

## **XIV: Late nineteenth and early twentieth century British thought**

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Key features of late nineteenth and early twentieth century British thought include analysis of the nature of liberty, keen interest in the role of the state in creating conditions for personal development, and belief either in perfectibility of human beings or in social progress, often in both. In spite of significant disagreements on these issues, the main representative thinkers of this period – here we focus on Herbert Spencer, T.H. Green, Bernard Bosanquet and L.T. Hobhouse – believed in systematic studies of human nature and society, drawing on a range of disciplines in humanities and natural sciences. Also all of them believed in a link between morality and politics. Unlike the liberal political theorists of the second half of the twentieth century, these Victorian and Edwardian thinkers, all passionate in defending liberty, were not moral pluralists.

### **1. Intellectual background**

British political thought of this period developed against the backdrop of Adam Smith's political economy and Bentham's utilitarianism, Darwinian and Lamarckian evolutionism, J.S. Mill's moral and political philosophy and the influx as well as domestic generation of socialist ideas. Smith's and Bentham's belief in free trade and free interplay of individual activity was representative of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century liberalism that battled against the vested interest of the landed aristocracy and the remnants of feudalism. The main political expression of this battle was the condemnation of governmental interference. Economic liberalism as displayed in the politics of *laissez-faire* was at the heart of the process of political liberalisation and it was this kind of liberalism that found its most prominent philosophical defence in the works of Herbert Spencer (1820-1903). However, the

late nineteenth century witnessed a significant departure from the liberalism aiming at limited government towards a “new liberalism” advocating substantial state involvement in social and economic life. Most late-Victorian liberals fought, rather successfully, to dissociate liberalism from its “ethos of egoistic possessive individualism” (Bellamy 1990: 2).

The ideas of the British thinkers of this period were shaped to a remarkable extent by developments in biology: Darwin’s theory of natural selection and Lamarck’s theory of evolution. The impact of these advancements of biological science was twofold. On the one hand they provided political thinkers like Spencer with a scientific method in justifying their vision of a perfect society (Gray 1990). In the case of Spencer, the theory of evolution was put to the service of defending individualism and limited state intervention. On the other hand, biological and evolutionary theory led to the grounding of diametrically opposed ideas, in favour of state intervention, in the case of the new liberals L.T. Hobhouse (1864-1929), J.A. Hobson (1858-1940) and D.G. Ritchie (1853-1903), who used the idea of “organicism” as a model of social growth and thus managed to reconcile Idealism with biological evolution (Freedman 1976). During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century a number of disciplines, related to social philosophy, developed rapidly: not just political economy and biology but also jurisprudence, psychology, anthropology and history. All these disciplines provided quite diverging, yet previously unutilised, methods for the study of morality and social progress.

For all British thinkers of this period J.S. Mill was a man of a previous generation but his influence on them could hardly be overstated. Not only Mill’s theory of liberty but also his understanding of individuality as an agency of talent, development, experimentation and thirst for knowledge and social utility, had a great impact on their metaphysics and political visions. Ernest Barker claims that the wide spectrum of meanings inherent in Mill’s

understanding of liberty anticipated the movement from old to new liberalism. “From a conception of liberty as external freedom of action, necessary for the discovery and pursuit of his material interest by each individual, Mill rose to the conception of liberty as free play for that spiritual originality, with all its results in ‘individual rigour and manifold diversity,’ which alone can constitute a rich, balanced and developed society.” (Barker 1951: 3) Well before Green (1836-1882) and Bosanquet (1848-1923), who were the most eloquent exponents of positive liberty, Mill outlined the spiritual and moral personality on which this concept was based. Mill, however, did not pursue the political implications of the different aspects of his concept of liberty: he did not develop a notion of rights, like Spencer; did not ascribe significant function to the state in providing the conditions for liberty, like Green and Hobhouse; and, arguably, he did not give due weight to the role of society in the constitution of personal flourishing, like Bosanquet. Interestingly, Mill’s utilitarianism was not well received in this period. Spencer rejected it as it ascribed too much importance to the general wellbeing and thus carried the potential to undermine personal freedom. Green and Bosanquet believed that it was based on a false metaphysical understanding of the person: according to them human beings were not fundamentally motivated by desires but by ideas of moral wellbeing. During the late nineteenth century Henry Sidgwick (1838-1900) was the only high profile exponent of Mill’s utilitarianism.

The influx of socialist ideas in Britain after 1880 went hand in hand with the turning of the liberal tide away from *laissez-faire* towards advocacy of ever increasing state intervention in internal affairs. Two types of Socialism made their way: the revolutionary variant of Henry Hyndman (1842-1921) that took on board the ideas of class-war and a socialist régime, and the reformist socialism of the Fabian Society, founded in 1884, that preached gradual change within existing institutions, through constitutional and democratic means. Aiming to

influence university audiences, the Fabians (Sidney and Beatrice Webb, H.G. Wells and G.B. Shaw) succeeded in making socialism intellectually and politically acceptable. Their ideology played a key role in the formation of the UK Labour Party during the twentieth century. Socialist ideas impacted significantly, although with a varying success, the political thinkers of this period. Bosanquet, who could easily qualify as the most anti-individualist British thinker of all times, had certain reservations about the economic and cultural claims of the working class. L.T. Hobhouse, on the other hand, embraced ideas of equality and redistribution to an extent that raised the question why the “socialist” label has not been more firmly attached to him. Yet as a whole, however receptive of socialist ideas, British Victorian and Edwardian thinkers resisted allowing the state to interfere in any way with the spontaneous process of formation of one’s moral and political ideals.

## **2. Spencer**

Herbert Spencer stood out from the other main late nineteenth century British thinkers in a number of ways. He did not have a conventional schooling and he did not pursue a university degree because of his outright rejection of school discipline and his refusal to study Greek and Latin under the private tutorship of his academically distinguished uncle. In his youth he worked for a number of railway companies taking part in station design, track building and general surveying – an experience that gave him direct insight into the nature of the industrial revolution (Harris 2004). His writing career started with his political “letters” to the *Nonconformist*, subsequently published together as a pamphlet (*The Proper Sphere of Government*, 1843) and consolidated when he became a sub-editor of the *Economist*. During this period he wrote and published *Social Statics* (1851), where he spelled out the moral principle from which the right role of the state could be derived. The inheritance he received after his uncle’s death in 1853 allowed him to devote all his time to his own writing and in

subsequent years he produced his *System of Synthetic Philosophy* which contained ten volumes on the principles of biology, psychology and sociology. In the late 1860s he was invited to apply for two major professorial chairs: in mental philosophy in University College, London and moral philosophy in Edinburgh. These offers were declined but they demonstrated the recognition he had achieved in academic circles.

There are two key elements in Spencer's social philosophy that can be seen as inconsistent with each other, but that can ultimately be understood only in each other's context: his individualistic understanding of liberty and his concern with social perfection. His reading of liberty as minimisation of any external intrusion went hand in hand with belief in society as a perfectly functioning organism. In his early career he argued for extending the franchise to working class men and for equal treatment of women, although in his later life he changed his views. The fusion of his political individualism and social perfectionism can be explained against the backdrop of the mid-nineteenth century, where the introduction of Free Trade in 1846 and the collapse of organised Chartism in 1848 bore witness to the benefits of economic prosperity based on capitalist competition.

Spencer's reputation as a "social Darwinian" also has to be understood in the context of his search for a theory of the perfect society. While Darwin was only marginally interested in an evolutionary process focusing more narrowly on the process of natural selection, Spencer, following Lamarck, was intrigued by the inheritance of selected characteristics. Spencer's coined phrase "survival of the fittest" had an evaluative meaning: unlike the Darwinian natural selection, it had moral implications. Spencer's evolutionary mechanism appears to guarantee "directional, indeed progressive change" (Offer 2001: xviii). What is more, Spencer's ideas of social evolution were published prior to 1859, when Darwin's *Origin of the Species* appeared, and Darwin acknowledged the influence of Spencer on the formation of

his own theory. However, a look into some of Spencer's more specific political recommendations will help us appreciate the extent to which the parallel with Darwin's natural scientific approach carries certain weight. By 1891, Spencer had started to argue that not only the state but also charitable organisations should abstain from alleviating poverty as any interference would produce false incentives, dependence, lack of responsibility and would interfere with the survival of the fittest. In Spencer's view, a key feature of the members of every species, including human beings, was their "fitness for life" which developed only in a natural process of spontaneous interaction (2001 [1884]: 128).

Spencer's arguments and "sentiments" on liberty were outdated by 1884 when *The Man versus The State* came out. He was well aware of the changing nature of liberalism during the second half of the nineteenth century and described the contents of these changes as well as their advocates, T.H. Green and Hobhouse, though in rather resentful terms. He pitched his understanding of liberty against two evils: present and past. For him the bygone era of feudalism, war and protected aristocratic interest was as bad as the coming era of the "socialistic" state with its ever increasing legislation, regulation and state bureaucracy. He used two related distinctions – voluntary versus compulsory cooperation and "regime of contract" versus "regime of status" – where voluntary cooperation and "regime of contract" explained the nature of authentic liberty, while their opposites were symbolic of the past and present threats to liberty (1991 [1897]: 142-3). The type of freedom most conducive to a well ordered society is personal freedom mindful of the personal freedom of others. Growing state power is counterproductive to liberty for several reasons. First, it is based on the false philosophy that "by due skill an ill-working humanity can be framed into well-working institutions" (2001 [1884]: 105). Second, its advocates held the wrong belief that only illegitimate authorities violate liberty. For Spencer, neither the legitimacy of the political

powers nor the nature of their intentions – altruistic or evil – mitigated the claim that state authority violates freedom. Spencer also developed a link between “socialism” and “slavery” in an argument anticipating Nozick’s parallel between taxation and forced labour. Spencer claimed that not only a full subordination of one man to another amounted to slavery, but that even a partial coercion had to be seen as a form of enslavement. In a state with increased social regulation people had to contribute some of their time or labour to the welfare of others. And even if this represented a small proportion of their time or income, the intrusion into personal liberty implied in this process was as unjustifiable as slavery. While the mid and late twentieth century libertarians strongly rejected any metaphysical foundations to theories of individuality or society, Spencer took very seriously natural law theories and made a case for the ontological status of natural rights. Unlike Bentham, he thought that they were not fiction but actually existed, and unlike Green and the new liberals, he thought that their existence was independent of social recognition.

Some of Spencer’s arguments carried more persuasive power than others. He drew a distinction between family ethics and state ethics, where the first was based on the principle of generosity and the second on the principle of merit, and observed that the wider community would not be able to function if it was run on the basis of family ethics. He also pointed out that both individual and social life “imply maintenance of the natural relation between efforts and benefits” (2001 [1884]: 164). His argument against free general education, though, was less impressive. He claimed that education in syntax, geography or history would have no benefit for the political maturity of citizens, in the same way that skills in cricket could not help someone to play the violin. To Spencer’s credit, we should say that he was well acquainted with the arguments of his opponents. As with most key ideological debates, it all came down to weighing up two evils against each other. In this case the evil he

feared more was the state's interference with what he believed was a natural process of developing individuals' economic and moral stamina, and the evil he was aware of but feared less was the poverty and economic destitution of the larger part of the population. One of his ways of expressing this dilemma was through the question "is it not cruel to increase the suffering of the better that the suffering of the worse may be decreased?" (2001 [1884]: 135). This was a tough question but one that T.H. Green was uniquely positioned to tackle well. The British idealist's understanding of human nature would provide the resources for explaining why the suffering of the better differed categorically from the suffering of the worse, as the former had the capacity to produce social benefits, while the latter had not.

### **3. Green**

Green was a leading if not the leading figure of New Liberalism – his theory of "true" or "positive" freedom offered the philosophical and ethical foundations of the late-Victorian liberal critique of mass poverty and social destitution that accompanied the nineteenth century industrialisation and urbanisation. Although the level of state intervention he recommended was rather qualified, a consistent application of his ideas, as demonstrated by Hobhouse, led to the justification of a much wider state involvement in economic and social infrastructures. Green founded the school of British idealism in Oxford and was one of the most influential philosophers in the period between 1880 and 1914. He is acclaimed for having succeeded in utilising the resources of German idealism, typically associated with conservative politics, in the service of a left-wing Liberal party programme.

Green was educated at Rugby and then studied classics, philosophy, law and modern history as an undergraduate at Balliol College, Oxford. After graduation, Green was elected to a College Fellowship and then appointed as a tutor at Balliol, teaching ancient and modern history and philosophy. In 1878 he became White's Professor of Moral Philosophy. He was



also an active member of the Liberal party and campaigned for legal protection of workers and land tenants' rights, for extending education and the franchise, and for temperance reform.

Green's moral philosophy, as developed in his main, posthumously published, philosophical work *Prolegomena to Ethics* (1883), had strong Aristotelian and Kantian influences. He combined belief in the developmental and social nature of human agency with an account of morality that centred on the "good will" as opposed to either pleasure or outcomes. Like Kant's, Green's moral theory built on an opposition between a natural and a moral world. For this reason he differed from Spencer and idealists, like D. G. Ritchie, who pursued a constructive link between philosophy and natural sciences. For Green, human agency had to be explained not in terms of desires but motives which are constituted by an act of self-consciousness. Human conduct consists of rational self-direction towards an object in which the person seeks self-satisfaction. Self-satisfaction, in turn, can be found in the joint pursuit of fulfilment of one's capabilities and engagement with socially beneficial activities.

Green's theory of the common good builds on and substantiates his understanding of agency and his moral theory. The moral ideal in which self-realisation can be found has, as mentioned, two significant aspects: the ever fuller deployment of one's capabilities and the commitment to the common good. Each of these is linked to a fundamental trait of human agency: the first being its developmental nature and the second, its social nature. Human nature is fully revealed only when its intrinsic sociability comes to some form of fruition. Practically, service to the common good could manifest itself in various ways, ranging from raising a family, to being a good citizen or becoming a social reformer. A key insight of Green's common good theory is that the personal good (personal flourishing), properly understood, always incorporated the common good (service to community).

Green's theory of the common good was a key ingredient of his political philosophy as developed in his *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation* (1886), *Lecture on "Liberal Legislation and Freedom of Contract"* (1881), and *On the Different Sense of "Freedom" as Applied to the Will and to the Moral Progress of Man* (1886). It allowed him to make significant advances on Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau in the analysis of political obligation, rights and freedom. His critiques of natural rights and freedom of contract anticipated late twentieth century liberal theory that was critical of Hayek's and Berlin's negative libertarianism. Perfectionist/autonomy based accounts of liberty and the rights recognition theory of recent decades build on Green's scholarship.

For Green, political obligation was justified on the grounds that it created the conditions for the fulfilment of man's vocation as a moral being. We owe obedience to a sovereign, the state or a political superior because their rule should contribute to establishing the institutions that enable the performance of our moral duties. However, the duty to obey the law is not equivalent to a moral duty. Moral duties cannot be imposed by the law because they are "duties to act *from certain dispositions and with certain motives*" (1986a [1886]: §10) which cannot be enforced as a matter of principle. The laws can control only our outward or external actions and thus indirectly encourage moral behavior, by promoting the conditions favourable to moral life. Therefore the state should not regulate religious faith, create conditions that hinder self-reliance or moral autonomy, or set up institutions that take away the opportunity for the exercise of moral duty, like the Poor Law, for example. Green seemed to have softened his stance on the latter, when in the context of his discussion of the reform in liberal legislation he recommended restrictions in the sale of alcohol. There he advanced the idea that a good law could act as "a powerful friend" (1986b [1881]: 203).

Green was critical of Hobbes and Locke who saw the justification of political obligation in the protection of natural rights. This critique prompted him to develop a new theory of rights that had been acclaimed as the one of the “finest” theories of rights to date (Martin 2001:49). Green challenged natural rights theories by arguing that rights existed as given to us by society. The reason society recognised the rights of its individuals was that thus it granted them powers which were necessary to their development as moral agents. Only by possessing certain rights could individuals become free contributors to the common good. The process of recognising rights was a two-way process. Those deprived of rights – Green gave slaves as an example – had to demonstrate their ability to adopt the values of the existing community of freemen and show a promise that once they had rights, they would contribute to the well-being of this community. The freemen, in turn, by recognising rights to former slaves made a step forward in the moral progress of mankind, progress marked by opening the existing civil institutions for the inclusion of those who were hitherto excluded from them.

The idea that rights were significant not only to the rights claimants (for example, the slaves), but also to those by whom the recognition of rights was actually fulfilled (in this case, the freemen), also found expression in Green’s theory of positive freedom. Like Mill, Green saw liberty as something over and above “lack of external restraints.” However, unlike him, Green did not conflate a variety of aspects of freedom in one all-encompassing concept but detected a principal difference between two types of freedom: “juristic” and “true.” Juristic freedom was linked to the desire to act according to preference while true freedom could be found in the types of action where one lived up to his moral nature. Here Green aligned himself with thinkers like Plato, the Stoics, St Paul, Kant and Hegel who had understood freedom differently from “exemption of compulsion”: either as a form of “fulfilment of the law of our being” or as “the condition of a citizen of a civilised state” (1986c [1886]: §§1,

17). Green demonstrated the practical application of true freedom in a political context when in his *Lecture on "Liberal Legislation and Freedom of Contract"* he explained the nature of "freedom" that should guide decisions on the legal reform of free contract. There Green introduced the term "positive" freedom, which was the freedom sought and found in activities that first, carried certain value, and second, were beneficial to everybody concerned. We should not seek freedom in activities that are detrimental to others. Free contract is notorious for its adverse effect on those with impeded bargaining powers, therefore its "freedom" should not be paradigmatic: a different, socially-minded type of freedom, that is, positive freedom, should inform our political reasoning.

#### **4. Intellectual background of British idealism**

The rise of British idealism at the end of nineteenth century, strongly connected to Green's academic influence, was not an isolated event. It was facilitated by an earlier development of cultural studies (S. T. Coleridge, 1772-1834), a concurrent rise of biblical studies through the influence of Benjamin Jowett (1817-1813), among others, who taught both T.H. Green and Edward Caird, and the increasing impact of German idealism through the ideas of Kant, Hegel, Fichte and Lotze (Gaus & Sweet 2001). Richter (1964) argued that the main reason British idealism succeeded in occupying such a prominent position was that the philosophy of its key figures managed to sooth the crisis of the Christian faith – a crisis caused by the undermining impact of empiricism and Darwin's theory of evolution. The British idealism of T.H. Green and Bosanquet offered a secular foundation for the Christian moral values. There is more to that, however. Through their concept of true or positive liberty, and through Green's theory of rights based on social inclusion (Dimova-Cookson 2011) they found ways to address the problems of poverty and social deprivation that were the by-product of the industrial revolution and its underlying liberal individualism.

The two *Fin de Siécle* thinkers who most fully internalised Green's ideas and took them to further heights, even though in a rather divergent fashion, were Bosanquet and L.T. Hobhouse. Bosanquet developed further the personal metaphysics and moral and social philosophy of his idealist predecessor, while Hobhouse spelled out in rather specific terms the political implications of Green's ideas on liberty, rights and political obligation.

## 5. Bosanquet

Bosanquet studied at Balliol College Oxford between 1867 and 1870. Upon graduation he was elected to a Fellowship at University College, Oxford. In 1881, with the inheritance from his father, he went to London where he got involved in adult education and social work through the Charity Organisation Society. At the age of 55 he became Professor in Moral Philosophy at the University of St Andrews but resigned this position after five years due to ill health. He was elected Gifford Lecturer for 1911-12 at the University of Edinburgh. Most of his philosophical research, however, was done outside the academic establishment, while his involvement with social work and social policy remained one of his priorities.

Bosanquet's main work in social and political theory, *The Philosophical Theory of the State*, was published in 1899 and was quickly acknowledged as a classic statement of the British idealist view of politics (Nicholson 1990), while his Gifford lectures *The Principle of Individuality and Value* and *The Value and Destiny of the Individual* provided the most developed statement of his metaphysical views. Bosanquet's best known political ideas include his reading of social institutions as "ethical ideas," his particular theory of the general will (see Nicholson 1990), and his recommendation of "moral socialism" as against "economic socialism." He has been both criticised and acclaimed for having pushed Green's idealism away from its liberal and radical implications towards a very unusual mixture of collectivist, socially conservative and economically individualist ideas (Gaus 2001).

However, Bosanquet had the time and the philosophical skills to elaborate further Green's personal metaphysics and moral philosophy and thus made its applications in social analysis more visible. Although the younger idealist made the collectivist aspects of idealism more explicit and thus made idealism in general less palatable throughout the greater part of the twentieth century, uncovering the inner mechanism of Green's morality has significant explanatory benefits. Also Green's untimely death in 1882 did not allow him to engage with the increasingly prominent socialist ideas in the period thereafter. The rise of socialist ideas triggered discussions on the nature of justice. It was Bosanquet who applied the idealist metaphysics on the analysis of justice and thus made the idealist legacy in this field more distinct.

Bosanquet's theory of justice as developed in his *Social and International Ideals* articulated moral dilemmas that anticipated Rawls's pivotal opposition between the "right" and the "good." Late twentieth century liberal thought proclaimed the distinction between personal "inviolability founded on justice," on the one hand, and the "welfare of society," on the other hand, as crucial for the process for protecting human rights (Rawls 1999: 3). Although the British idealists were acclaimed for overcoming dualities, like that between justice and virtue, for example (Boucher 1997), Bosanquet, in many ways, defied this characterisation. Like Green, Bosanquet saw continuity between the personal and the moral good, between the individual and social wellbeing, but he spelled out their points of conflict more clearly. As a result, he explained more precisely than Green did, the limits of state intervention: not only on the grounds that the state should not interfere with the spontaneous process of personal moral growth, but also because demands for justice can and do conflict with demands for public service.

Bosanquet's more specific argument was that the working class claims for "their own function, their own culture, their own duty, their own ambitions for a worthy and influential life" (1917: 195) were, on analysis, controversial. As a matter of principle, claims were demands made by individuals or groups for certain services that had to be provided to them by the state. And these claims represented the exact opposite of moral duties where individuals sacrificed aspects of their personal wellbeing in the name of the common good. Moral action and personal flourishing – strongly intertwined in the context of idealist metaphysics – crucially depended on one's preparedness to subordinate the narrowly personal to the wellbeing of the community. When we make claims for justice we are not acting as moral agents – we are not subordinating the individual to the social but using society to support the individual. However, the social ideal of justice is "justified" indirectly – the satisfaction of people's demands for justice helps them as individuals, but they will subsequently sacrifice their individuality in the name of public welfare. For Bosanquet, as was the case with the British idealists in general, every justification boiled down either to the assertion of moral action, or to creating the conditions for moral action, the key ingredient of which was the subordination of the narrowly conceived individual interest to the public good. Late twentieth century liberalism adamantly opposed such subordination. Yet nowadays, many political thinkers, critical of the negative libertarianism of the cold war era, turn back to the political ideas of New Liberalism in their attempt to resolve tensions in contemporary political theory (Simhony & Weinstein, 2001). The contemporary interest in New Liberalism breathes new life into the British idealist metaphysics and thus into Bosanquet's analysis of the particular dynamics between the individual and the social in the context of moral action.

## **6. Hobhouse**

British Idealism and New Liberalism are acclaimed by many for their success in reconciling personal flourishing with social welfare, liberalism with state intervention. While Green and Bosanquet balanced these on a metaphysical level, Hobhouse, “the most sophisticated intellectual exponent” of New Liberalism, made a case for their interdependence on a political level (Meadowcroft 1994). Hobhouse studied at Marlborough and at Corpus Christi College at Oxford, graduating in 1887. He stayed at Oxford as a Fellow subsequently in Merton College and in Corpus Christi College, but after his critique of idealism in his first major philosophical work, *A Theory of Knowledge* (1896) was not received well, he moved to the career of journalist, writing for the *Manchester Guardian* (1897-1903) and for *The Tribune* (1905-1907). During some of this period he also worked as a secretary to the Free Trade Union. In 1907 he accepted the newly created chair in sociology at London School of Economics and held this chair until his death in 1929, continuing to make substantial contributions to the *Manchester Guardian*. His book *Liberalism*, written in the winter of 1910-11 has been celebrated as “the best twentieth-century statement of Liberal ideals” (Collini 1979: 121).

For Hobhouse, liberty, properly understood, allowed one to exercise the full spectrum of his faculties and reflected the capacity for personal growth. The concept of liberty “rests on the nature of the ‘good’ itself” and is compatible with “discipline,” “organisation” and “strenuous conviction as to what is true and just” (1994 [1911]: 63, 56). The belief that liberty can only be achieved through the process of personal development, implied that it was impossible to exercise it unless certain social and economic conditions were already available. Therefore, a well-specified type of state intervention was necessary to liberty. A careful distinction had to be made between state control that “cramps the personal life and spiritual order, and the control that is aimed at securing the external and material conditions of their free and



unimpeded development” (1994 [1911]: 71). On these grounds Hobhouse advocated the “right to work” and the right to a “living wage”, arguing that they were just as valid as “the rights of person or property” (1994 [1911]: 76). He also made the case for redistribution of resources on the grounds of distinguishing between the social and individual factors of wealth. While everyone should receive the income associated with the individual factors, the wealth based on social factors should go into the public coffers. In addition, Hobhouse argued that relative inequalities of wealth are unacceptable, remaining true to his conviction that there was “a close connection in each instance between freedom and equality” (1994 [1911]: 68). Hobhouse’s radicalism in terms of redistribution of wealth and his misgivings about social inequality surpassed Green’s own recommendations for reform and came into conflict with Bosanquet’s beliefs in economic self-independence. He was among very few political thinkers who went so deeply into a socialist terrain yet retained their “liberal” qualification, although some critics doubt his entitlement to it (Collini 1979: 96).

Hobhouse’s belief in the continuity between liberalism and socialism explains two of his most deep-seated political convictions. He repeatedly stated that liberalism had to adapt its political expression in order to protect its fundamental values. Only by increasing the role of the state in the provision of economic conditions, that is, only by embracing collectivist and socialist policies, could society foster the realisation of the liberal values of personal flourishing, independence and voluntary collaboration. But this in turn provided the parameters within which socialism was justifiable: socialism that lost sight of liberal values was misguided. Hence New Liberalism collided on many points with Fabianism. Hobhouse opposed the materialist socialism of Hyndman’s Social Democratic Federation (1881-1911) and the allegedly bureaucratic socialism of the Fabians, promoting instead socialism that fostered liberty and was democratic in nature.

As one of the first British sociologists, Hobhouse attempted to bridge the gap between idealism and positivism. He embraced an organic view of social life based on the idea of an “orthogenic evolution” where progress was corollary to the work of mind and reason, was measured on ethical grounds, and reflected a process in which cooperation superseded competition. (Freedman 2006). His liberalism and ethical socialism found expression in his anti-imperialist views. In *Democracy and Reaction* he argued for “forbearance in international affairs” (1909 [1904]: 12), and he praised liberal reformers like Cobden who lagged behind him on the level of the state intervention in domestic life but nonetheless firmly resisted Imperial aggrandisement (Meadowcroft 1994: 12).

## **7. The matter of gender**

All four thinkers covered here embraced J.S. Mill’s belief in gender equality. And although the late nineteenth and early twentieth century British thought was dominated by male thinkers, a number of women earned their place in the history of ideas. Beatrice Webb (1858-1943) developed under the tutelage of Spencer but rejected his individualism in order to lay the foundations, together with her husband Sidney Webb (1859-1947), of Fabianism: the most distinct brand of British socialism (Greenleaf 1983: 381). She wrote on the cooperative movement and trade unionism in Britain. Helen Bosanquet (1860-1925), Bernard Bosanquet’s wife, had an active career as a theorist and publicist of the Charity Organisation Society. She wrote a number of sociological works on poverty, the standard of life and the family. Her recommended strategies for alleviating poverty were based on strengthening the rational will through private charity organisations and not centralised state policies. After publishing her *Defence of Idealism* in 1917, Mary Sinclair (1863-1946) became the first woman member of the Aristotelian Society. She was also among the first British philosophers who took interest and wrote on psychoanalysis. Sylvia Pankhurst (1882-1960) set up the

Suffragettes movement in 1914 which over the years evolved into the Workers' Socialist Federation. However, female participation in public life more often took the form of political activism rather than generation of political thought. This slow but visible process of women's involvement in politics was an expression of the moral and liberal values deeply held during the previous *Fin de Siècle*.

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### **Related Topics**

Aristotle, Equality, Hobbes, Liberty, Liberalism, Libertarianism, Locke, Mill, Natural Law and Rights Theory, Rights, Rousseau, Kant

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