INTRODUCTION

LIBERALISM RESARTUS

The term "liberalism" has always enjoyed a separate existence away from the constricting, formal, and austere world of political concepts and theories. To be liberal evokes generosity, tolerance, compassion, being fired up with the promise of open, unbounded spaces within which the free play of personality can be aired. Yet the clues to liberalism's political nature are not hard to detect. Generosity suggests the dispensing of bounties beyond the call of duty—to prioritise justice as the first liberal virtue is unnecessarily reductionist. Tolerance suggests a flexibility, a movement, a diversity—of ideas, of language, and of conceptual content—that sets liberalism aside from most of its ideological rivals, whose declared aspiration is to finalise their control over the political imagination. Compassion suggests an empathy, a sociability, an altruism, that pays homage to the human networks in which individualism is integrally and beneficially enmeshed, as well as an ardent desire to alleviate human suffering. And openness suggests that the permutations of human conduct and thought are unfathomable and wonderfully unpredictable. Lest we forget, those are liberalism's most remarkable qualities.

Just over a century ago, something significant happened to liberalism that brought those qualities into particular prominence. It underwent a series of transformations that changed the nature of Western politics, while altering the internal balance of liberal political thought itself. Many factors contributed to that change. Among those were the growing reach of democratised politics; the (re)discovery of social relations as partly constituting the individual; the popularisation of evolutionary theory grafted on to theories of progress; a new attentiveness to the psychology of human vitality; the identification of additional barriers to human action and development that required novel conceptions of liberty; and, not least, a reconceptualisation of politics as a responsible, responsive, and facilitating communal activity. That process occurred in a number of cultural locations: in France, in the Antipodes, in the United States, in Italy. But above all it took place in Britain, and Britain—then still a net exporter of political ideas—persevered in its nineteenth-century role as the leading producer and disseminator of cutting-edge liberal theory and of the practices that accompanied such thinking. The chapters in this first section are intended both to illustrate the potential that is always available in liberal

theory and ideology, and to emphasise the actual importance and impact of a body of ideas that grew over time and across space.

That British movement of ideas, known as the "new liberalism," was no chimera or historical oddity, no flash in the pan, no geographical eccentricity. Rather, it teased out of liberalism implicit and underplayed features that created an ideological turn. This juncture lies at the basis of the welfare state—probably the most important domestic institutional achievement of Western political systems in the twentieth century. Two of the central figures of the new liberalism, Leonard Trelawny Hobhouse and John Atkinson Hobson—who figure prominently in the following pages—deserve that salience because they epitomise that ideological turn in their fecund writings and in their innovative methodology. We can, indeed, employ them to unlock much of the liberal potential that has become hidden, or has been overlooked, in many of the philosophical liberal discourses that dominated the period between the 1970s and the 1990s. As befits a broadly based intellectual tradition, the two British thinkers are equally important for who they were as for the trend they so brilliantly and efficiently symbolised, for their ability to optimise liberalism's humanist promise, and for the distinctive liberal language they developed. Nonetheless, the story of the new, progressive liberalism of the twentieth century is a far more extensive and subtle one, involving individuals, groups, and institutions that through their synergies moulded an intricate and pervasive modern Weltanschauung, employing a range of liberal languages. And it is a story that should on no account be displaced by the political remoteness, specialised interests, and hypothetical thought-experiments characteristic of recent academic liberal debates.

In addressing the issues raised by those liberal currents and rearticulations of liberal principles, we are inevitably drawn to a profound set of concerns. What is liberalism? How does one go about attempting to answer that most seductive and elusive question? In particular, which of the features that typify the liberal tradition should we take note of from the vantage point of the present? Can we use our knowledge of liberalism, as it has developed over the past century or so, to decode some of its more recent manifestations, as well as to appreciate the complexity of that ideological movement over time and space? And, simply but importantly, where should we look for liberal thinking?

EXTENDING THE SEARCH

In the broadest sense, three fundamental perspectives on liberalism exist side by side and it may help to set them out.

First, liberalism—as history—can be understood as a narrative about the emergence of a belief system, contextualised and temporalised. That narrative has focused primarily on the liberation of individuals and groups from oppression and discrimination. Second, liberalism—as ideology—can be understood as an actually identifiable configuration of specified political concepts, such as liberty, progress, and individuality, that adopts a distinct pattern, or a series of family resemblances, to which the name "liberal" is designated. Third, liberalism—as philosophy—can be understood as a modelling device in which universal ground rules are drawn up for a just and free society, rules that permit in particular a fair and equal pursuit of the chosen life plan of every person.

These are some of the questions and approaches that the essays in this book, especially in its first part, address. But if Hegel's owl of Minerva has any say in the matter, my own journey through liberalism has been accompanied by a permanent flapping of her wings. There is no end of day at which understanding descends. Comprehension is incremental and insight changes with accruing perspectives. When I first embarked on exploring aspects of the liberal tradition, my aim was specific: to understand what had happened to liberalism between the mature John Stuart Mill— at the time appropriated by liberal minimalists and "self-regarders"—and the Beveridge Report of almost a century later. Even given the impact of the more holistic and other-regarding philosophical idealism that emerged in the post-Millian late nineteenth century, what occurred inside the liberal "black box" to transform a tract such as T. H. Green's *Liberal Legislation and Freedom of Contract* of 1881 into a policy document such as the Beveridge Report of 1942—William Beveridge's *Social Insurance and Allied Services*—still remained something of a mystery. Aside from some general awareness of Hobhouse as a worthy but secondary figure in the modern liberal canon, there were few accounts, and fewer analyses, of the complex movement of liberalism from an assumedly individualistic, even atomistic, theory of human nature and social structure towards something at the heart of welfare-state thinking. What accounted for that leap? *Was* it a leap, or was it an oversight of both participants and scholars in failing to recognise a more sustained and steady process that had been happening under their eyes? And if so, why did that failure in recognition happen?

Failure to recognize is not tantamount to a failure to get it right. It means that cultural and ideological causes obscure certain interpretations, certain points of view; that they deliberately conceal or underestimate them, or, more accurately and frequently, that the conceptual apparatus for their formulation and recognition is simply unavailable; and that the methodology employed by students of political thought is designed to extract and illuminate certain kinds of information but not others. The

study of liberalism suffered from all these characteristics, so that by the mid-twentieth-century research into the liberal tradition had become a highly constricted and stylised approximation of the evidence and perspectives that were potentially available to its students. But there has been another major impediment to the scholarly retrieval, mapping, and appraisal of liberalism. For the past forty years, its philosophical exploration has drifted apart from the thinking, the theorising, and the debates that have constituted liberalism as a broad political movement, both intellectual and political. Gone are the days when a John Stuart Mill could produce a text that would serve as reference point to political leaders as well as philosophers, a text that could be grasped by a reasonably educated individual. The specialized language of late-twentieth-century liberal philosophers, directed mainly at their colleagues rather than at the thinking public,[1] has been accompanied by a partial reconstruction of the liberal enterprise, a reconstruction that runs counter to many—though far from all—of the assumptions, beliefs, and prescriptions that have typified Western liberalism.

The loss is a double one: to historians of ideas and students of ideology because they no longer are as keenly in touch with the critical and reflexive testing of liberal principles; and to political philosophers because they no longer are significantly in touch with the political and cultural constraints that ensure the viable flexibility liberalism requires, as it competes in the real-world arena of policymaking, of reform, of social inspiration, and of political mobilisation. These diverging fields of analysis have to develop a common language and to begin to reconnect, to intersect, and to overlap in their concerns, in order for the members of the liberal family to be recognised as possessing a common ideational pool, however different the actual drawing out of political languages from that pool may be. There are only three modes of going about this. First, one of the discourses can be eliminated—an unlikely as well as a most undesirable possibility. Second, the disparate discourses can be reconciled, if each is prepared to learn the language of the others and make some serious mutual methodological concessions. Third, new discourses may be constructed that offer alternative sites for developing the study of liberalism, or that re-evaluate the existing discourses so that common, hitherto nontransparent, organising motifs and conceptual patterns are unveiled. My own forays into liberal theory, increasingly propelled by frustration with the current nonconversation among the disciplines, have attempted to establish small beachheads, initially for the second mode and more recently for the third.

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[1] In part the pressures on an increasingly beleaguered and specialised academic profession have brought about the need for philosophers to impress their scholarly peers long before they convey their thoughts to the public; in part liberalism has in their hands again become

This book has a second theme, though. It concerns the application of recent theories of ideology, my own included, in order to obtain a clearer view of the components of liberalism and their internal flexibility and substantive indeterminacy. It also assists in comprehending the boundaries of liberalism, their permeability, and the structures that exist outside them. At what points in a discursive field do we begin to move out of the liberal domain? Which conceptual mutations have to occur for us to decide that the configuration of arguments before us is no longer liberal? Finally, it examines some features of ideological morphology I have explored since completing my *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach*.[2] That second theme is a minor one in some of the chapters of the first part, whereas the first theme, likewise, is a lesser thread present in most chapters of the second. I shall address the second theme more specifically in a chapter linking the two parts.

ALTERNATIVE RECONSTRUCTIONS

The historical study of liberalism has become increasingly and healthily diversified over the past quarter-century. Some of it still follows canonical convention in setting out the qualitative criteria of the liberal political thinking it is prepared to take seriously, even as it has moved to extend somewhat the range of theorists that form part of the classical liberal canon. An example of that approach is that of Stefan Collini, who channelled the 1960s–1970s Cambridge focus on high politics into the scrutiny of high-minded political thinking among a broader cross-section of the liberal intelligentsia, while insisting that less structured or less sophisticated forms of political thought could not be subject to the same standards of analysis.[3] Other branches of historical research have illuminated the populist sources of issues that intellectuals later raised to the levels of properly articulated discourses. Thus, some liberal conceptions of communal identity and fraternity could be traced to working-class cultures that percolated into mainstream political thinking and that pressed on liberalism a need to develop greater social inclusiveness. An example of that is the work of Eugenio Biagini, who has also argued that continuities with earlier, "older" liberal strands should not be underestimated.[4] Fur-

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the élitist enterprise it used to be before democratic practice softened the overly rational and insular garb liberalism once donned.

[2] M. Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach* (Oxford, 1996).

[3] See, e.g., S. Collini, *Liberalism and Sociology: L. T. Hobhouse and Political Argument in England, 1880–1914* (Cambridge, 1979).

[4] E. F. Biagini and A. J. Reid, *Currents of Radicalism: Popular Radicalism, Organised Labour and Party Politics in Britain, 1850–1914* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 9, 15.

ther recent developments have yet to figure prominently: the continental, German-led development of conceptual history, investigating competing and changing vocabularies, and linguistic and conceptual adaptability in crucial historical bridging periods, has so far had little resonance in the study of liberalism.[5] Similar issues have arisen through the work of J. G. A. Pocock on political language and vocabulary—again insufficiently cashed out in existing research on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, on which the essays in this book focus.[6] Ultimately, it has to be said, liberalism has a far broader multidisciplinary genealogy than that assumed by canon-led historians of political thought: politics, psychology, sociology, management, biology. It is not just a philosophy but a sophisticated cultural compound. And its sources are manifold: liberalism is a discourse that surfaces at countless levels of written and oral expression.

When I first started work on *The New Liberalism*,[7] conceptual history was in its infancy, the focus on authorial intentions had just commenced, while discourse analysis and the linguistic turn had hardly begun to be applied to the study of political thought. I was convinced that the activity of creating socially significant and historically important political theory was a far broader one than what was represented through the traditional apostolic successions of the "great thinkers." My aim was to extend the range of subject matter that came under the legitimate scrutiny of political theory and to examine thinking that was located closer to the coal face of political activity. In so doing I tried to apply some of the analytical questions that concerned political theorists to the archival materials at the disposal of historians.

By the time *Liberalism Divided* had been completed,[8] I was beginning to make the first inroads into the approach I believed was needed to understand and decipher the political thinking produced by broader groups of intellectuals and activists. The opening sections of that book adumbrate some general thoughts about the forms in which that thinking appears to us. Curiously, some historians urged me to drop those methodological musings, which a decade later had been transformed into my theory of ideological structure (which I later termed ideological morphology in order to distinguish between that theory and the various currents under the general heading of "structuralism").

[5] R. Koselleck, *Futures Past* (Cambridge, MA, 1985); idem, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts* (Palo Alto, CA, 2002); M. Richter, *The History of Social and Political Concepts* (New York, 1995).

[6] But for an illuminating recent study on liberal vocabularies see R. A. Primus, *The American Language of Rights* (Cambridge, 1999).

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

[8] M. Freeden, *Liberalism Divided: A Study in British Political Thought, 1914–1939* (Oxford, 1986).

Ideologies and Political Theory enabled me to revisit British new liberalism—while exploring other forms of liberalism as well as different ideological families—and re-examine the ideas I had already studied. This time, however, the emphasis was on their decontestations and their configurations, and on investigating how specific conceptual arrangements created determinate fields of meaning from the raw material available to the formulators of liberalism—indeed, of political thought in general. An interest in methodology no longer seemed to me—as it still does to quite a few scholars—merely to be the overindulgent preliminary to talking about what really matters. Rather, it was the key to deciphering the secrets contained in written texts and oral utterances. It offered solutions to the central question I now knew had to be asked: what has to hold for this sentence, that paragraph, this narrative, to make sense to its author, and what has to hold for it to make sense to its consumers, be they the intended audiences at the time, or the audiences of the future? How are the sense and the meaning that should interest students of politics produced, formed, and extracted from the thoughts and practices available to a society? Which options are opened and which foreclosed, both for political thought and for political practices, when a particular cultural map is superimposed on a virtual infinity of logical conceptual possibilities?

But whereas part 2 concentrates on alternative modes of analysing ideologies, part 1 is concerned with alternative reconstructions of the history of liberal thought. While historians of liberalism in the past generation have approached their chosen subject through the prisms of high or of low politics, and while questions of genesis and lines of influence still have a strong hold on their academic imaginations, most of the essays in part 1 follow a different trajectory. They reshuffle the priorities accorded to questions asked of the liberal tradition, and they legitimate and respect the thought-artefacts themselves—the debates, discourses, conflicting renderings, shifting grounds, everyday discussions and concrete grapplings with liberalism on a number of levels of articulation that I hold to be informative, even illuminating.

The first two essays nevertheless also reflect the need of most academics to keep abreast of intellectual fashions—in this case the explosion of liberal political philosophy that made most of the running in the agendas of political theorists during the last quarter of the twentieth century—and to react to dominant paradigms of analysis. To forestall potential wrath from the ranks of political philosophers, I cannot stress too strongly how important that discipline is, and how crucial its analytical insights, critical appraisals, and ethical sensitivities have been to the refinement of political thought. There is, indeed, overlap between the study of political thinking in its broader scope and the types of arguments and perspectives that political philosophers have developed. But political philosophy is never-

theless a different enterprise, and in recent decades it has become very distanced from those who wish—through the analysis of actual or possible patterns of political thought—to understand better the nature of the political itself and to return some of the concerns of political theory to the sphere of the social sciences. This is particularly true of enquiries into liberalism, for not only has the language of liberalism changed, but some of its defining features have as well. Here is an example.

For John Rawls, liberalism—through its conception of justice—"protects the familiar basic rights and assigns them a special priority; it also includes measures to insure that all citizens have sufficient material means to make effective use of those basic rights . . . a liberal view removes from the political agenda the most divisive issues, serious contention about which must undermine the bases of social cooperation." And again, "liberal principles meet the urgent political requirement to fix, once and for all, the content of certain political basic rights and liberties, and to assign them special priority. Doing this takes those guarantees off the political agenda and puts them beyond the calculus of social interests."[9]

Contrast this with Hobhouse, for whom

> liberalism is the belief that society can safely be founded on [the] self-directing power of personality, that it is only on this foundation that a true community can be built . . . we have come to look for the effect of liberty in the firmer establishment of social solidarity . . . in the organic conception of society each of the leading ideas of historic Liberalism has its part to play. The ideal society is conceived as a whole which lives and flourishes by the harmonious growth of its parts, each of which in developing on its own lines and in accordance with its own nature tends on the whole to further the development of others.[10]

And on the role of the liberal state Hobhouse wrote,

> the conscience of the community has its rights just as much as the conscience of the individual. . . . Liberty and compulsion have complementary functions, and the self-governing State is at once the product and the condition of the self-governing individual. Thus there is no difficulty in understanding why the extension of state control goes along with determined resistance to encroachments on another. It is a question not of increasing or diminishing, but of reorganizing, restraints.[11]

The ahistoricity of arrested time versus historical development, depoliticisation versus the regulatory role of a democratic state representing the communal interest, justice through individual rights versus well-being and

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[9] J. Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York, 1993), pp. 156–57, 161.
[10] L. T. Hobhouse, *Liberalism* (London, 1911), pp. 66–67, 72.
[11] Ibid., pp. 79, 81.

flourishing through the recognition of social solidarity—these are some of the varying, and even irreconcilable, differences that open up between those twentieth-century notions of liberalism.

The Evidence for Liberalism

In chapter 1, I seek to offer an account of liberalism not from the external and critical perspective of analytical political philosophers, nor from the usual focus of historians of political thought on mainstream liberalism that tends to operate within the conventional garbs of individuals versus collectivities, nor even from the themes of freedom versus welfare that have been at the heart of some of my own studies. Rather, it is a tentative attempt to look at a number of alternative and insufficiently valued features of liberalism that, in retrospect, shed light on its under-researched twentieth-century manifestations. Those are then related to the Rawlsian phenomenon—phenomenon being the operative word!—as itself a particular historical occurrence, one liberal conversation among many. On the microlevel, I argue that concepts such as civilisation, movement, and vitality turn out to be inextricably linked to liberal discourse and the liberal frame of mind. Liberals are partis pris about their beliefs; they spread them not in terms of rationally and morally irresistible ground rules for a fair society prior to its establishment, but rather as the apex of a long process of a civilising mission—of becoming, not being—during which societies mature and propagate constantly evolving and spatially proliferating views of the good life. For liberals, civil society immediately assumes the dual meanings of gracious urbanity and of voluntarism, but it is assisted by an enabling and visionary state. The recent fixation of philosophical liberalism with neutrality is alien to a liberal tradition that has held to its non-negotiable beliefs and ideas as strong preferences for certain values and activities over others, and that has even advocated a limited exercise of duress in order to protect liberal values when those come under serious threat.

One of my contentions has been that the study of liberalism is enriched when we enlist different forms of evidence. That involves a challenge to the distinctions that many political philosophers—and some historians, too—make between primary and secondary texts in investigating political thought. A chief merit of the hermeneutic approach has been to identify a constantly changing set of horizons from which the past and the present are viewed and interpreted. When applied to the study of liberalism, that approach decrees that any secondary text, any commentary on a "great work," may itself be a worthy object of study. It is therefore perfectly possible to move seamlessly between texts designated as "primary" or

"secondary," when we appreciate that "primary" and "secondary," and even occasionally "first order" and "second order" are the products of a world of absolutes, a world of statics where "nothing flows" and time stands still, or the products of a scholarly paradigm in which original thoughts are merely revised and, occasionally, corrupted. This signals the absence of narrative and the absence of constructive change.

By contrast, liberal thought is not only a narrative, but should be savoured as a *collective* narrative that is formed by conversations, reactions, and ripple-effects within large groups, allows the introduction of impermanence within constraining family resemblances, and concurrently enables the idea of development, and of potential evolutionary improvement, to occupy centre stage. For that reason alone such methods of analysis are particularly adept at capturing the features of the liberal tradition, as both the notion of development and the notion of conceptual flexibility—often reconstructed ethically as a plea for tolerance—are situated at its core. In addition, to portray liberal thought as a configuration of conceptual decontestations that take on a specific, if fluid, profile allows us to conceive of it as a confluence between long-standing values and shifting cultural contexts. The outcome of all this is to reinforce the insight that, if we are to acknowledge that something significant did happen to liberalism, it can only become evident through new perspectives that embrace narrative as well as ideological morphology, and through engaging pluralism not only as a liberal value evoking tolerance, or the moral and value diversity of human life,[12] but as a structural feature that invariably reveals many liberalisms.

At the same time, evidence must remain empirical. The existence of liberal views has to be validated, even though interpretation may direct us to specific sites and may select circumscribed information from a larger field. The studies in this collection are strongly informed by the contention that liberalism is a pliant tradition subscribed to by identifiable groups, and that the scholar ought to reascertain periodically what those generally held beliefs are. Only then should they be subjected to the kind of critical appraisal necessary to locate them in this, rather than that, segment of the liberal family (and occasionally outside it). Of course, ideologies usually endeavour to anchor themselves in scientific foundations. But that is a different matter involving legitimacy, not scholarly plausibility. The scramble for the mantle of scientific authority is frequently a facile and flawed route to legitimacy pursued by the ideological producers themselves. The scholar of political thought, to the contrary, needs to abide by conventions of authentication and validation acceptable in the social sciences.

[12] On this standpoint see recently W. A. Galston, *Liberal Pluralism* (Cambridge, 2002).

All too often, however, proponents of philosophical liberalism have moved in a secluded and artificial world of perfectionism and neutrality. When they model a universal ethics, they call it liberalism because it is reflexive, and because it entertains some idea of rational equality as well as one of equal liberty. Nevertheless, philosophical liberalism is partially insulated from the practices and complex discourses that have made up the family of liberalisms. This was already the case in the past,[13] but it has now become more pronounced. Modelling frequently involves the substitution of name tags for complex theoretical positions, and the tendency of some Anglo-American philosophy is to simplify for reasons of brevity and for heuristic purposes. The return to dichotomies (e.g., perfectionist-neutral; individual-communitarian) and to ideal types (liberalism as grounded on single foundational ideas such as equality or autonomy) may serve as "extreme-case" or "pure-case" constructs through which to test the viability and coherence of arguments and explore their raw logical paths. Nonetheless, the contemporary mass-appeal nature of the political cannot be understood by reference only, or even predominantly, to philosophical texts—that would cause us to go seriously astray as political theorists and political scientists. The bulk of political thinking in a society does not take place in such texts. The ethical and epistemological motifs of liberal thought have always been carried also by authors and articulators who are not academically proficient, using less demanding forms of expression. This is true also of the strong American liberal tradition in the twentieth century, whose features—encompassing community, a common good, planning, and populism, as well as specific understandings of liberty—are rather different from those propounded by those who now speak in the name of liberal justice. Although not central to my own research,[14] that tradition, too, is beginning to receive the kind of serious scholarly attention it deserves.[15]

Thinkers such as Hobhouse and Hobson are different kinds of political theorists, though not less important for that difference. For in order to understand liberalism as a living ideology, we have to look in new places. Many liberals are not public intellectuals as conventionally understood,

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[13] Cf. M. Stears, *Progressives, Pluralists, and the Problems of the State: Ideologies of Reform in the United States and Britain, 1909–1926* (Oxford, 2002), p. 28, on nineteenth-century idealism as a form of liberalism.

[14] I have offered brief comparative comments on American progressive liberalism in *Ideologies and Political Theory*, chap. 6.

[15] For representative writings of the times see H. Croly, *The Promise of American Life* (New York, 1909); J. Dewey, *Liberalism and Social Action* (New York, 1935). For current analysis, see, e.g., Stears, *Progressives, Pluralists, and the Problems of the State*; D. T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, MA, 1998); L. Williams, *American Liberalism and Ideological Change* (DeKalb, IL, 1997).

in the sense of contributing to an authoritative ethic that is publicly available for others to dilute—though obviously they may be. They are typically ideologically active intellectuals who—whatever else they write and say—need to adopt an optimal ideological language, a language that has general appeal and is geared to maximising public support. Public intellectuals are therefore not only those concerned with public affairs but those that address mass publics. It is no accident that Hobhouse's more abstract works and his evening editorial writing for the famous liberal newspaper, the *Manchester Guardian*, sustained each other. Ideological, as distinct from philosophical or scholarly, quality relates to communication, to mobilisation, and, not least, to the deftness with which ideologies weave short-term issues and a changing political landscape into a loose and periphery-sensitive morphological framework. By "periphery-sensitive" we refer to the interface between ideological structures and the concrete and specific practices and events that serve either to translate them into political action or, conversely, to redefine the meanings attached to the ideological cores. Intellectuals as ideologists are nearer to Gramsci's understanding of their role, explored in the final chapter of this book. Hobson, in particular, has been regarded by some technicians of political philosophy as far too woolly to be taken seriously—a judgment that he was destined, ironically, to suffer from economists during his lifetime. That misses the point. Not even Rousseau, let alone Hobson, would pass the stringent deliberative and logical tests that current philosophy constructs. Without the shadow of a doubt, Hobson was a pivotal liberal political thinker. His input into liberal thought (quite apart from his impact on economics and on theories of imperialism) was outstanding, and if we—as scholars—decode him correctly, that input is revealed for the pervasive, multifaceted, and inventive contemplation that it was.

Pluralism as a Default Position

One curious effect of philosophical liberalism has been to present pluralism as problematic. It has demonstrated a dual tendency to extol diversity—as an expression both of individual autonomy and of multicultural identity—while insisting on the unity of the moral foundations of a well-ordered society. That latter constraint restricts the ontological possibilities contained in liberalism: ethical evolution or mutual dependence, for instance, are excluded as normal possibilities on that moral map. If this view of morality continues to prioritise autonomy and identity over other features of human existence and conduct, it will desensitise its proponents to the awareness of the ideological and semantic complexity embraced in political thinking. I refer to one manifestation of this issue in chapter 2:

the role of community in liberal thought. The new liberals accessed the concept of community through their strong organicism, predicated on biological views of the interdependence of living entities and on Idealist and classical notions of harmony. Although the organic analogy has gone out of fashion (though see chapter 8, below), its philosophical anthropology and reliance on social theory represented a departure from the nineteenth-century liberal individualist iconography in which heroic entrepreneurs, such as inventors, were seen to propel society forwards. It also represented a holistic view of society quite in tune with more recent hermeneutic perspectives. That holism requires a nonliteral reading to extract from it the idea of an interrelated and intermeshed semantic field and an appreciation of the consequent knock-on effect that a change in a political practice will have on the equilibrium of that field.

There is, however, a further consideration. If we postulate the existence of communities as valuable social entities—something that even philosophical liberals enamoured of individual cultural identities do—that will have a bearing on the conception of rights a society employs. I have argued elsewhere that rights are devices for first identifying and then prioritising crucial attributes and requirements of the rights-bearing entity, and as a consequence they require action or inaction by others to protect those attributes and requirements.[16] As such, rights are not substantively exclusive to liberalism. But they are procedurally highly salient in liberalism, for they postulate either or both of the following: the insulation of social spaces from external control because of the high premium put on self-determination or, to the contrary, the social obligation—that occasionally is a structural necessity—to enter such spaces in order to secure a range of *additional* liberal ends such as self-development, individuality, and rational action. It is only through appreciating the compound conceptual morphology of liberalism that we can account for the dual possibility of intervention and nonintervention in the liberal tradition as permanent and parallel features, depending on the liberal good/concept that needs to be protected. If we then ask, as so many do, how successful were the new liberals in reconciling individualism and collectivism, I believe that question to be somewhat off the mark. The question should rather be: Of the many forms of (imperfect reconciliation) of those two ideas that liberals adopted, how did each of them work, what did they resolve, and what did they leave unsettled? Such reconciliation can neither be a clear and final undertaking, nor one that requires a single blueprint.

To reiterate in a different way a point already made: One can never understand liberalism if one assumes that it is a monolith in its postulates, assumptions, and values. Liberalism is a cluster of concepts and goods,

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[16] M. Freeden, *Rights* (Milton Keynes, 1991).

some of which can only be attained by social initiative, others by its absence and by reliance on individual judgment and virtue. A right is then not an attribute or a foundational feature of individuals; it is not something that people are born with, nor is it the basic building block of liberal theory. Rather, it is a symbolic conceptual act *building on* elements of the world that are coopted into a social construct. It identifies crucial features of human well-being (or those considered to be crucial) and offers them a fortified conceptual defence, quite irrespective of the normative arguments it enlists. Using the terminology of rights transforms a social and analytical interpretation concerning the components of valued humanity into compelling political language. And it can be attached to whichever social units are identified as the main incarnations of the human condition. When liberalism abandoned the theory of natural rights, it replaced them with a more flexible understanding of rights. That understanding avoided the built-in brittleness that causes natural, universal rights to snap under the pressure of a single contrary instance; instead, it contextualised them while retaining certain limits as to what they could signify. The right to liberty, for example, became the right to the release from dehumanising socioeconomic as well as physical or legal hindrances, hindrances that were not universal but the product of imperfect social orders such as untrammelled capitalism. The limits imposed on rights were simple: the protection of any core liberal value only as long as its pursuit did not begin to impinge fatally on other core liberal values. Thus, liberty had to be constrained at the point where it began to undermine individuality or progress. That approach permitted the continued renegotiation of liberal values in the light of changing cultural paradigms concerning what was important about human beings and how best that could be furthered.

Through an acquaintance with the peculiar features of liberalism, we can modify our conception of rights, proceeding beyond the list of rights usually provided by liberals and scholars of liberalism, and beyond the deontological theories of moral philosophers. Rather, to entertain a rights discourse is to articulate and reflect a particular liberal *method*, one of ordering human demands and values in a politically sustainable and legitimate manner. Rights are the liberal device of ensuring that vital social goods are accorded special protection and respect and that the possibility of arbitrary conduct by states, groups, and individuals is sharply reduced. Because liberalism is sensitive to expressing human voices, and sympathetic to periodic reassessments of the relative positioning of human values, rights—not just as a legal or constitutional procedure but as an anchor of conceptual arrangements—need to embody the suppleness of conceptual reconfigurations that is at the heart of liberal tolerance and openness.

The Responsible Liberal Community

In chapter 3 I offer an historical case study of the ideological climate in which progressive thinking about poverty was moulded. It is intended to demonstrate the broad spectrum of ideological producers within the liberal family, and the importance of sources such as parliamentary debates for reconstructing liberal political thought. It should also give pause for thought about current progressive debates. The question of poverty, of absolute and relative disadvantage in both material and nonmaterial goods, has recently been sidelined at the expense of another question: that of adequately representing the plethora of cultures within a society. The challenge of halting the marginalisation of individuals and of ethnicities by revaluing their self-identity has edged out the parallel challenge of diminishing the marginalisation of people's welfare by recognising indispensable physical, mental, and emotional needs that demand satisfaction. Even issues of citizenship are understood to refer to participation and formal access rather than to the substantive enjoyment of and sharing in the ample array of goods a society has to offer. In a largely North American–led debate, that is not too surprising; ethnic identity is a far more potent social issue there than the social provision of welfare to the genuinely needy. But the poor are still with us and, moreover, political theorists as well as policymakers need to appreciate that at critical moments in our lives every one of us will become genuinely needy and dependent on the good will of others.

Poverty was one area through which the state was repossessed by liberals to assist in discharging the responsibilities that a body of citizens owed to one another. Debates over the role of the regulatory state, itself regulated by a strong democratic accountability, were numerous. The challenge of what constituted a legitimate state underwent a thorough reexamination, as will be explored in chapter 4. New tests of a social and ethical, as well as a legal, nature were devised. The question of dissent was linked to the liberal investment in social experimentation and difference, as well as to traditional liberal individualism, but it was also limited by the awareness that civilised standards of conduct had to be imposed on those unwilling to abide by them. And once again, these conceptual transformations, and the novel practices associated with them, yield abundant evidence for charting the overt and covert metamorphoses of liberal ideology.

Part 1 ends with two detailed studies of Hobson, the epitome of the Gramscian, socially engaged intellectual. In that guise he articulated a rising social liberal culture, and tied abstract concepts such as liberty to a concrete set of activities and understandings. His impact on later liberal

and social democratic traditions has been considerable on two fronts. The one has been the underconsumptionism elaborated on by Keynes, which bestowed theoretical validity on the redistribution of economic resources to the disadvantaged, thus increasing their consumption power to the benefit of all. The other has been the transmutation of Hobson's organicism into the wider, if less specific, notions of community, mutual responsibility, and interdependence that nourished much British political thinking after the Second World War, when the apparatus of the modern welfare state was extended in scope and in reach.

Particularly evident, also, was the flexibility, even generosity, with which Hobson approached human nature. His endorsement of experimentation meant the relaxation of the strict criteria that moralists had imposed on human conduct. It allowed for errors, for play and leisure activities—all from an organic, wholesome, view of the fullness of human existence. Experimentation, critically, played a dual and ambiguous role. It upheld the scientific method and the establishment of objective standards of welfare, thus producing temporary uniformities of understanding, but it also allowed the human will to discover the mutations and innovations that perpetuated differences and underwrote liberal pluralism. The ensuing tension revolves around the relationship between perceived social facts and the values that attach to them. The value of encouraging individual lifestyles, given the fact that each person is unique, confronts the belief in the power of collective and concerted decision making to improve the quality of life of the community, given the fact of social interdependence. Both are crucial liberal themes and the endeavour to establish a balance between the two was the main challenge of twentieth-century liberalism. In the struggle between liberal universalism and liberal pluralism in the early twentieth-century, the latter had the upper hand. The alleged human costs of, and philosophical reaction to, that ascendant intellectual paradigm have been heralded, however, since the totalitarian disasters of mid-century, often accompanied by misconstruals or reinventions of liberalism's modern trail. That thought returns us to some of the considerations raised in the first chapter of this book.