'written for his leader' and the 'public which both men wanted to persuade', and so Locke argued that political obligation is founded on that most liberal principle: consent. The 'new general situation' occasioned by the new culture in general, and the Exclusion Crisis in particular, along with Shaftesbury's personal influence, explains why Locke formulated the liberal principles of *Two Treatises*.<sup>157</sup> And, needless to add, another type of culture and social situation had enabled Locke to express a belief in patriarchy.<sup>158</sup> These explanations, according to Laslett, falsify liberal-whig interpretations of Locke, since they reveal a genuinely authoritarian side to Locke on the one hand, and show that Locke's principle of consent was embedded in a context of political opportunism and propaganda, on the other.

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Laslett's histories embody all three types of revisionist whiggism. Defeatist whiggism is evident in Laslett's histories of patriarchy. Patriarchy, according to Laslett, is a social structure that casts a long, repressed, shadow over modern Euro-American society. For Laslett, 'relevant' evidence of the patriarchal form of society—'anthropological, sociological and even psychological, as well as political and economic'—has conclusively demonstrated the persistence of patriarchy as an institution, personality structure, and political attitude in the modern world. Even the 'present era of self-conscious rationalism' is 'markedly patriarchal' in its 'family forms', 'emotional attitudes', and 'in its politics and economics'. The most pronounced example of patriarchy is the economic-legal set of rules that 'favours of the inheritance of a father's property by his eldest son', and so 'patriarchy has always been an essential, perhaps the essential, presupposition of capitalism'.<sup>159</sup>

Not only western capitalism, Filmer's patriarchal ideology, which legitimated the Stuart monarchy, provides a historical backdrop to the Nazi's mythological construction of the *Volk*:

'Filmer's patriarchal mystique of kingship could almost be said to have provided for the Stuart monarchs the sort of political mythology which the

doctrine of the “Volk” provided for the Nazi dictatorship of Germany. *Patriarcha* certainly exercised that sort of influence under James II and for the Jacobites.<sup>160</sup>

Laslett extended and specified this insight in *The World We Have Lost*, which suggests that Laslett’s migration from intellectual to social historiography was accompanied by his revisionist whiggism. In *The World We Have Lost*, patriarchalism is vividly depicted as a living political doctrine in the Vatican and the Soviet Union through their evocations of the father figure (the Pope and Stalin, respectively) as the source of political order.<sup>161</sup>

Connecting premodern political thinkers to twentieth century totalitarianism and authoritarianism was a widespread method in the postwar era for making historical sense of these new ideologies of the 1910s, the 1920s, and the 1930s. Beginning in the late 1930s, Euro-American political theorists of various persuasions sought, as a means to make sense of the radical political and social changes of the 1920s and the 1930s, to trace the roots of Communism, Fascism, and Nazism in traditions of thought reaching back to Plato, and including Joseph de Maistre, Hobbes, Luther, Hegel, and Machiavelli.<sup>162</sup> Indeed, this ‘contemporary history’<sup>163</sup> bears a resemblance to defeatist revisionist whiggism, and it structured a whole discourse on the historical origins of authoritarianism and totalitarianism, which culminated in Hannah Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951).

Laslett’s welfare state anachronisms, putting his pluralist whiggism on display, can be discerned in his discussion of the meaning of ‘property’ in Locke. Laslett attempted to establish that Locke did not narrowly define ‘property’ as ‘substantial possessions’ or ‘capital’. ‘Property’ in Locke means those multiple mental and physical capacities derived from natural law that all men own, so that even the poorest in society have enough property to justifiably demand of government to protect it. From this meaning of ‘property’, Laslett drew out the following implication: ‘If not complete communism, certainly *redistributive taxation*, perhaps *nationalization* could be justified on the principles we have discussed: all that would be necessary is the consent of the majority of the society, regularly and constitutionally expressed, and such a law would hold even if all the property-owners were in the minority [emphasis added].’<sup>164</sup> Needless to add, redistributive taxation and nationalization were the two key mechanisms of British postwar welfare state economy by which the forces of capitalism could be used to finance social services.

There are, finally, traces of the reedeming type of revisionist whiggism in Laslett’s histories. In *The World We Have Lost*, Laslett discussed the



‘trauma’ incurred by the uprooting transition from patriarchal to industrial society. Patriarchal society was full of misery, injustice, and exploitation, but at least people in that society were not alienated from their physical surroundings, other human beings, and themselves. People are alienated in industrial society, opined Laslett, but there is not much of a trade-off, for the industrial world is also full of misery, injustice, and exploitation.<sup>165</sup> There has, in other words, not been a corresponding gain for what we have lost in terms of human relationships and communal belonging.

### THE NINETEENTH CENTURY: THE IRONY OF THE VICTORIAN ORIGINS OF THE WELFARE STATE

British early postwar historians of the nineteenth century, their profoundly differing political and interpretive frameworks notwithstanding, agreed that postwar Britain had entered a new historical period: the welfare state. The coinage of this term is often attributed to William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury and avid social reformer in the idealist tradition, who in his wartime pamphlet *Christianity and Social Order* contrasted the German ‘warfare state’ with Britain’s ‘welfare state’.<sup>166</sup> Regardless of whether Temple coined the term or not—it is certainly true that the birth of the British welfare state was intimately tied to the British warfare state—it entered the cultural and political lexicon in the postwar era, concomitantly making its way into the historians’ vocabulary and research agendas.<sup>167</sup> For most revisionists, in particular the ones working on the Victorian period, the welfare state signified a revolutionary historical transformation. In contrast, for Marxist nineteenth century historians, such as Hobsbawm, seeing the welfare state as ‘revolutionary’ testified to the ideological and material limitations of bourgeois historiography since the welfare state was simply the capitalist method, inaugurated by Bismarck’s social legislation, of warding off the real proletarian revolution.

The revisionists, despite this Marxist critique, held on to their belief. As Calvin Woodard, an American who defended a Ph.D. in history at Cambridge on the origins of the welfare state,<sup>168</sup> explained: ‘Certainly, the widespread acceptance of the welfare state standard has brought about one of the greatest intellectual and moral upheavals in western history—one, indeed, analogous in import and ramifications to the Reformation of the sixteenth century.’ Woodard saw revolutionary transformations wrought by the welfare state in the very fabric of social and legal life, not least in the nature of spousal and labor relations, the supersession of moral

convictions in politics by value-free technical judgments, and the placing of human rights over moral duty in political attitudes.<sup>169</sup> The historian Maurice Bruce, in the book which Elton reviewed with approval, wrote that the 'Welfare State of the present day has grown out of the needs of the English people and out of the struggle for social justice'.<sup>170</sup>

There is an irony to these postwar revisionist representations of the welfare state. On the one hand, the welfare state was embraced as a distinctively national achievement, for the first time ensuring that all British citizens have a birthright to a minimum income, fundamental social services, and protection against sickness, unemployment, and old age. As Bruce argued: 'Political liberty and social justice, indeed, have grown together: what has been created has been essentially the achievement of a whole people.'<sup>171</sup> In that sense, the welfare state was the final culmination of a long history of national development, and that is, formally speaking, a whig interpretation, or a 'presentist' historiography. As Briggs observed: 'One strain in this historiography was a modern counterpart of the "Whig" historiography of nineteenth-century Britain with the concept of "welfare" substituted for the concept of representative government.' The welfare state, in this strain, was historically the true British state, and laissez-faire was explained away as a historical aberration, or a myth in the Sorelian sense, that is, an effective symbolic force geared toward political mobilization.<sup>172</sup>

On the other hand, the welfare state marked a revolutionary break in that whiggish development, since it overcame the dominance, aberrant or not, of laissez-faire capitalism, and geared the public toward collectivist or socialist values. This shift, according to the revisionists, began in earnest in the nineteenth century, and culminated in the 'revolutions' during World War II, such as the 'Beveridge revolution' and the 'Keynesian revolution'.<sup>173</sup> Even the war was perceived as a 'revolution which is digging deep into the very foundations of our society'.<sup>174</sup>

Both these interpretations are clearly advanced in the opening page of David Roberts' *Victorian Origins of the Welfare State* (1960). The 'welfare state was suddenly born around 1911 [the year of the National Insurance Act] and reached maturity after 1945 [emphasis added]' asserted Roberts. However, he hastened to add that the history of the welfare state is nonetheless over a century old, and it begins in 1832, the year of the Reform Act, the year when 'central government seriously assumes responsibility', making the century 'alive with social reforms and bureaucratic growth'.<sup>175</sup> For C.L. Mowat, similarly, 'the real break with the past, the real beginning

of the welfare state in its modern form, must surely be placed in 1908, in the enactment of the Old Age Pensions Act'.<sup>176</sup> It was this revolutionary history that the Victorian revisionists sought to unearth, and so we can interpret their histories through the pluralist type of whiggism adumbrated in the beginning of this chapter.

Significantly, in the shift from the laissez-faire state to the welfare state, the social and political thought of British absolute idealism, along with Fabianism, played a prominent role in the view of most revisionists. As Pelling explained: 'Political philosophy moved, *not unnaturally*, away from the individualism of the early John Stuart Mill into the more positive view of state powers which we associated with T.H. Green and the Idealists (the popularity of Herbert Spencer's "laissez-faire" ideas were largely in the United States) [emphasis added].'<sup>177</sup> Pelling was seconded by Briggs, who wrote that Green 'argued forcefully that the state ought to remove all obstacles to the development of "social capacity," such as those arising from lack of education, poor health, and bad housing'.<sup>178</sup>

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There are structural similarities between the Victorian histories and the histories examined so far which lend weight to the main argument of this study: that there is such a thing as revisionist historiography of modern English history, and that it is vested in the language of new idealism. For one thing, the Victorian historians labeled themselves as 'revisionists', always setting out to 'revise' or 'reappraise' the past. This self-label is on display in the title of the first chapter of Clark's *The Making of Victorian England* (1961), fittingly entitled 'The Task of Revision'.<sup>179</sup> The Victorian revisionists were clear on what they were revising as well: whig, or partisan, interpretations, predominantly of the liberal kind.<sup>180</sup> Clark, for instance, warned of giving the Victorian period 'an imaginary unity' and 'a greater coherence than in fact it possesses'.<sup>181</sup> On the very first page of Derek Fraser's *The Evolution of the British Welfare State*, the reader finds the following statement:

'The evolution of the Welfare State is not seen as an example of the Whig interpretation of history, the unfolding of some great scheme of progress as increasingly enlightened men approached ever onward and upward a future promised land.'<sup>182</sup>

Oliver MacDonagh, in a much-debated article on the 'administrative revolution' of the nineteenth century, attributed to the legal scholar

A.V. Dicey the responsibility for disseminating a false view of the nineteenth century. That error was understood against the backdrop of the historiographical *Ur* error, whiggism: ‘If he avoids a whig interpretation, if there are no human heroes or villains in his story but simply the unrecognized *Zeitgeist* of collectivism, he none the less (from the historian’s standpoint) falls into an equal error, that of intellectualizing the problem altogether.’<sup>183</sup> One critic of MacDonagh, Henry Pariss, disagreed with MacDonagh and portrayed Dicey as a whig:

‘Dr MacDonagh even believes that Dicey “avoids a whig interpretation.” In fact, Sir Ivor Jennings’ comment on *Law of the Constitution*, that “just as Macaulay saw the history of the eighteenth century through Whig spectacles, so Dicey saw the constitution of 1885 through Whig spectacles,” applies equally, mutatis mutandis, to *Law and Opinion*. Dicey’s career as a political partisan is of the greatest relevance to an understanding of his thought.’<sup>184</sup>

In particular, Pariss, like all revisionists, challenged Dicey’s interpretation of the years 1825–1870 as the age of ‘Benthamism’ or ‘Individualism’ or ‘liberalism’, utterly devoid of any impulses toward state intervention and social justice.<sup>185</sup>

To take a final example, in one of his early articles on factory politics, Patrick Joyce, whose Ph.D. thesis was supervised by the Cambridge revisionist John Vincent,<sup>186</sup> justified a novel historical approach by pointing out the dominance of whiggish historiographical liberalism, which he found even in revisionist interpretations:

Such a claim confronts that orthodoxy, still lively, that has the nineteenth century progressing inexorably to an individualistic democracy in which public opinion, separable from influence, achieves its free play in the later century, the “national” triumphing over the “local,” the deference community going to the wall. Indeed, such a “revisionist” as D. C. Moore, in noting the conceptual ambivalence of others, is himself not immune from rather similar tendencies in appearing content to assume the break-up of the deference community, the end of its political significance consequent on the 1867 Reform Act and the Ballot Act of 1872, and the development of an individualist, increasingly class-based democracy after these dates.<sup>187</sup>

Just as in the histories examined thus far, then, anti-whiggism was ubiquitous in Victorian historiography. This anti-whiggism is strictly correlated to the conceptual contours of Victorian revisionism, which in turn are fully in line with the revisionist philosophy of history examined in

the previous chapter. These contours are best spelled out in Clark's *The Making of Victorian England*, but are evident in other prominent works as well. As suggested above, some of the major divergences among the Victorian revisionists turned on the influence of Oakeshottian idealism. Jenifer Hart, as shown above, connected the 'Tory' interpretation of history (exemplified by Clark, MacDonagh, and Roberts) with the philosophy of Oakeshott. Her critique is worthy of a full-length quote:

According to its critics, a Whig interpretation requires human heroes and villains in the story. What do the Tories put in their place? In explaining progress in nineteenth-century England, *they belittle the role of men and ideas*, especially the role of the Benthamites; they consider that opinion, often moved by a Christian conscience, was generally humanitarian; that social evils were therefore attacked and dealt with when people felt them to be intolerable; that many changes were not premeditated or in some sense planned, but were the result of "the historical process" or of "blind forces." *The implication is that social progress will in the future, just as in the past, take place without human effort; all will turn out for the best if we just drift in an Oakeshottian boat* [emphasis added].<sup>188</sup>

This passage illustrates a number of salient issues regarding the competing views on the relationship between revisionist historiography and the new idealism. First, that the new idealism was easily associated with the ideologies of totalitarian regimes, and conflated with absolute idealism, relativism, determinism, or nihilism. The 'Oakeshottian boat' refers to a passage in Oakeshott's inaugural lecture at the London School of Economics, 'Political Education', wherein Oakeshott argued that politics has no foundation other than fluid historical traditions, and so can be likened to a boat endlessly traversing the waters.<sup>189</sup> In Hart's interpretation, the waters stood for 'blind forces' and the boat for passive human beings. Translated into the idiom of the philosophy of history, the Oakeshottian Tory historiography, according to Hart, denies 'human agency', the principle that 'decisions are ultimately made by people'.<sup>190</sup> Hart, interestingly, heeded Berlin's warning in *Historical Inevitability* that it is both hermeneutically and morally wrong to deny human agency in history, but did not register its proximity to the new idealism.<sup>191</sup> The Tory interpretation was dangerous, opined Hart, since the likes of MacDonagh and Clark were creating the 'latest orthodoxy', which must be challenged before it becomes 'part of the historian's gospel'.<sup>192</sup>

Second, the passage reveals that some of the critics of the new idealism, such as Plumb and Hart, shared one of the new idealism's main

presuppositions—namely, that the logic of history is ultimately governed by human agency and its vicissitudes. As Hart explained with reference to the Industrial Revolution: ‘The social effects of the Industrial Revolution were caused in the final analysis by men, by men’s inventiveness, by men’s decisions to build factories, by men’s desires to make profits.’<sup>193</sup>

Finally, the passage overtly points to the political stakes of the Tory interpretation of history in the context of the welfare state. The Tory interpretation is, according to Hart, decidedly against social and political planning, and it is this aversion to planning that is justified historically by denying that planning had anything to do with Victorian social reform:

[...] these views are dangerous because they lead imperceptibly to the notion that it is better not to plan: because so much was achieved unplanned, the process can and should be repeated. Unplanned changes are spoken of as “natural,” a praise word. Social progress, it is implied, will take place in the future as in the past without human effort as a result of “the historical process.” The role of men and of ideas (whether for good or for bad) is belittled.<sup>194</sup>

Oakeshott and new idealist philosophy of history featured in the works that Hart criticized either directly, as in the case of MacDonagh,<sup>195</sup> or indirectly as in the case of Clark. But the way these Tory revisionists—and they were political Tories—used new idealist concepts is far removed from Hart’s interpretation. These revisionists often did not directly refer to new idealist thought, as Elton, Laslett, and Hart did. Their histories are nevertheless clarified by new idealist philosophy of history, since new idealism is the only proximate tradition of thought that spelled out and championed the concepts underpinning these histories.

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Human agents, to begin with a salient point, for historians like MacDonagh and Clark at bottom made up the stuff of history. When Clark spoke of ‘factors’ or ‘forces’ in history—concepts widely used by British historians between the 1920s and the 1960s—he warned his readers that they should not read too much into these terms:

There is, however, a danger in talking too glibly about factors and forces as if they were inhuman elemental energies like earthquakes or whirlwinds tossing about a mass of indistinguishable human material without individual

feelings and personalities. This would, of course, be wrong. *Most of what happens in history is in some measure the result of the decisions of the human will, probably of a great number of human wills, directed to a greater or less extent by human intelligence.* Often, in fact, it is the result of the decisions of the human will intent on some immediate object of personal importance to the actor but forgotten by history. *Men act as individuals in history, they think as individuals and, what is more, they suffer as individuals.* [...] All statistics, all generalizations about classes, all tables of real wages, all index figures are, then, unsatisfactory general statements describing human beings about many of whom perhaps the most important fact is the extent to which they differ from the generality. But it is necessary to use them, in order to get some sort of plan of a community about which one is thinking [emphasis added].<sup>196</sup>

Moreover, even though the study of agency is to be based on evidence and social scientific generalizations, the Victorian revisionists stressed with resolve that their researches and narratives were inherently perspectival, imaginative, and open to other perspectives. MacDonagh therefore thought of his concept of the nineteenth century administrative revolution as ‘only’ a ‘model’.<sup>197</sup> Briggs, in ruminating on the very concept of periodization, proclaimed that each periodization is ‘arbitrary and unconvincing’. Thus, by calling the years 1784–1867 the ‘age of improvement’, Briggs did not intend to suture that period with one meaning at the exclusion of others. And so: ‘No single interpretation of these formative years may be regarded as definitive.’<sup>198</sup>

Clark emphasized the ‘imaginary’ nature of attempts to impose a unity and coherence to the Victorian age. Pondering on the ‘opening’ and ‘closing’ dates of this period, Clark found a number of equally valid possibilities, none of which is conducive to a unitary perspective, and so historians should not fall into the error of whiggism and reify ‘what is obviously an arbitrary date of convenience’.<sup>199</sup> In that sense, it is according to Clark ‘the historical imagination’ that builds up an interpretation of a whole period.<sup>200</sup>

Henry Pariss, the critic of MacDonagh, could agree with MacDonagh that one of Dicey’s main assumptions was to see a clear and ‘real’ division between eighteenth century ‘individualism’ and nineteenth century ‘collectivism’, while Pariss believed that ‘all division of the past into periods is artificial’, and that ‘it would be reasonable to say that these periods shade so insensibly into one another, that no precise turning-point can be fixed’.<sup>201</sup>

Because historical interpretation is necessarily perspectival and plural in its methodology, the Victorian revisionists were committed to another presupposition that is very close to the new idealism—namely, that a historical interpretation must analyze and portray as many perspectives from the past as possible from a sympathetic perspective. This aspect of Victorian revisionism emerges with clarity in Clark's *The Making of Victorian England*. For Clark, twentieth century historians have inherited a view of the Victorians constructed by a 'self-conscious, self-confident minority, who *seem to have made history and certainly have normally written it*, whose voices, unless we are careful, are the only ones we are likely to hear from the past [emphasis added]'. That minority was comprised of a liberal cultural and political elite. For example, it is the work of this minority that introduced the moral idea of 'respectability' and the teleological principle of progress in the interpretations of their age.

It is this influential minority that also propounded the view that the Victorian era, in particular the Industrial Revolution, increased the standard of living for all social classes, including the working class, and made for a 'more humane, more civilized and more equitable society'. This view would be the crucible in the famous 'standard of living' debate between early postwar historians, where the conventional wisdom states that Fabians and Marxists argued that the Industrial Revolution worsened the standard of living for the working class, while liberals and conservatives argued that it increased it.<sup>202</sup> According to Clark,

'it would be unfortunate to fall into the mistake which was constantly made by both liberals and Marxists and to believe that this conflict was always in any simple sense between what was new, progressive and enlightened and unselfish on the one hand and what was old, stupid and obscurantist and greedy on the other.'

In another passage that bears quoting in full, Clark argued:

What was happening in England was a very complex process in which there were a great many agents involved. There were the forces of the political revolution and the propagators of the march of mind, there were the humanitarians, the romantic writers and the apostles of the religious revival and there were those who affected the result by simply holding on to what they possessed. The relations of these agents are complicated, not always easy to predict and by no means settled and uniform. Nor is it easy to say at any given moment whose ideas are going to prevail, nor whose ideas



ought to prevail if human happiness is to be furthered. But there is one point to remember. What is at issue is not the unrolling of a simple political narrative, or the logical account of successive changes in the machinery of government; it is the development of a whole community and therefore the economic growth and cultural development of large classes of men, often obscure men, are likely to be more important for it than the behaviour of individuals, even of distinguished individuals.<sup>203</sup>

This passage is significant not only because it highlights a commitment to agency, perspectivism, and pluralism, but also since it effectively calls for a ‘history from below’, several years before Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class*, whose title might not be accidentally related to Clark’s *The Making of Victorian England*. Indeed, if we juxtapose two programmatic passages from the two books, we will witness an uncanny similarity. Clark: ‘the most important task of historical revision is to rescue real men and women who have been shrunk by historians into the bloodless units of generalizations, or have become the ugly depersonalized caricatures of partisan legend or modern prejudice.’<sup>204</sup> Thompson: ‘I am seeking to rescue the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the “obsolete” hand-loom weaver, the “utopian” artisan, and even the deluded follower of Joanna Southcott, from the enormous condescension of posterity.’<sup>205</sup>

Moreover, the passages from Clark’s book signal a thorough rejection of the whig belief in consensual national development, and acknowledge that revolutionary agents were as important in the making of Victorian England as any others. Clark’s new idealist revisionism, in other words, opened up for an entirely new outlook on the nineteenth century, one that unabashedly pointed to the irrelevance of nineteenth century developments as conceived by the liberal-whig historians.

Thus, the task of revision was to construct a new framework for the study of the nineteenth century. One important aspect of this new framework was to see the Victorians from the viewpoint of the ‘not very intelligent, not very erudite, human being, the scene changes, the intellectual issues raised—the problems propounded by biblical criticism or the question of the whereabouts of authority in religion or even the challenge of evolution—fade into the background and other equally important take their place’. From

this angle perhaps the most interesting problems presented by the history of the Roman Catholic community in England in the middle of the nineteenth century are not those which start with the reception of John Henry Newman and develop through his relations with his fellow-convert Henry

Manning, but those caused by the arrival in England of half a million destitute Irishmen. Or when considering another large section of the populace it is necessary to think of the years which followed 1859 not as years of an acute crisis of the mind but rather as the years of the great religious revivals among people who were probably little troubled by Darwinism and had certainly never read *Essays and Reviews*.<sup>206</sup>

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Another salient aspect of the new framework was the decentering of politics and the heightened emphasis on social relations, calling for the application of ‘social analysis’, which would bring to light ‘how superficial and unreal is the historical work which explains the course of events entirely in the terms of the day-to-day events which are thrown up in the ordinary commerce of politics’.<sup>207</sup> This decentering strategy was fully shared by MacDonagh who made it clear that to understand the history of Victorian administration, one needed to factor in ‘the underlying social and economic pressures’.<sup>208</sup>

We see here the same expansion from political into social and intellectual historiography as we saw in the works of Elton, Plumb, and Laslett. In Victorian revisionist historiography, this transition is more marked than in the revisionist historiography of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Victorian era had, with the advent of the Industrial Revolution and its vicissitudes, undergone such a massive social transformation in comparison to the seventeenth century, partly based on and partly warranting new modes of thought and action of which the liberal elites were little aware. Clark thus argued that the nineteenth century has been falsely regarded as a ‘liberal age’, for even the liberals were divided. The faction which favored state intervention the most—the ‘liberal realists’ led by Walter Bagehot, James Fitzjames Stephen, Anthony Trollope, Matthew Arnold, and other writers of the *Saturday Review*—while accepting the necessity for a democratic government, and thorough administrative, fiscal, and legal reform favoring some form of state intervention, stopped short of radically extending the franchise. That extension, in their view, would mean the submergence of the intelligent and educated few under the unintelligent and uneducated masses, which in turn would mean the destruction of that which underpinned British politics and society: the culture of respectability and self-improvement, underlying even Arnold’s *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), according to Clark.

The concept of politics from which these liberals derived limited conceptions of reforming the political and social landscape rendered them unsympathetic to the emergence of new classes, above all the working class, struggling for social recognition and political power.<sup>209</sup> Bagehot's conception of politics as gentlemanly discussion, according to Clark, failed to register the 'force and significance of opinions' and exhibited a 'neglect [of] what are going to be the springs of power'.<sup>210</sup> It refused to own up to the fact that what they had to deal with was 'not of their making', but rather broader 'social, economic, spiritual' developments, and 'popular audiences'.<sup>211</sup> In this context, Clark lauded the histories of the Webbs and the Hammonds, who paid attention to such contexts and audiences in the sphere of culture and society. Thus Clark wrote: 'No one interested in nineteenth-century studies should refuse to be grateful to them [the Webbs and the Hammonds]',<sup>212</sup> for they were able to break the historiographical spell cast by the Victorian liberals and their historiographical allies.

Pelling proposed an analysis similar to that of Clark. For Pelling, the governing liberal elites of the nineteenth century used 'respectability' as a cultural strategy to keep 'disreputable' people, such as manual laborers, out of politics. Moreover, because the working classes were deemed disreputable by these elites, the fact that 'there existed significant numbers of people living in destitution, and in conditions of housing which were far below the minimum required to maintain healthy activity' could be attributed to flawed character, and therefore unworthy of governmental perception, let alone intervention.<sup>213</sup>

The Victorian liberals, according to the revisionists, were upon closer scrutiny a highly conservative force, safeguarding the liberties cum privileges the Whigs had won during the seventeenth century. It was these dominant interpretations of the nineteenth century that the revisionists sought to demolish, a pursuit which Elton applauded in his bibliography: 'Historical research usually demolishes legends, and for the nineteenth century the legends are mainly liberal.'<sup>214</sup>

If the liberals were not on the side of radical change, then who was, and for what purpose? In answering the latter part of this question, the revisionists betrayed their own whiggism, for, on their reading, what the forward-looking agents of this age looked to achieve was the welfare of the people. Thus Pelling: 'there were many who felt that individual action was not enough, and that the boundaries of state activity ought to be enlarged to ensure the welfare of the people.'<sup>215</sup> In this shift in governmentality, administration proved a decisive area. As Bruce remarked:

'it is effective administration, with the underlying support of the courts, that converts good intentions into actions. In one respect, therefore, the evolution of the Welfare State is the evolution of social administration, from the amateur J.P. the overseer of the poor, through Queen Victoria's "red-tapist, narrow-minded" bureaucrat, to the trained official of today.'<sup>216</sup>

In placing strong emphasis on the history of administration, the revisionists were forced to relate to two influential perspectives on the same topic: the French historian Eli Halévy's histories of the Victorians, such as *The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism* (1928), and those of Sidney and Beatrice Webb, the progenitors of Fabianism. The Webbs, Clark pointed out, despite their unquestionable merits, placed too much emphasis on the role of Jeremy Bentham's philosophy in the making of the modern administrator: 'the great Fabian historians probably found Bentham congenial, since he was in so many ways their ancestor.'<sup>217</sup>

The revisionists rejected Benthamism for political reasons: the Benthamites either stood for the individualist philosophy of laissez-faire; or in Clark's words, referring to MacDonagh, the Benthamites had 'very great importance' in philosophical culture, but 'applied Benthamism', that is, Benthamism in legal and administrative reform, was not as extensive as Halévy and the Webbs would have it.<sup>218</sup> This also comes to show the extent to which the Fabians exerted influence on postwar historiography; indeed, their ideas are traceable even in the opposing side to this debate, that is, those liberal historians who nonetheless argued that Benthamism played a decisive positive role in the development of state intervention.<sup>219</sup>

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The Victorian revisionists shared the belief that the Victorian period ought to be interpreted in the framework of (Fabian) collectivism and socialism. Socialism or collectivism was seen as the emerging national condition, including its social and political thought. As MacDonagh put it: "We are all socialists now" meant, not of course that the majority or even any significant proportion of the traditionally ruling classes favored collectivism in any form, but that they were, at last, confronted with the brute facts that collectivism was already partially in being and that their society was doomed to move ever further in that direction.'<sup>220</sup> Pelling issued a similar interpretation. Registering the many meanings of 'socialism', including a minority of 'Marxists' in the Social Democratic Federation, Pelling found socialism to be an expression that cuts across social and

ideological divides, since it articulated the shared grievances of those who ‘were no longer happy either about the progress of industrial development or about the merits of the society that it was creating’.<sup>221</sup>

From that shared assessment, collectivism split into many directions in the revisionist histories. But though acknowledging the importance of, and differences between and within Marxists, trade unionists, non-conformists,<sup>222</sup> social investigators such as Charles Booth and Seebohm Rowntree,<sup>223</sup> and Tory socialists such as Richard Oastler and H.H. Champion,<sup>224</sup> the revisionists’ favored agents remained the burgeoning group of professional administrators and civil servants constituting the sinews of the centralized state. The massive socio-economic shift that had occurred during the nineteenth century, summarized by the shorthand term Industrial Revolution could, left to its own devices—that is to the industrialists, entrepreneurs, and philanthropists—not bring welfare to the entire English population. As such, in Clark’s words, perhaps the most acerbic revisionist in this area, the Industrial Revolution was not ‘a benevolent movement designed by far-sighted philanthropists for the good of humanity. [...] It was in fact morally neutral. It was not directed with any certainty to any particular end. It might bring good and might bring evil’.

The reason why it ultimately brought a lot of good through the welfare state is because it was ‘brought under conscious discipline’. It was far-sighted ‘experts’, or ‘statesmen in disguise’,<sup>225</sup> vested with ‘public authority’, who achieved that discipline. These experts did not draw on a philosophy as a blueprint for everything they did, but rather amassed ‘growing experience’ through departmental work which afforded them opportunities to hone in on the necessities involved in directing private and public enterprises for the common good. ‘It was’, as Clark wrote, ‘a lesson pregnant with importance for the future’,<sup>226</sup> for ‘the rule of experts and officials was beginning to take shape’.<sup>227</sup>

Clark reinterpreted Edwin Chadwick and John Simon, considered to be Benthamites, as experts of this ‘experiential’ kind. These experts drew on experience, but that experience, in turn, was imbued with an ‘inside’ of consciously held thoughts, intentions, problems, and values, without which the culture of expertise cannot be understood. This approach closely resembles Collingwood’s philosophy of history, which we have seen reverberate throughout this chapter, leading to original reinterpretations of the English past.

The experiences Clark had in mind included grappling with problems regarding housing, health, and sanitation, which arose in tandem with

urbanization, the construction of drainage systems, the need for local transport once large segments of the population had been severed from their families through urban migration, and the unequal distribution of wealth. In Clarks's interpretation: 'without conscious direction privately directed industrial development was not likely to do any of these things', since industrialists were held in sway by a 'profound reverence for the rights of private property', a 'dislike of paying rates and taxes which is common to humanity', and a distaste for 'centralization'.<sup>228</sup>

This interpretation of the Industrial Revolution owes much to the histories of the Webbs and the Hammonds.<sup>229</sup> MacDonagh, tellingly, explicitly labeled the culmination of the nineteenth century administrative revolution as a 'more or less conscious Fabianism'.<sup>230</sup> But it was a historiographical conservative Fabianism coupled to a new idealist conceptual arsenal.

## NOTES

1. Peter Mandler, 'The Consciousness of Modernity?: Liberalism and the English "National Character," 1870–1940', in *Meanings of Modernity: Britain from the Late Victorian Era to World War II*, ed. Martin Daunton and Bernhard Rieger (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2001), 119–145, 126–127.
2. Michael Oakshott, 'The Activity of Being an Historian', in *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (New York: Basic Books Publishing Co., Inc., 1962), 137–168, 162.
3. G.R. Elton, *Modern Historians on British History, 1485–1945: A Critical Bibliography, 1945–1969* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1970), 51.
4. An argument recently advanced by Steve Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2009). For an overview of the debates, see R.C. Richardson, *The Debate on the English Revolution* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).
5. Hugh Trevor-Roper, 'Frances Yates: Historian', *The Listener*, January 18, 1973, 87–88, 87.
6. This consensus terrified some British intellectuals on the right, such as Stephen Spender, 'British Intellectuals in the Welfare State', *Commentary*, 12 (1951), 425–430. Spender was a poet, and co-founder of *Encounter*, the magazine funded by the Central Intelligence Agency in the Cultural Cold War.
7. Asa Briggs, *The Age of Improvement* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1959), 5.
8. Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain, 1850–1930* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

9. E.g. A.L. Rowse, *The English Spirit: Essays in History and Literature* (Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1944); Herbert Butterfield, *The Englishman and His History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1944).
10. G.R. Elton, *The English* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992); George Kitson Clark, *The English Inheritance: An Historical Essay* (London: SCM Press, 1950); David Knowles, *The Historian and Character: And Other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963).
11. Peter Laslett, 'On Being an Englishman in 1950', *The Cambridge Journal*, 3 (1950), 486–497.
12. Herbert Butterfield, *George III and the Historians* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1959), 296.
13. Some of Christopher Hill's Marxist revisions arguably embody this meaning: Denis Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain: History, the New Left, and the Origins of Cultural Studies* (Durham, N.C.: and London: Duke University Press, 1997), 32–42.
14. The socialist-humanist revisionist works of E.P. Thompson are a good example of this meaning: Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism*, 211.
15. An example of this meaning in use are the 'anti-histories' of the 1960s and the 1970s, such as C.P. Snow's declinist revisionism claiming that British economic decline was due to the invasive influence of a conservative literary culture that has effectively stood in the way of social and economic progress. For accounts of anti-histories in Britain, see David Edgerton, *Warfare State: Britain, 1920–1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Jim Tomlinson, *The Politics of Decline: Understanding Post-war Britain* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2014). For Snow and the 'two cultures debate', see Guy Ortolano, *The Two Cultures Controversy: Science, Literature, and Cultural Politics in Postwar Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
16. J.A. Raftis, 'British Historiography Decentralizes', *Journal of British Studies*, 9 (1969), 143–151.
17. Trevor-Roper, 'Frances Yates', 87.
18. *The Economic History Review* soon caught on and introduced the article series 'Revisions in Economic History'. For an example see, Eli Hecksher, 'Revisions in Economic History: V: Mercantilism', *The Economic History Review*, 7 (1936), 44–54.
19. Geoffrey Callender, 'Historical Revisions: I.—Magna Charta', *History*, 2 (1917), 170–177.
20. Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), 11.
21. Trevor-Roper possibly had in mind a more contemporary example as well—namely Hilaire Belloc, in particular his *The Servile State* (London: T.N. Foulis, 1912), reprinted in the 1920s and the 1940s.

22. Hugh Trevor-Roper, 'Historical Revision No. CVIII: Archbishop Laud', *History*, 30 (1945), 181–190, 182–183; Hugh Trevor-Roper, *Archbishop Laud, 1573–1645* (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1940).
23. Cf. Adam Sisman, *Hugh Trevor-Roper: The Biography* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2010), 52–53.
24. Trevor-Roper, 'Historical Revision', 185.
25. E.J. Hobsbawm, 'The Fabians Reconsidered', in *Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964), 250–272, 264.
26. See e.g. George Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (New York: H. Smith & R. Hass, 1935); Sidney Webb and Beatrice Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism* (New York: Longmans Green, 1920). Thanks to Michael Saler for pointing out the similarity between these prewar works and postwar revisionism.
27. F.A. Hayek, 'History and Politics', in *Capitalism and the Historians*, ed. F.A. Hayek (Chicago, Ill.: The University of Chicago Press, 1954), 3–33, 9, 11.
28. For an argument, with a somewhat similar methodological ambition as mine, connecting conservative French thought during the Revolution and Restoration to modern historicism, see Carolina Armenteros, *The French Idea of History: Joseph de Maistre and His Heirs, 1794–1854* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2011).
29. This is why P.B.M. Blaas' work cannot be extended beyond 1945: P.B.M. Blaas, *Continuity and Anachronism: Parliamentary and Constitutional Development in Whig Historiography and in the Anti-Whig Reaction between 1890 and 1930* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers 1978). And yet, Michael Bentley seems to do just that: Michael Bentley, *Modernizing England's Past: English Historiography in the Age of Modernism, 1870–1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
30. See e.g. *Hugh Trevor-Roper: The Wartime Journals*, ed. Richard Davenport-Hines (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012).
31. This is pointed out by Noel Annan, *Our Age: The Generation That Made Post-war Britain* (London, 1991), 9, 17; and from a different angle, Maurice Cowling, *Religion and Public Doctrine in England: Volume I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 394–395.
32. G.R. Elton, *The Future of the Past: An Inaugural Lecture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 20–21.
33. W.N. Medlicott, 'Introductory Note', in Asa Briggs, *The Age of Improvement* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1959), v.
34. Christopher Brooke and Denis Mack Smith, 'General Editors' Preface', in Henry Pelling, *Modern Britain: 1885–1955* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1960), v.



35. M.D. Knowles, 'Academic History', *History*, 47 (1962), 223–232, 225.
36. Geoffrey Barraclough, *History in a Changing World* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957), 1, vii.
37. J.H. Plumb, 'Introduction', in *Crisis in the Humanities*, ed. J.H. Plumb (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1964), 7–11.
38. Ian Hall, *Dilemmas of Decline: British Intellectuals and World Politics, 1945–1975* (Berkeley, Calif. University of California Press, 2012), 29–48, 83–107.
39. See e.g. *Household and Family in Past Time: Comparative Studies in the Size and Structure of the Domestic Group Over the Last Three Centuries in England, France, Serbia, Japan and Colonial North America, With Further Materials from Western Europe*, ed. and intro. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972).
40. Knowles, 'Academic', 225.
41. George Kitson Clark, 'A Hundred Years of Teaching History at Cambridge, 1873–1973', *The Historical Journal*, 16 (1973), 535–553, 546.
42. Briggs, *The Age*, 95, 99.
43. Clark, *The English*, 139–170.
44. Clark, 'A Hundred Years', 551.
45. J.H. Plumb, 'The Sense of Crisis', in *The Making of an Historian: The Collected Essays of J.H. Plumb: Volume I* (Athens, Ga.: The University of Georgia Press, 1989), 164–180, 164–166.
46. This episode is subtly analyzed in Jonathan Haslam, *The Vices of Integrity: E.H. Carr, 1892–1982* (London and New York: Verso, 1999), 209–210.
47. Plumb, 'The Sense', 164.
48. J.W. Burrow, 'The Myth of 1688: Culmination and Decline', [unpublished essay, available at <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/webteam/gateway/file.php?name=the-myth-of-1688—culmination-and-decline.pdf&site=68>, accessed February 14, 2014], 1–2. The essay seems to have been written in or close to 1988, as it speaks of the tercentenary of 1688.
49. John Burrow, *Memories Migrating: An Autobiography* (Copyright The Estate of John Burrow, electronic copy in author's possession), 125, 127–128, 132, 135.
50. Burrow, *Memories*, 137–138.
51. 'Introduction', *Past & Present*, 1 (1952), i–iv, i, iii, iv.
52. G.A. Wells, 'The Critics of Buckle', *Past & Present*, 4 (1956), 75–89, 88.
53. Philip Abrams, 'History, Sociology, Historical Sociology', *Past & Present*, 28 (1980), 3–16, 8.
54. Jenifer Hart, 'Nineteenth-Century Social Reform: A Tory Interpretation of History', *Past & Present*, 15 (1965), 39–61, 39.

55. Quentin Skinner, 'The Principles and Practice of Opposition: The Case of Bolingbroke versus Walpole', in *Historical Perspectives: Studies in English Thought and Society, in Honour of J.H. Plumb*, ed. Neil McKendrick (London: Europa, 1974), 93–129, 94 n3.
56. Miles Taylor, 'The Beginnings of Modern British Social History?', *History Workshop Journal*, 43 (1997), 155–176, 158.
57. Taylor, 'The Beginnings', 166.
58. Taylor, 'The Beginnings', 162.
59. Which Linda Colley has perceptively noted in her *Lewis Namier* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989), 24.
60. Eric Hobsbawm, 'The Machine Breakers', *Past & Present*, 1 (1952), 57–70, 57.
61. E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1963), 12.
62. Haslam, *The Vices*, 193–194. For an example, see e.g. E.H. Carr, *Socialism in One Country: 1924–1926: Volume One* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1958).
63. On the popular use of history in England in general, see Billie Melman, *The Culture of History: English Uses of the Past, 1800–1953* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
64. *Tudorism: Historical Imagination and the Appropriation of the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Tatiana C. String and Marcus Bull (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Melman, *The Culture*, 185–214.
65. Eric H. Ash, *Power, Knowledge, and Expertise in Elizabethan England* (Baltimore, Md.: The John Hopkins University Press, 2004), draws on Elton's works to argue that the centralization of government and administration under Henry VIII grew exponentially, was cemented in the Privy Council, which then proceeded to delegate authority to what Ash calls 'expert mediators', thus enabling central government to reach the most remote parts of Elizabethan England.
66. Christopher Coleman, 'Introduction: Professor Elton's Revolution', in *Revolution Reassessed: Revisions in the History of Tudor Government and Administration*, ed. Christopher Coleman and David Starkey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 1–13, 1. See Elton's reply: 'Revisionism Reassessed', *Encounter*, July 1986, 37–41.
67. Penry Williams, 'A Revolution in History?: Dr. Elton's Interpretation of the Age', *Past & Present*, 11 (1963), 3–8, 7; *Tudor Rule and Revolution: Essays for G.R. Elton from his American Friends*, ed. Delloyd J. Guth and John W. McKenna (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).
68. Elton, *Modern Historians*, 26.
69. G.R. Elton, 'The Tudor Revolution: A Reply', *Past & Present*, 14 (1964), 26–49, 26.

70. G.L. Harriss and Penry Williams, 'A Revolution in Tudor History?', *Past & Present*, 13 (1965), 87–96; Elton, 'The Tudor', 49; G.R. Elton, 'A Revolution in Tudor History?', *Past & Present*, 15 (1965), 103–109.
71. Elton, 'The Tudor', 26, 42.
72. G.R. Elton, *The Tudor Revolution in Government: Administrative Changes in the Reign of Henry VIII* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 1.
73. Williams, 'A Revolution', 53.
74. David Knowles, 'The Eltonian Revolution in Early Tudor History', *The Historical Journal*, 17 (1974), 867–872, 868.
75. Christina Patterson, 'King of the Subject: David Starkey Returns to his Past Subject, Henry VIII', *The Independent*, April 9, 2009, [available at <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/interviews/king-of-the-castle-david-starkey-returns-to-his-pet-subject-henry-viii-1660597.html>, accessed March 10, 2014].
76. David Starkey, 'Conclusion: After the "Revolution,"' in *Revolution Reassessed: Revisions in the History of Tudor Government and Administration*, ed. Christopher Coleman and David Starkey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 199–209, 200–201.
77. Elton, *Modern Historians*, 26.
78. Herbert Butterfield, *The Origins of Modern Science 1300–1800: Revised Edition* (New York: The Free Press, 1965).
79. Elton, *The Tudor*, 425–426.
80. Elton, *The Future*, 24–26, 5.
81. Elton, *Modern Historians*, 96.
82. R. Liddesdale Palmer, *English Social History in the Making: The Tudor Revolution* (London: Ivor Nicholson & Watson Ltd., 1934).
83. Eileen Power, 'Introduction', in R. Liddesdale Palmer, *English Social History in the Making: The Tudor Revolution* (London: Ivor Nicholson & Watson Ltd., 1934), xi–3.
84. For histories of English historiography of political thought, see the essays in *Palgrave Advances in Intellectual History*, ed. Richard Whatmore and Brian Young (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2006), and *The History of Political Thought in National Context*, ed. Dario Castiglione and Iain Hampsher-Monk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). See also Richard Tuck, 'History of Political Thought', in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing: Second Edition*, ed. Peter Burke (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), 218–233; and Mark Goldie, 'J.N. Figgis and the History of Political Thought', in *Cambridge Minds*, ed. R. Mason (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 177–193.
85. Elton, *Modern Historians*, 176.
86. Elton co-edited the *Cambridge Studies in the History and Theory of Politics* book series, which since 1970 has published titles such as Shlomo

- Avineri's *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* (1970), Donald Winch's *Adam Smith's Politics: An Essay in Historiography Revision* (1978), and Paul Connerton's *The Tragedy of the Enlightenment: An Essay on the Frankfurt School* (1980).
87. G.R. Elton, *England under the Tudors* (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1974), 431–432.
  88. Elton, *England*, 161.
  89. Elton, *Modern Historians*, 137.
  90. Elton, *The Tudor*, 424–425.
  91. H.G. Corner, 'The Aims of the Institute of Public Administration', *The Journal of Public Administration*, 1 (1923), 49–55.
  92. Elton, *Modern Historians*, 123 n767, n770.
  93. Scott quoted in Raymond Nottage and Freida Stack, 'The Royal Institute of Public Administration: 1922–1939', *Public Administration*, 50 (1973), 281–304, 284.
  94. Raymond Nottage, 'The Royal Institute of Public Administration: 1939–1972', *Public Administration*, 50 (1973), 419–446.
  95. K.C. Wheare, 'The Machinery of Government', *Public Administration*, 22 (1945), 75–85, 77–78.
  96. Nottage and Stack, 'The Royal', 294, 299–300.
  97. Elton, *The Tudor*, 2.
  98. Walter Elliot, 'Where Will Civil Service Expansion End?', *Public Administration*, 25 (1948), 250–252, 250.
  99. Wheare, 'The Machinery', 76.
  100. L.A.C. Herbert, 'The Expert in the Civil Service', *Public Administration*, 21 (1944), 23–30, 24.
  101. Paul Addison, *No Turning Back: The Peacetime Revolutions of Post-war Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 133–168; J.A. Thompson, 'The Historians and the Decline of the Liberal Party', *Albion*, 22 (1990), 65–83, 68.
  102. Elton, *Modern Historians*, 27.
  103. Elton, *The Tudor*, 4.
  104. Elton, *The Tudor*, 415.
  105. Elton, *The Tudor*, 417.
  106. Elton, *The Tudor*, 5.
  107. Elton, *The Tudor*, 416.
  108. Knowles, 'The Eltonian', 871. See also G.R. Elton, 'Henry VII: A Restatement', *The Historical Journal*, 4 (1961), 1–29, 26–27.
  109. Joseph M. Herson Jr., 'The Last Whig Historian and Consensus History: George Macaulay Trevelyan, 1876–1962', *The American Historical Review*, 81 (1976), 66–97.
  110. David Cannadine, 'Historians in "the Liberal Hour": Lawrence Stone and J.H. Plumb Re-visited', *Historical Research*, 75 (2002), 316–354, 326.

111. J.H. Plumb, 'The Historian's Dilemma', in *Crisis in the Humanities*, ed. J.H. Plumb (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1964), 24–45, 28–29, 34.
112. J.H. Plumb, 'Churchill', in *The Making of an Historian: The Collected Essays of J.H. Plumb: Volume I* (Athens, Ga.: The University of Georgia Press, 1988), 225–253, 228.
113. Lewis Namier, 'Human Nature in Politics', in *Personalities and Powers* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955), 1–8.
114. J.H. Plumb, 'Namier Rejected', in *The Making of an Historian: The Collected Essays of J.H. Plumb: Volume I* (Athens, Ga.: The University of Georgia Press, 1989), 97–113.
115. J.H. Plumb, *The Growth of Political Stability in England: 1675–1725* (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1967), xiv.
116. In Oakeshott's *Cambridge Journal*, D.C. Watt strongly criticized Namier's diplomatic histories of the twentieth century as exemplifying precisely the type of history Namier sought to combat ('substituting new myths for old'): history as political propaganda, serving a particular nation-state's interests. See D.C. Watt, 'Sir Lewis Namier and Contemporary European History', *The Cambridge Journal*, 7 (1954), 579–601, 581.
117. For a good analysis juxtaposing Trevelyan and Churchill in the same political and historiographical context, see Victor Feske, *From Belloc to Churchill: Private Scholars, Public Culture, and the Crisis of Liberalism 1900–1939* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: North Carolina University Press, 1996).
118. Plumb, 'Churchill', 227.
119. J.H. Plumb, 'Lord Macaulay', in *The Making of an Historian: The Collected Essays of J.H. Plumb: Volume I* (Athens, Ga.: The University of Georgia Press, 1988), 253–275, 271–272.
120. Plumb, 'Churchill', 228.
121. Plumb, 'Churchill', 230.
122. Plumb, 'Lord Macaulay', 273.
123. Plumb, *The Growth*, xiv.
124. Plumb, *The Growth*, xvii.
125. Quentin Skinner, 'History and Ideology in the English Revolution', *The Historical Journal*, 8 (1965), 151–178. See also Skinner, 'The Principles'.
126. John Sanderson, 'Conrad Russell's Ideas', *History of Political Thought*, 14 (1993), 85–102, 85–88; Paul Christianson, 'The Causes of the English Revolution: A Reappraisal', *Journal of British Studies*, 15 (1972), 40–75; *The Origins of the English Civil War*, ed. Conrad Russell (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1973).
127. Annan, *Our Age*, 17–18.

128. Plumb, *The Growth*, 11–12.
129. Plumb, *The Growth*, 19, 2.
130. Plumb, *The Growth*, 22, 28, 54.
131. Plumb, *The Growth*, 64.
132. Plumb, *The Growth*, 71.
133. Butterfield, *George III*, 297–298.
134. Plumb, *The Growth*, 27.
135. Elton, *Modern Historians*, 177, 180.
136. Peter Laslett, ‘Introduction’, in Robert Filmer, *Patriarcha and Other Political Works*, ed. and intro. Peter Laslett (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1949), 1–49, 46.
137. Peter Laslett, ‘A Tribute from Britain: Le Roy Ladurie and the Career of Historical Sociology’, in *L’histoire grande ouverte: Hommages à Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie*, ed. André Burguière, Joseph Goy, and Marie-Jeanne Tits-Dicuaide (Paris: Fayard, 1997), 508–516, 512.
138. Ernest Barker, ‘Report of Professor Barker on Mr. Laslett’s Dissertation’, in *Laslett\_1940\_Fellowship\_Reports*: Archives D93 file 79, St John’s Colleges Archives, Cambridge, 2.
139. Both Oakeshott and Mannheim emphasized the necessary empirical basis of historical and sociological study. Where Laslett differed from them is in actually collecting and using all the primary sources he could find, while Oakeshott and Mannheim drew nearly exclusively on published texts.
140. For instance, Laslett edited the manuscript of *Patriarcha* discovered in East Sutton in the 1940s: Peter Laslett, ‘Sir Robert Filmer, Life, Times and Literary Activity: Nature of the Work undertaken and its Results’, *Laslett\_1948\_Fellowship\_Dissertation\_Summary*: Archives D93 file 80, St John’s Colleges Archives, Cambridge, 1. Later, he used the discovered parts of Locke’s private library along with diaries, manuscripts, and correspondence made available through the Lovelace Collection at the Bodleian Library: J. Harrison and P. Laslett, *The Library of John Locke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971); Peter Laslett, ‘The English Revolution and Locke’s “Two Treatises of Government,”’ *Cambridge Historical Journal*, 12 (1956), 40–55, 42.
141. Barker, ‘Report’, 2.
142. Peter Laslett, ‘Dissertation upon Sir Robert Filmer: Summary and Conclusions’, *Laslett\_1940\_Fellowship\_Dissertation*: Archives D93 file 63, St John’s Colleges Archives, Cambridge, 1; Laslett, ‘Sir Robert’, 523.
143. Michael Oakeshott, ‘Report on Evidence Submitted by Mr. P. Laslett’, in *Laslett\_1948\_Fellowship\_Reports-1*: Archives D93 file 79, St John’s Colleges Archives, Cambridge.
144. Michael Oakeshott, ‘Review of *Two Treatises of Government*’, *The Historical Journal*, 5 (1962), 97–100, 99, 100.

145. Laslett, 'Sir Robert', 3.
146. Laslett, 'The English', 43.
147. Philip Abrams, 'The Locke Myth', *Past & Present*, 8 (1959), 87–90.
148. See e.g. Peter Laslett, 'Introduction', in John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government: A Critical Edition with an Introduction and Apparatus Criticus by Peter Laslett* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 3–137, 70.
149. See for instance, Laslett, 'Introduction' (*Two Treatises*), 40. Discussing, in 1956, 'recent' scholars of the second book of the *Two Treatises*, Laslett has this to say: 'Their general position seems to be that to press for too definite an occasion the writing of the book is to detract from its *perennial* value as political philosophy. It would seem that if it cannot be shown to have been occasioned by the English revolution, *it must not be allowed to have an occasion at all* [emphasis added].' See Laslett, 'The English Revolution', 44.
150. Laslett, 'Introduction' (*Patriarcha*), 40.
151. Peter Laslett, 'The Gentry of Kent in 1640', *Cambridge Historical Journal*, 9 (1948), 148–164; Peter Laslett, 'Sir Robert Filmer: The Man Versus the Whig Myth', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 5 (1948), 523–546, 525–528.
152. Laslett, 'Introduction' (*Patriarcha*), 21.
153. Laslett, 'Introduction' (*Patriarcha*), 26, 41.
154. Laslett, 'Sir Robert Filmer', 533; Laslett, 'Introduction' (*Patriarcha*), 10.
155. Laslett, 'Introduction' (*Patriarcha*), 41; Laslett, 'Introduction' (*Two Treatises*), 40, 43.
156. Laslett, 'Introduction' (*Two Treatises*), 22, 34–35.
157. Laslett, 'Introduction' (*Two Treatises*), 36, 41.
158. Laslett argued that Locke fully satisfied certain criteria of capitalist and bourgeois practice, such as being a landowner and investing in the Africa Company and the Bank of England: Laslett, 'Introduction' (*Two Treatises*), 36, 43. Even though Laslett critiqued the concept of class as a sound historical category, he nonetheless argued that Marx and Engels' historical works, and the 'mythology' Collingwood prophesied in the 1930s would change the nature of historical research, had profoundly and positively shaped historical scholarship and the way people view their role in society. See Peter Laslett, 'Engels as Historian', *Encounter*, May 1958, 84–85.
159. Laslett, 'Introduction' (*Patriarcha*), 22–23.
160. Laslett, 'Introduction' (*Patriarcha*), 30.
161. Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost: England Before the Industrial Age* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), 234.

162. R.H.S. Crossman, *Plato Today* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939); Rohan Butler, *The Roots of National Socialism* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1942), 23–66; Georg Iggers, *The Cult of Authority: The Political Philosophy of the Saint-Simonians. A Chapter in the Intellectual History of Totalitarianism* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1958); Leo Strauss, *An Introduction to Political Philosophy: Ten Essays by Leo Strauss*, ed. and intro. H. Giddin (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 81–99; Isaiah Berlin, *The Magus of the North: J.G. Hamann and the Origins of Modern Irrationalism*, ed. H. Hardy (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1993); Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair. A Study in the Rise of the Germanic Ideology* (Berkeley, Calif, Los Angeles, Calif. London: University of California Press, 1961).
163. Jan-Werner Müller, ‘European Intellectual History as Contemporary History’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 46 (2011), 574–590.
164. Laslett, ‘Introduction’ (*Two Treatises*), 105, see also 104.
165. Laslett, *The World We Have Lost*, 18–19, 21, 156.
166. William Temple, *Christianity and Social Order* (New York: Penguin Books, 1942).
167. For two contrasting examples, see John Saville, ‘The Welfare State: An Historical Approach’, *The New Reasoner*, 3 (1957), 5–25; and Asa Briggs, ‘The Welfare State in Historical Perspective’, *Archives européennes de sociologie*, 11 (1961), 221–259. See also Henry Pelling, ‘The Working Class and the Origins of the Welfare State’, in *Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1968), 1–19. In 1978, a book was published in the *Documents of Modern History* series, edited by A.V. Dickens, which added another legitimating aspect—a document collection—to the welfare state as a historical topic in professional historiography: J.R. Hay, *The Development of the British Welfare State, 1880–1975* (London: Edward Arnold, 1978).
168. Calvin Woodard, ‘The Charity Organisation Society and the Rise of the Welfare State’ (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge, 1961).
169. Calvin Woodard, ‘Reality and Social Reform: The Transition from Laissez-Faire to the Welfare State’, *The Yale Law Journal*, 72 (1962), 286–382, 288.
170. Maurice Bruce, *The Coming of the Welfare State* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1961); David Owen, ‘Review of *The Coming of the Welfare State*’, *The American Historical Review*, 68 (1962), 114–116, 115.
171. Bruce, *The Coming*, viii.
172. Briggs, ‘The Welfare’, 222.
173. Briggs, ‘The Welfare’, 231.



174. Harold J. Laski, 'The Education of the Civil Servant', *Public Administration*, 20 (1943), 13–23, 13.
175. David Roberts, *Victorian Origins of the British Welfare State* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1960), vii.
176. C.L. Mowat, 'The Approach to the Welfare State in Britain', *The American Historical Review*, 58 (1952), 55–63, 58.
177. Pelling, *Modern Britain*, 13. See also Henry Pelling, 'Labour and the Downfall of Liberalism', in *Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1968), 101–121, 120.
178. Briggs, 'The Welfare', 245.
179. George Kitson Clark, *The Making of Victorian England: Being the Ford Lectures Delivered Before the University of Oxford* (New York: Atheneum, 1969).
180. This anti-whiggish impetus of revisionist historiography has not gone entirely unnoticed. Thus, Jay Winter, who was Pelling's pupil, notes that Pelling 'has shown that it is possible to write about the past of organized labour without adopting a plebeian version of the Whig interpretation of history through which we see the struggles of the past moving inexorably to the victories of the present'. See Jay Winter, 'Introduction: Labour History and Labour Historians', in *The Working Class in Modern British History. Essays in Honour of Henry Pelling*, ed. Jay Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), vii–3, x.
181. Clark, *The Making*, 31.
182. Derek Fraser, *The Evolution of the British Welfare State: A History of Social Policy Since the Industrial Revolution* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1973), 1.
183. Oliver MacDonagh, 'The Nineteenth-Century Revolution in Government: A Reappraisal', *The Historical Journal*, 1 (1958), 52–67, 56.
184. Henry Pariss, 'The Nineteenth-Century Revolution in Government: A Reappraisal Reappraised', *The Historical Journal*, 3 (1960), 17–37, 18.
185. Henry Pariss, *Constitutional Bureaucracy. The Development of British Administration Since the Eighteenth Century* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1969), 17.
186. John Vincent, *The Formation of the Liberal Party: 1857–1868* (London: Constable, 1966).
187. Patrick Joyce, 'The Factory Politics of Lancashire in the Later Nineteenth Century', *The Historical Journal*, 18 (1975), 525–553, 528.
188. Hart, 'The Tory', 39.
189. Michael Oakeshott, 'Political Education', in *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (New York: Basic Books Publishing Co., Inc., 1962), 111–137, 127.

190. Hart, 'The Tory', 57, 59.
191. Hart, 'The Tory', 60.
192. Hart, 'The Tory', 39.
193. Hart, 'The Tory', 60.
194. Hart, 'The Tory', 61.
195. MacDonagh, 'The Nineteenth-Century', 66.
196. Clark, *The Making*, 112–113; A similar point is made by MacDonagh, 'The Nineteenth-Century', 54.
197. MacDonagh, 'The Nineteenth-Century', 61.
198. Briggs, *The Age*, 1, but see also i.
199. Clark, *The Making*, 32.
200. Clark, *The Making*, 14.
201. Pariss, 'The Nineteenth-Century', 24.
202. For a good synthesis, see Harold Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society: 1780–1880* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), 134–176.
203. Clark, *The Making*, 63, see also 42. See also Briggs, 'The Welfare', 246.
204. Clark, *The Making*, 13.
205. Thompson, *The Making*, 13.
206. Clark, *The Making*, 147–148.
207. Clark, *The Making*, 47.
208. MacDonagh, 'The Nineteenth-Century', 54.
209. This interpretation bears a close resemblance to that of Harold Laski. See Laski, 'The Education', 14.
210. Clark, *The Making*, 50.
211. Clark, *The Making*, 56.
212. Clark, *The Making*, 13.
213. Pelling, *Modern*, 12.
214. Elton, *Modern*, 103. For an analysis of the histories here under discussion, connecting them to Elton's works, see Valerie Cromwell, 'Interpretations of Nineteenth-Century Administration: An Analysis', *Victorian Studies*, 9 (1966), 245–255.
215. Pelling, *Modern*, 12.
216. Bruce, *The Coming*, viii. See also Oliver MacDonagh, *A Pattern of Government Growth. 1800–1860* (London: MacKibbon and Kee, 1961), 15.
217. Clark, *The Making*, 20.
218. Clark, *The Making*, 19.
219. Lionel Robbins, *The Theory of Economic Policy in English Classical Political Economy* (London: Macmillan, 1961); J. Bartlet Brebner, 'Laissez Faire and State Intervention in Nineteenth-Century Britain', *The Journal of Economic History*, 8 (1948), 59–73; L.J. Hume, 'Jeremy Bentham and the Nineteenth-Century Revolution in Government', *The Historical*

- Journal*, 10 (1967), 361–375; Hart, ‘The Tory’, 47; Briggs, ‘The Welfare’, 236; Pariss, ‘The Nineteenth-Century’, 37.
220. MacDonagh, ‘The Nineteenth-Century’, 62–63.
221. Pelling, *Modern*, 13.
222. K.S. Inglis, ‘English Nonconformity and Social Reform, 1880–1900’, *Past & Present*, 7 (1958), 73–88; Briggs, ‘The Welfare’, 251; Clark, *The Making*, 161–162.
223. Pelling, *Modern*, 12.
224. Henry Pelling, ‘H.H. Champion: Pioneer of Labour Representation’, *The Cambridge Journal*, 6 (1953), 222–239; Briggs, ‘The Welfare’, 236; Mary Lawson-Tancred, ‘The Anti-League and the Corn Law Crisis of 1846’, *The Historical Journal*, 3 (1960), 162–183.
225. George Kitson Clark, “‘Statesmen in Disguise’: Reflections on the History of the Neutrality of the Civil Service”, *The Historical Journal*, 2 (1959), 19–39.
226. Kitson Clark, *The Making*, 93–94. See also Clark, “‘Statesmen in Disguise’”; R.J. Lambert, ‘A Victorian National Health Service: State Vaccination 1855–71’, *The Historical Journal*, 5 (1962), 1–18, 15–16.
227. Clark, *The Making*, 110.
228. Clark, *The Making*, 96–97.
229. David Cannadine, ‘The Present and the Past in the English Industrial Revolution 1880–1980’, *Past & Present*, 32 (1984), 131–172, 136.
230. MacDonagh, ‘The Nineteenth-Century’, 60; Roberts, *The Origins*, viii.

## The Political Thought of Revisionism

### NEW IDEALISM AND POSTWAR POLITICAL THOUGHT

Revisionist political thought can be divided into four aspects. First, the revisionist historians inherited a Victorian institutional structure that was still very much in place in the early postwar period, where historians from Oxford and Cambridge enjoyed a privileged opportunity to join the ranks of the British government or the Civil Service. Second, revisionist historians were a significant presence in the discourse on the death or decline of political philosophy, which captured the imagination of western intellectuals from the 1950s to the early 1970s. What is perhaps most surprising about the revisionists' engagement in this discourse is their participation in the early debate on human rights. Third, it was not entirely clear in the early postwar era to the European intellectuals who had experienced World War II that the intellectual roots of authoritarianism and totalitarianism had been severed from the European mind by the Allies' victory. That prompted a number of intellectuals, including the revisionist historians, to probe into the history of totalitarianism and authoritarianism. And fourth, the revisionists articulated their postwar political thought in the framework of the British welfare state, defending its great possibilities for human well-being, but concomitantly signaling the serious technocratic and scientific limitations it threatened to impose on the flourishing of human freedom. Indeed, perhaps *the* defining feature of revisionist

political thought was a welfare statism with a critical edge in the form of a humanism expressed in the language of both absolute and new idealism.

Accordingly, this chapter revolves around four salient themes in revisionist political thought: the purchase of academic history in government policy-making, the discourse on the origins of totalitarianism and authoritarianism, the death of political philosophy and its relationship to the discourse on human rights, and revisionist historians' responses to the welfare state.

This chapter does not address the issues of imperial decline and decolonization, an omission which requires justification. Stephen Howe has convincingly shown that one can only speak of early postwar British intellectuals' engagement with decolonization and empire through an exercise in virtual or counterfactual history. Thus, in Howe's virtual account, there was a 'passionate engagement with non-European intellectual traditions evinced in the 1950s writings of Karl Popper, Isaiah Berlin and Michael Oakeshott'.<sup>1</sup> But moving from counterfactual to factual history, Howe finds no major and systematic discourse on decolonization and empire among Britain's leading intellectuals, on both the left and the right, in the 1950s and even the 1960s. While the 1865 Jamaican Moran Bay Revolt elicited the impassioned response of a Dickens, Mill, Ruskin, and Carlyle, the comparable postwar incident, the Kenyan Mau Mau revolt, 'or any other colonial crisis' of the 1950s, including the Suez crisis, finds no similar response, 'nor anything like Sartre's, Camus's and others' engagement with the matter of Algeria'.<sup>2</sup> While questions of empire and decolonization certainly were crucial to the development of Britain's changed role in the world,<sup>3</sup> and the development of the welfare state,<sup>4</sup> strangely, most British intellectuals did not directly address them. For example, in Laslett's famous introduction to *Philosophy, Politics and Society*, Laslett asked the question 'Is a Jamaican as Good as an Englishman?' as one to which common postwar English citizens would expect to get an answer from political thinkers, but pursued the question no further.<sup>5</sup>

However, British imperial decline in the postwar era, and Britain's transition to a domestically oriented welfare state, were developments that *indirectly* found their way in intellectual discourse through the revival of English cultural particularism. 'English culture' captured the fascination, and imagination, of human and social scientists in the form of a self-sufficient entity that could, in the eyes of some, paradoxically be universalized through its long-standing tradition of radical democratic politics. English culture, then, became both an object of study *and* an agency for redemptive change in a post-imperial and post-colonial world. This

mentality underpins Laslett's revisionist reading of post-imperial Britain. Ruminating on the historical origins of the welfare state and England's changed role in the world, Laslett wrote the following in Oakeshott's *Cambridge Journal*:

This [the welfare state] is not simply an achievement of Fabian socialism, though it is obviously the English socialists who would be most likely to point to it if called upon to justify their Englishness, for it is nothing more than the most recent instance of what has been called our being able to change at the appropriate speed in time. It is the twentieth-century fruit of that lofty, slowgrown tree of English political maturity. The knowledge that the English are going on making this demonstration to the other peoples of the world adds to my happiness.<sup>6</sup>

Such assumptions also underlie the foundational works of Cultural Studies, such as Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), Raymond Williams's *Culture and Society* (1958), and E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963). As such, 'Cultural Studies intellectuals reinvented English exceptionalism despite their radical politics'.<sup>7</sup> It was precisely this newfound cultural Englishness that made it possible for the first generation of Cultural Studies scholars to find, in Denis Dworkin's words, 'conservative critics such as Leavis and Eliot more relevant to a socialist understanding of postwar transformations than the approved list of progressive writers'. In other words, even though empire and decolonization can be inferred as an 'absent presence' in British postwar intellectual discourse, on the left and the right, it is nonetheless the case that postwar intellectuals focused their energies on theorizing the state of Britain, more often than not confining that focus to England. Moreover, these intellectuals drew on idealism, both German and British, at least until the late 1960s, in their search for a socialist humanism centered on redeeming human agency in what was already then considered by intellectuals an age of overwhelming technocracy and bureaucracy.<sup>8</sup>

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The four aspects introduced above allow us to bring together a number of significant political texts penned by the revisionists. These include George Kitson Clark's *The Kingdom of Free Men* (1957); E.H. Carr's 'The Rights of Man' (1948) and *The New Society* (1951); Peter Laslett's 'The Face to Face Society' (1956) and his introduction to the first series

of *Philosophy, Politics and Society* (1956); Isaiah Berlin's *Does Political Theory Still Exist?* (1961), *Political Ideas in the Romantic Age* (delivered as a lecture in the 1950s), and *Two Concepts of Liberty* (1958); and, finally, Maurice Cowling's *The Nature and Limits of Political Science* (1963). In other words, relatively 'minor' texts here take center stage so as to elucidate a major pattern in the history of postwar political thought and historiography.<sup>9</sup> For, as Cowling correctly observed, political-philosophical treatises in the postwar era did not disappear with the advent of the welfare state, but they were different in both style and content from the type exemplified by Hobbes, Hegel, or Green. Thus, postwar texts in political philosophy took the form of more modest inquiries into the fundamentals of politics, usually national politics and culture. As examples of the richness and variety of these texts, Cowling mentions Clark's *The Kingdom of Free Men*, Raymond Williams's *The Long Revolution* (1961), Denis Brogan's *The Price of Revolution* (1951), Herbert Butterfield's *Liberty in the Modern World* (1951), C.P. Snow's *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* (1959), John Plamenatz's *On Alien Rule and Self-Government* (1960), and Anthony Crosland's *The Future of Socialism* (1956).<sup>10</sup> One could easily extend this list to encompass Europe and the USA, with books such as Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), Milovan Djilas's *The New Class* (1957), and Daniel Bell's *The End of Ideology* (1960).

Oakeshott has been widely read as the model postwar idealist in matters of political thought, exerting direct influence over historians by enlisting them to write for his short-lived *Cambridge Journal*. This interpretation carries two major problems with it when applied to the history of postwar political thought. It not only overlooks other strands of and changes within British idealism; it also glosses over the specific and idiosyncratic version of conservatism that Oakeshott espoused,<sup>11</sup> since Oakeshott's conservatism both continues and radically departs from the tradition of Burkean and Humean conservatism.<sup>12</sup>

Regarding Oakeshott's peculiar brand of conservatism, we should not fail to register the aspects rendering Oakeshott, in the same way as Leavis, *not* a complete outsider, but rather a 'deviant' among the postwar intellectuals of the British welfare state.<sup>13</sup> Oakeshott's conservatism is highly unorthodox, in the context of both the intellectual and political history of British conservatism. Oakeshott dismissed every axiomatic principle and concept in conservatism believed to be essential to it: natural law, including 'that private property (the emblem of choice) is a natural right', providence, organicism, the innate human propensity to sin, Anglicanism,

the Conservative Party, and Royalism. In this way, Oakeshott separated himself from the likes of David Hume, Edmund Burke, and the postwar Conservative Party.

However, the Conservative Party and indeed British conservative intellectuals between the 1920s and the early 1970s were in some respects similar to Oakeshott. For example, much of British conservative thought during this period consisted of an amalgam of idealism, historicism, liberalism, organicism, and Fabianism, where doctrines of self-realization were easily coupled to state intervention.<sup>14</sup> But Oakeshott does depart from his fellow conservatives in holding, in a distinctively new idealist vein, that no particular belief is essential to conservatism: 'I do not think it [conservatism] is necessarily connected with any particular beliefs about the universe, about the world in general or about human conduct in general.'

Conservatism, for Oakeshott, is a disposition or 'hypothesis' toward concrete political life independent of any particular metaphysics, theology, history, and institution. Conservatism maintains 'that governing is a specific and limited activity, namely the provision and custody of general rules of conduct, which are understood, not as plans for imposing substantive activities, but as instruments enabling people to pursue the activities of their own choice with the minimum frustration, and therefore something which it is appropriate to be conservative about'.<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, Oakeshottian conservatism accepts a plurality of traditions and 'voices'—schematized by the scientific, historical, political, and poetical voices—as a deep-structural feature of political life. This plurality or 'multiplicity of activity and variety of opinion is apt to produce collisions: we pursue courses which cut across those of others, and we do not at all approve the same sort of conduct'.<sup>16</sup> Some form of conflict, then, is inevitable within a political culture, and can be accommodated by a pluralist ethics and epistemology through which the various differing voices and traditions engage in a conversation of mutual recognition and non-dominance.

Political life is not only plural, but its traditions necessarily change, since they are contingent. This is an aspect of Oakeshott's conservatism which is intimately connected to his new idealist philosophy of history. Oakeshott's conservatism, however, distinguishes 'change', occurring *within* a tradition, from 'innovation', radically *breaking from* a tradition. Traditions themselves, or established manners of concrete behavior, 'intimate' certain needs for change in the conversation of plural voices, while innovations induce change through ideological thought, understood by



Oakeshott as ‘a set of related abstract principles, which has been independently premeditated’.<sup>17</sup>

According to Oakeshott, the last 500 years of western history have been governed by something resembling a hegemonic meta-ideology, ‘Rationalism’, which Oakeshott decoupled from rationality, the latter of which he deemed a necessary presupposition of thought. Rationalism (with a capital R) is theoretically underpinned by a belief in the essentially law-governed and predictable nature of human life, together with the political disposition that a scientifically governed politics can achieve what a Rationalist takes to be the ultimate End of all human undertakings, such as, depending on further ideological beliefs, ‘Freedom, Equality, Maximum Productivity, Racial Purity’.<sup>18</sup> As Pitkin pithily describes the Oakeshottian Rationalist: ‘The political Rationalist wants to restructure society in fundamental ways to make it more uniform, efficient, logical.’<sup>19</sup> As such, Rationalism, in Oakeshott’s historical readings, underlies the French, American, and Russian Revolutions; the liberal, communist, Nazi and Fascist ideologies; as well as more modest undertakings, such as the National Health Service, technocratic governance, vocational training, and social planning.<sup>20</sup>

Oakeshott’s concern as a political theorist has been, not without tension or paradox, to argue that his version of conservatism is an ‘intelligible’ theory, a concern made difficult by the avowal that Rationalism, in certain guises at least, ‘is not at all unintelligible, and there is much in our circumstances [the 1950s] to provoke it’.<sup>21</sup> More broadly, ideology can ‘reveal important hidden passages in the tradition’, and so the study of tradition *qua* ideology can be ‘a useful part of political education’.<sup>22</sup> Though Rationalism falsely posits a perfect future society where human ends will cease colliding, it has been responsible for major achievements. In an article published in the *Cambridge Journal* in 1948, Oakeshott credited Rationalism, or what he then termed ‘rationalistic politics’, for achieving ‘the supersession of violence by co-operative endeavour in many fields of human activity, and the whole movement for social and educational reform’.<sup>23</sup>

As these passages show, Oakeshott was not entirely opposed to the welfare state or ideological theorizing. Indeed, already in his 1939 introduction to *The Social and Political Doctrines of Contemporary Europe*, he saw the possibility of a fruitful development of nineteenth century individualist liberalism to a liberalism that recognizes the need for community, planning, and state intervention as setting the necessary, but not sufficient, conditions for the activities of freedom. He did this, conceptually,

by urging a modification of Mill's atomistic liberalism with Green's social liberalism:

'it [liberalism] has long since modified its individualism, which was always a tendency rather than a principle, and consequently Mill's doctrine requires to be supplemented by the kind of view which appears in the passage printed from Green.'<sup>24</sup>

These sentiments, penned in 1939, give off echoes in Oakeshott's political writings from the 1950s to 1960s.

This brief account of Oakeshott's conservatism suffices to show that he was not the thorough irrationalist and reactionary as portrayed by leftist historians. Interestingly, unlike leftist *historians*, leftist *political theorists* have been more ambivalent in their assessment of Oakeshott. Pitkin, to take an important example, lauds Oakeshott for being critical of social engineering and technocracy in a time 'when all agencies are impersonal and faceless', and for articulating the need for a politics which could enable individual freedom to develop in a genuinely communal and plural context, anchored in the inevitable flux of time refracted through historical consciousness. Oakeshott, in other words, is here seen as an heir to the tradition of British idealist political thought. However, at the same time, Pitkin critiques Oakeshott—along with Aristotle, Tocqueville, and Arendt—for fearing the 'politics of the felt need', by which Pitkin means 'needs existing, but not yet felt, or not yet articulated, or not yet organized, for the needs of the future or of the powerless, or for goals that transcend need'. Unarticulated forms of exploitation and oppression, both domestic and colonial, both private and public, in being unable to intimate their demands, conceptually fall outside the purview of Oakeshott's political theory. That, Pitkin concludes, cannot be a desirable aspect of a political theory when facing forms of oppression inscribed in the experience of women, African-Americans, and immigrants to Britain from India, Jamaica, and Kenya.<sup>25</sup>

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Oakeshott's new idealist political outlook certainly appealed to conservative revisionist historians in their attempt to derive a political attitude from academic history. But equally importantly, there were British intellectuals in the human sciences on the political left or center-left, including historians, who also looked to the new idealism to formulate a theoretical approach to politics in the postwar era.<sup>26</sup> Here Collingwood's philosophy

of history found a new lease on life—thus lending credence to my division of ‘left’ (Collingwood) and ‘right’ (Oakeshott) new idealism.<sup>27</sup> The philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, to take a clear example, explained why Collingwood’s philosophy could appeal to the postwar left: ‘those who broke with Marxism because of its moral failures, both under Stalin and in the post-Stalinist age, have been extremely unclear as to the kind of authority that their moral condemnation has possessed.’<sup>28</sup> Asking what was required of a ‘genuinely post-Marxist ideology of liberation’, a humanist socialism, MacIntyre proposed two answers: on the one hand, to give theoretical credence to the investigation and political significance of ‘evaluative’ words—thus re-inserting morality into politics and political philosophy in response to the dominion of value-free social science and philosophy—and on the other, to build up an explanatory framework of human action. Two traditions overlooked by the Marxist tradition could furnish leftists with the conceptual tools to explore these questions. One was the analytic philosophy formulated by Wittgenstein, Austin, and Ryle. The other was described thus by MacIntyre:

I spoke earlier of *two* philosophical schools whose importance had been overlooked by the Marxist tradition, and so far I have mentioned only one. *The other is that part of the British idealist tradition which culminated in the work of R.G. Collingwood.* I take it that Collingwood’s outstanding merit was to have understood that we cannot investigate a philosophical subject matter adequately unless we take seriously the fact that such a subject matter always has a historical dimension. That dimension is missing in most work by philosophers within the analytical tradition [emphasis added].<sup>29</sup>

Because of his belief that history was crucial to a humanist socialism, which he imbibed from Collingwood, MacIntyre duly engaged with the type of historiographies analyzed in the previous chapter, in particular with what he perceived as the new histories of ‘non-tragic optimism’. MacIntyre critiqued these histories for placing their hopes in the powers of technocracy and bureaucracy at the expense of morality and human agency. In this category, he included Geoffrey Barraclough, C.P. Snow, and E.H. Carr, who epitomized the betrayal of the humanist strands of both Marx and Mill. This kind of history, according to MacIntyre, and in a similar spirit as Pitkin, can only function if it dismisses from the true course of history phenomena such as the extermination camps, the problem of racism in the USA, and all the sufferings and moral perversions following the technological colonization of community life.<sup>30</sup> It is because the non-

tragic optimists failed to see the historical novelty of the contemporary situation, as Collingwood enjoined all historians to do, that they falsely grafted the hopes and realities of the past onto the present and future.

Contrasting the political thought of Oakeshott with that of MacIntyre symbolizes the conceptually fuzzy parameters of early postwar revisionist political thought, which have formally been well articulated by Rodney Barker: 'Both resistance to state collectivism and its advocacy could be either radical or conservative.'<sup>31</sup> There was, then, both a critical and accommodating edge to those revisionist historians who saw fit to draw on idealism in their ruminations on postwar British society. It was accommodating because the achievements of the welfare state seemed undeniable in terms of the material improvement of the entire population, thus unquestionably creating the conditions for the fulfillment of human freedom. It was critical because the postwar political consensus, in adopting a technocratic stance to politics, paradoxically threatened to stifle the development of the same freedom, as well as those new culturally, politically, and economically marginalized voices calling for independence, welfare, and justice.

The political scientist Bernard Crick captured this double-edged attitude well in his preface to the centenary tribute to the 1867 *Essays on Reform*, a collection of essays on constitutional matters written by leading political and legal thinkers, not least Leslie Stephen and A.V. Dicey, in light of the Second Reform Bill. The tribute saw the participation of the revisionist Laslett. Crick made it clear that the postwar contributors differ from the writers of the original *Essays* in that they 'reflect both a variety of political opinions and far less certainty that there is *a* single key to reform'.<sup>32</sup> But there *were*, Crick was clearly implying, possibilities for reform which intellectuals could help politicians and administrators realize through what Crick called 'applied social thought, something between the merely empirical and the merely visionary'.<sup>33</sup> We will see below how the revisionists were more than ready to position their political thought between the empirical welfare state and the humanist critiques they deployed for the sake of improving it.

This early postwar type of political thought stands in contrast to a new type of political theorizing that emerged in the late 1960s and the 1970s. As Jan-Werner Müller has pointed out, this new type of theorizing saw European, including British, leftist political thinkers couple, in almost *a priori* terms, a stifling bureaucracy, consumerist culture and debased morality to an ossified state, whether in the Eastern or Western blocs.<sup>34</sup> In consequence, political theorizing parted ways with statist assumptions

and began to search for the conditions of possibility of individual and group autonomy in the spheres of culture (Cultural Studies), ‘theory’ (anti-humanism, the New Left), subversive militant action (*Rote Armee Fraktion, Brigade Rosse*), and for a time the new communist regimes in Latin America and Asia.<sup>35</sup> These are certainly crucial movements and traditions in the twentieth century, but unless we take stock of revisionist political thought, our understanding of twentieth century European political thought will remain incomplete.

### REVISIONIST HISTORIANS AND GOVERNMENT POLICY-MAKING

There was a distinct mode in which the revisionists and other Oxbridge historians of their generation employed historical knowledge in the realm of concrete policy-making. For the generation of politicians and highly placed civil servants who dominated British politics in the postwar consensus period, knowledge of history filled a vital role in political activity and policy-making. For this generation, the past was political and the political was historical. This fact is anything but surprising given that in the first two decades of the postwar era, Oxford arts students ‘continued to monopolize entry into the higher ranks of the civil service, the BBC and the learned professions, if anything even more markedly than they had done a generation before’. Among those arts students, historians dominated in numbers until the late 1960s.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, even those students who became dons were connected to England’s elite political, social, and cultural institutions, and they were often influenced by idealist ideas of education, such as education as a means to self-realization, and the essential role of state intervention in creating the conditions of freedom and the development of the self.<sup>37</sup> Noel Annan, an influential public intellectual and historian trained in Cambridge, in a passage worth quoting in full, describes how:

In mid-century dons found themselves busier than before the war. They advised departments in Whitehall and foreign governments, they administered big science for the nation. They acted as consultants to industry, advised investment trusts, conducted polls, ran theatres and worked for cultural agencies such as the British Council and the Arts Council; they wrote reviews for the Sunday newspapers and weekly periodicals, they were televised, they organized experiments in education and filled seats on countless

national and local communities—they were involved in society to a degree unthinkable to a don at the beginning of this century.<sup>38</sup>

One influential civil servant and scholar who symbolized this view of history was Lionel Robbins, the civil servant in charge of the seminal Robbins Report on British higher education, which paved the way for the British university expansion starting in the 1960s.<sup>39</sup> Robbins explained what policy-making owes to history:

I do not think we can hope to understand the problems and policies of our day if we do not know the problems and policies out of which they grew. I suspect the damage has been done, not merely to historical and speculative culture, but also to our practical insight, by this indifference to our intellectual past—this provincialism in time—which has become so characteristic of our particular branch of social studies.<sup>40</sup>

The revisionist Henry Pelling issued a statement to similar effect: ‘only the fullest [historical] understanding of popular feelings can provide a firm basis for successful measures of social change.’<sup>41</sup> Writing in 1961, Robbins might have exaggerated his fears. Well into the 1970s, British policy makers relied on historical knowledge as a toolbox with which they could build a collective memory of the nation, set contemporary matters in historical context, and draw out practical lessons from analogous historical examples. The appeasement of Hitler, for instance, became a measuring rod against which foreign crises from the Suez to the Falklands were evaluated, bearing a vague resemblance to a cyclical theory of political change.

Such was the popularity of historians in the government in the early postwar era that in the 1960s, the Cabinet Office’s Historical Section was hard pressed to satisfy the demand of good historians for the research and writing of official histories. Historians enjoyed a good reputation among leading politicians owing partly to the skill of those who served in World War II—such as Michael Postan and Joel Hurstfield who, respectively, wrote memoranda on the tank problem and the conservation and substitution of raw materials, which directly influenced the war government’s policies. Some of the revisionists studied in this book too impressed leading British politicians during the war, not least Carr and Berlin, the latter of whose dispatches from Washington were highly praised by Churchill.<sup>42</sup>

An effort to influence the public understanding of World War II was made in the commissioning of a multi-volume official history, written by the prominent scholars Betty Behrens, W.N. Medlicott, Michael Postan,

Margaret Gowing, W. Keith Hancock, and Richard Titmuss. Titmuss's *Problems of Social Policy* (1950) was a volume in this history, and became a key text justifying the welfare state. These histories fulfilled the dual function of creating a collective memory of the war, and informing administrators and civil servants about the errors of the war to aid them in avoiding similar mistakes in the present.<sup>43</sup> Though these government histories often amounted to propaganda, rendering them suspect to many revisionists—hence Butterfield's 'I do not personally believe that there is a government in Europe which wants the public to know the truth'—there was some space for negotiation which made room for histories on the standards of professional historiography. Churchill and Attlee, based on numerous historians' recommendations, often allowed historians to reveal sensitive material, even if these revelations were politically compromising.<sup>44</sup>

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Direct application of historical research to issues of policy and in response to the demands of government was fairly rare among the revisionists, even if the institutional opportunities were readily available to them. Far more common was the activity of opining on problems of policy or administration. But revisionist historians performed this task in their histories only because they could assume that their works would be read by, thus potentially influence, highly placed politicians, many of whom would have studied history at the universities, perhaps together with the revisionists. Henry Parris, thus, ended his work on the history of British administration by criticizing the 1968 Fulton Report on the Civil Service for misusing history. The Report, according to Parris, mistakenly identified the structure of the Civil Service in the 1960s with the recommended structure laid down in the Northcote–Trevelyan Report of the mid-nineteenth century. In particular, the Fulton Report mistakenly saw 'the all-rounder as a liability rather than an asset. The first defect of the service, in their view, is that "it is still essentially based on the philosophy of the amateur (or 'generalist' or 'all-rounder')"'.<sup>45</sup>

Carr, who was no stranger to government work after serving as a prominent foreign affairs civil servant, was even more critical of assumptions underlying British policies than was Parris. Viewing British foreign policy as underpinned by a utopian approach, animated by the principle that 'the maintenance of British supremacy is the performance of a duty to mankind', Carr argued for the virtues of a relativist approach. It was the same relativist, or rather pluralist and perspectivist, approach he developed

in the context of his philosophy of history, that he now applied to policy: 'The weapon of the relativity of thought must be used to demolish the utopian concept of a fixed and absolute standard by which policies and actions can be judged.'<sup>46</sup>

There was an Oakeshottian flipside to this Collingwoodian political use of history among the revisionists. The creation of *Past & Present* was partly a response to the perceived growth by British Marxist historians of conservative historiography at the universities, much like *New Left Review* was founded partly based on the assumed rise of reactionary political thought in higher education.<sup>47</sup> Defending the professional historians and the importance of specialized research, Rodney Hilton argued that historical work could be a valuable political practice, even if the dividends were not immediately apparent: "The battle of ideas had to be fought indirectly as well as directly, and especially in the universities themselves. It could change the opinions of students, future teachers, and opinion formers."<sup>48</sup> For the first generation of New Left historians, conservative historiography professed to be apolitical, but that in itself was seen as a political gesture. It was a conservative entrenchment, by means of historical narrative and education, of traditions and practices which served to normalize the politics of oppression and exploitation, coevally refusing to grant genuine historical resistances and alternatives to this politics any historical significance.

But if we have learned anything from the previous chapter, and the discussion on Oakeshott in this chapter, it is that attributing a reactionary attitude to postwar British conservative historiography and political thought fails to capture its complexities. So much is clear in Oakeshott's 'Scientific Politics'. Oakeshott did argue in this article that the proper 'antidote' to Rationalism is 'a knowledge of the only history that matters in this connection, the history of England',<sup>49</sup> a statement which does insinuate a whiggish-exceptionalist narrative. However, he outlined three principles for such a historical education, two negative and one positive, which complicate matters: first, that a recourse to 'a past golden age' is 'fanciful' and so the English tradition does *not* present the best of all worlds. Second, that an emphasis on the history of political tradition enables students to understand the plurality of present politics, and so is preferred to methods which are founded on Rationalist principles. And third, that such a history revolves around parliament, the common law, limits to the exercise of power, and resistance to tyranny.<sup>50</sup>

In 'The Study of "Politics" in a University', Oakeshott developed these educational precepts by making a distinction between 'university' and



‘vocational’ education, with particular reference to the study of politics. Oakeshott did not reject the vocational study of politics (essentially the training of technocrats, administrators, and statesmen), which seeks to ‘abridge’ the complexities of a tradition into rational principles intended to enable students to evaluate, compare, and enhance the ‘relative efficiency of different administrative areas’.<sup>51</sup> For the practice of politics and administration, such an educational approach is highly useful.

However, history and philosophy are omitted from this vocational scheme of political education, leading to a loss in understanding the plurality that defines both political life and the historical and philosophical study of politics. To promote historical and philosophical knowledge in political study, Oakeshott invoked the idea of university education, where what matters is not the construction of hypotheses, models, or solutions to be applied to present political dilemmas. What matters is rather to encounter the political past ‘as a variety of modes of thinking or directions of intellectual activity, each speaking with a voice, or in a “language” of its own, and related to one another conversationally—that is, not as assertion or denial, but as oblique recognition and accommodation’.<sup>52</sup> To foster this pluralism in students, a university education in politics should teach them ‘explanatory’, as opposed to political, languages.<sup>53</sup>

This Oakeshottian idea of education famously provoked the ire of leading Labour politicians, but it was taken up by leading conservative revisionist historians, not least Elton, Clark, and Cowling. Elton came closest to Oakeshott in his views on historical education. On the one hand, history can, according to Elton, teach ‘practical lessons’, but ‘without too much demand on technical specialization’, for ‘it can often make reasonable predictions [...] and may suggest guiding lines for the future’ by informing ‘present decisions’. The way historical education can inform present decisions is by teaching students about ways in which the social world is made through people’s interactions with each other in specific historical conditions. Unlike Oakeshott, however, Elton argued that the variety of modes of thought and action the past exhibits is such to make them difficult, though not impossible or wholly inappropriate, to translate into instructions for present action.<sup>54</sup> Elton, therefore, drew a slightly softer distinction than Oakeshott between vocational and university education:

‘Three or four years spent at a university cannot teach a man to know history; they cannot train him as a politician or publicist or publisher; they can at best begin to lay some foundations for a view of the world and (universities

being what they are) are likely to lay foundations which, as later experience shows, need to be broken up.<sup>55</sup>

The upshot of Elton's arguments regarding historical education is the following: a historical education which is acutely sensitive to the specific modes of reasoning in various professions, the political and societal norms and problems of its time—'nearly all historical subjects are in fact immortal, metamorphosing internally, sometimes out of recognition, while wearing the same suit of clothes to the casual eye'<sup>56</sup>—and which teaches about the plurality of both the past and present views of the past, is eminently suited to prepare students for any kind of work in a pluralist society. This attitude was shared by Clark, who extended the principle of sympathetic understanding to historical education, arguing that it should apply even to 'sinful regimes', without thereby implying forgiveness, since 'the act of forgiveness is probably different from the act of understanding'.<sup>57</sup>

Cowling voiced a similar view as Elton, both following in Oakeshott's footsteps. But even though Cowling subscribed to the distinction between vocational and university education, he argued that English historical education was predominantly oriented toward practical life, which blurred the lines between the two: 'In English history the range of writing designed to fulfil the practical function has always been extensive.'<sup>58</sup> So strong was this tendency that even Oakeshott succumbed to transposing an explanatory language to the context of political argument: 'When, however, he [Oakeshott] goes on, uncharacteristically, to claim that "our mistakes will be less frequent and less disastrous [...] if we escape the illusion that politics can ever be anything more than the pursuit of intimations," he is imputing to sensible, explanatory language practical consequences which there is no reason to think it will produce.'<sup>59</sup>

For Cowling, historians and historical education should not try to suppress dealing with or being animated by present political and social issues. Indeed, historical education can be made richer if it does not suppress these problems. The point is nonetheless that history is an explanatory language and as such does not commit itself to any concrete policy or political action in the context of academic research and learning: 'Explanation is hampered by every other sort of practical commitment as well: though it is also, in one sense, positively fertilized by every sort of "bias"—so long as the bias is directed to explaining the subject-matter, and not making an impact on it.'<sup>60</sup>

This critique, common to conservative revisionist historians, was directed at two types of practical use of history in the postwar era: on the one hand, what Cowling called 'liberal orthodoxy in political studies',

and, on the other, the ‘historical moralism’ issued by the likes of Jacob Talmon, Hannah Arendt, and Karl Popper. These moralists, according to Cowling, unfoundedly opined that certain concepts and philosophies will *inevitably* lead to certain types of politics, in the way that idealism and historicism leads to totalitarianism, while ‘*technological social science*’ and piecemeal social engineering leads to an open society.<sup>61</sup> Both liberals and moralists committed the same mistake as Oakeshott—namely, to posit philosophies or systems of thought as the necessary, and perhaps even sufficient, conditions for the emergence of actual ideologies and political practices. That, according to Cowling, is empirically false, and elides the multifarious uses to which ideas and concepts can be put. And, in new idealist-sounding terms, it is precisely this plurality of uses which students of history must learn to analyze.

### THE ORIGINS OF TOTALITARISM AND AUTHORITARIANISM

Another major political use to which revisionist historical inquiry was put was to understand the origins of authoritarianism and totalitarianism, in particular Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, Communist Russia, and the possible inroads of these ideologies in postwar western democracies. This type of history, which would be named ‘contemporary history’ in the 1940s, had emerged in Britain in the 1930s, not least with R.H.S. Crossman’s *Plato Today*,<sup>62</sup> which sought to trace the ideology of Nazi Germany in the thought of Plato.<sup>63</sup> W.H. Auden’s poem *September 1, 1939* captured well the emotional attitude underlying these histories:

Accurate scholarship can  
Unearth the whole offense  
From Luther until now  
That has driven a culture mad.<sup>64</sup>

And the scholarship did, though how historically accurate it was to trace Nazi ideology back to, among others, Plato, Luther, Nietzsche, Treitschke, Ranke, and Hegel became a peripheral question.<sup>65</sup> In his last published work, *The New Leviathan*, even Collingwood, who by this time had begun to take psychoanalysis seriously, attributed German military aggression to a historically entrenched mentality of ‘herd-worship’, codified by Luther, but rooted in a culturally specific ‘hostility toward sex’.<sup>66</sup>

Histories of authoritarianism and totalitarianism found a new lease on life in the early postwar period for several and related reasons. In the first instance, for the intellectuals writing these histories, the Nazi past was living memory, and a threat that was not considered destroyed with the advent of peace and the nascent European political community. For instance, the ‘authoritarian personality’ that made Nazism possible was thought to be a potential trait in the human being of mass society.<sup>67</sup> Arendt wrote on the very first page of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*: ‘No doubt, the fact that totalitarian government, its open criminality notwithstanding, rests on mass support is very disquieting. It is therefore hardly surprising that scholars as well as statesmen often refuse to recognize it.’<sup>68</sup>

Collingwood, interestingly, had posited a comparable assumption as an integral part of his political and social theory in *The New Leviathan* through his concept of the ‘non-social self’ and his analysis of the radically and constitutively split nature of ethics. Collingwood asked ‘are foreigners human?’ and gave the following answer: ‘How you exploit the world around you depends on what you think you can get out of it. We have a psychological need to inflict suffering. We are sadists. Explain it if you can, but at least face it. What we need of the world around us is victims for our sadistic impulses. We need someone to torture. You admit that we may legitimately exploit our aliens. Torturing them is our way of exploiting them.’ ‘We cannot prevent ourselves’, Collingwood concluded in terms that invoke Carl Schmitt’s concept of the political, ‘from having these confused emotions of friendliness and unfriendliness to our fellow-men’. This is so because of our inherent non-social appetite for power, and the key lies not in disowning it on the stage of reason, but on the contrary owning up to it, which means that one must forego the idea that the stage of reason is so strong a foundation that it can cut itself off from its origins in the non-social self.<sup>69</sup>

In the second instance, histories of totalitarianism and authoritarianism found a place in the early postwar era because the Soviet Union was perceived as a living form of both ideologies. Finally, these histories were written because Britain and, in particular, the USA, had begun employing social-scientific methods to solve social problems and regulate both public and private life, and in doing so, showed tendencies toward that management and social engineering of human minds which bore, in the eyes of some, striking resemblances to totalitarianism and authoritarianism. Out of these concerns grew an extensive body of literature tracing the origins and nature of totalitarianism and authoritarianism, including widely discussed works by Berlin, Arendt, Popper, Talmon, and Strauss.

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This postwar context was an opportunity for revisionist histories of ideas to show their relevance in the postwar world. The revisionists did not interpret totalitarianism and authoritarianism in Marxist fashion as two extreme forms of the same capitalist ideology, the roots of which could be derived from a more fundamental socio-economic reality. Rather, the revisionists found totalitarianism and authoritarianism lurking in ideas of many kinds and many historical periods. These included idealist political philosophy from Plato to Hegel; Enlightenment political and social ideas animating the French Revolution; religious ideas reacting against secularization and revolution; scientific thought from Descartes to Marx and Darwin; Romantic literature and poetry; and various nihilist, voluntarist and relativist doctrines exemplified by Nietzsche and pragmatism.

For the theorists and historians of totalitarianism and authoritarianism, including the revisionists, the study of ideas was a crucial component in the understanding and critique of the present as it unlocked the logic of contemporary history. The generation of European intellectuals to which the revisionists belonged, born between the 1890s and the 1930s, had conceived the great changes of the first half of the twentieth century in terms of systems of ideas which debunked the belief in a transcendental evaluative frame: liberalism and capitalism gave way to collectivism and socialism, while idealism and historicism had a part to play in the German ‘catastrophe’, only to be replaced by human rights after the war. Ideas, then, were manifestly present in mentalities, institutions, and policies.

Among the revisionists, it is Berlin and Laslett who best exemplify this use of history. As we will recall from the previous chapter, Laslett’s interpretations of patriarchalism and liberalism as internally contradictory and not necessarily opposing ideologies were directly tied to his assessment of the ideological nature of Nazism, and the nature of both the capitalist and the socialist camp. We see here how revisionist whiggism comfortably situated itself in political–theoretical debates of the postwar era. That might serve to explain why Oakeshott’s ‘Rationalism’ and Berlin’s ‘monism’, two intellectual–historical concepts, were successfully employed in early postwar political argument.

According to Berlin, Crossman’s *Plato Today*—which had grown out of G.D.H. Cole’s ‘Pink Lunch Club’ in Oxford, composed of left-liberals and socialists, including Berlin, Frank Pakenham, J.L. Austin, Roy Harrod, Christopher Hill, A.L. Rowse, and Crossman—was even more important in the 1950s than it was in the 1930s.<sup>70</sup> Berlin reported in the 1970s that

his turn toward Crossman's presentist type of intellectual history (or history of ideas), and away from analytic philosophy, came in 1944, but had been signaled to him already in 1939. Berlin related that the end of Berlin the philosopher came at a philosophy conference organized by the Moral Sciences Club in Cambridge in 1940. Berlin had presented a paper on the problem of other minds, which was savagely and mockingly attacked by Ludwig Wittgenstein, already at that time known as the leading philosopher in Britain. To Berlin, this episode symbolized the self-importance exuded by analytic philosophers, who had no interest whatsoever in the fact that France had been invaded by Germany on the very same day of the conference.<sup>71</sup> The controversial Oxford philosopher C.E.M. Joad wrote in 1940 an article which shared Berlin's puzzlement over the political lethargy of analytic philosophers: 'while Rome burns they [analytic philosophers] fiddle with the meaning of sentences',<sup>72</sup> Joad mockingly wrote, on the one hand, satirizing analytic philosophers' method of analyzing language from a purely logical or conceptual point of view, excluding any evaluative, normative or historical content, and on the other, signaling the need to defend the historical unity of European civilization.<sup>73</sup>

If Berlin's histories of ideas fall under Crossman's shadow in trying to make historical sense out of totalitarianism and authoritarianism, they used Collingwood's philosophy of history to shed light on present political constellations. This approach is well expressed in Berlin's *Political Ideas in the Romantic Age*, which originated in the 1950s. What structured Berlin's approach was Collingwood's theory of absolute presuppositions:

During the great ferment of ideas which preceded and followed the French Revolution, experience altered what Collingwood used to call the "absolute presuppositions" of experience. Those categories and concepts which were taken for granted and had been taken for granted before, and seemed too secure to be shaken, too familiar to be worth inspection, were altered, or at any rate severely shaken. The controversies of our age are the direct product of this "transformation of the model," which alone makes the period and its thinkers worthy of our attention.<sup>74</sup>

For Berlin, Collingwood's theory of absolute presuppositions was necessary for interpreting the foundations of contemporary politics. Collingwood's philosophy gave thought a prime place in social and political change. This assumption allowed Berlin to argue that both mainstream postwar political culture (the view of humans as infinitely malleable, and concepts such as 'social engineering' and legalism) and counter-culture

(emphasizing tradition or humans as ends in themselves) originated and are most clearly expressed in Enlightenment thought and the Romantic reaction to the Enlightenment.<sup>75</sup> From this clash between two sets of absolute presuppositions, Berlin proceeded to draw out the origins and dividing lines of not just totalitarianism and authoritarianism, but essentially all major twentieth century western political movements:

Fascists and Communists, imperialists and totalitarians, liberal republicans and constitutional monarchists too, to this day, speak the language not merely of Burke but of Hegel; social scientists of all brands, planners and technocrats, New Dealers and social and economic historians use, without knowing it, the notions and terminology of Saint-Simon virtually unaltered. And it is not only the traditional irrationalists and enemies of democracy and the disciples of Charles Maurras who inhabit a violent world brought into being, almost single-handed, by Joseph de Maistre. Nor should it cause as much surprise as perhaps it might to find so much of modern anti-intellectualism and existentialism (particularly of the atheistical type), and much of 'emotive' ethics, not merely in Kierkegaard or Nietzsche or Bergson, but in the writings of Fichte and in forgotten treatises by Schelling.<sup>76</sup>

### HISTORICIZING HUMAN RIGHTS

Among the declarations of the 'death' or 'decline' of political philosophy in the 1950s and the 1960s—most notably by Leo Strauss, David Easton, and Alfred Cobban—the most poignant came from the revisionist historian Laslett.<sup>77</sup> The declaration—'for the moment, anyway, political philosophy is dead'—came on the opening page of Laslett's introduction to the first series of *Politics, Philosophy and Society*, a collection of essays in political philosophy and the philosophy of the social sciences. The series, edited by Laslett, acted as a forum for political philosophy, which lacked a journal of its own until the 1970s.<sup>78</sup> The series thus continued into the 1970s, featuring chapters by leading political philosophers such as John Rawls, T.D. Weldon, Isaiah Berlin, Michael Oakeshott, John Plamenatz, Hanna Pitkin, H.L.A. Hart, J.G.A. Pocock, and Charles Taylor.

What Laslett meant by political philosophy was an unbroken and great tradition, spanning from Hobbes to Bosanquet, where grand-scale theorizing on the essentials of politics was applied to concrete political problems, and where the philosopher, armed with philosophical principles and concepts, was either a politician engaged in politics or in the service

of politicians. Laslett identified three culprits for the death of this type of political philosophy. First, the atrocities of the 1930s and the 1940s: 'Faced with Hiroshima and with Belsen, a man is unlikely to address himself to a neat and original theory of political obligation.' These horrors left political philosophers dumbfounded, as they could not be contained in any traditional philosophical account of political life. Second, the new 'post-Marxist, post-Freudian' social sciences had undermined political philosophy's claim to uncover perennial truths. Laslett singled out Mannheim's sociology of knowledge as the prime example of this type of social science, as it unequivocally grounded abstract philosophical concepts in concrete historical settings, thereby relativizing their content. Third, logical positivism had come to dominate professional philosophy, and it expelled ethics and political-philosophical statements from its register, on account of being meaningless, that is, either empirically unverifiable or logically inconsistent.<sup>79</sup> Indeed, according to Laslett, the logical positivists 'have radically revised the identity of the philosopher as a person', as Laslett observed in philosophers such as Wittgenstein, Ryle, Russell, and Ayer.<sup>80</sup>

In the last series of *Philosophy, Politics and Society* (1979), Laslett saw a revitalization of political philosophy, owing to the impact of Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* (1971) and Robert Nozick's *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (1974).<sup>81</sup> But this reassessment of political philosophy pointed to a resurgence of the *traditional* type of political philosophy. That, however, was not necessarily a positive development seen from Laslett's revisionist perspective. Laslett had never believed that political philosophy or theorizing *as such* had disappeared, or that it could ever disappear. What he was arguing, in a normative and performative mode, was not only that traditional political philosophy had disappeared but also that a *new* type of political thinking had arisen. For Laslett, thus, there were those in 1956 who 'were preparing to take up their responsibilities towards political discussions once more'.<sup>82</sup> Laslett clarified this position in a response to Irving Kristol's critique of the first series of *Philosophy, Politics and Society*: 'For I believe, with a growing body of philosophical and historical opinion, that the techniques which have been worked out should be used to build newer and more effective political theories which could be used to answer the insistent questions of responsible citizens.'<sup>83</sup>

Not least among the new philosophers and historians were those trying to develop a 'philosophy of all humanity', harking back to Stoicist cosmopolitanism, finding legal expression in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and questioning the viability of the nation-state and the



concept of sovereignty.<sup>84</sup> This philosophy of human rights Laslett perceived as a clear and intelligible answer to the challenge posed to traditional political philosophy by Hiroshima and the Nazi extermination camps. In particular, the philosophy of human rights offered a combative response to what, in the wake of World War II, the Allied victors named ‘crimes against humanity’.<sup>85</sup> ‘What has emerged from the recent holocausts?’, Berlin asked in 1959 and answered, echoing Laslett: ‘Something approaching a new recognition in the west that there are certain universal values which can be called constitutive of human beings as such.’<sup>86</sup>

Berlin, Laslett, and Carr were interlocutors in the debate on what is today called ‘first and second generation’ human rights. In today’s historical and legal scholarship on human rights, leading scholars, such as Martti Koskenniemi and Samuel Moyn, have argued that human rights played hardly any but a rhetorical role in international law. The practical efficacy of human rights emerged as late as the 1970s, when the concept was appropriated by the US government of Jimmy Carter, East European dissidents, liberal exiles from Latin American dictatorships, and NGOs such as Amnesty International, with the specific aim to rescue individuals from harm, in particular torture, done to them by state actors for political reasons.<sup>87</sup>

Koskenniemi advances normative arguments for why human rights, as designed by the United Nations and the European Union, and adopted by virtually every sovereign state, are deeply flawed for intertwined theoretical and practical reasons. They are flawed because they arose in the lineage of naturalist-realist-positivist legal theory, thereby partaking in that legal practice in which law is constructed as value-neutral, and handed over to dispassionate administrators or technocrats, who only seek to apply formal legal schemes regardless of substantive or ‘subjective’ political, economic, and social factors. In Koskenniemi’s words, human rights belong to the postwar ‘colonisation of political culture by a technocratic language’. This has led to serious deficiencies in the concept and practice of human rights. One deficiency is that human rights, in both their conceptual and institutional aspects, cannot bring into their orbit values or languages that are not founded on human rights, but which clearly signal severe forms of human exploitation and breaches of human integrity, such as certain varieties of anti-western, religious, and feminist movements.

Another deficiency is that while human rights claim to be value-neutral, the technocratic and value-neutral institutions vested with the authority to safeguard human rights are in practice always engaged in weighting particular values and goods, such that they favor one or few groups, and ipso facto the rights of particular groups, over those of others. And

since human rights claim to belong to a category untouched by political, historical, social, and economic differences, their politics remain hidden under the veil of universality, which has the additional consequence that their politics are removed from any effective judicial regulation. Human rights thus become mere ‘talk’, a ‘banal administrative recourse to rights language in order to buttress one’s political priorities’.<sup>88</sup>

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Berlin, Carr, and Laslett voiced a similar type of critique against human rights at the moment of their birth in the postwar era. They did so, significantly, by drawing on the methodological historicism of the new idealism refracted by the ideologies to which they were wedded. None of the revisionists subscribed to the end-of-ideology thesis as voiced by the American intellectuals Martin Seymour Lipset and Daniel Bell in the context of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, even if some contributed papers to the conferences or journals of the Congress.

The reason why the revisionists rejected the claim that ideologies were dead was that they simply did not believe that that was the case. Nor did they share the unbridled belief in technocracy as a universal technique with which all social problems could be solved with no reference to politics, which was what the end-of-ideology theorists argued. In the words of Giles Scott-Smith: ‘Just as the Marshall Plan brought to Europe the systems of large-scale technocratic management for solving all socio-economic problems, so the CCF became the public forum for the Plan’s intellectual justification.’<sup>89</sup>

Of the three, Laslett spent least time reflecting on the meaning of human rights, and of the three he is the most difficult to pin to a specific ideology. It is clear, however, that he saw Oakeshott’s historical critique of Rationalism as a healthy corrective to the universalist and ahistorical claims of human rights—though, as we will see later, he did not adhere to Oakeshott’s normative political thought. Laslett wrote of Oakeshott, having the aims of *Philosophy, Politics and Society* in mind: ‘His distrust of rationalism, however, and the whole tendency of his political doctrine, makes its presence within this context particularly illuminating. For this and for the decision to include something of his own on a theme still less related to the rest, the editor alone [Laslett] is responsible.’<sup>90</sup>

Berlin’s critique rested on the use of Collingwood’s theory of absolute presuppositions, which guided Berlin in his anti-metaphysical and historicist interpretation of human rights. Berlin accepted human rights as an

effective reply to the dehumanizing consequences of the totalitarian and authoritarian experiments, as did Laslett and Carr. However, he hastened to add that human rights are ‘no longer’, unlike natural laws

based on theological or metaphysical assumptions. Hence to speak of our values as objective and universal is not to say that there exists some objective code, imposed on us from without, unbreakable by us because not made by us; it is to say that we cannot help accepting these basic principles because we are human, as we cannot help (if we are normal) seeking warmth rather than cold, truth rather than falsehood, to be recognised by others for what we are rather than to be ignored or misunderstood.<sup>91</sup>

While human rights affirm the Hebrew, Greek and humanist traditions, they are also ‘transformed by the romantic revolt’.<sup>92</sup> Indeed, in the end, it would seem that the content of human rights is governed by the absolute presuppositions of Romanticism, which are thereby revealed as relevant in the postwar world as they were in the early nineteenth century. Thus, the postwar era mirrors the clash of absolute presuppositions the origins of which lie in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It was in the twentieth century, Berlin argued in ‘The Bent Twig’, an essay on nationalism from 1972, that the ‘monist’ tradition which solidified in the late eighteenth century came to a political climax. Monism came to permeate all the major political ideologies as both liberal and socialist movements, and communist and capitalist states, succumbed to the cult of ‘technological techniques’. These techniques were believed to offer *the* answer to what the ultimate end of political life is and the methods by which to attain it. In the capitalist states, the methods were constructed by ‘disinterested experts’, while the communist states spoke, in Stalin’s words, of ‘engineers of human souls’.<sup>93</sup> The revolt against this monism, drawing on late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Enlightenment thought, was a pluralism drawing on particular strands of the Romantic revolt. And it is this revolt that gives content to human rights according to Berlin:

The effectiveness of this revolt (for such it seems to be), since it is still in its early beginnings, is hard to foretell. It springs from the feeling that human rights, rooted in the sense of human beings as specifically human, that is, as individuated, as possessing wills, sentiments, beliefs, ideals, ways of living of their own, have been lost sight of in the “global” calculations and vast extrapolations which guide the plans of policy-planners and executives in the gigantic operations in which governments, corporations and interlocking élites of various kinds are engaged.<sup>94</sup>

For Berlin, human rights are constituted by the natural disposition of humans to belong to, and to be recognized as belonging to, particular nations; to express individual eccentricities; to differ in terms of values and ends; while nonetheless sharing the same physiological constitution and ability to understand and recognize as objective other people's values and ends, even when these are morally incommensurable with one's own. That is why Berlin was adamant to stress that his value pluralism does not entail ontological or epistemological relativism.

Berlin's adoption of the thought of the Romantic revolt refers to its Herderian strand,<sup>95</sup> which is pluralist, 'cultural, literary, idealistic and humane'. It differs from other strands, such as the one represented by Joseph de Maistre, which found its historico-logical conclusion in Fascism.<sup>96</sup> Berlin's analysis of human rights—which does not see as unequivocally universal or objective anything but the ability to understand human beings who live by values incommensurable with one's own—found a practical expression in Berlin's paradoxical liberal Zionism.<sup>97</sup> Berlin was committed to the Jewish state of Israel, but one which, placing the politics of the ultimately sidelined Chaim Weizman over that of the politically victorious David Ben-Gurion, recognized Arab Palestinians as entitled to the same rights as the Jews.

Carr provided an equally explicit statement on human rights as Berlin. Carr was selected, along with Croce and numerous other leading political thinkers across the globe, to contribute to a collection of essays commissioned by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. The collection gathered the views of leading academics on the drawing of an International Declaration of Human Rights. Jacques Maritain, the French Catholic philosopher who wrote the introduction, admitted that though simple agreement by all nations to commit to human rights was easy won, there would be irreducible and conflicting interpretations of its meaning and application. This difficulty was due to the existing philosophical difference between historicists and natural law theorists, and the ideological difference between communists and liberals.<sup>98</sup>

Though differing from Croce in seeking to complement the liberal with the communist conception of human rights, Carr suggested in similar wording as Croce the need to apply a historicist method to arrive at a minimal list of human rights fit for the historical present. Croce passionately argued for the development of 'rights of man in history', whose only validity and authority stems from morality in an everlasting history. Human rights arise in a particular historical time in order to solve particular problems and address particular needs. In order to arrive at a historically provisional list of

such rights, Croce called for an international and public debate on historical principles underlying human dignity and civilization, convinced that the liberal side would prevail over the 'authoritarian-totalitarian' side.<sup>99</sup>

Carr shared with Croce the belief that the only conception of human rights that could be of practical use ought to be a historicist one. As he put it in an essay from 1949: 'The rights of man, the things which he most wants from society, have changed with the times.'<sup>100</sup> Any international declaration must, accordingly, contain a 'large factual element', arrived at through an inquiry establishing which rights, both theoretically and empirically, are enjoyed by human individuals, and to which rights individuals attach the highest importance. An 'imperfect' and 'provisional' list of human rights would be drawn based on the results of this inquiry. This list, furthermore, should take the form of a guideline, and not an 'internationally binding arrangement', as the latter, in appeasing the demands of the major international powers in order to garner their commitment, would be reduced to unrealizable principles and conceptual emptiness.<sup>101</sup>

Another point where Carr's position closely resembles that of Croce is the belief that rights are correlative to duties. The concept of duty as an indissoluble counterpart of right had been part of the register of British idealist political philosophy from Bradley to Collingwood. As central as it has been, however, it has often taken idiosyncratic guises and changed from being embedded in a moral philosophy of the absolute to a pluralist political philosophy. Hence, Bradley: 'What is duty? It is simply the other side of right. It is the same relation, viewed from the other pole or moment. It is the relation of the particular to the universal, with the emphasis on the particular.'<sup>102</sup> In contrast, Collingwood, who saw duty as the highest form of practical rationality, higher than utility and right, argued that to act out of duty is: 'to explore a world full things other than myself, each of them an individual and unique agent, in an individual or unique situation, doing an individual or unique action which he has to do because, characterized and circumstanced as he is, he can do no other'.<sup>103</sup>

These eccentricities and differences notwithstanding, Carr accepted the idealist belief that one cannot conceive the concept of right without thereby also invoking duty: 'a declaration of rights is *ipso facto* also a declaration of obligations.'<sup>104</sup> Duties are inscribed in the two modern conceptions of human rights, that of the French Revolution (Declaration of the Rights of Man, adopted by the French Assembly in 1789), and that of the Russian Revolution (Declaration of Rights of the Toiling and Exploited Classes, adopted by All-Russian Congress of Soviets in 1918). In the former, which

established ‘political rights’ (freedom of speech, assembly, religion, and the press), freedom was curtailed by requirements for preserving public order by recourse to the law and the will of the community. The duty of the rights holder, under this conception, is an obligation to passive obedience to the established order. The latter conception, in contrast, expresses ‘social rights’ (social services which ensure material safety in childhood, adulthood, old age, sickness, and unemployment, such as free education and healthcare). Social rights also require corresponding duties from rights bearers, but these differ substantially from the duties embedded in political rights. Those who enjoy social rights have a duty to the institution which ensures the social rights of individuals comprising that society. The duty lies in responding to the institutions’ call for labor and productive services, which are the material condition for social rights.

According to Carr, the social conception does not supplant, but rather complements the political conception of human rights. Here Carr seemed to echo the call of Maritain to arrive at a pragmatic, ‘practical ideology’ of human rights to which communists and capitalists, liberals and socialist, could commit. He did so, first, by recalling that F.D. Roosevelt spoke of four freedoms, including what can be interpreted as social rights (‘freedom from want’ for instance); second, by emphasizing that Article 63 of the Charter of the United Nations includes economic and social rights; and third, by pointing to the Soviet Constitution of 1936 which accepts the right to free speech, press and assembly, but adds to this list the right to work and the right to social security irrespective of race and gender. Without such an addition, Carr maintained, political rights would be trumped by various social and economic hindrances: ‘Will the holding of certain political opinions expose the holder to social or economic discrimination? Does freedom of speech include freedom for the worker to criticize his employer or manager?’<sup>105</sup> Only a conception of human rights which entails both political and social rights can provide a basis for a negative answer to these questions. The final Declaration Carr, unsurprisingly, found ‘pale, eclectic and unconvincing’.<sup>106</sup>

### THE DEATH OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OR POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY IN A HISTORICAL KEY?

As we can see from these interventions in early human rights discourse, revisionist historians were willing to pick up where traditional political philosophy had left off. They conceived themselves as heirs to this tradition,

which is not perplexing given the strong presence of political thought in the Oxford and, especially, Cambridge Faculties of History. The revisionists differed from critics of modernity such as Strauss and Arendt, for whom history and science had dethroned political philosophy's claim to perennial wisdom and instated a regime which either led to value-free political science or value-laden historiography. In this sense, both history and science succumbed to historicism, as both conflated the search for perennial truths of politics with mere 'opinions', leading to relativism and nihilism in philosophy, and 'conformism and philistinism' in politics.<sup>107</sup>

But what Strauss saw as 'opinion', an obstacle in the way of truth, and by extension political philosophy proper, the revisionists saw as a healthy plurality of beliefs which did not necessarily entail relativism or nihilism in any form. Rather, the diversity of beliefs were the fullest historical expression of an irreducible diversity of thought that was to be celebrated, and the fundamental presuppositions of which were to be spelled out, thus dispelling the fear of relativism and nihilism. Some of the revisionists saw themselves as eminently suited for this task, in particular since, in their eyes, the critics of modernity, analytic philosophers, and positivist social and political scientists had either refused or failed to do so. Carr included Namier in the tradition of positivist political science. Namier, according to Carr, believed that technocracy was a sign of national maturity, and proudly joined the choir of those who proclaimed the death of political philosophy, thus revealing, to Carr, that both conservatism and empiricist historiography were in the business of political argument.<sup>108</sup>

Surprisingly, it was Cowling who best spelled out the revisionist attitude toward political philosophy—in an Oakeshottian key which certainly marked a difference from Berlin, Carr and Laslett—when he wrote a series of ruminations on what political philosophy is in *The Nature and Limits of Political Science*:

Political philosophy, then, is the outcome of Mind reflecting upon itself and its first task is to explore its limits, to ask what it knows and be sure that it neither assumes nor asserts as truth what it can neither know nor recognize as more than tentative explanation of what it may hope to explain more clearly in the future. Metaphysical explanation on this basis has temporary validity, useful to the generation which gives it so far as it is coherent and has meaning.<sup>109</sup>

We are, indeed, presented as we look out upon the world with the spectacle of men, creeds and attitudes and opinions in conflict with one another. And the conflict is not only chronic, it is also unavoidable.<sup>110</sup>

The only thing a philosopher has to do is to explain that disagreement of this sort occurs: to suggest what status the conflicting statements have: and to ensure that explanation is rid of the confusion which comes from supposing that he has to do anything more.<sup>111</sup>

Another conservative revisionist, Clark, also spelled out the pluralism and perspectivism of the revisionist approach as applied to politics. Clark believed that ‘modern philosophy’, in which he included the new idealism, was correct in believing that epistemology did not rest on any one foundation, since ‘[systematic] thought seems to have led different men at different times to utterly incompatible conclusions, some of which may seem to us on reflection to be very odd indeed’.<sup>112</sup> Thought was inherently plural and perspectival in positing its ultimate foundations, and Clark drew a normative consequence from this belief: ‘neither the government, nor public opinion, nor any Church, nor any other body, has the right to use its power to impose on men its own view of truth except by argument, or to deny currency to what it believes to be error.’<sup>113</sup>

Berlin too expressly articulated revisionist pluralism and perspectivism. In opposition to the formalism of analytic philosophers, Berlin argued in the 1960s that political philosophy could only exist in a pluralist society: ‘Unless political philosophy is confined to the analysis of concepts or expressions, it can be pursued consistently only in a pluralist, or potentially pluralist, society.’<sup>114</sup> Postwar society was for Berlin a pluralist society, and he expressed puzzlement over the many pronouncements on the supposed death or decay of political philosophy: ‘It is a strange paradox that political theory should seem to lead so shadowy an existence at a time when, for the first time in history, literally the whole of mankind is violently divided by issues the reality of which is, and has always been, the sole *raison d’être* of this branch of study.’<sup>115</sup>

Berlin was puzzled given that he could cite numerous postwar examples of political philosophies that have made genuine and original contributions to the stock of political theorizing amassed through western history. ‘The study of myths, rationalisations, ideologies and obsessive patterns of many kinds’, wrote Berlin, have ‘become a great and fertile preoccupation of our time’. It was the rise of Fascism and Communism, in particular, which had occasioned the need for psychoanalysis and the sociology of knowledge, since these disciplines were and are indispensable for understanding the logic of obscure and irrational beliefs.<sup>116</sup> In addition, a host of political philosophies in the postwar era—including ‘Neo-Marxism,



neo-Thomism, nationalism, historicism, anti-essentialist liberalism and socialism, transpositions of doctrines of natural rights and natural law into empirical terms, discoveries made by skillful application of models derived from economic and related techniques to political behaviour—all bore witness to the plurality, vigor and unpredictability of political thinking, rather than ‘the death of a great tradition’.<sup>117</sup>

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It was to this debate on political philosophy that Berlin and the other revisionists saw themselves as contributors. Berlin’s contribution was primarily historical. He believed that the twentieth century possessed a historical peculiarity which necessitated a comparison with the past on the one hand, and an appreciation of the historical impetus behind the conceptual innovations to political thinking in the twentieth century, on the other. As Berlin explained in ‘Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century’, a text penned down in the late 1940s:

‘The historical approach is inescapable: the very sense of contrast and dissimilarity with which the past affects us provides *the only relevant background* against which the features peculiar to our own experience stand out in sufficient relief to be adequately discerned and described [emphasis added].’<sup>118</sup>

Carr agreed with this statement, and argued in *The New Society* that history is to the twentieth century what philosophy was to the ancients, and theology to men in the Middle Ages. The function of history in contemporary political life, in Carr’s thought, resembles the function ascribed to it by Berlin: ‘A historically minded generation is one which looks back, not indeed for solutions which cannot be found in the past, but for those critical insights which are necessary both to the understanding of its existing situation and to the realization of the values which it holds.’<sup>119</sup>

Although the twentieth century was marked by a continuity from the absolute presuppositions of past ages, not least of which were ‘humanitarian individualism and romantic nationalism’,<sup>120</sup> there is, according to Berlin, a dividing line which renders the twentieth century and its political life incommensurable with any period from the past. In a reference to Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*, Berlin attempted to capture this novelty of the twentieth century in terms of an anti-dialectical union of two types of thinker, a union which in Dostoevsky’s time would have been unthinkable: the Grand Inquisitor, who sets out to lift from humans

the burden of freedom of choice, and provide the only happiness possible to them, as subjects who submit to a necessary higher authority; and Barazov, the exact opposite, the believer in free scientific inquiry, and willing to accept any truth, even if, and perhaps especially when, it contravenes authority. 'By an irony of history', Berlin found that these two incommensurable figures, which evidently stand for the Enlightenment and counter-Enlightenment, have been brought together and are inseparable in the twentieth century figure of the technocrat.<sup>121</sup>

The practical result of this twentieth century development has been the suppression of plurality and is directly proportional to the rise of technocratic governance. Underlying this shift is the rejection of rationality and an emphasis on unconscious and irrational drives as the fundamental facts of human nature in both capitalist and socialist regimes. Politics in the twentieth century, therefore, is not based on rational argument, but rather the removal of a plurality of rational visions and methods, for only in this way can 'agreement on matters of political principles' be reached. This, then, 'is how Communist and Fascist States—and all other quasi- and semi-totalitarian societies and secular and religious creeds—have in fact proceeded in the task of imposing political and ideological conformity'.<sup>122</sup>

It is this historical present that set the conditions of postwar political philosophy, according to Berlin. 'Why should anyone obey anyone else?', the question of political obligation, the most fundamental question of political philosophy, thus found an entirely new set of conditions in the twentieth century. These conditions affected other fundamental political concepts as well, among which are 'authority, sovereignty, liberty'.<sup>123</sup>

The political philosopher must be a historicist because he or she cannot understand the meaning and practical consequences of these concepts in the twentieth century unless he or she places them against the background of their past meanings, and recognizes that the only meaning they possess is historical—that is, governed by absolute presuppositions. What, more precisely, has become of concepts such as 'obligation' in the twentieth century? According to Berlin, this question must be juxtaposed to the fact that there is 'a new concept of society' in the twentieth century, marked by the coincidence of extremes noted above. The new concept of society is monist in nature, and can envision only one direction and one end to all human endeavors, driven by 'quasi-occult impersonal forces', such as class structure, the collective unconscious, or racial superiority. This concept fears reason, plurality, indeed ideas themselves, for they are the source of disorder and disquiet. 'In this sinister fashion has Saint-Simon's prophecy about (in Engels's paraphrase) "replacing the government of persons by

the administration of things” finally come true—a prophecy which once seemed so brave and optimistic.<sup>124</sup>

Within such a concept of society ‘obligation’, along with ‘truth’, ‘freedom’, and ‘beauty’ are emptied of all moral, plural, rational and personal connotations, references, and justifications. Since the new concept of society only demands of its subjects that they ‘wholeheartedly and unceasingly’ commit themselves to ‘building and maintaining the well-adjusted—sometimes called the “integrated”—social whole’, concepts such as ‘obligation’ and ‘truth’ become ‘transformed into purely offensive or defensive weapons, used by a State or a party in the struggle to create a community impervious to influences beyond its own direct control’.<sup>125</sup> In other words, these concepts were, in the twentieth century, redefined ‘in terms of the only activity recognized as valuable, namely the organisation of society as a smoothly working machine providing for the needs of such of its members as are permitted to survive’.<sup>126</sup>

The two senses of the concept of liberty, as analyzed in Berlin’s widely discussed ‘Two Concepts of Liberty’, were *second* to the more fundamental issue of political obligation, since the dominating issue of the twentieth century, Berlin wrote in this essay, ‘is the open war that is being fought between two systems of ideas which return different and conflicting answers to what has long been the central question of politics—the question of obedience and coercion’.<sup>127</sup>

Berlin offered an analysis of the meaning and history of political obligation in much more elusive and paradoxical terms than in his analysis of liberty. There is a reason for these conceptual tensions—namely: obligation, according to Berlin, eludes a clear meaning or categorization since it is founded on the individual but conceptually opaque desire for recognition and belonging:

Provided the answer to “Who shall govern me?” is somebody or something which I can represent as “my own,” as something which belongs to me, or to whom I belong, I can, by using words which convey fraternity and solidarity, as well as some part of the connotation of the “positive” sense of the word “freedom” (which it is difficult to specify more precisely), describe it as a hybrid form of freedom; at any rate as an ideal which is perhaps more prominent than any other in the world today, yet one which no existing term seems precisely to fit.<sup>128</sup>

Political obligation, then, is given by individuals under an eminently livable, yet conceptually imprecise, condition: individuals will allow others

to govern them provided that they receive recognition and status by their governors as members of a unique group of people, in particular a nation. Individuals have desired recognition as much as freedom ever since Romanticism and nationalism entered the global scene of ideas. Recognition, however, differs from freedom in the following way:

The essence of the notion of liberty, in both the “positive” and the “negative” senses, is the holding off of something or someone—of others who trespass on my field or assert their authority over me, or of obsessions, fears, neuroses, irrational forces—intruders and despots of one kind or other. The desire for recognition is something different: for union, closer understanding, integration of interests, a life of common dependence and common sacrifice.<sup>129</sup>

The reason why obligation remained an elusive term for Berlin was due to its necessary complement: recognition. Berlin clearly sought to maintain an individualist and empiricist analysis and justification of obligation, and at the same time, introduce a mode of political thought and life which was collectivist and Romanticist, thus embodying a version of the ideological *extremes se touchent* reality he believed defined the twentieth century.

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It is well known that Berlin saw the positive concept of liberty at work in even the most liberal and humanist of British idealists, that is, T.H. Green, and even though he never questioned Green’s liberal credentials, Berlin found Green’s analysis of freedom as more amenable to a dictator’s or tyrant’s usurpation than Mill’s negative concept of freedom.<sup>130</sup> What is less well known is that a number of revisionists came to Green’s defense, which is rather remarkable since Berlin’s critique did *not* affect Green’s political philosophy. At any rate, Harold Perkin felt pressed to reply in an article from 1977:

The concept of positive freedom used here is not at all that criticized by Isaiah Berlin in his Inaugural Lecture, *Two Concepts of Liberty* (Oxford, 1958), which embraces the notion of self-mastery by a “true” or higher self and paves the way therefore for authoritarian philosophers or regimes, like certain Benthamites and Hegelians or Fascist and Stalinist governments, to claim that they are liberating the higher self of the individual by enchainning the lower. It simply contrasts the positive freedom to fulfill

one's self, whether labelled higher or lower, with the merely negative absence of constraint which was the core of the naive version of laissez-faire liberalism.<sup>131</sup>

Before Perkin, Cowling insisted that Berlin's concept of positive freedom, much like that of Berlin's friend Jacob Talmon, was too abstract to be an empirically accurate description of those who used the concept, and moreover was embedded in all the wrong historical contexts.<sup>132</sup> Clark, finally, critiqued what he perceived as Berlin's emphasis on negative freedom:

For instance, the moral weakness of the old [negative] conception of freedom was that its full benefits were enjoyed by only a section of the population. Probably those benefits meant more to people than is now usually believed, but the main fact is indisputable. There were many to whom poverty, economic dependence, ignorance and miserable conditions allowed little power of choice; while privilege and the power of wealth secured that legal and political rights existed for many only in the imaginations or orators, and a traditional acceptance of economic inequality based on moral realities.<sup>133</sup>

Clark never disputed negative freedom as one ultimate value of the human condition, but he was adamant to stress that it was part of a greater idealist-sounding equation: 'As I see it, freedom always stands as the link in an equation, I am free *from* something *to* do something or be something.'<sup>134</sup> The state, according to Clark, can keep this equation in balance, and thus set the conditions for freedom in the full sense of the term:

We must take account of the fact that a starving man is not free, nor is an ignorant man free, nor is the victim of economic oppression; and we have learnt in relation to these things in the last 120 years a lesson which cannot be questioned. In these matters, in many matters, the State must intervene and use its authority to give men the chance of freedom.<sup>135</sup>

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Another revisionist who believed, like Berlin, that political obligation was the major issue for postwar political philosophy was Laslett. Laslett's contribution to political philosophy pivoted on a critique of the liberal theory of obligation as consent. Laslett distilled the fundamental belief of liberal political philosophy into the principle that 'politics is an attempt to demonstrate

that political society is a human artifact, and that in obeying political authority men are obeying themselves'. According to Laslett, this liberal principle of individual consent has structured virtually all modern western political philosophies, such as those of Locke, Bentham, Mill, Rousseau, Hegel, Bosanquet, Green, and Marx.<sup>136</sup> Moreover, this belief in consent is the professed ideal of the 'democratic institutions of the modern world'.<sup>137</sup>

This liberal belief, however, has a serious flaw, which Laslett identified in 'a failure to take into account Filmer's type of scepticism' regarding the possibility of both explaining and justifying political society in purely individual, rational, and, ahistorical terms, as the liberal theorist is wont to do.<sup>138</sup> In his introduction to Filmer's *Patriarcha*, Laslett did not develop this skepticism toward liberalism. But in 'The Face to Face Society', published seven years later, Laslett steered Filmer's type of skepticism toward a critique of liberalism informed by the new idealism and the sociology of knowledge, which Berlin and Carr too regarded as an original twentieth century contribution to political philosophy. In particular, Laslett drew on Mannheim's concept of 'total personality', and pointed to the fact that the liberal theory of consent is historically out of joint.

The concept of 'total personality' found its place in Laslett's thesis that liberal theory is based on a type of society, 'the face to face society', which structured the lives of ancient Europeans. In this model, societal and political relations proceeded from the 'total intercourse between personalities', where each member of society was continuously engaged in the concrete activities and problems of society, and responded to 'all situations' with his 'whole personality'. This society was an Oakeshottian dream, since it was governed both by rational argument and a mode of interaction which embodied non-rational traditions in which people interacted through 'exclamations, apostrophes, laughter and silences'.<sup>139</sup>

But while Laslett lauded Oakeshott's critique of Rationalism,<sup>140</sup> since it could be accommodated by Laslett's own critique of liberalism, he found little sympathy for Oakeshott's attempt to turn his skepticism into a more positive political theory. Members in the 'face to face society' would have been hard pressed to articulate the reasons and motivations behind a decision, because it was the outcome of whole personalities in total situations. Even if carried to the abstraction of an explanatory or philosophical language, neither a whole personality, nor a total context, nor both, can act as explanations or principles since they do not allow for the logical and analytical divisions which are necessary for these intellectual operations. Though Laslett fully understood that this was the reason why Oakeshott often expressed himself in metaphors and paradoxes,<sup>141</sup> he ultimately saw

Oakeshott's strategy as the conservative version of the liberal fallacy. The difference between Oakeshott and the liberals resided in the fact that the concepts 'rationality', 'individual', and 'consent' in liberalism carried the same function as the concepts 'tradition', 'intimation', and 'contingency' in Oakeshott in that the meaning of both sets of concepts was governed by the logic of the 'face to face society'.

Laslett argued, contra Oakeshott and liberal political theory, that in modern 'territorial society', total social interaction in the context of political life is reserved for ruling groups, including committees of political parties, boards of industry, boards of international organizations, soviets, and parliamentary bodies. Liberal theorists, in particular, make the false assumption that these types of groups have a face to face relationship with the society at large. That is why consent carries so much weight in liberalism, for it entails a directness which ensures accurate and ongoing political representation. This liberal assumption is further founded on the belief that society is essentially an aggregate of autonomous or 'solitary individuals'. According to Laslett, this belief is merely 'an abstraction from individual behaviour in the face to face situation' and not a correct empirical description of modern politics. Based on this reification liberal theorists analyze the individual's political relations and power in territorial society in an abstract or fictional manner, that is, *as if* it was a face to face society. Based on this analysis, liberal theorists conclude that individuals give consent to government and establish impersonal and generalized trusts for the fulfillment of clearly agreed upon rational ends, and for the keeping of clearly stated promises on the government's part.<sup>142</sup>

But upon closer analysis, these are not face to face characteristics and mechanisms at all, for the relationships between governors and governed in modern politics are not constituted by the total intercourse of whole personalities. This crucial fact is, then, not an empirical element in the liberal concepts 'individual', 'rationality', 'consent', and 'trust'.<sup>143</sup>

For Laslett, the only way these concepts can be modified to accord with the facts of modern politics is if liberal theorists acknowledge that in territorial society, man is *both* the 'whole man' responding to situations with his 'whole self' (and not a reified atomistic 'individual'), *and* capable of forming 'separate interests and identities'. This is where modern forms of social science enter the picture, for it is only anthropology, 'political psychology', and 'objective sociology' which can account for this distinctively modern form of identity and social relationship, and therefore ought to underpin a new theory of political obligation.<sup>144</sup> That however, was a project Laslett only suggested, and never pursued.

## WELFARE STATE HUMANISM

By the late 1950s, welfare state provisions, scientific advances, the rate of employment, and technocratic governance in Britain were accelerated to such a degree to lead some intellectuals to believe that these developments signaled the way into the future. It was to be a future where efficiency, mechanization, social justice, and individual freedom would all march on the somewhat predictable path of modernization. In the early 1960s, this belief gave rise to the field of future studies or ‘futurology’. One of the intellectuals of future studies was Michael Young, a prominent Labour politician and social reformer, who worked very closely with Laslett. Young and Laslett, for instance, together advocated for extending higher education to older age groups, and consequently founded the Open University as well as the University of the Third Age,<sup>145</sup> the latter of which had as one its objectives, in Laslett’s words, to ‘assail the dogma of intellectual decline with age’, and to provide an institutional setting for lifelong learning as ‘[part] mutual-aid society, part social movement, part educational facility, and part lifestyle culture’.<sup>146</sup>

Young ruminated on the present realities and future consequences of the postwar social and scientific revolutions in *The Rise of the Meritocracy* (1958), which coined the term ‘meritocracy’.<sup>147</sup> In this book, Young articulated what the revisionists in this study too saw as the crucible of early postwar society. Young laid down his assessment and critique by speculating on what the future, more precisely the 2030s, holds in store for British society of the 1950s. By the 2030s, Young prophesied in this book, ‘it is scientists who have inherited the earth’, and Britain’s ruling Technician’s Party is led by women.<sup>148</sup> The hopes placed in value-neutral technicians, scientists, and feminists in the 1950s have been fulfilled in the early twenty-first century.

Things hardly turned out as intended, however, for the society of the 2030s is still ridden with strikes and major discontent, ‘grievances certainly organized by history’, bearing witness to the ‘casualties of progress’, thus reproducing the same conditions for the rise of popular protest movements as in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>149</sup> The scientists and technocrats promised a meritocratic society which would efface social divisions and conflicts, since biological realities would ensure a society as efficient and harmonious as nature herself. All evaluations, selections, and jobs in this new society are, therefore, scientific in nature. IQ tests are administered every five years, and the ‘Eugenics House’ supplies IQ



certificates to authorized inquirers, such as employers and government officials. The social sciences had shown already in the (envisioned) 1960s that any man of intelligence who is placed in a routine job will inevitably suffer from sickness, neurosis, absenteeism, and will thus contribute to wasting productive energy and inefficiency. The task, which was fulfilled by the 2030s, was therefore to match intelligence with appropriate work, and in this way, it was hoped, in the 1950s, that there would arise a society both efficient and committed to enabling the fulfillment of human aspirations. In Young's dialectical description, this scheme 'was everywhere demonstrated as the highest expression of both efficiency and humanity; as the very engine of productivity at the same time as the liberator of mankind'.<sup>150</sup>

It did not turn out that way, as virtual irony would have it. Meritocracy ended up creating a new class, the meritocrats, which reproduced similar types of class divisions, exclusions, and antagonisms whose disappearance had been predicted in the twentieth century. The difference between the society of the 1950s and the one of the 2030s was that the latter divided society into two classes: the meritocrats and the rest, strictly and solely determined by their sub-standard IQs. Historical social and class categories—working, middle, and upper classes, for example—were dissolved in this new social division, since intelligence or lack thereof was dispersed through all classes of old. Interestingly, however, kinship was not dissolved, and the two necessary requirements for social status were thus merit and kinship.<sup>151</sup>

Young's key point was that there were few in the 1950s that were either willing or able to seriously address the 'inescapable human consequences' of 'increasing mechanization'.<sup>152</sup> The welfare state was a marvelous achievement, but pushed too far in the direction of technocratic and scientific management, it would lose sight of the human ends for which it was a condition and instrument.

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As Young's virtual history shows, the fear of technocracy, expertise, and science was widespread among intellectuals during the 1950s and the 1960s, and it explains why humanism reasserted itself as an alternative in various ideologies and philosophies. As Erich Fromm wrote in the introduction to *Socialist Humanism*: 'One of the most remarkable phenomena of the past decade has been then renaissance of Humanism in various ideological systems.' Fromm perceived the rise of humanism as 'a new

reaction to this latter threat in a more intensified form—the fear that man may become the slave of things, the prisoner of circumstances he himself has created—and the wholly new threat to mankind’s physical existence posed by nuclear weapons’. Humanism cut across traditional ideological divides, and so Fromm saw it flourish within Marxism, Catholicism, Protestantism, and liberalism.<sup>153</sup> As a result, *Socialist Humanism* saw contributions from leading intellectuals from these, and more, intellectual traditions, including Lucien Goldmann, Veljko Korac, Léopold Senghor, Herbert Marcuse, Eugen Kamenka, Umberto Cerroni, Danilo Pejovic, Ernst Bloch, Bertrand Russell, Gajo Petrovic, Richard Titmuss, Sir Stephen King-Hall, and Galvano della Volpe.

If intellectuals from a variety of otherwise conflicting ideologies and traditions could agree on the need for humanism, they could also agree on the necessity of the welfare state. Titmuss, a contributor to *Socialist Humanism*, who was the first Professor of Social Administration at the London School of Economics, and who held several Cabinet posts, expressed that much when he proclaimed that all major political parties in the west had accepted the welfare state: ‘Whether they know it or not, and whether they like it or not, Democrats and Republicans, Conservatives, Socialists, and Liberals in North America and Europe have become “welfare-statists”’. Each one of these traditions was committed to maintaining full employment, keeping up economic growth, and providing social services and opportunities for all generations. That, however, was only one side of the equation. The other Titmuss posed in the form of two questions: ‘Has man a greater sense of social control and participation in the work and life of his community? What will be the human consequences of further social and technological changes?’<sup>154</sup>

These were the key questions posed by humanists of all ideological and intellectual hues in early postwar Britain, including the revisionist historians. For example, Raymond Williams, the doyen of the New Left, pinpointed the crux of planning thus: ‘It seems unlikely that the case for general planning will ever be widely accepted until not only do its forms seem sensible, but also its methods seem compatible with just this feeling of freedom.’<sup>155</sup> Laslett spoke of how ‘the lesson we have been teaching to recent generations and which we are in the middle of demonstrating now, is the working out of a way to reconcile an equitable economic system with genuine freedom for the individual’.<sup>156</sup> Carr, to take another revisionist example, asked: ‘Has not the evolution of man as a social being lagged fatally behind the progress of technology?’<sup>157</sup> And again: ‘The individual becomes depersonalized; the machine and the organization are more and

more his masters. The contemporary problem of individualism in a mass civilization has no precedent anywhere in history.<sup>158</sup>

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What answers did the revisionists offer to these questions, and how do these compare to answers provided by other traditions and movements? The answers provided by any of these traditions can be distinguished if we consider whether a tradition was *non-statist* or *statist*. It is clear that intellectuals who were politicians or deeply engaged in government work—such as Titmuss, Richard Crossman, T.H. Marshall, and C.P. Snow—were statist. For Titmuss, partly influenced by the Swedish social scientist Gunnar Myrdal, the answer lied in promoting altruistic and humanistic values to what must by necessity, since the numbers are so large, be an impersonal state ‘formally organized, to be administered by strangers, and to be paid for collectively by strangers’. While a vast bureaucracy informed by technocrats and scientists can manage resources in such a way to ‘close the gap between the “have” and “have-not” nations of the world’, it will remain blind to fundamental human needs, and so: ‘Altruism by strangers for strangers was and is an attempt to fill a moral void created by applied science.’ Only in this way can a ‘humanist social policy in Britain and the U.S.A.’ emerge.<sup>159</sup> In distinctly idealist-sounding terms, Titmuss advanced the thesis that the ultimate aim of education in the welfare state must not be to ‘educate the young to compete more efficiently as economic men in the private market one with another’, but rather to ‘educate them because we desire to make them more capable of freedom and more capable of fulfilling their personal differences irrespective of income, class, religion, and race’.<sup>160</sup>

In more concrete terms, Titmuss looked back to the nineteenth century development of ‘microscopic welfare states’, such as friendly societies, trade unions, clubs, chapels, and schemes of mutual insurance, which by 1899 had numbered 24,000, according to Titmuss. Titmuss drew a lesson from this historical development: ‘We can now see this great movement as the amateur’s compassionate answer to the challenge of the economic and psychological insecurities of industrialism and individualism.’ But he did not advocate for a return to a society whose welfare lay in the hands of voluntary associations as much as, if not more than, in the state’s administrative powers. History, in this sense, could only kindle an imagination circumscribed by present realities: ‘we must find imaginative ways and new institutional means of combining humanity in administration with redistributive social justice in the future development of welfare politics.’<sup>161</sup>

Crossman, on the other hand, in a turn of mind in the 1970s came to reassess the role of volunteers in modern social service in *The Role of the Volunteer in the Modern Social Service* (1973). He had initially dismissed voluntary associations as belonging to a social oligarchy and church bourgeoisie vested with particular class interests, but had come to reappraise their role when ‘in the construction of the new social service state we turned our backs on philanthropy and replaced the do-gooder by highly professional administrators and experts’. This had the unfortunate consequence that ordinary people, the recipients of welfare, were never even consulted about their needs and wishes in the construction of services intended for them, a failure resulting in ‘tragic and inhuman stupidities’, and social disintegration.<sup>162</sup>

Against this statist and what is today called ‘civil society’ approach, the first generation of the New Left erected a non-statist alternative. They pointed to other areas of society to challenge the statist accounts, which exclusively focused on state provision of social services. For these New Left thinkers—including historians such as Thompson, Cultural Studies scholars such as Williams, and philosophers such as MacIntyre—the material gains for the working classes, often summed up in J.K. Galbraith’s term ‘affluent society’—still reproduced the inequalities and hierarchies that is a structural feature of any capitalist economy. The historical novelty introduced by welfare state capitalism was the corruption of working class morality and culture, since it reduced the working class individual to the position of consumer, determined by a complex cultural-economic-political system designed to keep him or her out of political and economic participation, efface his or her social morality, and set the conditions for his or her cultural life. For the New Left, statist thinkers such as Crossman and Titmuss, and by extension the Labour Party and the entire state apparatus, ultimately maintained and reproduced this system.<sup>163</sup>

The problem in Britain for New Left historians in the 1950s and the 1960s paralleled a problem during the nineteenth century: the working class had, during both periods, been corrupted from within through the formation of the labor aristocracy. This, in Thompson’s assessment, served to politicize history in the worst form possible: ‘history-as-industrial relations’ was on the rise, wrote Thompson, and continued: ‘the new Delectable City is seen to be a state of affairs in which a rationalized and disciplined trade union movement, governed by an automated, forward-looking T.U.C. (which turns on all proper occasions to qualified academic advisors for its policy-briefing), gets itself thoroughly integrated with the

organs of the State and of the employers, enforcing an impeccable wages policy, and curbing the Trouble-makers in our midst. A difficulty with this myth, as with all myths, is that it can only be persuasive by leaving a lot of actual history out.' It is, Thompson concluded, the 'goal of the Wilsonian Corporate State'.<sup>164</sup> This undesirable state of affairs provided a rationale for a history from below as a direct response to a state-economy-culture which, even under socialist rule, did not follow socialist principles: 'There is a growing concern to examine political and social manifestations which are not in any "approved" line of Labour evolution.' This 'Fabian sin', Thompson wrote with political hope, is 'dangerous to the established constitutional and parliamentary-political Thing'.<sup>165</sup>

Hobsbawm echoed Thompson in arguing that the 'machine breakers' of the early nineteenth century are a good analogue to the working class in the 1950s: 'there are plenty of examples of the straightforward opposition to machines which threaten to create unemployment or downgrade labour even to-day. In the normal working of a private enterprise economy the reasons which led workers to distrust new machines in the 1810s remain persuasive in the 1950s.'<sup>166</sup>

It was precisely because the welfare state served a greater god, capitalism, that it was not dismantled when the Conservatives came to power in the 1950s, affirming for the first generation of the New Left the explanatory power of Marxism. The postwar consensus, for the New Left, meant a political consensus premised on capitalist conditions. What the New Left wanted to see was, in Williams's words, the creation of a new social consciousness that could transform these conditions, but 'the Labour Party's permanent task of creating a new kind of social consciousness was just too difficult'.<sup>167</sup> So too was Soviet state-socialism, which turned under Stalin into a brutal state machine that denied human agency and morality,<sup>168</sup> leading Thompson, MacIntyre, and Taylor into developing a humanist form of socialism which looked to human agency and morality as the foundations of both working class politics and historiography.

British state politics, in the eyes of the New Left, was delegitimized by a new labor (or rather Labour) aristocracy, while international communism was delegitimized by the Soviet Union's oppressive and murderous police state and its brutal intervention in the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. At home and abroad, under capitalism and under communism, workers were dehumanized and rendered indifferent to and alienated from politics. In response, the New Leftists sought to redeem, historically and in the present, other forms of popular politics, either those that directly countervailed the state,

as in Hobsbawm's machine breakers, or those that waged indirect politics by means of culture, as in Richard Hoggart's working class reading practices.

Ultimately, the New Left's scholarly interventions were geared toward fostering participatory democracy, which could either look back in nostalgia to an early modern golden age (as in e.g. Thompson), or accept and work within the realities of industrial production, large scale organization, and social pressures, which in the right hands could secure the material, cultural, and moral demands of a good life (as in Williams, for instance).<sup>169</sup>

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The statist looked to Victorian forms of civil society and modern forms of administration in answering Titmuss's questions. The non-statist drew on a wide array of traditions, including Aristotelianism, a revised Marxism, and Christian and ethical varieties of socialism. The revisionist historians do not fit neatly in either of these two traditions, though they contain elements from both. The tradition that best clarifies revisionist thought regarding the welfare state is the political thought of British absolute idealism, as inherited and modified by the new idealists.

The revisionists believed that the idealist originators and conceptual architects of the welfare state never lost sight of the distinction between human ends and material conditions and means for those ends. William Beveridge and R.H. Tawney, the latter perhaps not an architect but at the very least a leading Christian socialist advocating for humanist planning, were both influenced by the Master of Balliol College, the idealist philosopher Edward Caird, to probe into the bases of inequality.<sup>170</sup>

Clark, therefore, saw 'social idealism', along with population increase, the age of total war, and revolutions in technology, as a direct cause of the welfare state.<sup>171</sup> Pelling, looking further back to the beginnings of the welfare state in Victorian Britain, found that during this age '[political] philosophy moved, not unnaturally, away from the individualism of the early John Stuart Mill into the more positive view of state powers which we associated with T.H. Green and the Idealists'.<sup>172</sup> Even Berlin, who as we saw above had serious reservations regarding the idealist concept of positive freedom, saw Green as belonging to the same liberal-humanist-socialist tradition as Mill: 'both were humane Victorian liberals with a good deal of sympathy for socialism.'<sup>173</sup>

How did the revisionists conceive of the necessity of the welfare state? Berlin, despite his strong reservations against idealism, felt obliged to express his indebtedness to Tawney when he argued that freedom means

little unless it is considered in light of equality and justice: ‘We are rightly reminded by R.H. Tawney that the liberty of the strong, whether their strength is physical or economic, must be restrained. [...] simply because respect for the principles of justice, or shame at gross inequality of treatment, is as basic in men as the desire for liberty.’<sup>174</sup> Moreover, unless freedom is able to take flight under proper material conditions, it makes little sense to even call it freedom: ‘It is true that to offer political rights, or safeguards against interventions by the State, to men who are half-naked, illiterate, underfed and diseased is to mock their condition; they need medical help or education before they can understand, or make use of, an increase in their freedom.’<sup>175</sup> This, in Berlin’s analysis, justifies a measure of state intervention, which can ensure that human beings receive the services they require for the exercise of their freedom.

Clark was even more explicit about the need for state and social forms of intervention to further individual freedom. He drew the personal example of reading, where Clark realized that he is free to read only ‘by the mild coercion of a certain number of patient women’; ‘starting with my mother, I was forced to be free, and the freedom conferred on me was a very real freedom.’<sup>176</sup> In matters of state intervention, Clark drew conspicuously idealist conclusions: ‘As the State has increased in its sense of its responsibility towards its subjects, the amount of liberty that it imposes on them increases also’, pointing to the fact that it was the state, often independent from political votes and partly with the help of self-help and labor organizations, which improved standards of education, sanitary standards, housing standards, employment conditions, and social insurance. All these measures promoted freedom by protecting individuals from insecurity: ‘In all these matters it is right and necessary to think of the compulsive work of the State as also a work of liberation.’<sup>177</sup>

Cowling, to take a final example, was sympathetic to T.H. Marshall’s *Sociology at the Crossroads* from 1947 since it viewed the extension of social services, such as unemployment insurance, ‘not primarily a means of equalising incomes’ but as a means for ‘a general enrichment of the concrete substance of civilized life’.<sup>178</sup> The only problem Cowling raised regarding scholars such as Marshall who ‘appoint themselves laureates of the Welfare State’, was to question whether they have a ‘minimal awareness of the fact that not all its aspects need be defended as necessary consequences of a categorical imperative’.<sup>179</sup>

In defending the welfare state in this way, the revisionists can be placed in the same fold as the statist discussed above, in particular Titmuss. But unlike the statist, and more akin to the non-statist, the revisionists were

willing to look beyond the state and civil society to assess the weaknesses of the welfare state, and in order to deepen its humanist commitments. The language in which they did so was either directly idealist or expressed in quasi-idealist terms.

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Clark, an ardent supporter of the welfare state, was nonetheless troubled with some of its consequences, as ‘more and more members of the population will have to fit into specialized positions in large undertakings, the control of which will necessarily be expert, complex and remote’.<sup>180</sup> Owing to the requirements of modern society, ‘in a thousand and one ways, largely unnoticed, the expert and the technologist have extended their grasp on the community’.<sup>181</sup> Although the technologist’s work is vital to the provision of welfare services, and for setting the conditions for the full expression of individual freedom, Clark stressed that ‘it is unlikely that his thought and experience [methods of applied and pure science] should disclose all that is important in life’. ‘And in what he has never carefully considered and never deeply experienced, in art, philosophy and religion, may lie all grounds for belief in freedom of choice or in any claim for any general system of right or value for mankind. If the technologist makes our gods, they are likely to be tyrannical ones.’<sup>182</sup>

The contemporary cult and dominance of the expert Clark contrasted with the humanist and plural origins underlying contemporary society, arguing that it is precisely in this humanism and plurality that we find the basis of what is best in the welfare state: ‘Nevertheless, the fact of moral progress is not to be questioned, and we owe it to the relative humanity of our institutions, which is both a humiliating and a very hopeful reflection.’ And: ‘The variety of the beliefs of those who have been responsible for human progress suggests, however, another difficulty of a slightly different nature; there has also been a variety of motive.’<sup>183</sup>

Clark was disturbed over the increasing influence of the new political, social, and natural sciences, which professed to solve all the problems of society and construct the foundation for a new and seamless one, without recourse to any but purely scientific values and methods. Other revisionists joined in on this critique. In *What is History?*, Carr referred to a prediction by Mannheim regarding sociology: ‘The other danger is that foreseen by Karl Mannheim almost a generation ago, and very much present today, of a sociology split into a series of discrete technical problems of social readjustment.’ If that should happen, sociologists would



‘become the unconscious apologist for a static society’.<sup>184</sup> Historical science here found a crucial role in Carr’s thought—namely, as a reminder to experts of the plurality, change, and uniqueness, which is as much part of the human condition as are general patterns. Against the reduction of the human condition to static theoretical models, Carr suggested that ‘change, development, unique and general must be studied’, and that a ‘two-way traffic’ between history and science must be opened.<sup>185</sup> Elton too gave history a similar task. The historian, Elton argued, ‘can help them [social scientists] to understand the importance of multiplicity where they look for single-purpose schemes, to grasp the interrelations which their specialization tends to overlook, to remember that the units in which they deal are human beings’.<sup>186</sup>

Carr, as a civil servant in the Publicity Department of the Ministry of Information during World War II, expressed a desire to see more ‘generalist’ civil servants, that is arts students from Oxford and Cambridge, to complement the prevalence of ‘experts’. Writing to a friend in 1939, Carr wrote: ‘The staff of this department is composed mainly of “experts” and we badly want some good civil servants and organisers.’<sup>187</sup> Without generalists, Carr proclaimed in *The New Society*, planning and state intervention in the hands of experts would remain directionless. ‘What is still uncertain and still controversial is the purpose for which the state intervenes and plans’, Carr wrote, and hastened to add that the ‘tragedy of our generation’ is that the only cogent purpose conceived by planners has been the ‘contingency of war’.<sup>188</sup>

For Carr, it was clear that the purpose of the new society was to balance the old ideals of individual freedom and democratic rule with the realities of mass society, which necessitated the rise of social and economic planning. Looking at planning in the West and the Soviet Union, Carr observed that the former’s strong insistence on individualism and democracy was hampered by the rule of experts and a new form of capitalism which reduced the individual to a consumer. In doing so, capitalism determined the individual’s consciousness and social position by an array of ideological innovations, such as advertising and new cultural forms of power, including the fashion industry, radio, and television. The Soviet Union, by contrast, put too much weight on the individual for the sake of the whole, a political strategy which far too easily turned into oppression and the stifling of individual liberty.<sup>189</sup>

The solution to both of these unintended consequences Carr saw in the ‘attempt to find a compromise, a half-way house, a synthesis between

conflicting ways of life. [...] The fate of the western world will turn on its ability to meet the Soviet challenge by a successful search for new forms of social and economic action in which what is valid in the individualist and democratic tradition can be applied to the problems of mass civilization'.<sup>190</sup> In other words, the task Carr set for the new society was 'to reconcile democracy and socialism'.<sup>191</sup> Carr even offered the ultimate goal for this solution:

'If, however, I were to asked to define the content of progress, I should fall back on the well-worn word "freedom"; and, to move at the present time, I should say "freedom for all," or "freedom for many," in contrast with the "freedom for some" which has been the great achievement of the recent past.'

Following the Russian philosopher of history Berdyaev, Carr defined freedom as '[the] opportunity for creative activity'.<sup>192</sup>

Laslett, to take a final example, voiced his critique of the welfare state in his views of higher education. Observing a great increase in what Oakeshott called vocational education, 'Home Economics and Business Administration' for instance, Laslett argued that the 'insistence on "the general cultivation of the mind" is of great importance', since 'literary and humane studies are perpetually forced on to the defensive'.<sup>193</sup> This was no defense of the 'definition of academic freedom which rests on the autonomy and self-sufficiency of individual universities', which 'is obviously out of date'.<sup>194</sup> It was, however, a suggestion for an institutional structure of higher education that could offer answers to the directionless movement, which Carr spoke of, of a society ruled by the imperatives of experts and technology: 'The growth of wealth and the progress of technology are not by themselves going to provide equal opportunities for all; nor can they tell us how excellence is to be maintained in intellectual societies'.<sup>195</sup> To this, Laslett added a historical observation: 'twentieth-century technological change has nothing of the permanence of nineteenth-century administrative and political reform. Its advocates and prophets are often misguided enthusiasts and their schemes impractical'.<sup>196</sup>

What Carr proposed as a visionary solution to society as a whole, Laslett applied to higher education in his chapter in *Essays on Reform*. Greater 'equality of opportunity' was a necessity in terms of efficiency as well as an end in itself, Laslett suggested in this essay. Freedom and cultivation of the mind were ultimate ends as well. However, these ends existed in a mass society which threatened to submerge individual freedom and creativity in the flux of anonymous and impersonal structures geared toward efficiency.

Therefore: ‘The great imperative would seem to be to avoid mass living and institutional anonymity, trying all discoverable means.’<sup>197</sup>

Laslett proposed several such means, some of which he worked to bring about in practice, not least the Open University, initially named the University of the Air. The units of the British university system of the post-war era, Laslett believed, needed to be systematically interdependent and offer both technical training and non-vocational education. The university should be interdependent to allow students to transfer geographically with ease in an era that witnessed increased domestic and international migration of the student population. The university should, moreover, be both vocational and non-vocational so that it can encompass the two fundamental types of education promoting the flourishing of human well-being in society. Laslett envisioned higher education as a ‘lifelong relationship between the individual on the one hand and intellectually, technologically, and professionally qualified teaching society within the nation on the other’.<sup>198</sup> That was the vision behind the Open University and the University of the Third Age.

Finally, the postwar British university should incorporate technological innovations such as radio, computer, and televised communication. Laslett participated in a 1966 Oxford conference which signaled things to come in communications technology, where a computer system was revealed which linked the Bodleian Library, Cambridge University Library, the Library of Congress, and Harvard University Library ‘into one whole, available at every point in the higher education networks of both countries’.<sup>199</sup> These technologies would soon allow groups such as mothers who cared for their children at home to enjoy educational opportunities while they were rearing their children, and it would facilitate lifelong learning. In regard to women’s higher education, Laslett believed that ‘the higher education of all women is the only guarantee of what will become the definition of a properly educated, truly civilized, and humane society’.<sup>200</sup>

## NOTES

1. Stephen Howe, ‘When (If Ever) Did Empire End?: “Internal Decolonisation” in British Culture Since the 1950s’, in *The British Empire in the 1950s: Retreat or Revival?*, ed. Martin Lynn (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 214–238, 216.
2. Howe, ‘When’, 225.

3. John Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System, 1830–1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); *The British Empire in the 1950s: Retreat or Revival?*, ed. Martin Lynn (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).
4. Jordanna Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire* (Berkeley, Calif.: The University of California Press, 2012); Jodi Burkett, *Constructing Post-Imperial Britain: Britishness, ‘Race’ and the Radical Left in the 1960s* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
5. Peter Laslett, ‘Introduction’, in *Philosophy, Politics and Society*, ed. Peter Laslett (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963), vii–xv, xiii.
6. Peter Laslett, ‘On Being an Englishman in 1950’, *The Cambridge Journal*, 3 (1950), 486–497, 491–492.
7. Jed Esty, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003), 187. See also Mike Savage, *Identities and Social Change in Britain Since 1940: The Politics of Method* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). I owe the latter reference to James Vernon.
8. Denis Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain: History, the New Left, and the Origins of Cultural Studies* (Durham, N.C. and London, 1997), 88–89, 141.
9. This interpretive strategy has been employed to great effect by Jan-Werner Müller in his *Contesting Democracy: Political Ideas in Twentieth Century Europe* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2011).
10. Maurice Cowling, *The Nature and Limits of Political Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 12–13.
11. A superb account of Oakeshott’s political philosophy is Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, ‘The Roots of Conservatism: Michael Oakeshott and the Denial of Politics’, in *The New Conservatives: A Critique from the Left*, ed. Lewis A. Coser and Irving Howe (New York: Quadrangle, 1974), 243–289.
12. This point is made by Anthony Quinton, *The Politics of Imperfection: The Religious and Secular Traditions of Conservative Thought in England from Hooker to Oakeshott* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1976), and Paul Franco, *The Political Philosophy of Michael Oakeshott* (New Haven, Conn. and London: Yale University Press, 1990).
13. Noel Annan, *Our Age: The Generation That Made Post-war Britain* (London: Fontana, 1990), 426–453 on Leavis, and 523–543 on Oakeshott.
14. E.H.H. Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism: Conservative Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 56–63.
15. Michael Oakeshott, ‘On Being Conservative’, in *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (New York: Basic Books Publishing Co., Inc., 1962), 168–197, 183–184, 185.

16. Oakeshott, 'On Being', 185.
17. Michael Oakeshott, 'Political Education', in *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (New York: Basic Books Publishing Co., Inc., 1962), 111–137, 117.
18. Oakeshott, 'Political', 116.
19. Pitkin, 'The Roots', 247.
20. In this respect, Oakeshott resembles Croce. See David D. Roberts, *Benedetto Croce and the Uses of Historicism* (Berkeley, Calif., Los Angeles, Calif., London: University of California Press, 1987), 231.
21. Oakeshott, 'On Being', 186.
22. Oakeshott, 'Political', 125.
23. Michael Oakeshott, 'Scientific Politics', *The Cambridge Journal*, 2 (1948), 347–359, 350. The Conservative Party, which saw itself as in large part responsible for bringing about and continuing these reforms, as Paul Addison has noted, shared this sentiment: 'the Conservatives at that time [1959] saw themselves as more modern and progressive of the two parties.' See Paul Addison, *No Turning Back: The Peacetime Revolutions of Post-war Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 129.
24. Michael Oakeshott, 'Introduction', in *The Social and Political Doctrines of Contemporary Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939), xi-4, xviii.
25. Pitkin, 'The Roots', 245, 273, 257.
26. Thus, it does not have to follow, as many scholars seem to argue, that Isaiah Berlin did not draw on new idealism simply because he rejected Oakeshott's new idealist political thought. See e.g. Paul Franco, 'Oakeshott, Berlin, and Liberalism', *Political Theory*, 31 (2003), 484–507.
27. See Chap. 2.
28. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Against the Self-Images of the Age: Essays on Ideology and Philosophy* (London: Duckworth, 1971), 93.
29. MacIntyre, *Against*, 95. We should therefore view with skepticism the kind of pronouncements on the death of idealism after World War II as this one: 'The exhortatory guides to good citizenship and political obligation [...] went out of fashion. So did British Idealism itself, dismissed as irrelevant by Marxists and logical positivists who now dominated university departments.' See Matthew Grimley, *Citizenship, Community, and the Church of England: Liberal Anglican Theories of the State between the Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 215.
30. Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Modern Times', *The New York Review of Books*, March 17, 1966.
31. Rodney Barker, *Political Ideas in Modern Britain In and After the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 1997), 13.

32. Bernard Crick, 'Preface', in *Essays on Reform: A Centenary Tribute*, ed. Bernard Crick (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), v–vii, v.
33. Crick, 'Preface', vii.
34. The Suez Crisis and the Hungarian Revolt of 1956 jolted western leftist intellectuals into drawing similarities between the behavior and goals of Britain and the Soviet Union. In J.W. Burrow's words: 'there seemed not much difference between the irresponsibility of our action and the brutality of the Russian suppression of the rising in Budapest.' See J.W. Burrow, *Memories Migrating: An Autobiography* (Copyright The Estate of John Burrow, electronic copy in author's possession), 131. Another historian quoted Leon Bagrit in showing how the communist and capitalist blocs were moving in a similar technocratic direction: 'Recent examination of changes in Communist Russia indicate that under the impact of automation, even communist dogma is beginning to undergo a reformation. Due to the creation of a new technological class on a world wide scale, orthodox political theories are now beginning to be amended, if not to crumble, and the process must inevitably continue. So it is possible that both capitalism and communism will find common denominators as a result of the forces let loose by the productive power of automation.' Leon Bagrit quoted in W.H.G. Armytage, *The Rise of the Technocrats: A Social History* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), 302.
35. Jan-Werner Müller, 'The Cold War and the Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century,' in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War: Volume III: Endings*, ed. Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1–23, 5.
36. Jose Harris, 'The Arts and Social Sciences, 1939–1970', in *The History of the University of Oxford: Volume VIII: The Twentieth Century*, ed. Brian Harrison (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 223, 235; Alan Booth, *The British Economy in the Twentieth Century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 194–199.
37. Robert Anderson, *British Universities: Past and Present* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2006), 111.
38. Noel Annan, *The Dons: Mentors, Eccentrics and Geniuses* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2000), 280.
39. The Report bore some imprints of the idealist tradition in speaking of higher education as a means toward self-realization: Anderson, *British*, 151.
40. Lionel Robbins, *The Theory of Economic Policy in English Classical Political Economy* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1961), 1–2.
41. Henry Pelling, *Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain* (London: Macmillan, 1968), 179.

42. Isaiah Berlin, *Washington Despatches, 1941–1945: Weekly Political Reports from the British Embassy*, ed. H.G. Nicholas (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981).
43. Peter J. Beck, *Using History, Making British Policy. The Treasury and the Foreign Office, 1950–1976* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 23, 25–26.
44. Beck, *Using*, 28, 30.
45. Henry Parris, *Constitutional Bureaucracy. The Development of British Central Administration Since the Eighteenth Century* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1969), 287–288.
46. E.H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis. 1919–1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1958), 75–76. See also E.H. Carr, *The Soviet Impact on the Western World* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1946), 93, where he argued, in a Mannheimian key, that the Marxist use of dialectical logic is valuable insofar as it is precisely such a weapon of relativity: 'This thorough-going relativism is ideologically the most destructive weapon in the Marxist armory. It can be used to dissolve all the absolute ideas on which the existing order seeks to base its moral superiority.'
47. Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism*, 19, 69.
48. Hilton quoted in Dworkin, *Cultural*, 24.
49. Oakeshott, 'Scientific', 357; see also Michael Oakeshott, 'Political Education', in *Philosophy, Politics and Society*, ed. Peter Laslett (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963), 18.
50. Oakeshott, 'Scientific', 355, 357–358.
51. Michael Oakeshott, 'The Study of "Politics" in a University', in *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (New York: Basic Books Publishing Co., Inc., 1962), 301–333, 318–319.
52. Oakeshott, 'The Study', 311.
53. Oakeshott, 'The Study', 327, 331.
54. Elton, *The Practice*, 48–49.
55. Elton, *The Practice*, 149.
56. Elton, *The Practice*, 155, see also 41–42.
57. George Kitson Clark, *The Kingdom of Free Men* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), 176–177.
58. Cowling, *The Nature*, 123.
59. Cowling, *The Nature*, 79.
60. Cowling, *The Nature*, 110.
61. Cowling, *The Nature*, 81, 4, 112, 116.
62. R.H.S. Crossman, *Plato Today* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939).

63. This discourse culminated in the early 1940s. See e.g. Herbert Butterfield, *The Statecraft of Machiavelli*, (London: G. Bell and Sons Ltd., 1940); Rohan Butler, *The Roots of National Socialism* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1942); J.H. Muirhead, 'With Whom Are We at War?', *Philosophy*, 15 (1940), 3–6.
64. W.H. Auden, 'September 1, 1939', *The New Republic*, October 18 1939, 297.
65. One philosopher who questioned the whole attitude was T.M. Knox, Collingwood's pupil. See T.M. Knox, 'Hegel and Prussianism', *Philosophy*, 15 (1940), 51–63. See also E.F. Carritt and T.M. Knox, 'Hegel and Prussianism', *Philosophy*, 15 (1940), 313–317.
66. R.G. Collingwood, *The New Leviathan: Or Man, Society, Civilization and Barbarism*, ed. and intro. David Boucher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), §33.52.
67. See e.g. Maria Hertz Levinson, 'Psychological Ill Health in Relation to Potential Fascism: A Study of Psychiatric Clinic Patients', in *The Authoritarian Personality*, ed. T.W. Adorno (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950), 971–976.
68. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism: New Edition* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1966), vii.
69. Collingwood, *The New Leviathan*, §35.87, §35.82.
70. Arie M. Dubnov, *Isaiah Berlin: The Journey of a Jewish Liberal* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 124.
71. Dubnov, *Isaiah*, 159.
72. C.E.M. Joad, 'Appeal to Philosophers', *Philosophy*, 15 (1940), 400–416, 410.
73. This is not to say that analytic philosophers, save Bertrand Russell, were pacifists, as many occupied positions high up in the military during the war, usually in an intelligence branch. J.L. Austin, Gilbert Ryle, A.J. Ayer, and T.D. Weldon, for example, all served in the war. See the essays in *British Analytical Philosophy*, ed. Bernard Williams and Alan Montefiore (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967).
74. Isaiah Berlin, *Political Ideas in the Romantic Age* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2006), 14, but see also 5.
75. Berlin, *Political Ideas*, 5–6.
76. Berlin, *Political Ideas*, 2, 52.
77. David Easton, 'The Decline of Modern Political Theory', *The Journal of Politics*, 13 (1951), 36–58; Alfred Cobban, 'The Decline of Political Theory', in *European Intellectual History Since Darwin and Marx*, ed. W. Warren Wagar (New York and London: Harper Torchbooks, 1966), 184–202; Leo Strauss, 'What is Political Philosophy?', in *What is*



- Political Philosophy and Other Studies* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1959), 9–54, 17; Armytage, *The Rise*, 355; Judith Shklar, ‘A Life of Learning: Charles Homer Laskins Lecture’, *ACLS Occasional Paper*, No. 9 (1989), 10.
78. Laslett, ‘Introduction’ (*Philosophy, Politics and Society*). The first edition was published in 1956. For the best analysis of Laslett’s views on political philosophy, to which I am indebted, see Petri Koikkalainen, ‘Peter Laslett and the Contested Concept of Political Philosophy’, *History of Political Thought*, 30 (2009), 336–359.
  79. Laslett, ‘Introduction’ (*Politics, Philosophy and Society*), viii. On positivism in British thought see Edmund Neill, ‘The Impact of Positivism: Academic Political Thought in Britain, c. 1945–1970’, *History of European Ideas*, 39 (2013), 51–78.
  80. Laslett, ‘Introduction’ (*Politics, Philosophy and Society*), xiii.
  81. Koikkalainen, ‘Peter Laslett’, 358.
  82. Laslett, ‘Introduction’ (*Philosophy, Politics and Society*), x.
  83. Peter Laslett, ‘Ultra-Modern Greats’, *Encounter*, August 1956, 72–74, 74.
  84. Laslett, ‘Introduction’ (*Philosophy, Politics and Society*), xii.
  85. Samuel Moyn, *Human Rights in History* (London and New York: Verso, 2014), 78.
  86. Isaiah Berlin, ‘European Unity and its Vicissitudes’, in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas*, ed. Henry Hardy (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 174–207, 202.
  87. *The Breakthrough: Human Rights in the 1970s*, ed. Jan. Eckel and Samuel Moyn (Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).
  88. Martti Koskenniemi, *The Politics of International Law* (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2011), 133–134.
  89. Giles Scott-Smith, *The Politics of Apolitical Culture: The Congress for Cultural Freedom, the CIA and Post-war American Hegemony* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 149.
  90. Laslett, ‘Introduction’ (*Philosophy, Politics and Society*), xii.
  91. Berlin, ‘European’, 204.
  92. Berlin, ‘European’, 205.
  93. Isaiah Berlin, ‘The Bent Twig: On the Rise of Nationalism’, in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas*, ed. Henry Hardy (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 238–263, 255. 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 (2014), 565–588. Cherniss does not discuss Berlin’s view of human rights.
  94. Berlin, ‘The Bent Twig’, 256–257.

95. Arie Dubnov, 'A Tale of Trees and Crooked Timbers: Jacob Talmon and Isaiah Berlin on the Question of Jewish Nationalism', *History of European Ideas*, 34 (2008), 220–238, 234.
96. Isaiah Berlin, 'The Apotheosis of the Romantic Will: The Revolt Against the Myth of an Ideal World', in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas*, ed. Henry Hardy (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 207–238, 225.
97. Dubnov, *Isaiah*. See also Avishai Margalit, 'The Crooked Timber of Nationalism', in *The Legacy of Isaiah Berlin*, ed. Mark Lilla, Ronald Dworkin, and Robert Silvers (New York: New York Review of Books, 2001), 143–160, 149–150, 159.
98. Jacques Maritain, 'Introduction', in *Human Rights: Comments and Interpretations*, ed. UNESCO, intro. Jacques Maritain (Paris: UNESCO, 1948), i–3, v, viii.
99. Benedetto Croce, 'The Future of Liberalism', in *Human Rights: Comments and Interpretations*, ed. UNESCO, intro. Jacques Maritain (Paris: UNESCO, 1948), 81–85, 81.
100. E.H. Carr, 'Rights and Obligations', in *From Napoleon to Stalin and Other Essays: Second Edition* (London: Macmillan Press, 1980), 11–19.
101. E.H. Carr, 'The Rights of Man', in *Human Rights: Comments and Interpretations*, ed. UNESCO, intro. Jacques Maritain (Paris: UNESCO, 1948), 5–11, 9.
102. F.H. Bradley, 'Note: Rights and Duties', in *Ethical Studies* (London: Henry S. King & Co., 1876), 187–193, 188.
103. Collingwood, *The New Leviathan*, §17.55, §18.52.
104. Carr, 'The Rights', 7.
105. Carr, 'The Rights', 7–8.
106. Carr, 'Rights', 12.
107. Strauss, 'What is Political Philosophy', 20, but see also 25. On the place of historicism in Arendt and Strauss, see Liisi Keedus, *The Crisis of German Historicism: The Early Political Thought of Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), in particular Chap. 3.
108. Carr, *What is History?*, 33.
109. Cowling, *The Nature*, 127.
110. Cowling, *The Nature*, 133.
111. Cowling, *The Nature*, 137.
112. Clark, *The Kingdom*, 129–130.
113. Clark, *The Kingdom*, 127.
114. Isaiah Berlin, 'Does Political Theory Still Exist?', in *Concepts and Categories: Philosophical Essays*, ed. Henry Hardy (Oxford: Penguin, 1979), 143–172, 150.

115. Berlin, 'Does Political Theory', 172.
116. Berlin, 'Does Political Theory', 156, 171.
117. Berlin, 'Does Political Theory', 172.
118. Isaiah Berlin, 'Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century', in *Liberty*, ed. Henry Hardy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 55–94, 58.
119. E.H. Carr, *The New Society* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1951), 1, 18.
120. Berlin, 'Political Ideas', 59.
121. Berlin, 'Political Ideas', 86.
122. Berlin, 'Political Ideas', 77.
123. Berlin, 'Does Political Theory', 148.
124. Berlin, 'Political Ideas', 85.
125. Berlin, 'Political Ideas', 81.
126. Berlin, 'Political Ideas', 79.
127. Isaiah Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', in *Liberty*, ed. Henry Hardy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 166–218, 168.
128. Berlin, 'Two Concepts', 206.
129. Berlin, 'Two Concepts', 204.
130. Berlin, 'Two Concepts', 217, n 1.
131. Harold Perkin, 'Individualism versus Collectivism in Nineteenth-Century Britain: A False Antithesis', *Journal of British Studies*, 17 (1977), 105–118, 113 n15.
132. Cowling, *The Nature*, 52–53.
133. Clark, *The Kingdom*, 184.
134. Clark, *The Kingdom*, 98.
135. Clark, *The Kingdom*, 184.
136. Peter Laslett, 'The Face to Face Society', in *Philosophy, Politics and Society*, ed. Peter Laslett (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963), 157–184, 167–169.
137. Peter Laslett, 'Introduction', in Robert Filmer, *Patriarcha and Other Political Works*, ed. and intro. Peter Laslett (Oxford, 1949), 1–49, 43.
138. Laslett, 'Introduction' (*Patriarcha*), 43. Alan Ryan's discussion of Filmer suggests that Laslett has redeemed a potentially important thinker for contemporary political theory. In discussing Hobbes's argument for the origins and foundations of government, Ryan points out Filmer as Hobbes's contemporary theoretical rival, and argues the following: 'Although few modern readers think much of Filmer's history, there is something deeply engaging about his response to the assertion in state-of-nature theory that men are born free and equal: they are not.' See Alan Ryan, *The Making of Modern Liberalism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012), 170.
139. Laslett, 'The Face to Face Society', 158.

140. Laslett, 'Introduction' (*Politics, Philosophy and Society*), xii.
141. Laslett, 'The Face to Face Society', 160.
142. Laslett, 'The Face to Face Society', 168–169, 173.
143. Laslett's critique of the theory of consent presaged swaths of studies during the 1950s and the 1960s issuing similarly spirited challenges. For some significant works, see Hanna Pitkin, 'Obligation and Consent–I', *The American Political Science Review*, 59 (1965), 990–999, and 'Obligation and Consent–II', *The American Political Science Review*, 60 (1966), 39–52; John Dunn, 'Consent in the Political Theory of John Locke', *The Historical Journal*, 10 (1967) 153–182; John Dunn, *Political Obligation in Historical Context: Essays in Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Carol Pateman, *The Problem of Political Obligation: A Critique of Liberal Theory* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1985).
144. Laslett, 'The Face to Face Society', 171, 161, 184.
145. Asa Briggs, *Michael Young: Social Entrepreneur* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), vii, 10, 20–21, 193–194, 198–199, 246, 305, 336, 363, 372, 383.
146. Stephen Katz and Debbie Laliberte-Rudman, 'Exemplars of Retirement: Identity and Agency Between Lifestyle and Social Movement', in *Old Age and Agency*, ed. Emmanuelle Tulle (Hauppauge, N.Y.: Nova Science Publishers, 2004), 45–63, 55, 53.
147. Michael Young, *The Rise of the Meritocracy 1870–2033: An Essay on Education and Equality* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1958), 10.
148. Young, *The Rise*, 86, 11.
149. Young, *The Rise*, 11–12.
150. Young, *The Rise*, 93.
151. Young, *The Rise*, 90, 83–84.
152. Young, *The Rise*, 94.
153. Erich Fromm, 'Introduction', in *Socialist Humanism: An International Symposium*, ed. Erich Fromm (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1965), vii–viii. See also Lawrence Black, *The Political Culture of the Left in Affluent Britain, 1951–1964* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 133: 'Like the New Left's interest in the ethical issues raised by Morris, revisionism was part of what in the later 1950s was not so much a cultural turn in socialism, as a return or renewal.'
154. Richard Titmuss, 'Social Welfare and the Art of Giving', in *Socialist Humanism: An International Symposium*, ed. Erich Fromm (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1965), 344–359, 348.
155. Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1961), 295.
156. Laslett, 'On Being an Englishman', 491.

157. E.H. Carr, *What is History: The George Macaulay Trevelyan Lectures Delivered in the University of Cambridge January-March 1961: Second Edition*, ed. R.W. Davies (London: Macmillan, 1986), 112.
158. E.H. Carr, *The Soviet Impact on the Western World* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1946), 103.
159. Titmuss, 'Social Welfare', 345–346, 350.
160. Titmuss, 'Social Welfare', 352. There were those intellectuals who believed that with Labour you could satisfy, if not conceptually reconcile, all demands in British society. Thus, on Annan's take, a vote for Labour in 1945 was 'a vote for fair shares against grandiloquence in foreign policy, for reconstruction, a planned economy, technocracy and also (for voting is always self-contradictory) for greater personal freedom and less respect for authority'. See Annan, *Our Age*, 283.
161. Titmuss, 'Social Welfare', 353–354.
162. Crossman quoted in Grimley, *Citizenship*, 216–217.
163. Black, *The Political Culture*, 123.
164. E.P. Thompson, 'History from Below', *Times Literary Supplement*, April 7 1966, 279–283, 279.
165. Thompson, 'History', 280.
166. Eric Hobsbawm, 'The Machine Breakers', *Past & Present*, 1 (1952), 57–70, 63.
167. Williams, *The Long*, 329.
168. Madeleine Davis, 'Reappraising British Socialist Humanism', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 18 (2013), 57–81.
169. Williams, *The Long*, 316, 300.
170. J.M. Winter, 'R.H. Tawney's Early Political Thought', *Past & Present*, 18 (1970), 71–96, 72.
171. Clark, *The Kingdom*, 14, 16.
172. Henry Pelling, *Modern Britain: 1885–1955* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1960), 13.
173. Berlin, 'Does Political Theory?', 171.
174. Berlin, 'Two Concepts', 215.
175. Berlin, 'Two Concepts', 171.
176. Clark, *The Kingdom*, 99.
177. Clark, *The Kingdom*, 102–103.
178. Cowling, *The Nature*, 40.
179. Cowling, *The Nature*, 41.
180. Clark, *The Kingdom*, 17.
181. Clark, *The Kingdom*, 17.
182. Clark, *The Kingdom*, 19.
183. Clark, *The Kingdom*, 71, 73.
184. Carr, *What is History?*, 60.

185. Carr, *What is History?*, 60.
186. Elton, *The Practice*, 38.
187. Carr quoted in Haslam, *The Vices*, 82.
188. Carr, *The New Society*, 37.
189. Carr, *The Soviet Impact*, 103.
190. Carr, *The Soviet Impact*, 115–116.
191. Carr, *The New Society*, 53.
192. Carr, *The New Society*, 118.
193. Peter Laslett, 'The University in High Industrial Society', in *Essays on Reform: A Centenary Tribute*, ed. Bernard Crick (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 120–139, 124.
194. Laslett, 'The University', 126.
195. Laslett, 'The University', 131.
196. Laslett, 'The University', 136.
197. Laslett, 'The University', 129. This concern was widespread among intellectuals in the humanities in the early postwar era. See Harold Silver, *Higher Education and Opinion Making in Twentieth-Century England* (London: Woburn Press, 2003); Eric Ashby, *Technology and the Academics: An Essay on the Universities and the Scientific Revolution* (New York: St Martin's Press Inc., 1963).
198. Laslett, 'The University', 133.
199. Laslett, 'The University', 135.
200. Laslett, 'The University', 133–134.

## Conclusion

This book has laid bare how the historical and political thought of the new idealist philosophers R.G. Collingwood, Michael Oakeshott, and Benedetto Croce impacted the thought of a prominent but ideologically and conceptually diverse group of post-World War II British revisionist historians and political thinkers. These include E.H. Carr, Isaiah Berlin, G.R. Elton, Peter Laslett, and George Kitson Clark. I have pursued three arguments to conceptually map this impact: first, the new idealists' defense of a pluralist and perspectivist methodology along with their concepts of agency, sympathy, and historical imagination was taken up by the revisionists in developing a postwar philosophy of history which responded to challenges posed by persistent teleological philosophies of history and the social sciences. Second, this philosophy of history, conjoined to elements from the Fabian tradition of historiography, informed sustained revisions of the modern English past from the Tudors to the Victorians. These revisions successfully challenged the interpretive legitimacy and institutional dissemination of liberal-whig historiography, but were in turn premised on a 'revisionist whiggism' suffused with welfare state political values and beliefs. Third, and final, the historicist, pluralist, and humanist political thought of the new idealism—inclusive of the absolute idealist concepts of positive freedom and state intervention—is recognizable in the particular political beliefs that the revisionists espoused. The revisionists, in strikingly new idealist-sounding language, historicized political philosophy and

human rights, and justified the welfare state while critiquing the pernicious dehumanizing effects of welfare state bureaucracy and technocracy.

In performing all these linguistic acts, which were responses to particular problems in postwar socio-political and intellectual fields, the revisionists were not conceptually indebted exclusively to the new idealism. I have therefore sought to illustrate how other traditions and the revisionists' individual creativity in using concepts were instrumental to revisionist thought as well.

Moreover, the revisionists' overt and intentional use of new idealist concepts has been inconsistently evident in their writings. Yet, if we grant that the themes I have identified were the central themes of revisionism, and if we wish to identify what conceptual tradition, fully within the revisionists' immediate socio-cultural fields, consistently articulated these themes, then we must accept, in the form of an abductive inference, that the new idealism is that tradition, and as such clarifies the meaning of revisionism. No other contending contemporary tradition—Marxism, positivism, 'modernism', and whiggism—embodied these themes in this particular constellation.

\* \* \*

What, if anything, can the new idealism and revisionism contribute to the problems historians face today? The term 'crisis in higher education' is heavily used in today's public debate over the nature of higher education in Britain, the USA, and other western countries. Although conceptually vague, this crisis discourse does point to a widespread discontent with things as they are. I will discuss one major problem that faces higher education today, at least from the perspective of a broadly speaking leftist historiography, to which I count myself.

Since the 1980s, what used to be called the 'public sector' during the welfare state period has been colonized by a form of bureaucracy that relies on those private sector languages and techniques that are called the New Public Management (NPM). The practical result has been an unholy union between neoliberal policy on the hand, and what can be likened to Soviet-style management and Stakhanovite work ethic on the other.<sup>1</sup> It may seem like an Orwellian tale, but this is how one British historian, who works on Soviet Russia, describes his actual experience of reporting to one of his departmental managers: 'I chose some boilerplate text and points from an archival report in which a Soviet scholar justified his research to



his funding body. Having translated and tweaked it, I incorporated it into an end-of-project report about my own research project. It was accepted without comment.<sup>2</sup>

As is well known, departments in the humanities, in Britain and elsewhere, have since the 1980s seen the influx of managers, commissioners, inspectors, and regulators, in short non-academic bureaucrats. These have, under the general neoliberal policy of mistrust against the public sector—and in the name of self-referential values such as ‘efficiency’, ‘rationality’, ‘excellence’, ‘measurable performance indicators’, ‘accountability’, ‘competition’—created a new logic of institutional academic practice. Some anthropologists of education call it ‘audit culture’.<sup>3</sup> The problems that prompted these changes were never made clear to academics in persuasive terms, owing to incommensurable perspectival differences, but the solutions are devastatingly effective in Britain: the introduction of fees, a substantial drop in state funding per student, increased student-to-teacher ratio, increased temporary-to-permanent faculty ratio, scholarly ranking tables that everybody disowns but in which every scholar tries to perform well, research funding contingent upon persuading funding agencies that the research meets ‘strategic’ and ‘excellence’ goals, and so on. If individual scholars do not play the game of securing grants on these essentially managerial terms, and publishing in ‘high-ranking journals’, they are increasingly likely to never get hired, lose their jobs, or are denied tenure. If departments do not hire only those scholars who ‘excel’, who bring in the funding, they most likely see drastic budget cuts. I have heard British colleagues speak of how their universities will hire well-known American scholars, with countless publications in high-ranking journals and a proven funding record, for a semester or two, just long enough to be included as faculty members in the evaluations that determine the competitiveness, and budget, of the department.

By clothing its moral and financial concepts in value-neutral terms, the ideology of NPM can contain what ought to be conceptually conflicting positions. Thus, NPM presents itself as ‘neutral’ and ‘rational’ while in fact it is deeply contingent, constructed, and driven by instating rules and regulations which promote the corporate-style regulation of *everything*. What the new idealism can help us realize, together with other critical theories, is that thought has the dual duty to critique metaphysical systems that seek to disguise themselves as ahistorical and universal on the one hand, and imagine and articulate alternatives to what we perceive as unfair practices and structures, on the other.

Historicizing the metaphysics of neoliberalism and NPM, that is unearthing the contingency and inherent strains of neoliberalism's absolute presuppositions, can perform the former task. Here we may also benefit from the three types of revisionist whiggism discussed in this book. There is no escaping whiggism, in some form or other, whether it is called 'whiggism' or 'presentism' or 'genealogy' or 'scientific history'.<sup>4</sup> Forms of defeatist whiggism have worked well for British 'declinist' historians such as Correlli Barnett in the 1980s,<sup>5</sup> and nowadays work well for far-right political movements who see the corruption of England, or any other European nation, in the historically disastrous introduction of multiculturalism. What the new idealism and revisionism can help us do, in our own terms and our own languages, is *construct* historical narratives which portray both neoliberalism and extreme right extremism in a defeatist mode, *but at the same time* bring to light alternatives in a pluralist or redeeming mode, or both.

The latter task will require a will to connect to the historical imagination—for the imagination is needed if we are to be able to be whigs about all the disparate leftist movements that today present alternatives to neoliberalism, such as the Occupy movement, the cooperative movement, welfare statist economists such as Thomas Piketty and Joseph Stiglitz, the Black Lives Matter movement, the Arab Spring movement, and the younger generations of the feminist movement. And the imagination is needed if we are to transgress the current historiographical condition where, in the words of one historian, 'all is comity and mutual appreciation', which attests to a cynical 'mutual indifference rather than agreement'.<sup>6</sup> We must, in a healthy spirit of authentic pluralism and perspectivism, dare to imagine, argue for, and act on alternatives.

## NOTES

1. Chris Lorenz, 'If You're So Smart, Why Are You Under Surveillance?: Universities, Neoliberalism, and New Public Management', *Critical Inquiry*, 38 (2012), 599–629.
2. Craig Brandist, 'A Very Stalinist Management Model', *Times Higher Education*, May 29 2014, [available at <https://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/comment/opinion/a-very-stalinist-management-model/2013616.article>, accessed August 11, 2015].
3. *Audit Cultures: Anthropological Studies in Accountability, Ethics, and the Academy*, ed. Marilyn Strathern (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).

4. *Popularizing National Pasts: 1800 to the Present*, ed. Stefan Berger, Chris Lorenz, and Billie Melman (New York and London: Routledge, 2012); *The Contested Nation: Ethnicity, Class, Religion and Gender in National Histories*, ed. Stefan Berger and Chris Lorenz (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); William H Sewell, Jr., *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago, Ill.: Chicago University Press, 2006); Richard A. Muller, 'Reflections on Persistent Whiggism and Its Antidotes in the Study of Sixteenth—and Seventeenth-Century Intellectual History', in *Seeing Things Their Way: Intellectual History and the Return of Religion*, ed. Alister Chapman, John Coffey, and Brad S. Gregory (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 134–154.
5. Correlli Barnett, *The Audit of War: The Illusion and Reality of Britain as a Great Nation* (London: Macmillan, 1986).
6. Susan Pedersen, 'Festschriftiness', *London Review of Books*, 33 (2011), 31–32, 31. See also Darrin M. McMahon and Samuel Moyn, 'Introduction: Interim Intellectual History', in *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History*, ed. Darrin M. McMahon and Samuel Moyn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 3–13, 4: 'intellectual historians can claim today no widespread agreement about how to conduct their work, and they often seem to lack the will to argue out the alternatives.'

## APPENDIX: SHORT BIOGRAPHIES OF KEY NEW IDEALISTS AND EARLY POSTWAR BRITISH HISTORIANS

**Isaiah Berlin** (1909–1997), political philosopher and historian of ideas. Berlin, of Russian-Jewish descent, was naturalized as a British citizen in 1929. Studied philosophy, politics, and economics (or ‘Modern Greats’) and classics at Corpus Christi College, Oxford (1928–1932). Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford, and Lecturer in Philosophy at Oxford University (1932–1938). Fellow of New College, Oxford, and Lecturer in Philosophy at Oxford University (1938–1950). Served in the British Information Office in New York and Washington, DC, during World War II. Immediately after the war, Berlin served briefly in the British Embassy in Moscow. Chichele Professor of Social and Political Theory at Oxford University (1957–1967). President of the British Academy (1974–1978). Trustee of the National Gallery (1975–1985). Founding President of Wolfson College, Oxford (1966–1975). Berlin is a major figure in post-World War II liberal political theory, intellectual history, and the philosophy of history. Key works include *Karl Marx* (1939), *The Hedgehog and the Fox* (1953), *Historical Inevitability* (1954), ‘Two Concepts of Liberty’ (1958), *Concepts and Categories* (1978), *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas* (1979), and *The Crooked Timber of Humanity* (1990).

**Asa Briggs** (1921–), historian and educational reformer. Educated at Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, earning a B.A. in 1941, and at the University of London, earning a B.Sc. in 1941. Served as an intelligence officer during World War II. Fellow of Worcester College, Oxford (1945–1955). Reader in Recent Social and Economic History at Oxford

University (1950–1955). Faculty Fellow of Nuffield College, Oxford (1953–1955). Member of the Institute of Advanced Study, Princeton University (1953–1954). Professor of Modern History at the University of Leeds (1955–1961). Professor of History and Pro Vice-Chancellor at the University of Sussex (1961–1976). Provost of Worcester College, Oxford (1976–1991). Chancellor of the Open University (1978–1994). Briggs was an important figure in the rise and development of the new ‘red-brick’ British universities in the 1960s, and in the development of continuing education. He is also one of the major British social and media historians of the twentieth century. Key works include *The Age of Improvement, 1783–1867* (1959), *Victorian Cities* (1963) and *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom*, 6 vols. (1961–1996).

**Herbert Butterfield** (1900–1979), historian. Educated at Peterhouse, Cambridge, earning a M.A. in 1922. Visiting Fellow, Princeton University (1924–1925). Fellow of Peterhouse, Cambridge (1928–1979). Editor of the *Cambridge Historical Journal* (1938–1952). Professor of Modern History at the University of Cambridge (1944–1963). Master of Peterhouse, Cambridge (1955–1968). Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cambridge (1959–1961). Regius Professor of Modern History at the University of Cambridge (1963–1968). Butterfield was one of the major historians of historiography of the twentieth century, with works such as *The Whig Interpretation of History* (1931), *Christianity and History* (1949), and *History and Human Relations* (1951). He was also a prominent scholar in the nascent field of international relations, with publications such as *Diplomatic Investigations: Essays in the Theory of International Politics* (Co-editor, 1966). Finally, Butterfield’s *The Origins of Modern Science, 1300–1800* (1949) was an important study in the history of science. Other key works include *The Englishman and His History* (1944), *George III, Lord North and the People, 1779–1780* (1949), and *Christianity, Diplomacy and War* (1953).

**Edward Hallett Carr** (1892–1982), historian and civil servant. Studied classics at Trinity College, Cambridge (1911–1916). Served in the Foreign Office during World War I, and was sent as a delegate to the Paris Peace Conference. Woodrow Wilson Professor of International Politics at the University of Aberystwyth (1936–1947). Editor of *The Times* (1940–1945). From 1947, Carr made a living as a writer, apart from stints as Fellow of Balliol College, Oxford (1953–1955), and Senior Research Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge (1955). His *The Twenty Years’ Crisis* (1939) is considered to be the first book in the ‘realist’ school

of international relations. His articles in and editorship of *The Times*, advocating radical social reform, helped pave the way for the Beveridge Report of 1942 and the Labour Party's victory in 1945. Carr's *What is History?* (1961) is an important book in postwar philosophy of history. Other major works include *The Soviet Impact on the Western World* (1941), the fourteen-volume *History of Soviet Russia* (1950–1978), and *The New Society* (1951).

**George Kitson Clark** (1900–1975), historian. Studied history at Trinity College, Cambridge (1919–1921). Earned a Litt.D. from the University of Cambridge in 1954. Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge (1922–1975). Lecturer in history at Trinity College, Cambridge (1928–1929). Lecturer in history at the University of Cambridge (1929–1954). Tutor at Trinity College, Cambridge (1933–1945). Reader in English Constitutional History at the University of Cambridge (1954–1967). Helped found New Hall, Cambridge (1954). Ford's Lecturer at Oxford University (1959–1960). Foreign Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (1975). Clark was an influential history teacher and administrator at the University of Cambridge. His *The Making of Victorian Britain* (1962) is a seminal study in the social history of Victorian Britain. Other major works include *Peel* (1936), *The English Inheritance* (1950), and *The Kingdom of Free Men* (1957).

**Robin George Collingwood** (1889–1943), philosopher, historian, and archaeologist. Studied classics (or 'Greats' or *literae humaniores*) at University College, Oxford (1908–1912). Served as an intelligence officer during World War I, and was sent to the Paris Peace Conference as a delegate. Fellow of the British Academy (1934–1943). Waynflete Professor of Metaphysical Philosophy at Oxford University (1935–1943). Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford (1935–1943). Collingwood's *The Idea of History* (1946) revitalized the philosophy of history after World War II. He was, along with Michael Oakeshott, one of the last British idealists. Major works include *Speculum Mentis* (1924), *An Essay on Philosophical Method* (1933), *The Archaeology of Roman Britain* (1930), *Roman Britain and the English Settlements* (Co-authored, 1936), *The Principles of Art* (1938), *An Autobiography* (1939), *An Essay on Metaphysics* (1940), *The New Leviathan* (1942), and *The Idea of History* (published posthumously, 1946).

**Maurice Cowling** (1926–2005), historian. Studied history at Jesus College, Cambridge (1943–1944, 1948–1949). During World War II, Cowling served in India, Egypt, and Libya. Fellow of Jesus College,

Cambridge (1951–1953). Fellow at Reading University (1953–1954). Worked briefly in the Foreign Office (1954). Leader writer for *The Times* (1955–1956). Conservative MP candidate (1959). Assistant Lecturer in History at the University of Cambridge (1961–1975). Fellow of Peterhouse, Cambridge (1963–1993). Reader in History at the University of Cambridge (1975–1988). Literary Editor of *The Spectator* (1970–1971). Key works include *The Nature and Limits of Political Science* (1963), *Mill and Liberalism* (1963), *1867: Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution* (1967), *The Impact of Labour, 1920–1924* (1971), *The Impact of Hitler, 1933–1940* (1975), and *Religion and Public Doctrine in Modern England*, 3 vols. (1980, 1985, 2001).

**Benedetto Croce** (1866–1952), Italian historian, philosopher, and politician. Studied jurisprudence at the University of Rome, but did not earn a degree. In 1903 Croce founded, with the philosopher Giovanni Gentile, the journal *La Critica*, which molded much of Italian philosophical and literary discourse until the 1940s. Became Senator for life in the Kingdom of Italy in 1910, and was the Italian Minister of Public Instruction (1920–1921). Initially sympathetic toward Fascism, Croce quickly became one of its fiercest opponents. After the fall of the Fascist regime, he became Minister without a Portfolio (1943–1945), and President of the Liberal Party. He resigned from politics in 1947. Founded *L'Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Storici* (Italian Institute for the Study of History, 1946). Croce was one of the last European idealists. His philosophy and histories were widely discussed in Europe and the USA in the first half of the twentieth century. Main works in English translation include *Aesthetics as Science of Expression and General Linguistics* (1909), *Philosophy of the Practical, Economic and Ethic* (1913), *The Philosophy of Giambattista Vico* (1913), *Logic as the Science of Pure Concept* (1917), *Theory and History of Historiography* (1921), *History of Italy, 1871–1915* (1929), and *History as the Story of Liberty* (1941).

**Geoffrey Rudolph Elton** (1921–1994), historian. Elton, of German-Jewish descent, was naturalized as a British citizen in 1947. He earned a Ph.D. in history from the University of London in 1949. Served in the British Army during World War II. Lecturer in History at the University of Cambridge (1949–1963). Fellow of Clare College, Cambridge (1954–1994). Reader in Tudor Studies at the University of Cambridge (1963–1967). Professor of English Constitutional History at the University of Cambridge (1967–1983). Regius Professor of Modern History at the University of Cambridge (1983–1988). Elton was an influential history

teacher at the University of Cambridge, and supervised over 70 Ph.D. students, many of whom were North Americans. His works on Tudor England and the philosophy of history are still discussed among professional historians. Major works include *The Tudor Revolution in Government* (1953), *England Under the Tudors* (1955), *Reformation Europe* (1963), *The Practice of History* (1967), *Political History: Principles and Practice* (1972), and *The English* (1992).

**Jenifer Hart** (1914–2005), historian and civil servant. Studied at Somerville College, Oxford, graduating in 1935. Civil servant in the Home Office (1936–1947). Fellow of Nuffield College, Oxford (1950–1952). Fellow of St Anne’s College, Oxford (1952–1981). Hart’s article ‘Nineteenth-century Social Reform: A Tory Interpretation of History’ (published in *Past & Present*, 1965) was a major contribution to the historical debate on the origins of the welfare state. Other major publications include *The British Police* (1951) and *Critics of the British Electoral System, 1820–1945* (1992).

**Eric John Ernest Hobsbawm** (1917–2012), historian, cultural and political commentator. Educated at King’s College, Cambridge (1936–1939). Rejected for intelligence service during World War II for his communist politics, and served as a sapper in a field company. Member of the Communist Party Historians Group (1946–1956). Lecturer in History at Birkbeck College, London (1947–1959). Fellow of King’s College, Cambridge (1949–1955). Reader in History at Birkbeck College, London (1959–1970). Professor of History at Birkbeck College, London (1970–1982). Visiting Professor at The New School for Social Research, New York (1984–1997). Co-founded the journal *Past & Present* (1952), which to this day is a leading international journal in the field of history. Hobsbawm is one of the most famous British historians of the twentieth century, and a key figure in western Marxist historiography. He joined the British Communist Party in the 1930s, and remained a member until his death. He influenced the British Labour Party in the 1980s, but was severely critical of the rise of New Labour. Key works include *Labour’s Turning Point* (1948), *Primitive Rebels* (1959), *Captain Swing* (Co-author, 1969), *The Age of Revolution: 1789–1843* (1962), *Labouring Men* (1964), *Industry and Empire* (1968), *The Age of Capital: 1848–1875* (1975), *The Invention of Tradition* (Co-editor, 1983), *The Age of Empire: 1875–1914* (1987), and *The Age of Extremes: 1914–1991* (1994).

**Michael Clive Knowles**, in religion Dom David Knowles (1896–1974), historian and Benedictine monk. Studied classics at Christ’s College,



Cambridge (1919–1922). Studied theology at Collegio Sant’Anselmo, Rome (1922–1923). Ordained as priest in the Catholic Church in 1922. Fellow of Peterhouse, Cambridge (1944–1963). Regius Professor of Modern History at the University of Cambridge (1954–1963). Knowles is one of the most important British church historians of the twentieth century. His works include *The English Mystics* (1927), *The Monastic Order in England* (1940), *The Religious Orders in England*, 3 vols. (1948–1959), *The English Mystical Tradition* (1960), *The Evolution of Medieval Thought* (1962), and *The Historian and Character* (1963).

**Peter Laslett** (1915–2001), historian and educational reformer. Studied history at St John’s College, Cambridge (1935–1938). Served as an intelligence officer during World War II. Research Fellow of St John’s College, Cambridge (1948–1953). Producer at the British Broadcasting Corporation (1948–1960). Lecturer in history at the University of Cambridge (1953–1966). Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge (1953–2001). Co-founder of the Cambridge Group of the History of Population and Social Structure (1964). Reader in Politics and the History of Social Structure at the University of Cambridge (1966–1983). Co-founder of the Open University (1969). Fellow of the British Academy (1979–2001). Co-founder of the University of the Third Age (1982). Laslett’s edition of and introduction to John Locke’s *Two Treatises of Government* (1960) revolutionized the study of Locke by showing that the *Two Treatises* were written not in 1689, justifying the Glorious Revolution, but as early as 1679–80, thus forcing a reconsideration of the role of context in the study of ‘classic’ political treatises. Other notable publications include an edition of and an introduction to Sir Robert Filmer’s *Patriarcha* (1949), *The World We Have Lost* (1965), and as editor of and contributor to the *Philosophy, Politics, and Society* series (1956, 1962, 1967, 1972).

**Oliver MacDonagh** (1924–2001), Irish historian and lawyer. Studied law and history at University College Dublin and at the University of Cambridge. Admitted to the Irish Bar (1945). Lecturer in history and Fellow of St Catherine’s College, Cambridge (1952–1964). Professor of Modern History at University College, Cork (1968–1973). Professor of History at the Australian National University (1973–2001). Key works include *Pattern of Government Growth, 1800–1860* (1961) and *Ireland* (1977).

**Michael Oakeshott** (1901–1990), political philosopher and philosopher of history. Studied history at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge

(1920–1923). History Fellow of Gonville and Caius College (1925). During World War II, Oakeshott served in the irregular Phantom unit. Editor of the *Cambridge Journal* (1947–1954). Fellow of Nuffield College, Oxford (1949). Professor of political science at the London School of Economics (1951–1969). Oakeshott was a noted conservative political theorist and philosopher of history after World War II. Key works include *Experience and its Modes* (1933), *The Social and Political Doctrines of Contemporary Europe* (Editor, 1939), *Rationalism in Politics* (1962), *On Human Conduct* (1975), *On History* (1983), and *The Voice of Liberal Learning* (1989).

**Henry Pelling** (1920–1997), historian. Studied classics and history at St John's College, Cambridge (1939–1941, 1946–1947). Earned a Ph.D. in history from the University of Cambridge in 1950, and a Litt.D. in 1975 from the same university. During World War II, Pelling served in the Normandy campaign and in the assault on Berlin. Fellow and Praelector of Queen's College, Oxford (1949–1965). Assistant Director of Research at the History Faculty at the University of Cambridge (1966–1976). Fellow of St John's College, Cambridge (1966–1997). Reader in Recent British History at the University of Cambridge (1976–1980). Fellow of the British Academy (1992–1997). Pelling was a prominent historian of the British labor movement. His *Short History of the Labour Party* (1961) went through eleven editions in his lifetime. Other major publications include *The Origins of the Labour Party* (1954), *Modern British Politics: 1885–1955* (1960), *Social Geography of British Elections* (1967), *Popular Politics and Society in Later Victorian Britain* (1968).

**John Harold Plumb** (1911–2001), historian. Studied at University College, Leicester, and at the University of Cambridge, earning a Ph.D. in 1936. Served as an intelligence officer during World War II. Fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge (1946–2001). Professor of Modern English History at the University of Cambridge (1966–1982). Fellow of the British Academy (1968–2001). Master of Christ's College, Cambridge (1978–1982). Plumb was a very influential historian at Cambridge between the 1950s and the 1970s, and mentored a number of students who rose to prominence in the public sphere and in the historical profession, including David Cannadine, Linda Colley, Simon Schama, and Roy Porter. He was an important figure in the development of British social history with works such as *The Growth of Political Stability: England, 1675–1725* (1967). Other works include *England in the Eighteenth Century* (1950),

*G.M. Trevelyan* (1951), *Sir Robert Walpole*, 2 vols. (1956–1960), *The Death of the Past* (1969), and *The Collected Essays of J.H. Plumb*, 2 vols. (1988).

**Edward Palmer Thompson** (1924–1993), historian, writer, and political activist. Studied history and literature at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge (1942, 1945–1946). Served in World War II as a tank commander. Youth brigade volunteer in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia (1946–1947). Member of the British Communist Party Historians Group (1947–1956). Teacher at the Extra-Mural Department at the University of Leeds (1948–1965). Reader in Social History at Warwick University (1965–1971). Thompson was a leading figure in the British peace movement, and a key figure in the European Nuclear Disarmament Movement. He was a leading thinker of the first New Left in Britain, critical of Stalinism and orthodox Marxism, and co-founder of the journal *The Reasoner* (1956–1957), followed by *The New Reasoner* (1957–1960), which in 1960 merged with *Universities and Left Review* to become *New Left Review*. Thompson is one of the major social and cultural historians of the twentieth century, and his book *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) is a landmark study. Other important works include *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (1955), *Whigs and Hunters: The Origins of the Black Act* (1975), and *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (1978).

**Hugh Redwald Trevor-Roper** (1914–2003), historian. Studied modern history at Christ Church, Oxford, earning a B.A. in 1936. Research Fellow of Merton College, Oxford (1937–1939). Served as an intelligence officer during World War II. Lecturer at Christ Church, Oxford (1945–1957). Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford University (1957–1980). Fellow of Oriel College, Oxford (1957–1980). Master of Peterhouse, Cambridge (1980–1987). Trevor-Roper was one of the foremost British controversialists of his era. His *The Last Days of Hitler* (1947), based on the investigation conducted by him as an officer in Britain's Secret Intelligence Service, conclusively demonstrated that Hitler was dead. In 1983 Trevor-Roper authenticated what he believed to be 60 volumes of Hitler's private diaries. The diaries, however, turned out to be inauthentic, and Trevor-Roper's professional reputation suffered as a consequence. In 1967, he successfully campaigned for Harold Macmillan to become Chancellor of Oxford University. As a historian, Trevor-Roper's interests were broad. Key works include *Archbishop Laud, 1573–1645*

(1940), *Historical Essays* (1957), 'The General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century' (article published in *Past & Present*, 1959), *The Rise of Christian Europe* (1965), *Religion, the Reformation and Social Change and Other Essays* (1967), and *Renaissance Essays* (1985).

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