

Preface

This monograph is adapted from a doctoral thesis entitled 'T. H. Green, Religion and Radical-Liberal Argument in Victorian Britain' (Department of History, Washington University in St. Louis, May, 2000). It responds to a vast literature on Green, modern ethics, Victorian political thought and British political history since 1789, while addressing questions about historical method and interpretation in the history of political thought. It is therefore a trans-disciplinary work that the author hopes will be of interest to readers of history, philosophy, politics and religious studies. Instead of interpreting Green's life and work with primary reference to British Idealism, the study examines the emerging culture of British academic philosophy, as well as the wider religious and political environments in which Green worked, with attention to both the formation and reception of Green's ideas. It explores religious ideas and themes in Green's work and examines the relation of religion to ethico-political discourse. In showing the persistence of religious ways of knowing in the Age of Darwin and Marx, this study suggests that the 'secularization of Western thought' was decidedly incomplete even by the opening of the twentieth century, when Green's influence was at its peak.

Research for the study was commenced during the early 1990s, when the historical view of Green had been effectively established by Melvin Richter's *The Politics of Conscience: T. H. Green and His Age* (1964). Although Richter's book was well received by historians, Green and British Idealism were unfashionable in an Anglo-American philosophical establishment dominated by the analytic or 'ordinary-language' school. Some political theorists attentive to the history of philosophy and political theory remained interested in Green's conception of 'positive liberty' and his theory of 'self-realization'. Richter had discussed Green's religious inspirations and his Liberal partisanship. One effect of *The Politics of Conscience*, perhaps unintended, was to reinforce the common perception of Green as a pioneering theorist of the Welfare State. However, by the 1970s scholars were eagerly reclaiming Green for the

Liberal Tradition, arguing that his philosophy illuminates a middle ground between 'socialism' (i.e. cradle-to-grave Labourism) and neoconservatism (with its agenda of systematically dismantling the Welfare State). Coincident with the communitarian turn of liberalism during the 1980s, Green's ideas appeared to be almost fashionable again in professional philosophical circles (see Chapter One).

In tracing Green's reception over the years by philosophers, political theorists, policy makers and politicians, I was struck by the great disparity of opinions and by the stated reasons on which those opinions were founded. Between 1880 and 1940 Green's writings were widely read and discussed, and their influence in many areas of British life has been amply documented. Nearly every Oxbridge-educated civil servant of the period would have been familiar with Green's teachings and would have formed some opinion of them. Not only within the British Empire and the Anglophone world but also among Westernized elites in China and Japan Green's ethical and political ideas were common currency and were taken as seriously as the ideas of J. S. Mill and Marx. In Britain itself, even after the Second World War there persisted a cultural memory of Green as perhaps less a good philosopher than a 'good man', a difficult philosopher to read but one who clearly wished to right social and political wrongs of Victorian Britain. On the other side, growing numbers of professional philosophers from the 1920s deemed Green a philosophical non-entity who clogged philosophical discourse with 'meta-physical' jargon and nonsense. Clearly, differing perspectives about the purposes of philosophy and changing fashions in ethical-political discourse had some bearing on deciding who the real Green was and on determining the historical significance of his thought.

Other issues concerning historical interpretation and the methods of study of political thought simultaneously caught my attention. The vanguard of the study of the history of political thought ca. 1980 was represented by linguistic contextualists like J. G. A. Pocock and Quentin Skinner, who were identifying the 'political languages' in European thought since the Renaissance. These and other scholars were tracing the emergence of new political and social vocabularies with the growth of Western commercial society from 1600, including natural rights, political economy, utilitarianism and evolutionism. Perhaps because T.H. Green had criticized uses of these vocabularies in his own time, and because he deployed an 'emotive' (non-analytical) vocabulary in his discussion of philosophical issues, political theorists and intellectual historians tended to regard him as a throw-back to an earlier 'moment' of inquiry (recalling Auguste Comte's division of thought into historical, stage-like theological, philosophical and scientific eras). Green was most readily categorized as a Hegelian Idealist, arguing for the primacy of spirit over matter and substituting, in a presumably un-English way,

the 'real will' of society and 'the state' for God and the divine order. Many commentators ignored or glossed over the fact that Green spoke and wrote not only of an abstract Hegelian 'Spirit' but also of God and Christ.

Historians of politics and society could *trace* Green's influence in Britain ca. 1880–1920, yet historians of 'thought' could scarcely *account* for Green's impact. Why did Green's conception of the individual in society, with its theological trappings, gain currency in a world — or a section of the globe — that was supposedly becoming less religious and more secular? I concluded that the 'secularization thesis' associated with Weber, Tawney and others, and tacitly accepted by most intellectual historians, presented more hindrances than aids to understanding Green and his social significance. This difficulty was compounded by the fashionable historians of political thought identifying 'political thought' in a manner that emphasized elite discourses. These traced the movement of Great Ideas but effectively excluded ideas of wider social allegiance or those that influenced the thinking of 'the masses'. What was needed, I thought, was to reunite intellectual history, as the study of Great Ideas, with the social history of politics and language. I have consequently tried to recapture the sense of Green's relevance to his era by noting resonances between his teachings and popular attitudes and 'middle-brow' ideas. Among the latter were popular constitutionalism, revolving around the conception of the 'freeborn Englishman', and popular Protestantism, foregrounding Christian ideas of conscience, Godly community and social duty. Scholars of the history of political languages school have neglected such 'discourses'. The play in the title of my book on the influential work of John Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (1975), is intended as a compliment rather than a swipe: the 'Cambridge School' of intellectual historians provide clues as to how Green and thinkers of the early modern and modern eras might be interpreted, but their assumptions about the social dimensions of discourse need to be reconsidered.

If there is a polemical note to this book, it includes the insistence that religious ideas and attitudes be taken seriously in comprehending an age of secularization. Green's era was marked by loss of faith *and* religious revivalism. In Western Europe and regions populated by Western Europeans ca. 1850–1900 people were renouncing *and* reaffirming orthodox Christianity in record numbers. Victorian Britain was a pluralistic society profoundly influenced by secular movements and currents of thought. Yet religious ideas and beliefs in the Age of Darwin and Marx continued to shape understanding of the body social, to promote social cohesion, and also to justify challenges to the social order. Christianity influenced most Britons' sense of right and wrong as well as their

sense of what was politically desirable and possible. Political Radicalism and Christian Socialism, both of which Green encouraged, were forms of argument in which popular beliefs merged with 'High' ideas to engender new conceptions of social purpose. Green's philosophical Idealism, even if imperfectly understood or disdained by philosophical successors, complemented popular modes of social understanding in his time.

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The Introduction to *The Greenian Moment* discusses issues raised by Green scholarship and recent contributions to the history of political thought. Here I suggest why and how Green's life and work might be re-contextualized in order to reveal broader and deeper relationships between Green's ideas and popular as well as professional discourses on ethics and politics. Chapter One is extensive, rather than intensive, continuing examination of accounts of the significance and impact of Green's teachings. The chapter contains biographical exposition and it comments on Green's philosophical career in relation to contemporary currents of European philosophy and science. Chapter Two provides an account of Green's theory of the individual in society, including his conceptions of individuality and community, and indicates how an idea of enlightened self-interest functioned in his system of ethics and anchored his theory of polity. Chapter Three situates Green's ideas within traditions of 'rational' and 'enthusiastic' religion since the seventeenth century. It establishes that the German theological movement represented by Kant, Schleiermacher, Hegel, D. F. Strauss and F. C. Baur, and transmitted to Britain via Benjamin Jowett and other liberal Anglicans, was only one of many influences on Green's religious thought. The chapter emphasizes connections between Green, evangelicalism and religio-political liberalism that have been neglected by scholars focusing on the 'Germanic' features of Green's philosophical work.

Chapter Four examines Green's cooperation with evangelicals, Broad Churchmen and Nonconformists on religious issues, education and in matters of social reform. It shows how Green's social outreach in this respect had significant ramifications for 'advanced' or 'New' Liberalism and other reformist ideologies of the late Victorian period. Green was impressed by the phenomenon of English 'Political Dissent' (which involved a striking expansion from the 1820s of Nonconformists' political participation) and the consequent changes to Victorian political and public life. It is argued here that Green's Philo-Dissentism was a significant factor in channeling Dissenters' sense of mission into social reform Radicalism. Chapter Five follows up on conclusions arrived at in the

preceding two chapters to demonstrate Green's role in the revival of 'moral' politics in the 1880s and '90s. The chapter examines the social and intellectual conditions for the ripening of a Greenian 'moment' and traces the religious and 'spiritual' impulses behind British campaigns for social reform and reconstruction down to 1914. Chapter Six considers Green's place in the political memory of Victorian and post-Victorian Liberalism. The chapter notes the influence of the Greenian outlook on non-Liberal thought and thinkers. It examines Green's advocacy of women's rights and his support for the political aspirations of marginalized social categories. It advances conclusions about Green as a role model in an age of democracy and 'collectivist' politics and about his continuing reputation as an activist intellectual.

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Readers will be aware that Thoemmes Press has published a complete new edition of T. H. Green's writings in five volumes, including previously unpublished materials, letters and reprints of articles and reports from the contemporary press. This edition, prepared by Peter Nicholson, had not yet appeared when I first examined the Green Papers at Balliol College and other primary materials relating to Green in the Bodleian Library and the Oxfordshire County Record Office. For the convenience of readers, I frequently cite here letters to and from Green and newspaper articles as they appear in the Nicholson edition: *Collected Works of T. H. Green. Volume Five: Additional Writings* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1997). In a very few instances where my reading of a manuscript source differs from that of Nicholson I have so indicated in my footnotes. As regards Green's previously published writings, I cite the edition of *Prolegomena to Ethics* edited by A. C. Bradley (1883) and I cite Green's other writings as they appear in the original *Works of T. H. Green*, ed. R. L. Nettleship (3 volumes, 1885-88). However, there are three texts I cite as printed in T. H. Green, *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation and Other Writings* (CUP, 1986), edited by Paul Harris and John Morrow. These are *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation*, the lectures originally published as 'The Different Senses of "Freedom"' and the lecture 'Liberal Legislation and Freedom of Contract'. Harris and Morrow have corrected these texts against the manuscripts in the Green Papers and have demonstrated variances between the manuscripts and the texts published by Nettleship in the 1880s.

I have been fortunate in receiving extensive comments on my manuscript from Peter Nicholson and John Morrow. They have drawn my attention to errors of fact, misstatements and inconsistencies. Although I have not followed their advice on every point, this study has benefited from their critical acumen and constructive suggestions. They are of

course not responsible for errors or problems that remain. Neither space nor memory permit me to acknowledge all those whose comments, advice and encouragement have helped me in preparing this book and the dissertation that preceded it. (I acknowledge assistance on particular points in footnotes.) However, I would like to thank some scholars with whom I have discussed the subjects of this study over the past two years: Avital Simhony, Gerald Gaus, David Weinstein, Maria Dimova-Cookson, Stamatoula Panagakou, Colin Tyler, Thom Brooks and Ben Wempe. I am grateful to Matt Carter for allowing me to read an advanced draft of his book, *T. H. Green and the Development of Ethical Socialism*, prior to its publication in the present series. It is with great pleasure that I thank once again Richard W. Davis, who maintained an interest in this project from its beginning as a dissertation prospectus, through dissertation and post-dissertation stages. Finally, my greatest debt is to my wife for her undiminished commitment to this book and to me.