INTRODUCTION

T. H. Green, Philosophy and Liberalism

T. H. Green's moral and political philosophies have been the subjects of many studies, not only due to his contributions to the discipline of political theory but because of the practical lessons about politics his contemporaries and successors drew from his teachings. Green was recognized in his lifetime as the leader of a new 'school' of philosophy, initially named (by the Oxford don Mark Pattison) the Oxford Hegelian school, and subsequently called British (or English) Idealism or Hegelianism.[1] A great deal of Green scholarship both old and new focuses on Green's relation to British Idealism.[2] Other studies have advanced claims about Green's impact on Liberal and Radical thought, on voluntary initiatives of social reform and on government policy during the late Victorian and Edwardian period. Indeed, Green was lauded by contemporaries and observers of subsequent generations as a model activist intellectual. The

[1] M. Pattison, 'Philosophy at Oxford,' *Mind*, 1 (1876), pp. 82–97.

[2] This literature includes: L. T. Hobhouse, *The Metaphysical Theory of the State* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1918); F. P. Harris, *Neo-Idealist Political Theory* (New York: King's Crown, 1944); A. J. M. Milne, *The Social Philosophy of English Idealism* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1962); A. Quinton, 'Absolute Idealism,' *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 57 (1971), pp. 303–29; D. Watson, 'Social Theory and National Culture. The Case of British and American Absolute Idealism, 1860–1900,' *Social Science History*, 5 (1981), pp. 251–74; P. Robbins, *The British Hegelians, 1875–1925* (New York: Garland, 1982); J. Morrow, 'Ancestors, Legacies and Traditions: British Idealism in the History of Political Thought,' *HPT*, 6 (1985), pp. 491–515; A. Vincent and R. Plant, *Philosophy, Politics and Citizenship. The Life and Thought of the British Idealists* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984); P. Nicholson, *The Political Philosophy of the British Idealists* (CUP, 1990); D. Boucher, ed., *The British Idealists* (CUP, 1997); W. J. Mander, ed., *Anglo-American Idealism, 1865–1927* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2000).

present study pays due attention to his public and political life, especially to his work in areas of educational and social reform.

The study does not purport to organize comprehensively the data of Green's existence. However, it does utilize individual biography as a lens through which to view aspects of Victorian 'moral life' — more particularly, Victorian ethics and ethical culture at their intersection with politics and public life. In a sense, the study reverses the direction of previous approaches to Green by viewing his philosophical *opus* through his political and public commitments. It treats Green's life and work primarily in relation to Victorian Liberalism.[3] Victorian Liberals were preoccupied with *religious* questions to a degree that makes the liberalism of their time appear very nearly the opposite of what is today called liberalism. To be sure, many British Liberals ca. 1860 were as interested in neutralizing the authority of religious institutions — for instance, by effecting the 'separation of Church and State' — as are liberals of the present day. (Although disestablishment of the Church of England was a goal shared by only a minority of Liberals, commitment to some modification of the position of the established Church handily distinguished Victorian Liberals from Conservatives.) Unlike many modern liberals, most Victorian Liberals were convinced that religious belief did, and properly should, provide an ethical perspective from which temporal questions were to be considered.

To examine Victorian political culture and the life of a pre-eminent Victorian like Green is therefore to study politics in their relation to religious beliefs and attitudes. Even — or especially — when one regards famous Victorian agnostics, like Green's friend and philosophical rival Henry Sidgwick (1838–1900) or Leslie Stephen (1832–1904), and atheists, like George Jacob Holyoake (1817–1906), it is impossible to separate their attitudes toward secular issues from their beliefs about Belief. Although Holyoake's militant secularism represented a decidedly minority position within the Liberal fold, he was nevertheless a partisan in the Liberal interest.[4] Stephen, though he inclined later in life towards

---

[3] Works on British liberalism and the Liberal Party I have found relevant to my investigation are D. Southgate, *The Passing of the Whigs, 1832–1886* (London: Macmillan, 1962); J. Vincent, *The Formation of the British Liberal Party, 1857–1868*, 2nd edn. (Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester, 1976); I. Bradley, *The Optimists. Themes and Personalities in Victorian Liberalism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1980); A. Hawkins, '"Parliamentary Government" and Victorian Political Parties, c. 1830–c. 1880,' *EHR*, 104 (1989), pp. 638–69; E. F. Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform. Popular Liberalism in the Age of Gladstone, 1860–1880* (CUP, 1992); and J. Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian Britain* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1993).

[4] Holyoake was a warrior of conscience as well as a great entrepreneur of Victorian secularism. He edited the *Reasoner*, fought for liberty of the press and advocated producer and consumer co-operatism. As Ian Bradley notes, Holyoake was the 'last person in Britain to be imprisoned on charge of atheism' (*The Optimists*, pp. 270–1).

political and social conservatism, maintained a worldview formed by his interaction ca. 1850–65 with other young intellectuals (students and dons) at Oxbridge, most of whom supported Gladstone's party as a force of progress and who, like J. S. Mill, viewed the Conservatives as 'the stupid party'.[5] Significantly, Stephen, Green and many other contemporary shapers of opinion did not regard their rationalism as antithetical to spiritual life.[6]

I examine here Victorian liberalism not as an ideology—for it was too diffuse to be understood as such—but as an ethico-political culture. 'Political culture' is not identical to 'opinion' or the 'public sphere' in the sense given those terms by Jürgen Habermas and others, but it is a definite social sphere.[7] I treat political culture or sub-culture as an intelligible, recoverable world of political acts and meanings, examining arguments used by Victorian Liberals and Radicals to make sense of events and enable collective action. I do not attempt to systematically assess Green's contributions to specific disciplines or areas of thought — that is, to hypostatized intellectual discourses like moral philosophy, political theory or theology. Although I engage in technical discussion of different philosophical viewpoints (e.g., idealism, empiricism, utilitarianism), I am not primarily concerned with Green's relation to British Idealism. Likewise, situating Green's social and political ideas within the intellectual construct called 'Western thought' — as a canon of texts — is not the main purpose of this investigation. As David Boucher and Siep Stuurman have observed, the *histories* of philosophy and political thought are recent inventions (at least in the English–speaking world), designed for didactic purposes with which we may not necessarily

---

[5] Stephen was not the only Liberal of this generation to grow conservative with age. Sidgwick feared economic socialism. James Bryce and A. V. Dicey, both friends of Green, ended their lives on the right or 'individualist' wing of the Liberal Party. N. Annan, *Leslie Stephen. The Godless Victorian* (Chicago: UP Chicago, 1984); C. Harvie, *The Lights of Liberalism. University Liberals and the Challenge of Democracy, 1860–86* (London: Allen Lane, 1976); J. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870-1920* (OUP, 1986), chap. 5.

[6] On this point, see especially S. Collini, *Public Moralists. Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain, 1850-1930* (OUP, 1991), chap. 2.

[7] See J. Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, 2d ed. (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1965). People participate in a political culture as both producers and consumers of its meanings. A political culture is characterized by its participants' views of politics and society and may include assumptions about social rank or class, gender, ethnicity, and religion in relation to past, present and projected social orders. In the sense that by participating in political culture individuals have a proprietary relation to it, one may meaningfully speak of the political culture *of* Victorian Britons, as well as the culture of liberals (or of Radicals, socialists, Conservatives, and so on). It would be pointless, however, to speak of the *political* culture of British Theosophists or of the Social Democratic Federation.

agree.[8] My aim is to assess Green's work *across* disciplines and discourses in order to locate wider cultural meanings.

I am interested in Green not only as a social and political philosopher who may be of interest to present-day thinkers but as *zoon politikon*, indeed, as partisan and politician. Green considered himself and was acknowledged by his contemporaries as both a Liberal and a Radical. In using the terms 'Radical', 'Radicalism' and 'Radical-Liberalism', I refer to a political movement parallel to Liberalism, one allied with an older Whig tradition for political purposes during much of the nineteenth century yet antagonistic to it in fundamental ways.[9] This study reads Green's social and political ideas and his methods of realizing them against the ideas, values, and political objectives of Liberalism and Radicalism in Britain between ca. 1850 and 1914. Examination of T. H. Green and his work thus serves as an opportunity to explore a larger relationship between elite and popular liberalism during the High Liberal era, when the Liberal Party benefited from a high degree of ideological cohesion and attracted broad social support.

Whereas *political* historians have not ignored religious debates in Victorian politics, thorough consideration of religious expression has not been typical until quite recently of scholarship in Victorian intellectual history, history of political thought or history of political culture. For much of the twentieth century historians regarded religious controversy (and political arguments couched in religious terms) during the modern era as a quaint interest of theologians and denominational historians. Social historians in particular have tended to view denominational conflict as a cypher for class conflict. George Kitson Clark and Edward Norman are among the few historians of nineteenth-century Britain active since the 1960s who have considered religious ideas as

---

[8] See D. Boucher, 'Histories of Political Thought in the Post-Methodological Age,' *HPT*, 14 (1993), pp. 301–16. The history of political thought emerged ca. 1860–1900 in the Anglophone world as a sub-discipline of history, 'largely philosophical in subject matter, emphasizing the timelessness of the issues; … and highly practical in intention, highlighting the continuing political relevance of the thinkers discussed' (p. 301). Also S. Stuurman, 'The Canon of the History of Political Thought,' *History and Theory*, 39 (2000), pp. 147–66; and Gerald Graff, *Professing Literature. An Institutional History* (Chicago: UP Chicago, 1987).

[9] 'Liberal' refers to a national political movement since the 1830s, constituted as the parliamentary Liberal Party in 1859; 'liberal' (lower case) refers both to an ideology and a cultural outlook, including tendencies in social and economic thought and in religion. 'Radical' as a political label was simultaneously more and less specific than 'Liberal'. By way of illustration, many Radical MPs ca. 1820–1848 adhered to the specific doctrines of Benthamism or Philosophic Radicalism. Yet Radical was also used in a looser sense to indicate a person who took identifiably Liberal ideas or policies to *extremes*. For a succinct treatment of British Radicalism and issues involved in its definition, see D. Nicholls, 'The English Middle Class and the Ideological Significance of Radicalism, 1760–1885,' *JBS*, 24 (1985), pp. 415–33.

intellectual-cultural discourse in relation to social history.[10] Over the last decade or so historians defining themselves primarily as historians of ideas have begun to re-examine religious debate in the history of political thought and explore the roles of religious ideas and concepts in political ideology; in this they follow the lead of earlier generations of scholars, who recognized religion as one of the *sources* of Victorian political and social ideas or ideologies.[11]

By examining the place of religion in Green's theory of moral development and studying his conception of a liberal polity with reference to his religious inspirations and involvements, the present work casts new light on aspects of Green's thought noted by earlier scholarship. Green scholarship and even general studies of Victorian thought have indeed noted Green's religious cast or frame of mind, as did Green's contemporaries. Green's religiosity is a running theme of the memoir by Richard Nettleship, his student.[12] Benjamin Jowett (1817–93), Green's tutor at Balliol and one of the most influential Oxford dons after 1850, initially viewed his pupil as a typical product of a clerical household and Rugby School, which lay under the shadow of the liberal Anglican and Christian Socialist Thomas Arnold (1795–1842). With Jowett lies the primary responsibility for Green's introduction to German Idealism. Jowett drew an interesting inference from Green's enthusiasm for the thought of Hegel and other German philosophers, suggesting that Green's intellectual intoxication amounted to something like religious zealotry. To his friend Florence Nightingale Jowett wrote (on 15 December 1872), 'I . . . have persuaded the Revd Hegel Green to give up lecturing for a year and take to writing — whereby the minds of our undergraduates will be greatly clarified.'[13] (Green was not in fact a Reverend.)

Melvin Richter has suggested that Green's philosophizing was a substitute for religion, calling it a surrogate faith.[14] Yet attempts to elucidate

[10] G. Kitson Clark, *Churchmen and the Condition of England* (London: Methuen, 1973); E. R. Norman, *The Victorian Christian Socialists* (CUP, 1987).

[11] See especially B. Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: the Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1785–1865* (OUP, 1988); D. Nicholls, *Deity and Domination: Images of God and the State in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994 [1989]); and A. M. C. Waterman, *Revolution, Economics and Religion: Christian Political Economy, 1798–1833* (CUP, 1991).

[12] R. L. Nettleship, 'Memoir,' in *Works of T. H. Green*, iii, ed. Nettleship (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1888), pp. xi–clxi.

[13] *Dear Miss Nightingale. A Selection of Benjamin Jowett's Letters to Florence Nightingale, 1860–1893*, ed. V. Quinn and J. Prest (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), p. 235.

[14] M. Richter, 'T. H. Green and His Audience: Liberalism as a Surrogate Faith,' *Review of Politics*, 18 (1956), pp. 444–72. See also P. Montagné, *Un Radical Religieux en Angleterre au XIXe Siècle ou la Philosophie de Thomas Hill Green* (Toulouse: Ouvrière, 1927); M. Richter, *The Politics of Conscience: T.H.Green and His Age* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964), chaps. 1–4; Vincent and Plant, *Philosophy, Politics and Citizenship*, chap. 2; M. Bevir, 'Welfarism, Socialism and Religion: On T. H. Green and Others,'

'Green's religion' for the purpose of interpreting his philosophy and political teachings have been insufficiently analytical, and ahistorical, because of their narrow contextualization of his thought. There is a paradox in Green scholarship: while many scholars have drawn attention to Green's religious interests, they have too quickly explained them away. One is left by many accounts of Green with the vapid impression of his religion as merely a rational conviction of a divine principle in the universe.[15] The ethical aspect of his religion is interpreted as a fervent desire — only slightly informed by particular doctrines, traditions or institutions — for the liberation of the individual in his or her temporal as well as spiritual existence, and for the prevalence in society of right thinking and living.[16] In *God's Funeral* (1999), the critic, novelist and biographer A. N. Wilson, represents Green as a theistic philosopher (an epigone of Jowett as well as Hegel) and practically disqualifies him as a Christian.[17]

Wilson's characterization of Green as a timid theist and unwitting ally of the Darwinists is consistent with that of more nuanced studies. Many Green scholars have discussed religion as something Green left behind; they consider his religious 'roots' and 'influences' chiefly in relation to attitudes he is supposed to have transcended. His thought is thereby regarded as an instance of Western thought's growing out of a religious and embracing a secular consciousness. While political and social historians today agree that religious beliefs greatly influenced Victorian social practice and that it was a major element of Victorian political culture, many intellectual historians continue to assume that

---

Review of Politics, 55 (1993), pp. 639–61; D. Boucher and A. Vincent, *British Idealism and Political Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2000), chap. 1.

[15] 'Idealism' presumes a form of theism. The view of individuals and their activities (including their thoughts) as manifestations of a Universal Mind or Spirit (or the Absolute) is characteristic of 'Absolute Idealism'. None of the British Idealists made reality and individuals' experiences of it *dependent* on the mind of God (George Berkeley's 'psychological idealism'). However, 'Personal Idealists' (including Green) gave more emphasis than Absolute Idealists to 'the point of view of the individual experient' (W. R. Boyce Gibson) in order to argue that reality was intelligible to individuals, not a transcendent realm of which humans could gain only occasional, indirect glimpses. Quinton, 'Absolute Idealism'; and Boucher, ed., *British Idealists*, pp. xii–xiv.

[16] The reduction and marginalization of Green's religion by specialized studies is perpetuated in more general works: e.g. E. Barker, *Political Thought in England 1848 to 1914* (Westport, CT: 1980 [orig. 1915]), chap. 2; J. Bowle, *Politics and Opinion in the Nineteenth Century* (London: J. Cape, 1954), Book 2, chap. 4. Mark Francis and John Morrow, however, allude to religious qualities of Green's thought in relation to contemporary movements of ethics and political theory: *A History of English Political Thought in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: St. Martin's, 1994), chap. 13. See also Nicholls, *Deity and Domination*, pp. 74–81.

[17] New York: W. W. Norton, 1999. The title of Wilson's book is from a poem of Thomas Hardy.

political thought, in Britain as elsewhere, was secularized during the Victorian period.[18] To trace Green's thought along a supposed trajectory of the 'secularization process' is to misread his thought and the contemporary enterprise of political theory in which he participated, and to misunderstand their relation to the ethical climate of the era. The present study points out the problematic nature of claims about the secularization process during the nineteenth century by treating religion, including its *evangelical* varieties, as in some sense a source of political–philosophical ideas rather than as rationalization for them.[19]

In the same vein, on the level of political and social history, the study indicates ways in which arguments for political and social 'reform' during the mid and late Victorian era were shaped by religious activists and agencies, and how reformers channelled the religious sensibilities of the British public into social and political action. It advances new claims about the significance for British Liberalism and a wider 'reform' agenda of Green's philosophy and his practical activities. On this point it should be noted that Green's teachings had arguably their widest and heaviest impact during the 1880s and '90s, or at the juncture where 'advanced' Liberalism and 'Socialism' were widely regarded in Britain as overlapping and complementary, rather than oppositional ideologies. A few days after Green's death, a young Oxonian inspired by him, Arnold Toynbee, delivered a lecture to the Leicester Liberal Association (which Green had himself addressed only a year before) entitled 'Are Radicals Socialists?' His answer to the question was a qualified Yes.[20]

---

[18] I have found instructive the following contributions to the continuing debate over the secularization of Western social and political thought: A. MacIntyre, *Secularization and Moral Change* (London: OUP, 1967); O. Chadwick, *The Secularisation of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century* (CUP, 1975); K. W. Britton, 'John Stuart Mill on Christianity' in *James and John Stuart Mill. Papers of the Centenary Conference*, ed. J. Robson and M. Lane (Toronto: Toronto UP, 1976), pp. 31–42; E. Eisenach, *Two Worlds of Liberalism. Religion and Politics in Hobbes, Locke, and Mill* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1981); L. Dickey, *Hegel. Religion, Economics, and the Politics of the Spirit, 1770–1807* (CUP, 1987); J. E. Crimmins, ed., *Religion, Secularization and Political Thought. Thomas Hobbes to J. S. Mill* (New York: Routledge, 1989); R. J. Helmstadter and B. Lightman, eds., *Victorian Faith in Crisis. Essays on Continuity and Change in Nineteenth-Century Religious Belief* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford UP, 1990); R. Plant, *Politics, Theology and History* (CUP, 2001).

[19] 'Evangelical' refers to persons and a tendency within the Church of England; 'evangelical' (lower case) indicates a religious impulse at work both within and outside the established Church (e.g. among Methodists, Baptists).

[20] *Leicester Daily Mercury*, 29 March 1882; reprinted in A. Toynbee, *Lectures on the Industrial Revolution in England* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1884). On left or 'advanced' Liberalism and socialism during the period, see H. M. Lynd, *England in the Eighteen-Eighties: Toward a Social Basis for Freedom* (London: Frank Cass, 1968 [orig. 1945]); D. A. Hamer, *Liberal Politics in the Age of Gladstone and Rosebery: a Study in Leadership and Policy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972); H. V. Emy, *Liberals, Radicals and Social Politics: 1892–1914* (CUP, 1973); P. Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats* (CUP, 1978);

Without minimizing the novelty of his ideas, this study counters the charge, rehearsed in Chapter One below, that Green's ethico-political arguments and methods — because of their esoteric and often eccentric expression — were uncongenial to both other elite Liberals and the rank and file.

While Green criticized particular actions and attitudes of Liberal politicians, he supported the Liberal Party's wider 'mission' as articulated by William Ewart Gladstone ('The People's William'), John Bright, Joseph Chamberlain, Charles Dilke and others. Green had a higher personal regard for Bright, who during the 1840s, '50s and '60s seemed the Radical-democratic spirit incarnate, than for Gladstone, the Tory turned Peelite turned Liberal.[21] The Oxford classicist Henry Nettleship — one of the most astute commentators on Green — observed that if his friend had devoted himself more to public speaking 'his style would have come to resemble that of Bright.'[22] Yet Green was a thorough Gladstonian: he identified strongly with the mature Gladstone's conception of the nature and purpose of politics, and he approved of the Gladstonian mode of political action which, between 1867 and the late 1880s, bridged gaps between Radical and Whig sections of the Party. Green praised Gladstone's leadership in numerous political speeches delivered in support of Liberal candidates and policies between 1868 and 1882.[23]

M. Freeden, *The New Liberalism: An Ideology of Social Reform* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978); P. Weiler, *The New Liberalism: Liberal Social Theory in Great Britain* (New York: Garland, 1982); Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory*, chaps. 6–8; E. F. Biagini and A. J. Reid, eds., *Currents of Radicalism. Popular Radicalism, Organized Labour and Party Politics in Britain, 1850–1914* (CUP, 1991), parts 2 and 3; J. Lawrence, 'Popular Radicalism and the Socialist Revival in Britain,' *JBS*, 31 (1992), pp. 163–86.

[21] Green met Bright and corresponded with him between 1860 and 1865, although none of the correspondence remains in the Green Papers at Balliol College. Green seems to have been influenced by Bright on the question of the proper Liberal stance towards the American Civil War. On visiting Oxford in 1864 Bright professed to be very pleased with the young Liberal set that included Albert Dicey, James Bryce and Green. Harvie, *Lights of Liberalism*, pp. 110–15; T. H. Green Papers [*GP*], 1(d), box 1: 'Notes by Mrs. Green. THG 1850–70 copies'. On the scheme of citation used here, see the Bibliography.

[22] *GP* 1(b): Nettleship to Charlotte Green (1882), transcription of a letter in CBG copybook, 23–65. On Green's Radicalism as influenced by Bright, see R. L. Nettleship, 'Memoir,' pp. xvi–xxxvii, xliii–xlv, cx–cxiii. Characteristic of Green's view of Bright was his description of a Commons speech by Bright on national defence (August 3, 1860) as 'that of a sober man among drunkards' (quoted in the 'Memoir,' p. xxiv).

[23] Green delivered an address on behalf of the Oxford Liberal Association to Gladstone upon the latter's visit to Oxford on January 30, 1878. (*Oxford Chronicle and Berkshire and Buckinghamshire Gazette [henceforth OCBBG]*, 2 Feb. 1878, p. 7 and supplement; the speech is printed in *AW*, pp. 317–19). This was shortly after the opening of Oxford's new Liberal Hall, and in the aftermath of the 'Bulgarian Agitation' which provided the occasion for Gladstone's most dramatic political come-back. *GP* 1(b): John St. Loe

What does Green's support for Gladstone indicate about prevailing values or ethical norms of the Victorian Liberal party? Jonathan Parry observes that Gladstone, in his manifestation as 'The People's William' (from the 1860s),

> was the man most responsible for developing the myth of 'the people' as a moral force, sharing essentially Christian sentiments, bound together in a spiritual campaign against injustice, and collectively charged with making responsible judgments about broad principles of government.[24]

It is unnecessary to take entirely seriously Gladstone's belief in a 'collectively charged' people moralized by Christianity. Many of his critics objected to his moralizing tone and political opportunism. Yet we should not dismiss the expressed religious sentiment of British Liberals in the age of Gladstone and Green. Nor are we justified in marginalizing religion as a source of collective identity and purpose. John Vincent observed more than thirty years ago that 'for many [Victorian] Liberals, politics was not an autonomous activity, but one deriving from a religious centre …'.[25] The stalwarts of the Liberal Party might be adherents of political economy or another science of society yet take Christianity as their fundament and (in Vincent's words) 'as the conscious expression of their modernity and their sense of belonging to a revolutionary *élite* working for a newer and better civilization.'[26] Vincent refers on this point to men like the Edward Baineses (father and son), John and Jacob Bright, Richard Cobden, Edward Miall and Samuel Morley, most of them *non-metropolitan* ideologists and politicians proud of their origin in and association with the business classes — Matthew Arnold's 'Philistines'.[27]

Liberalism as a creed and political movement during the Victorian era may have been more decisively shaped by unsophisticated, 'Hebraic' Christianity — especially Dissenting or Nonconformist Protestantism — than by any other cultural current, religious or secular.[28] Polite and educated Victorians, as envisaged by Matthew Arnold, may not have

---

Strachey to Charlotte B. Green (1882), transcription of a letter in CBG copy-book, pp. 103–13. On the basis of Green's support, and that of other liberal intellectuals, for Gladstonian foreign policy, see R. T. Shannon, *Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation 1876* (London: T. Nelson, 1963), pp. 203–20.

[24] Parry, *Rise and Fall of Liberal Government*, p. 252.

[25] Vincent, *Formation of the British Liberal Party*, p. xxxi.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. xxx.

[27] In *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) Arnold indicted leaders of Liberal opinion for their Puritanism, Hebraism and Philistinism. Edward Miall (1809–1881) edited the *Nonconformist* and was a leader, between the 1840s and 1870s, of the movement to disestablish the Church of England. 'Mialism' was 'the inadequate conception of man's totality', flawed by exclusive attention to 'the worth and grandeur of the religious side in man' (from Arnold's 'Preface,' Yale University Press edition 1994, ed. S. Lipman, p. 22).

[28] I use the terms Dissent and Nonconformity interchangeably, as they were virtual synonyms in public discourse after 1828. Parry proclaims boldly, 'Popular enthusiasm

invoked religion in the manner of the 'Philistine' commercial classes or that of the masses, yet Liberals — including professors, Parliamentarians and pitmen, as well as preachers — viewed political questions in light of religious beliefs and preoccupations. As I seek to demonstrate, understanding of the political-cultural common ground they shared is vital to understanding Victorian liberalism and Green's place in it.

Gladstone, the dominant figure in Victorian Liberal politics, and Green, one of liberalism's great philosophical advocates, have not often been discussed together. They may have met on more than one occasion. One opportunity for their direct or indirect interaction was over the issue of religious tests: Gladstone was MP for Oxford University during the early to mid-1860s, when Green was campaigning against tests of religious conformity at the universities. Yet the Green who appears to have made an impression upon Gladstone was the *fictional* one, the Oxford tutor 'Henry Grey' in Mrs. Humphry Ward's best-selling novel of 1888, *Robert Elsmere*. Gladstone was critical of the liberal religious tendencies displayed by Grey and other characters in the novel, which he reviewed in the May 1888 issue of *Nineteenth Century*.[29]

The different temperaments of Green and Gladstone and their different paths in life have obscured some meaningful political and philosophical affinities. Green believed politics, like other human activities, to be something more than a complex process by which individuals satisfied animal impulses and acted out instincts.[30] In his view, the ascendant 'hedonist' theories of human psychology, rooted in the theories of John Locke and David Hume, could not explain the moral strivings of individuals. As Richard Nettleship observed, 'To Professor Green, Locke was not the seventeenth-century champion of free-thought and independence, but the logical father of certain views of experience

---

for the Liberal party derived its greatest impetus from nonconformist commitment…' Yet he is ambiguous as to whether Dissent galvanized Gladstonian Liberalism or vice versa: 'Very few nonconformists of any denomination were unaffected by the surge of enthusiasm within the Liberal party in the 1860s.' J. Parry, *Democracy and Religion: Gladstone and the Liberal Party, 1867–1875* (CUP, 1986), pp. 199, 200.

[29] See *The Gladstone Diaries. Volume XII: 1887–1891*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), pp. 106–11 [16 March–11 April 1888]; and W. S. Peterson, 'Gladstone's Review of *Robert Elsmere*: Some Unpublished Correspondence,' *Review of English Studies*, n.s. 21, no. 84 (1970), pp. 442–61.

[30] 'Empiricism certainly inclined to the belief that man is a material organism, that thought is a function of the nerves, and that circumstances control action. Against this Green would assert that the nature of man is spiritual, that the physical body is not the cause of thought but its influence, and that circumstances are no more than occasions for the exercise of freedom in choice.' G. S. Brett, 'Green, Thomas Hill' in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, vi, ed. J. Hastings (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), p. 436.

which he found dominant in modern England…'.[31] Nor could evolutionism, positivism, utilitarianism and other doctrines then in vogue explain the reasons for which people submitted to government, imposed moral responsibilities upon themselves and created new political obligations.[32] This conviction, as much as his technical theories of humans' being and knowing, marked Green as a philosophical Idealist.[33]

Green criticized 'positivism' as expounded by Auguste Comte (1798–1857) and Herbert Spencer (1829–1902), which purported to explain in evolutionary terms the origin and growth of sentiments of goodness and altruism, but he was more opposed to these thinkers' assumptions and methods than to some of their conclusions. Green held that religious truths, the 'laws' of political economy and principles of social evolution could be reconciled to a considerable extent, since natural laws and moral action were alike expressions of divine order. He understood the 'metaphysic of ethics' as fundamental to the disciplines of moral psychology, jurisprudence (literally 'science of right') and sociology (science of morals in social interaction).[34] Ben Wempe points out that in Green's philosophical system the science of political economy was formally separate from metaphysic of ethics, as the individual could resist economic laws no more than he could the laws of nature. Yet individuals' moral choices were not absolutely determined by nature and people exercised morality independent of natural causation.[35] Indeed, Green argued that philosophy was scarcely possible unless one granted the fact of free will. However, not all willing actualized freedom. He criticized as simplistic the view of liberty as a mere absence of constraint by law and authority, and he conceived of freedom ('positive

[31] R. L. Nettleship, 'Professor T. H. Green. In Memoriam,' *Contemporary Review*, 41 (1882), p. 862.

[32] 'Popular Philosophy in its Relation to Life [1868],' in *Works*, iii, pp. 92–125; 'Introduction to the Moral Part of Hume's "Treatise [of Human Nature]" ' [1874], *Works*, i (Longmans, Green and Co., 1885), pp. 301–71; *Prolegomena to Ethics*, ed. A. C. Bradley (Oxford: Clarendon, 1883), Book IV, chaps. 3–4; *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation*, secs. 17–31 (as printed in *Harris and Morrow*). The *LPPO* were delivered in 1879–80 and initially printed in the second volume of Green's *Works* (Longmans, Green and Co., 1886), pp. 334–553.

[33] Modern idealism defines itself against 'realist', naturalistic–materialist and utilitarian schools. A succinct treatment of these and other philosophical positions is provided by R. N. Beck, *Handbook in Social Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1979). British Idealists took issue with a view of man that posited his split existence between animal (or natural) and spiritual being. See Boucher, ed., *The British Idealists*, pp. xi–xx; and M. Mandelbaum, *History, Man, and Reason: A Study of Nineteenth Century Thought* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1971), chap. 11.

[34] *GP* 2 (numbered philosophical manuscripts), MS 10a: 'Lecture on moral philosophy' (ca. 1868).

[35] B. Wempe, *Beyond Equality: T. H. Green's Theory of Positive Freedom* (Delft: Eburon, Netherlands, 1986), pp. 195–7.

freedom') as a moral-spiritual capacity of individuals as much as a legal-political condition.[36] He imagined a moral society as one in which individuals discover and actualize the 'spiritual principle' in themselves through both the pursuit of individual goods and collective experiments in 'the organization of life'.[37]

While Gladstone gave relatively little thought to philosophy or metaphysics (in a technical sense), his theological and historical interests inclined him toward a 'spiritual' view of life resembling Green's. In comparing the views of Green and Gladstone on politics, there emerges a set of assumptions about moral purpose that reveals the basic ethos of Victorian liberalism. Gladstone's revelation in the 1860s that virtually all adult male Britons were 'morally entitled to come within the pale of the Constitution' was a key episode in the history of the British Liberal Party and of liberalism.[38] He was instrumental in the passage of the Reform Acts that extended the parliamentary franchise to male urban householders (1867) and male rural labourers (1884–5).[39] Gladstone's youthful Toryism habitually set constitution, Church and State on one side, and popular opinion on the other. His Liberal populism appears to have been prompted by his recognition, during the 1850s and '60s, that 'intelligent' working men endorsed the proper policies of peace, free trade and financial retrenchment.[40] Whereas Gladstone came to embrace democracy only in late middle age, Green entered adulthood as a passionate political Radical. Hereditary privilege and class discrimination were to Green among the most deplorable features of British society. He perceived the Volunteer movement of 1858–9 — the formation of militias ostensibly to forestall French aggression — as one

---

[36] See 'Liberal Legislation and Freedom of Contract' (1881) in *Harris and Morrow*, pp. 194–212. 'Though of course there can be no freedom among men who act not willingly but under compulsion, yet on the other hand the mere removal of compulsion, the mere enabling a man to do as he likes, is in itself no contribution to true freedom' (p. 199).

[37] See Green's 1879 professorial lecture, 'On the Different Senses of "Freedom" As Applied to Will and to the Moral Progress of Man,' secs. 5, 23–24 (in *Harris and Morrow*, pp. 228-49). There is a similar treatment of freedom, spirituality and civil life in *Prolegomena to Ethics* [henceforth *PE*], Book III, chaps. 3–5.

[38] House of Commons speech, 11 May 1864. Quoted in P. Magnus, *Gladstone. A Biography* (London: John Murray, 1954), p. 160.

[39] On Gladstone's conversion to democracy see R. Shannon, *Gladstone. Volume I: 1809–1865* (London: Methuen, 1984 [1982]), chaps. 6–8; H. C. G. Matthew, *Gladstone. 1809–1874* (OUP, 1986), chap. 5; and Parry, *Rise and Fall of Liberal Government*, chaps. 9, 11.

[40] Gladstone promoted such policies as Chancellor of the Exchequer (1852–5, 1859–65). During the same period the Whig leader Lord John Russell argued that franchise reform was justified by 'the improvement and intelligence of the people and the general spread of information since 1832.' Quoted in E. J. Evans, *The Forging of the Modern State. Early Industrial Britain, 1783–1870* (London: Longman, 1983), p. 344.

designed to intimidate the British working classes. In a letter to his family Green remarked,

> Fools talk at Oxford of… [the rifle corps] being desirable, in order that the gentry may keep down the chartists in the possible contingency of a rising. I should like to learn the use of the arm that I might be able to desert to the people, if it came to such a pass.[41]

Though he was not, strictly speaking, a Chartist, Green advocated a much broader (more Radical) franchise than did Gladstone, and he regarded the vote as a civil right. As a young Oxford don he joined the Reform League, an extra-parliamentary pressure group, and publicly advocated parliamentary reform between 1866 and 1868.[42] Shortly before Gladstone formed his first (Liberal) government, Green proclaimed,

> We who were reformers from the beginning, always said that the enfranchisement of the people was an end in itself. We said, and we were much derided for saying so, that citizenship only makes the moral man; that citizenship only gives that self-respect, which is the true basis of respect of others, and without which there is no lasting social order or real morality.[43]

Green's commitment to popular government was more deeply rooted than Gladstone's, and he took democratic theory to lengths that disturbed some contemporaries. Green believed the scope of moral agency in society would be enlarged by popular participation in politics at both the local and national levels. The question for him was not, as it was for Gladstone and Lord John Russell, whether the disenfranchised masses — or any social category — deserved the vote. Nor, Green suggested, was electoral reform to be implemented with definite political results in mind: 'Untie the man's legs, and then it will be time to speculate how he will walk.'[44]

Green maintained that men denied citizenship were denied the means of achieving 'real morality': 'citizenship only makes the moral man.' For Gladstone, on the other hand, democracy was instrumental:

[41] Quoted in R. L. Nettleship, 'Memoir,' p. xxiv. This passionate announcement presents an interesting contrast to Green's anti-militarism: he opposed state military build–up and British military interventions in Continental politics. Henry Nettleship, one of Green's early associates at Oxford, remarked that the *Morning Star*, the pacifist daily paper issued 1856–69, formed a staple of Green's reading. H. Nettleship recollection (1882) in *GP* 1(b).

[42] The People's Charter(s) of the late 1830s demanded above all the widening of the suffrage. The English republican movement of the 1860s and '70s, one of the animating forces behind the Reform League, was greatly influenced by earlier Chartist agitations. Green was favourably impressed by the plebeian Radicalism of the 1850s and '60s. Harvie, *Lights*, pp. 125–6 (noting speeches by Green reported in the *Oxford Chronicle*); R. L. Nettleship, 'Memoir,' pp. cx–cxiii.

[43] Green at a dinner of the Wellington Lodge of Odd Fellows, February 1868, quoted in R. L. Nettleship, 'Memoir,' p. cxii.

[44] *Ibid.*

popular sentiment could be registered as endorsement of enlightened policies and leaders.[45] Despite these and other differences, Green's and Gladstone's political views converged in the cluster of sentiments Christopher Harvie, Jonathan Parry and others have identified as Gladstonian. Gladstonianism was a mode of politics that sought to harness enlightened leadership and popular moral enthusiasm to 'Reform', representing the latter as a matter of national destiny. Even before the peak of Gladstone's political career J. S. Mill identified the 'characteristic feature' of Gladstone's ministerial life as a zeal 'to seek out things that require or admit of improvement.'[46]

Though Victorian Liberals were fond of declaring that men could not be made moral by act of Parliament, many readily conceded that legislation could promote morality and inhibit vice. Indeed, doctrinaire 'laissez-faire'-ism or libertarianism was becoming unfashionable among Liberals by the late 1860s. Though *moral* was more important than material improvement, both might be advanced through legislative action. Most self-described reformers of the era assumed that appropriate legislative activity would support rather than weaken the moral life and that judicious state action was compatible with social voluntarism. The Congregational minister and Radical-Liberal R. W. Dale, with whom both Gladstone and Green were acquainted, remarked in 1878 that 'within the last thirty years a very great and remarkable change has passed upon the theoretical views of the advanced Liberal party': the doctrine of restraining powers of government 'within the narrowest possible limits' had been replaced by the conviction that 'government may contribute very much to the positive development of national life.' Despite their valorization of the individual, most Liberals agreed with Dale that improvement was manifested in 'national advance'.[47] National morality, formed in part by religious belief, was exercised and developed through popular political participation. Collective moral feeling could shape the political agenda, at least so far as the public could render 'judgments about broad principles of government'.[48]

Green's theory of individual freedom as self-realization or self-perfection was linked to his conception of the common good by the mechanism of a democratic imperative. According to Green, the task of

[45] On Gladstone as apostle or prophet, see R. Kelley, *The Transatlantic Persuasion. The Liberal–Democratic Mind in the Age of Gladstone* (New York: Knopf, 1969), chaps. 1, 5–6. On contemporary perceptions of the danger of Gladstone's populism, see Christopher Harvie, 'Gladstonianism, the Provinces, and Popular Political Culture, 1860–1906' in *Victorian Liberalism*, ed. R. Bellamy (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 152–74.

[46] Quoted in Bradley, *The Optimists*, p. 200.

[47] Quoted in Bradley, *The Optimists*, p. 211.

[48] Parry, *Rise and Fall of Liberal Government*, p. 252.

ruling oneself — in a negative sense, taming self-defeating desires and anti–social passions — was correlative to ruling others. Although he by no means discounted the role of self-interest in politics, as in private life, Green believed conscience and altruism would be activated in individuals allowed positive political rights. Without full (male) citizenship there could be no firm commitment to the social order and no workable consensus as to the moral purposes of the state. Indeed, as we shall see in Chapter Two below, Green held sovereignty itself to be contingent not upon the state's use or threat of force, or even upon the authority of determinate persons, but upon a moral consensus ratified in the everyday activities of society's members.

Like John Dalberg, Lord Acton (1843–1902), the eminent liberal Catholic historian and critic, Green saw a positive correlation between true liberty and conscience.[49] Conscience, as an element of moral judgment, was at once the individual's comprehension of a spiritual principle in the universe — as held by the Stoics, for whom conscience was in man's nature — and the effect on him of socialization (internalizing social norms and habits). Yet conscience by itself could not moralize the individual or make him free. As individuals participated in public life, in effect testing each others' moral capacities, the more 'freely' and completely would they be brought to 'consciousness of the absolutely desirable' (as opposed to the arbitrary and 'irrational') in themselves.[50]

Green's commitment to liberty in a social context, or what he called 'positive freedom', was not founded on purely abstract reasoning; he believed his optimism was justified by historical example. One was the 'ethical life' of the ancient Greek city-states. G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831), in lectures posthumously published as 'Introduction to the Philosophy of History', stated that the ancient Greek 'Idea of freedom' 'was not yet a conscious morality, but a spontaneously ethical life in which the will of the individual stands firm upon the unmediated custom and habit that prescribes what is right and lawful.' In *Philosophy of Right* (1821) Hegel observed that it is in the Greek *poleis* 'that we see the principle of personal individuality arising,' along with 'the ethical life of freedom and happiness,' among citizens ('free men', not slaves or women).[51] For Hegel, of course, the story of human history was a growing realization of the meaning of freedom.[52] Green agreed with Hegel that moral freedom, insofar as it could be experienced collectively, had been invented,

[49] Acton stated, 'Liberty is that condition which makes it easy for conscience to govern' (Cambridge University Library, Add. MS. 4939). Quoted in G. E. Fasnacht, *Acton's Political Philosophy. An Analysis* (London: Hollis and Carter, 1952), p. 32.

[50] Green, 'Different Senses of "Freedom",' secs. 5–6.

[51] Hegel, *Introduction to 'The Philosophy of History', with an Appendix from 'The Philosophy of Right'*, trans. Leo Rauch, Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1988, pp. 95, 104.

[52] Acton's view was similar: 'Liberty is the one common topic of ancient and modern history. Every nation, every epoch, every religion, every philosophy, every science'

if only partly achieved, in the *polis.* 'The man … entering into the idea of the *polis* was equally qualified to rule and be ruled.'[53] Although Green did not *define* positive freedom as self-rule, the conception was clearly shaped by the classical Greek idea that the person who both ruled himself or herself and adjusted personal desires to accommodate the good of others had advanced beyond an immature condition of license.

The idea of freedom had been advanced as well by the growth of Christianity. Green shared with Hegel a belief in the 'positivity' of Christianity, that religious ideas and religious modes of knowing had governed progressive political change in the West.[54] Indeed, many of Green's contemporaries ignorant of Hegelian philosophy tacitly accepted this as well. In 'Four Lectures on the English Revolution' (1867), Green depicted Oliver Cromwell as a pioneer of freedom of conscience. The real heroes of Green's lectures, however, were the Independents (non-Anglican Protestants), believers in an 'inward light' whose 'spirit' refused to be 'bound' by ecclesiastical and civil laws.[55] This view of conscientious dissent and civil disobedience as premonition of modern liberty resembled that of Acton and of contemporary Nonconformist leaders (see Chapter Three below). More generally, the philosophy of history expressed in Green's English Revolution lectures and other writings was accepted by Victorian believers and unbelievers alike — namely, that social groups, societies and states were defined, and judged by posterity, by their religious and moral 'character'; and that mankind's spiritual and political quest for freedom was both origin and goal of history.

Benjamin Jowett and Mark Pattison mischievously and somewhat misleadingly characterized Green as a disciple of Hegel (see Chapter One below). Like Hegel, Green claimed to discern in the history of the Christian West the enlargement or extension of the conceptions of freedom and the common good. The 'conscientious citizen of modern Christendom' develops powers of judgment (Kant's *Urteilskraft*) which carry with them the recognition 'that every human person has an absolute

(Cambridge University Library, Add. MS 4941, quoted in Fasnacht, *Acton's Political Philosophy*, p. 6).

[53] Green, 'Different Senses of "Freedom",' secs. 5-6. Cognition of 'the sense of "autonomy of will"' in the *polis* was possible only in 'some favoured individuals' — i.e., *citizens* enjoying some degree of economic independence. See also *PE*, Book III, chap. 5, on the limitations of Greek freedom.

[54] Hegel claimed that the Christian character of European states remained even as the specifically Christian content of civil institutions was altered. See 'The Positivity of the Christian Religion' (1795–1800) in *Hegel. Early Theological Writings*, trans. T. M. Knox, with an introduction by R. Kroner (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania UP, 1971), pp. 67–118. Green cannot have read Hegel's essay, which was unpublished until the twentieth century, but Hegel's understanding of religion and social change was evident in those writings of Hegel with which Green was familiar.

[55] *Works*, iii, pp. 277–364.

value; … that every one has a "suum" which every one else is bound to render him.'[56] The positivity of Christianity, for Green, lay not only in the fact (as he saw it) that the Christian nation-state was the political community in which the highest degree of human freedom had hitherto been achieved; Christianity continued to shape the larger culture in which individuals in Western democracies were moralized and politicized:

> In modern Christendom, with the extension of citizenship, the security of family life to all men (so far as law and police can secure it), the establishment in various forms of Christian fellowship of which *the moralising functions grow as those of the magistrate diminish*, the number of individuals whom society awakens to interests in objects contributory to human perfection tends to increase.[57]

Green was convinced that Christian sociability and forms of fellowship helped produce a type of individual of higher moral potential than the subject of a despotic state or a member of a 'savage' society — an individual able to reconcile the apparently conflicting demands of self-perfection and the common good. The evolution of Christian thought and the progressive realization of Christian principles had led to and were continually improving modern 'free' society.[58]

Despite the esoteric formulation of Green's ethico-political philosophy, it coincided on many points with the convictions of contemporary Liberals about faith and moral progress. Victorian Liberals were convinced that the nation's well being depended as much on the moral 'health' of individuals as on the balance of trade or the efficiency of the Army and Navy. For Green and many Gladstonians, regardless of specific religious beliefs, it was inconceivable that individuals could behave morally without grounding in some positive faith. Comte imagined a secular-scientific stage of social evolution succeeding and obliterating the vestiges of Christian society, and 'Positivism' (the Comtean motto was 'Love, Order, Progress') held considerable attraction for some

---

[56] *PE*, sec. 217 (in the section titled 'The Extension of the Area of Common Good').

[57] 'Different Senses of "Freedom",' sec. 5 (emphasis mine). The paragraph continues: 'So far the modern state, in that full sense which Hegel uses the term (as including all the agencies for common good of a law-abiding people), does contribute to the realization of freedom, if by freedom we understand the autonomy of the will or its determination by rational objects, objects which help to satisfy the demand of reason, the effort after self–perfection.'

[58] Acton had noted the significance of the 'discoveries' of natural law (12th–13th centuries) and conscience (by Socinius and the Independents, 16th–17th centuries) and commented in 1862, 'Reverence for conscience is the germ of all civil freedom, and the way in which Christianity served it.' Quoted in Fasnacht, *Acton's Political Philosophy*, p. 31.

members of the British educated classes around mid century.[59] Yet despite their anticlericalism, few British Positivists were sanguine about the withering away of Christianity and its replacement by a superior ethical system.[60]

When Gladstone examined ancient and modern history he became convinced that the survival of a complex commercial-industrial state depended on a shared faith rooted in the nation's history (i.e. *not* a synthetic, scientific philosophy).[61] The idea of national faith, however, gradually became detached in his mind from a national (or state) church, as he came to conceive of the visible church as the nation of Christian citizens.[62] Gladstone's faith, like that of John Henry Newman, had been founded on dogmas, guarded by one catholic church.[63] During the 1830s and '40s Gladstone was an almost fanatical upholder of Anglicanism as he understood it. Like Newman and other members of the Oxford Movement (or Tractarians), Gladstone prophesized the moral dissolution of the British nation with the erosion of the religious Establishment.[64] As late as 1865, when campaigning to retain his Parliamentary seat for Oxford University, Gladstone insisted that the ancient

[59] F. W. Knickerbocker, *Free Minds: John Morley and His Friends* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1943); W. Irvine, *Apes, Angels, and Victorians. Darwin, Huxley, and Evolution* (Cleveland, OH: World Publishing Co., 1959 [1955]), chaps. 14–18; C. Kent, *Brains and Numbers: Elitism, Comtism and Democracy in Mid-Victorian England* (Toronto UP, 1978); and T. R. Wright, *The Religion of Humanity: the Impact of Comtean Positivism on Victorian Britain* (CUP, 1986).

[60] T. H. Huxley, while a member of the London School Board in 1870, referred to his own faction in the struggles of that body as the Third or Scientific Party (neither Protestant nor Catholic). Yet, as Helen Lynd puts it, 'Huxley, Spencer, Frederic Harrison, and Matthew Arnold conceived that in criticizing the churches they were not abandoning religion but laying the foundation for a more living religion and morality' (Lynd, *England in the Eighteen-Eighties*, p. 341). Huxley insisted that children in the Board Schools read from the English Bible — and not merely, as is sometimes maintained, because he believed in its 'literary' value.

[61] Bradley, Colin Matthew and Parry have suggested that Gladstone's Classical researches (including the three-volume *Studies on Homer and the Homeric Age* [1858]) led him to the conviction that a civilization required a core religious belief, cherished by the masses as well as the elite, if it was to avoid going the way of the ancient Greek states. Bradley, *The Optimists*, pp. 78–9; J. P. Parry, 'The State of Victorian Political History,' *HJ*, 25 (1983), pp. 479–80; Matthew, *Gladstone. 1809–1874*, pp. 152–5.

[62] D. Schreuder, 'Gladstone and the Conscience of the State' in *Conscience of the Victorian State*, ed. P. Marsh (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 1979), pp. 73–134.

[63] Newman took the independent or 'free' intellect as the greatest peril to salvation (not to mention temporal order): 'Liberalism is the mistake of supposing that there is a right of private judgement, that is, that there is no existing authority on earth competent to interfere with the liberty of individuals in reasoning and judging for themselves.' J. H. Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (1864), quoted in Bradley, *The Optimists*, p. 86. Gladstone, however, believed in man's sinfulness *and* his freedom.

[64] Gladstone went so far as to argue (in *The State in its Relations with the Church*, 1838) that the state should purge heterodox clergy in order to allow the Church to moralize society. Shannon, *Gladstone I*, pp. 50–7, 76–87. Gladstone's fantasy of a national clergy was

universities should be kept orthodox: he would rather see 'Oxford level with the ground than its religion regulated in the manner which would please Bishop Colenso' (Colenso being only the most recent Churchman to question the veracity of Biblical narrative).[65]

Though Gladstone remained in his own religious habits a High Churchman, ever ready to criticize the heresies of liberal Protestantism, he became a proponent of undenominational Christianity — at least in part because he came to appreciate its political and social uses. In one of his characteristic shifts of attitude combining political expediency and emotional conviction, Gladstone began to listen carefully to Dissenting Protestant leaders during the 1860s.[66] Like his 'conversion' to democracy, his embrace of Dissent had powerful political repercussions — first registered in educational policy and the question of Irish Church endowment. Gladstone was impressed (or pretended to be) by leaders of Dissenting opinion, made appeals to their followers during his first Liberal premiership and helped ensure Dissenters' traditional loyalty to the Liberal Party.[67] In effect, Gladstone had concluded that a sort of free trade in Christianity would better facilitate the moralization of society than the ministrations of an Established Church. This view of the *civil* and social functions of religion was surprisingly close to Green's.

Green's religious creed was quite different from Gladstone's, and in essential matters his view of religion changed less drastically over time. Son of a moderately evangelical country rector (gentleness and lack of ambition were two of Valentine Green's qualities affectionately recalled by his son), he became a Broad Churchman, opposing doctrinal narrowness in any and all sects. Green was in this sense a successful product of Rugby School, an institution dedicated, in the mind of its most famous

---

an unintentional parody of certain ideas of S. T. Coleridge: see B. Knights, *The Idea of the Clerisy in the Nineteenth Century* (CUP, 1978), and J. Morrow, *Coleridge's Political Thought: Property, Morality and the Limits of Traditional Discourse* (New York: St. Martin's, 1990).

[65] Gladstone to a Dissenter (J. Baldwin Brown), July 29, 1865: letter reprinted in *Correspondence on Church and Religion of W. E. Gladstone*, ed. D. C. Lathbury (London: Macmillan, 1910), pp. 219–20. John William Colenso, Bishop of Natal, South Africa from 1853, was illegally deposed for heresy in 1865. Author of *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (1861) and *The Pentateuch Examined* (1862–3). On the Colenso controversy, see especially G. Faber, *Jowett: A Portrait with Background* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1958), chap. 14.

[66] G. I. T. Machin, 'Gladstone and Nonconformity in the 1860s: the Formation of an Alliance,' *HJ*, 17 (1974), pp. 347–64.

[67] See discussion in 5.6–5.7 below. Gladstone's title 'apostle of Liberalism' (Kelley, *Transatlantic Persuasion*, chap. 6) is apt. He 'claimed to discern in the public mind … [a] commitment to the "laws of eternal righteousness" which the leading Dissenting preachers … expounded in the sermons which he read and approvingly scored.' His 'conception of Liberalism as a joint and zealous struggle for economy, self-government and Christianisation was massively powerful and massively influential.' Parry, *Rise and Fall of Liberal Government*, pp. 251–2, 254.

headmaster, Thomas Arnold, to the production of self-governing 'Christian gentlemen'.[68] With his Classical education and indoctrination in liberal Anglican, 'latitudinarian' Christianity, Green might be expected to have regarded Dissent as theologically crude and Dissenters as uncultivated. Yet he openly sympathized with Dissent, which was at that time more evangelical (on the whole) than the Establishment. An anti-dogmatist, he believed that the English universities, like all institutions of civil and political life, should be thrown open to individuals without regard to religious affiliation, and he fought alongside University Liberals to repeal tests of conformity in the Ancient Universities. Green conformed to the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Anglican creed in order to take his Oxford fellowship in 1860. According to Henry Nettleship, Green believed it politically naïve to refuse such pledges: to be scrupulous about the letter of the articles when one accepted the spirit of Christian teachings would leave the colleges to High Churchmen and Tories.[69] Green became thereafter a chief representative of the anti-doctrinal sensibility at Oxford.

The particular qualities of Green's religion will be discussed in subsequent chapters, but it bears mentioning here that Green emphasized the moral and social *utility* of religion. Like liberals of his own and other times, Green saw that doctrinal controversy eroded morality and civility as well as religion. As for the constructive dimension of religion, Green and Gladstone shared the view that 'faith' was the basis of the best in human nature. Both defied the naturalistic spirit of the age by denying that religious belief could be reduced by science or philosophy to a more fundamental instinct or mental phenomenon. That Green viewed religion as an irreducible quantity is revealed in a statement in 1872 to his former pupil Henry Scott Holland, subsequently a Canon of St. Paul's and a founder of the Christian Social Union. Green avowed, 'I have never dreamt of philosophy doing instead of religion. My own interest in it, I believe, is wholly religious …'. He explained:

---

[68] D. Newsome, *Godliness and Good Learning. Four Studies on a Victorian Ideal* (London: Cassell, 1961), especially chap. 1; and A. Briggs, 'Thomas Hughes and the Public Schools,' *Victorian People. A Reassessment of Persons and Themes 1851–1867*, 2nd ed. (Chicago, IL: Chicago UP, 1970), pp. 140–67. Certain of Green's contemporaries nevertheless noted his resistance to the Rugbeian mould. As a sixth former Green rationalized absenting himself from compulsory chapel and he was squeamish about exercising prefectural power. Algernon Grenfell, who went up to Oxford with Green from Rugby in 1855, described him as ever 'a boy apart … a plant growing, not a brick being moulded.' *GP* 1(b): Revd. Algernon Grenfell to Charlotte Green, 10 October 1882, letter transcribed in CBG copy-book, pp. 141–9.

[69] *GP* 1b: H. Nettleship to C. B. Green, 1882. On the issue of religious conformity at Oxford at mid century, see W. R. Ward, *Victorian Oxford* (London: Frank Cass, 1965), chaps. 11–12; Harvie, *Lights of Liberalism*, chaps. 3–4, 6; H. A. L. Fisher, *Life of James Bryce*, i (London: Macmillan, 1927), chap. 3.

> There can be no greater satisfaction to me than to think that I at all helped to lay the intellectual platform for your religious life; and that, not merely because if I were only a breeder of heretics I should suspect my philosophy. If it is sound, it ought to supply intellectual formulae for the religious life whether lived by an 'orthodox' clergyman or (let us say) a follower of Mazzini … [Philosophy] is to me (not exactly, in the popular phrase, 'the handmaid of religion') but the reasoned intellectual expression of the effort to get to God.[70]

Certain of Green's contemporaries — notably, Sidgwick, John Morley and Leslie Stephen — lapsed into agnosticism because faith seemed to impose demands incompatible with those of intellect.[71] Green not only refused to view religion as an inferior means to the true and the good but he habitually rejected the opposition of faith to reason as false. He was completely unsympathetic to burying skepticism in obedience to ecclesiastical authority, as did Newman, E. B. Pusey and Gerard Manley Hopkins.[72] Intellect, reason, the attempt to understand the natural world by comprehending its laws — all served an overarching spiritual purpose. Green stated in his 1878 lay sermon 'Faith',

> The human spirit is one and indivisible, and the desire to know what nature is and means is as inseparable from it as the consciousness of God and the longing for reconciliation with him.[73]

Green was intent upon demonstrating the impact of religious belief on individual behaviour and social life, which was manifest in 'the development of the moral ideal' (*Prolegomena to Ethics*). As we shall see in subsequent chapters, Green's personal faith informed his moral theory, even if some contemporaries chided him for his religious heterodoxy. Henry Nettleship expressed puzzlement that Green's refusal to believe in the miraculous aspects of the Gospel had not apparently disturbed 'the basis' of his 'evangelical piety'. He never doubted Green's 'complete belief in the code of ethics universally accepted as Christian as a practical guide for conduct.'[74] Green was but little concerned with reconciling specific Christian teachings, much less dogmas; nor was he especially interested in comparing religious ideas to some universal moral code. Rather, he explored the epistemology of Christian belief,

---

[70] The letter (dated October 6, 1872) was occasioned by Holland's ordination. S. Paget, ed., *Henry Scott Holland. Memoirs and Letters* (London: J. Murray, 1921), p. 65.

[71] See especially Annan, *Leslie Stephen*.

[72] Interestingly, Daniel Brown has argued that Hopkins was susceptible to many aspects of Green's thought: see *Hopkins' Idealism: Philosophy, Physics, Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997).

[73] Printed in *Works*, iii, pp. 253–76. Quotation p. 264.

[74] The adjectives 'complete' and 'practical' are significant here. 'Of the *pain* of doubt, so far as I know, he felt very little … He knew nothing of mental cataclysms, and had none of the qualities which make interesting converts.' GP 1(b): Nettleship to Charlotte Green (1882). Nettleship implicitly contrasted Green's case to those of the conscientious doubters of his time, like Stephen, Sidgwick and A. H. Clough.

emphasizing the moral and mental habits of individuals who experienced Christian piety — habits which underlay their efforts at self-realization and consequently governed their social interaction. In Green's view, the proper channelling of moral sentiment, including religious belief and practice, was to lead to a liberal millennium.

Many other Radical-Liberals during the last three decades of the nineteenth century sought to employ religious belief in the service of political and social 'reform' — preaching and often practicing what Melvin Richter calls a 'politics of conscience'. Many of the most active of these were liberal Anglicans and Dissenters.[75] Green's religiously informed liberalism was as pragmatic as it was principled, insofar as it promoted the social cohesion of the Liberal party in an emerging age of mass politics. Like Gladstone, Green recognized that shared religious 'spirit', if not common adherence to specific religious observances, could constitute the basis for lasting social and political cooperation. Through the practice of free faith individuals explored the boundaries of their nature and learned how true freedom entailed both resistance to authority and adherence to shared principles ratified in social and political practice. Green's optimism about the spiritual consciousness of the 'common people' was partly based on his awareness of how popular Protestantism buttressed the 'Englishman's birthright': popular religion reinforced a sense of constitutional inheritance (e.g. the right to resist oppression) that lent itself to Liberal goals.[76] This spiritual consciousness was experienced not merely 'negatively' — as identification of restraints to be thrown off in the name of justice or freedom — but positively, as a zeal for social improvement, in the quest for which citizens might agree to impose upon themselves new social obligations. Although Green's conception of liberal society and polity was sometimes expressed in esoteric terms, it was congenial to many of his contemporaries because of rather than despite its religious resonances.

Shared appreciation of the transformative power of religion and democratic citizenship was a significant factor in the social cohesion of the Liberal Party, although this was not enough — in the long run — to

[75] See W. J. Rowland, 'Some Free Church Pioneers of Social Reform,' *Congregational Quarterly*, 35 (1957), pp. 134–45; K. S. Inglis, 'English Nonconformity and Social Reform, 1880–1900,' *Past and Present*, 13 (1958), pp. 73–88; Peter d'A. Jones, *The Christian Socialist Revival, 1877–1914* (Princeton UP, 1968), pp. 86–94, 421ff; R. J. Helmstadter, 'The Nonconformist Conscience' in *The Conscience of the Victorian State*, ed. Marsh, pp. 135–72; W. M. King, 'Hugh Price Hughes and the British "Social Gospel",' *Journal of Religious History*, 13 (1984), pp. 66–82; S. Meacham, *Toynbee Hall and Social Reform, 1880–1914: the Search for Community* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1987).

[76] P. Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class, 1848–1914* (CUP, 1991), especially Part Three; Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform*, chaps. 1, 4; and J. Vernon, *Politics and the People. A Study in English Political Culture, c. 1815–1867* (CUP, 1993), chaps. 7–8, conclusion.

avert the disintegration of traditional Liberalism. When Green died in March 1882, the Liberal Party was in the seat of power yet dividing within itself.[77] A vacillating tactic combining agrarian reform with coercion in Ireland was strengthening the forces of nationalism at the expense of liberalism. (In May 1882, Charles Stuart Parnell, the 'Uncrowned King of Ireland', was released from Kilmainham Gaol, where he had been imprisoned on a charge of seditious conspiracy.) Britain's quashing of Arabi Pasha's rebellion in Egypt (1881–2) was not domestically popular and chilled relations with other Great Powers, especially France. Orthodox Liberals championed 'just' struggles for national liberation — such as the Magyar, Italian and Polish struggles earlier in the century — yet deplored militarism. British agriculture and land values declined as foreign imports increased, hastening the decay of landed society. To a greater degree than had been the case during the preceding thirty years, Capital and Labour seemed to represent conflicting political interests.

Liberals' departure from the party of Gladstone after 1886 over Irish Home Rule, whether quiet or ostentatious, often masked their disagreement over wider issues, such as imperial relations, labour law and social reform.[78] They disagreed about remedies for the 'labour unrest' of the later 1880s, which involved male artisans and (more alarmingly) unskilled male labourers, women and juveniles.[79] Radicals disagreed with Whigs and among themselves over the nature and extent of 'state intervention'.[80] By ca. 1900 some of Green's moderately Liberal contemporaries had come to view the 1860s and '70s as liberalism's Golden Age. Some who could not follow the late Victorian and Edwardian shift of Liberal ideology and practice found in 'memorializing' Green a con-

---

[77] On late Victorian political instability and the challenge to democracy, see especially R. Shannon, *The Crisis of Imperialism 1865–1916* (London: Palladin, 1984), parts 2–3; and M. Bentley, *Politics Without Democracy 1815–1914* (London: Fontana, 1984), Part 2.

[78] J. F. Glaser, 'English Nonconformity and the Decline of Liberalism,' *AHR*, 63 (1958), pp. 352–63; S. Koss, *Nonconformity in Modern British Politics* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1975), pp. 8–10.

[79] Labour unrest among hitherto non-unionized workers (e.g. the London dockers in 1889) and the 'sweated trades' has long been recognized as a factor of late Victorian liberal crisis. See H. Pelling, *The Origins of the Labour Party, 1880–1900*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965). Judith Walkowitz has broadened this assessment by pointing to male fear of female (especially working-class) indiscipline and violence: *City of Dreadful Delight. Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: UP Chicago, 1992).

[80] See e.g. E. Bristow, 'The Liberty and Property Defence League and Individualism,' *HJ*, 18 (1975), pp. 761–89; Shannon, *Crisis of Imperialism*, chaps. 5, 8–9; M. Barker, *Gladstone and Radicalism: the Reconstruction of Liberal Policy in Britain, 1885–94* (Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester, 1975); T. A. Jenkins, *Gladstone, Whiggery and the Liberal Party, 1874–1886* (Oxford, 1988); and M. Taylor, *Men Versus the State: Herbert Spencer and Late Victorian Individualism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992).

venient means of emphasizing the constructive and redemptive role which liberalism had claimed for itself. Liberals who moved beyond what Green's philosophy explicitly endorsed, and who came to identify themselves as Radicals, Socialists and even Conservatives, were also eager to claim Green's moral legacy. This study attempts to show not only how T. H. Green contributed to Victorian liberalism but how Green as a cultural construct intrudes upon present understanding of him as a historical figure.

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON HISTORICAL METHOD

As I demonstrate in Chapter One, Green scholarship and general accounts of modern British thought reveal ambivalence about Green, or uncertainty about how to situate him within the movements of his own time or within the canon of political philosophy. I have observed already that the attribution to Green by some contemporaries of 'Hegelian' ideas has perhaps been one of the chief factors encouraging modern scholars to locate Hegelianism and German Idealism as the most immediate or the governing context of Green's thought. (This line of inquiry has of course resulted in important findings about congruence between Hegelianism and British Idealism.) Likewise, the marked anti-naturalistic bias of Green's thought (see 1.4–1.5, 2.2–2.3 below) and his criticisms of Locke, Hume and Spencer appear to have led some scholars to assume that Green was either hostile towards or unimpressed by 'British thought'. Others regard Green's writings and his public activities as unproblematic realizations of thought, as conscious, deliberate applications of theory (like Marxian *praxis*) or as natural derivatives of his social position.[81] These approaches have led to some interesting insights about Green's stated or unstated intentions and thereby to imputation of historical significance, but they also disregard the tentative or exploratory character of, for instance, Green's civic activities and the extent to which his ideas were worked through in his social practice.

Other interpretive tendencies have, I believe, served to obscure the picture of Green. Historians have more often resorted to 'functional' than to 'meaningful' analysis of Green and his work. Functional analyses focus on questions of precise causality, purporting to explain why X thought or did Y, or how (in what way) A was able to influence B. Melvin Richter has argued that Green's evangelical upbringing accounts for the tone of his thought; subsequently, scholars have

[81] See C. Jenks, 'T. H. Green, the Oxford Philosophy of Duty and the English Middle Class,' *British Journal of Sociology*, 28 (1977), pp. 481–97; and Melvin Richter, 'Intellectual and Class Alienation: Oxford Idealist Diagnoses and Prescriptions,' *European Journal of Sociology*, 7 (1966), pp. 1–26.

claimed, without elaboration or careful justification, that Green's thought assumed a particular form because of this evangelical upbringing. But this claim raises questions about how evangelicals thought and whether they all thought alike. Functional explanations also assess beliefs and actions according to their social utility and rationality *from the viewpoint of the modern observer*: because a person wanted to accomplish X, he thought or did Y; or, given a particular social condition or situation, it was reasonable for him to believe or do specific things. But this approach begs the question of why Green perceived conditions as he did, and why others similarly positioned may have perceived them differently, and it limits cultural analysis to sociology of knowledge. Functional analysis can go only a short way towards revealing the social dimensions of meaning.

I try to engage in my assessment of Green in a form of 'cultural meaning' analysis that has been employed effectively by Stefan Collini and Laurence Dickey. In his richly contextualized study of Hegel, Dickey argues that

> A Christian theology of history rather than an Hellenic ideal constitutes the 'motivational situation' within which the [i.e., Hegel's] writings of the 1790s were written … *Sittlichkeit* [a Protestant conception of morals and right living] was an ideal—an inspiration for, and telos of, religio-political activism.[82]

Hegel did not simply reflect upon the ideas of the great ethicists and philosophers of the Western tradition; his work was informed by the narrower, more homely cultural ideas of German Pietist Protestantism. Hegel scholars had already noted how Hegel's thought bore the imprint of his Swabian and Lutheran background, but none had decoded that constitutive culture as systematically as Dickey. This is more than to state that Hegel's philosophy did not occur in a cultural vacuum. It is to recognize that analysis of culture, to paraphrase the American literary critic Kenneth Burke, produces meanings for us as we place objects of study 'in contexts of varying scope.'[83] Dickey borrows the term 'motivational situation' from Max Weber's *Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, observing that Weber 'always tried to use contextualism to assess the "motivational situation" of historical actors and to illuminate what he called "the subjective-meaning complex of action". "Meaningful", not "causal", relationships were what Weber was trying to establish.'[84]

I am likewise interested in the cultural situations that informed Green's ideas and actions and shaped the social constructions of meanings. This involves paying attention to his 'life-world', including the broad ethical and political culture in which he participated, as well as

[82] Dickey, *Hegel*, p. 149.
[83] K. Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley, CA: California UP, 1969), p. 77, quoted in Dickey, *Hegel*, p. 298.
[84] Dickey, *Hegel*, p. 299, n. 18.

the narrower academic-professional culture he helped create.[85] 'Life' must be given as much weight as 'text', even in the ascription of textual meaning: not only a writer's stated concerns and goals must be considered but also those of the people to whom he was responding. One must also take under consideration a wider range of 'texts'. Until recently historians have given remarkably little attention (during the Victorian or other periods) to relationships between political theorists (or 'thinkers') and political participants, or between high theory and plebeian political opinion.[86] Except for Green's lecture 'Liberal Legislation and Freedom of Contract' (1881), Green scholars have neglected his ethical and political statements delivered to, or intended for consumption by, popular audiences—occasions when Green often eschewed the technical language of Idealist philosophy for the purpose of more effective communication.[87] Examination of Green's contributions to 'middle-brow' or non-specialist publications such as *North British Review* and *Contemporary Review*, and of his speeches at public meetings or to working men's clubs, provides insight into Green's relation to popular liberalism.

Even terms and idioms used by Green the philosopher—*ex cathedra,* as it were—may carry cultural meanings that remain unnoticed when his statements are read exclusively against those of other Great Thinkers or in relation to 'political languages'. Practitioners of 'linguistic contextualism', such as John Pocock, Quentin Skinner, Anthony Pagden, Stefan Collini and Donald Winch construe political-philosophical texts by 'locating' them in political languages or discourses.[88] They interpret texts by demonstrating the orderly, conventional and derivative nature of individual acts of speaking and writing. By comparing linguistic practices of political thinkers across time, they have categorized the symbolic content of political languages according

---

[85] The notion of a life-world as a surrounding medium of intellectual activity was employed by Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger and has been revived by Dominick LaCapra: *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1983).

[86] On 'plebeian' political thought and discourse in the Victorian period, see especially Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform*; and Vernon, *Politics and the People*.

[87] A notable exception is Peter Nicholson's 'T. H. Green and State Action: Liquor Legislation,' *HPT*, 6 (1985), pp. 517–50 (reprinted in *Philosophy of T.H.Green,* ed. A.Vincent (Aldershot, England: Gower, 1986), pp. 76–103), dealing primarily with Green's reported speeches to temperance audiences. On intellectuals' widening sense of public life, see J. Stapleton, *Political Intellectuals and Public Identities in Britain Since 1850* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2001).

[88] E.g. J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1975); Q. Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 vols. (CUP, 1978); A. Pagden, ed., *The Languages of Political Theory in Early Modern Europe* (CUP, 1987). An early statement of the approach is Skinner, 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas,' *History and Theory*, 8 (1969), pp. 3–53.

to discourses (e.g., civic humanism), and this approach to intellectual history has produced interesting insights into the work of Machiavelli, James Harrington, Locke and others. The categories ('paradigms') themselves can be refined or disputed insofar as the autonomy of conceptualized languages can be challenged by demonstrating variations within the posited languages or divergent rhetorical intentions or political goals within a language community.[89]

I need not rehearse here the various objections of historians and philosophers to the method of the 'Cambridge School' of intellectual historians, but one broad issue deserves mention here because of its relevance to the present study. This concerns the historical significance of speakers' and writers' conformity (or nonconformity) to the posited discursive paradigms. Mark Bevir and Mark Francis have noted how 'hard contextualism' (which Bevir associates with Pocock in particular) pre-selects the supposedly autonomous and specialized discourses within which acts of speech and writing are rendered meaningful, so that unconventional speakers/writers become marginalized.[90] Indeed, it is difficult to imagine any imputation of textual or contextual meaning being possible at all without some process of selection and comparison, but focus on discourse as the bedrock or irreducible reality of social and political thought can obscure the relations of speakers/writers to their societies. While discourses do establish 'communities' of authors often far removed in time and space, focus on discourse may arbitrarily preclude comparison of statements by speakers/writers inhabiting the same social and political environment. One effect of this is that language is effectively rendered *asocial*, insofar as the discourses traced by linguistic contextualists appear to assume the roles of independently thinking entities, divorced from human agency. Another is that social meanings of arguments are artificially narrowed: by focusing on *textual* traditions (and texts of High Culture at that), linguistic contextualism situates social and political ideas in discourses maintained by comparatively small numbers of elite thinkers, while ignoring other informing cultures. Traditions, textual and otherwise, constitute culture, yet culture cannot be interpreted as a sum of traditions or discourses.

---

[89] M. Francis, 'The Use and Abuse of Paradigms in the History of Political Thought,' *Politics*, 18 (1983), pp. 93–9; Larry Dickey, 'The Pocockian Moment,' *JBS*, 26 (1987), pp. 98–107; D. Harlan, 'Intellectual History and the Return of Literature' and D. Hollinger, 'The Return of the Prodigal: The Persistence of Historical Knowing,' *AHR*, 94 (1989), pp. 581–621; and M. Richter, 'Reconstructing the History of Political Languages,' *History and Theory*, 29 (1990), pp. 38–70.

[90] Francis, 'Uses and Abuses of Paradigms'; M. Bevir, 'The Errors of Linguistic Contextualism,' *History and Theory*, 31 (1992), pp. 276–9; M. Bevir, 'Review Article: English Political Thought in the Nineteenth Century,' *HPT*, 17 (1996), pp. 114–27; M. Bevir, 'Begriffsgeschichte,' *History and Theory*, 39 (2000), pp. 273–84.

In the interest of demonstrating congruence between Green's intellectual and practical work and contemporary shifts in ethical and political attitudes, this study most often considers Green's statements with reference to the 'argument' of mid and late Victorian Radicalism. By Radical argument I mean the discursive expression of a Radical world-view as used to achieve political ends. My use of the term argument is similar to that employed by Stefan Collini in his study of Leonard Hobhouse. Despite the somewhat disconcerting vagueness of his definition of 'argument' as 'a certain level of discourse,' a 'medium … in which … thought moved and had its being,' I have adopted Collini's method by considering the arguments of Green and his contemporaries in terms of the 'forensic resources' furnished by the political culture from which the arguments were generated and to which they contributed.[91] Although I cannot attempt here a reconstruction of Victorian political culture, I do at least refer to social contexts of argument and try to indicate how moral and political vocabularies employed in elite debates related to underlying beliefs and *moeurs*.[92]

Analysis of argument entails reconstructing what Collini calls '"the context of refutation" — that is, an account of the theories which [a writer or speaker] was attacking, the arguments he was rebutting, the assessments he was challenging.' Furthermore, it requires sensitivity to the 'overriding [rhetorical] force' of discourse, familiarity with 'the emotional resonances of key terms', and awareness of 'the exploitable tensions within accepted beliefs.'[93] This requires not only close reading of texts but knowledge of idioms and rhetorical functions characteristic of the cultures in which arguments are embedded. (Thus Collini's method might well be termed 'soft contextualism': it situates speech-acts in political and popular culture as well as literary culture.)[94] One must know, in effect, what contemporary audiences of texts/speeches knew:

> Political arguments … must, if they are to have any persuasiveness, deploy, re-work, or otherwise make use of the shared evaluative language of those to

[91] S. Collini, *Liberalism and Sociology: L.T. Hobhouse and Political Argument in England, 1880–1914* (CUP, 1979), p. 9. Ronald Formisano comments usefully on the use and abuses of the political culture concept: 'The Concept of Political Culture,' *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 31 (2001), p. 393–426. I am indebted to Professor Jack C. Knight for his comments about my references to political culture in the dissertation on which the present work is based.

[92] Recent studies attending to 'forensic resources' of argument and culture include P. Joyce, *Democratic Subjects. Self and Society in Nineteenth-Century England* (CUP, 1994); D. Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class. The Political Representation of Class in Britain, c. 1780–1840* (CUP, 1995); and J. S. Meisel, *Public Speech and the Culture of Public Life in the Age of Gladstone* (New York: Columbia UP, 2001).

[93] Collini, *Liberalism and Sociology*, p. 9.

[94] On refining the 'hard contextualist' approach, see Francis and Morrow, *A History of English Political Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, introduction; and Bevir, 'Review Article: English Political Thought in the Nineteenth Century'.

> whom they are addressed, and hence must appeal to the ideals and aspirations which that language represents. In this sense, political theories are parasitic upon the less explicit habits of response and evaluation that are deeply embedded in the culture.[95]

Thus, we must acknowledge the ethico-political preoccupations of Green's audiences as a way of hearing how terms, ideas, even styles of delivery would have been received. Some of Green's most cogent ethical and political statements were not written for philosophers, nor even for university students, but were presented to audiences gathered for particular purposes, such as temperance agitation or mobilization of support for candidates for public office. We can easily imagine that the first audiences of Green's lectures on political obligation at Oxford in 1879–80 might have suspended judgment in order to listen to an argument to the end; whereas the clergymen, temperance enthusiasts and provincial political activists who heard 'Liberal Legislation and Freedom of Contract' at Leicester in 1881 must have attended to Green's words in a very different, partisan manner. The social meanings of Green's statements were determined, to some extent, by the nature of his audiences.

Although I am indebted to the work of pioneering linguistic contextualists like Pocock and Skinner, I attempt to frame ethico-political language within debates occurring in social rather than literary space. Because of the passage of time, some of those debates are — from our current vantage point—every bit as esoteric as narrowly 'literary' ones. Yet only by acknowledging the obscure as well as the familiar contemporary debates can we grasp what situations and circumstances motivated Green and what factors shaped the reception of his ideas by others. This is similar to the 'archaeology of knowledge' approach of Michel Foucault:

> Such an analysis does not belong to the history of ideas or of science: it is rather an inquiry whose aim is to rediscover on what basis knowledge and theory become possible; within what space or order knowledge was constituted; on the basis of what historical a priori, and in the element of what positivity, ideas could appear, sciences be established, experience be reflected in philosophies, rationalities formed, only, perhaps, to dissolve and vanish soon afterwards.[96]

Foucault was primarily interested, of course, in exposing instances of exclusion and the creation of 'hierarchies of knowledge', by which dominant classes or social elements have deemed discourses unacceptable or irrelevant in explaining the world as they see it. It may well be that bringing to light suppressed or neglected discourses is different from

[95] Collini, *Public Moralists*, pp. 4–5.
[96] M. Foucault, *The Order of Things [Les mots et les choses]*, trans. A. Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1970), pp. xxi–xxii.

examining concepts *in* discourses across time and with attention to social situation, as recommended with different emphases by Melvin Richter, Mark Francis and Mark Bevir. Yet the two approaches, 'archaeology of knowledge' and rich contextualism, share a common purpose—to highlight the subjective rationality in the deployment and contestation of concepts, and to reveal the social meanings of ideas. Eugenio Biagini, Boyd Hilton, Patrick Joyce and other historians whose work is cited within these pages have illuminated Victorian political and social life by showing the importance of moral vocabularies and arguments marginalized by many intellectual historians.

In examining the subjective-meaning complex of the ideas of Green and his contemporaries, I do not mean to ignore major informing discourses like Hegelianism or ideologies such as liberalism. However, one needs to look beyond the constituent elements (or what A. O. Lovejoy called 'unit-ideas') of 'political theory' and 'history of political thought' in order to appreciate how Green's teachings resonated with the moral assumptions of his contemporaries.[97] Although he was activated by a desire to philosophize religion, Green was not attempting to transcend it. Many later commentators have lost sight of the Greenian 'moment' in accepting the claim that modern political theory, properly so called, is secular. Theological elements of ethico-political discourse, so pronounced in the writings of Richard Hooker and John Locke, were certainly less evident in Western political thought by the second half of the nineteenth century. Yet the Christian element in the thought of Green (and of some other British Idealists), and the religious contexts of its reception, should make us wary of marginalizing religious ideas in modern political thought as vanished rationalities.

[97] A. O. Lovejoy, *Essays in the History of Ideas* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1948).