

**ERNEST BARKER:  
CLASSICS, ENGLAND-BRITAIN, AND EUROPE, 1906–1960**

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**Abstract:** Ernest Barker's contributions to the study of classical political thought have remained a benchmark in that field for much of the twentieth century. This introduction seeks to place his output in historical context, examining the professional, political and personal factors which underpinned his success as an interpreter of Plato and Aristotle, especially. It considers his education, the popular nature of his work, his ambiguous relationship to the establishment, his English-British patriotism, his European connections and perspective, his dual career as a scholar and journalist, and his liberalism as central to the cultural authority he acquired in the first half of the twentieth-century. The introduction emphasises the close relationship between Barker's 'national' status as a classical scholar, the methodological, democratic, and religious sensibilities that informed his work, and the deep sense of public mission by which he was moved, down to his last years. In doing so, it draws together themes which are explored more fully in the special issue as a whole.

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The present issue of *Polis* marks the centenary of a work which anchored the career of a notable English scholar. *The Political Thought of Plato and Aristotle* was published in 1906 by Methuen, when its author — the Oxford classicist, Ernest Barker — was thirty-two years old. Why celebrate such a centenary? The book has certainly endured well; it was re-issued in paperback form — with Barker's approval — in the United States as late as 1959, a year before his death. This was as part of the series of 'Dover Books on History and Social Science'. As such it stood alongside classic works by Bakunin, Emma Goldman, Kropotkin, J.B. Bury, Hegel (*History of Philosophy*), Margaret Sanger, and John H. Russell, significantly a list with a strong libertarian bent. As one of the contributors here, Quentin Taylor, observes in his article on Barker and Plato, it is only in the last twenty years or so that Barker's star as a commentator on Plato and Aristotle has fallen among classicists; and even this has to be set against the return to print three years ago of both *Plato and Aristotle* and its successor, *Greek Political Theory: Plato and his Predecessors* (1918) for the college textbook market.<sup>2</sup> It has to be set, too, against the sustained popularity of his translation of Aristotle's *Politics* (1946), which Eckart Schütrumpf comments upon below.

Longevity would be reason enough for revisiting these and associated works by Barker, and for identifying and analysing their formative assumptions, concerns and omissions, both in relation to contemporary and

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<sup>2</sup> Barker, *The Political Thought of Plato and Aristotle* (Temecula, Ca., 2003); *Greek Political Theory: Plato and his Predecessors* (Temecula, Ca., 2003).

subsequent scholarship in classical political thought right up to the present. But the centenary of the first work also provides an opportunity to consider the wider intellectual and cultural context in which Barker wrote and on which his success depended. It was a context that was rich in studies of Greek antiquity as a foil for contemporary political argument, and one in which the classical scholar commanded high public esteem. As a self-effacing man, Barker did not actively seek authority. However, his literary style, personality and politics guaranteed him a responsiveness in a society that was receptive to acquiring self-knowledge through the prism of the Greek *polis*. In this introduction I shall explore the interrelationship between Barker's professional, public and private persona in early-twentieth century Britain and European intellectual life more widely that underpinned his scholarly vocation.

In his first contribution below, Quentin Taylor has noted some of the political and literary developments that formed the backdrop of Barker's work as an Edwardian classicist. To this account may be added the founding in 1906 by Joseph Malaby Dent of the Everyman's Library of world classics, cheap editions for a growing autodidact audience, hungry for self-improvement. Barker himself had once been dependent upon reprints of this kind: as the son of a miner turned agricultural labourer in Lancashire, he had climbed a steep educational ladder in the 1880s with the assistance of some of the volumes from Cassell's 'National Library'. Edited by Henry Morley, this series was the Victorian forerunner of Everyman's, and reproduced classic works of English literature. Such reading supplemented his formal education at the Manchester Grammar School, to which, through a stroke of immense good fortune, he won a scholarship.<sup>3</sup> He went up to Balliol College in 1893 to read *Literae Humaniores* — again on the scholarship ladder — proceeding to a Fellowships in Classics and a Lectureship in Modern History at Oxford held at Merton, St. John's, and New College, respectively. After a spell as Principal of King's College London from 1920 until 1928, he became the first Professor of Political Science at the University of Cambridge, a position he held until his retirement in 1939.

Nevertheless, for all his intellectual accomplishment and the recognition that he gained, Barker never attempted to distance himself from his early environment. He remained a life-long champion of the bright, working-class pupil, in particular.<sup>4</sup> His future work was marked by a concern to engage the interest of a wide public in accordance with a distinctive philosophical

<sup>3</sup> Barker, *Age and Youth: Memories of Three Universities and Father of the Man* (London, 1953), pp. 253–4.

<sup>4</sup> All Barker's hopes for education were realized in the 1944 Education Act, which created a tripartite system of Grammar, Secondary Modern, and Technical Schools in the state sector. As an esteemed educationalist he was sent a draft copy of the Bill for comment by the President of the Board of Education, R.A. Butler: Butler to Barker, 16 December 1943, The National Archives, ED136/444. However, within a decade the principles of the Act were challenged by the Labour Party in favour of the comprehensive

method. This entailed bringing the material of history and thought vividly alive through the use of broad historical analogies and contemporary illustrations. He did so by developing an intimate partnership with his readers, a style that was distinctive even among contemporary classicists who shared his broad cultural sympathies. It is worth exploring Barker's method and style in further detail if we are to understand fully his unique contribution to classical scholarship.

Turning first to Barker's method as a classical scholar, it was one which was vitally framed by a conception of a living past, a past constituted by an indissoluble unity between history, philosophy and contemporary life. When applied to the study of ancient political thought, this issued in a creative engagement with competing ideas in the past and present as a means of attaining philosophical truth. His approach became crystallized in the writings of the Italian Idealist philosopher, Benedetto Croce, whose book on *The Theory and History of Historiography* Barker read with much agreement when it was published in Britain in 1921.<sup>5</sup> As he argued in a lecture of 1922, history was more than simply philosophy teaching by examples — a thinly-veiled reference to the Cambridge historian, Sir John Seeley, in the late-nineteenth century; it was 'philosophy in the higher sense of a deep and rich understanding of the present — the present seen in all its connexion and contact with its roots and its inspirations in the long far-reaching past'.<sup>6</sup>

This belief helps to explain Barker's receptivity to the idea of intellectual continuity across a range of idioms and epochs in the West, beginning with classical Greek political thought, which Robert Todd explores further in his article. It owed much to the legacy of Hegelian Idealism in Britain at the end of the nineteenth-century, specifically the notion that ideas, while limited to a particular time and place, were also incorporated into a larger historical synthesis and thus shorn of their partiality.

Hegelian ideals were at the forefront of Barker's commentary on Plato and Aristotle in the first two decades of the twentieth century in a much wider, if shifting sense, too. The changing emphases within Barker's Idealism between *Plato and Aristotle* and *Greek Political Theory* are readily apparent if the articles by Peter Simpson and Quentin Taylor in this special issue are read together. These emphases reflected a certain unsteadiness in his thought during

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school: National Executive Committee of the Labour Party, *Challenge to Britain: A Programme of Action for the Next Labour Government* (London, 1953). Barker took great exception to the belief informing this debate that the 'brighter child' was a problem, and a residual problem at that. That seemed to him to be the negation of education: Nicolas Barker to Julia Stapleton, 10 September 1994.

<sup>5</sup> He reviewed two further English translations of Croce's work in national newspapers, his *History of Europe in the Nineteenth Century*, reviewed in *The Sunday Times*, 28 October 1934, and *History*, reviewed in *The Observer*, March 1941.

<sup>6</sup> Barker, 'History and Philosophy', based on an address to the Historical Association in London, January 1922, in *Church, State and Study* (London, 1930), p. 224.

the first two decades of the twentieth century as he found himself pulled in the many and often conflicting directions that political argument then took in Britain. Not least, as Simpson points out, the hold of political Hegelianism on him had intensified by 1918 as he turned his attention exclusively to Plato.<sup>7</sup> This was often, in Simpson's view, at the expense of a fuller and less 'one-sided' reading of Plato's thought as expressed through Socrates and Socrates alone. But Simpson also charts the receding influence of Hegel that allowed Barker's political ideas to stabilize around the more enduring inspiration of Whig constitutionalism after the Second World War. Simpson analyses the consequences of this development in Barker's thought for his reading of both Aristotle and Plato in his translation of Aristotle's *Politics* (1946).

Barker's edition of the *Politics* also features prominently in Eckart Schütrumpf's article, specifically his abandonment there of a position he had taken in 1931 on the structure and composition of the *Politics*. This position was inspired by Werner Jaeger and a wider German debate that Barker had sought to bring before a British audience. However, in the introduction to his translation, he laid great stress on the text's 'unitary' nature, reversing his earlier endorsement of Jaeger's view that the *Politics* had been written over time and in response to different circumstances and influences; he had taken this approach to Plato before 1918, too, as Simpson and Schofield make clear. It might be too shallow to suggest that Barker experienced a major reaction against German thought and scholarship following the Second World War. But Schütrumpf certainly brings out the interpretive loss to Barker's later work in rejecting the need to account for evident discrepancies within the *Politics* as Aristotle's ideas and contexts changed. This is notwithstanding the credit he gives Barker for challenging Jaeger's simplistic view of Aristotle's intellectual development from Platonic idealist to empirical political scientist.

The early impact of Idealism on Barker is further evident in his conception of the close connections between Plato's philosophy and his preoccupation with political reform. This approach is defended by George Klosko below — whatever the accuracy or otherwise of Barker's detailed interpretation — not least on the basis of the historical evidence in its favour, and the interest and stimulation it offers the reader of Plato. Klosko particularly defends Barker thus against the grain of the literary, 'ironic', 'anti-utopian' account of Plato in later twentieth-century scholarship associated with Leo Strauss and Allan Bloom, and which, in a different way, surfaces in Simpson's article here. In Klosko's view, Strauss and Bloom only succeed in emptying out the philosophy in Plato's writings in deference to a 'pat message of political

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<sup>7</sup> This was despite Barker's condemnation of Hegel at the outset of the First World War for 'advanc[ing] to a conception of the State as something of an absolute, something of an ultimate, to which the individual must be adjusted, and from his relation to which he draws his meaning and being': *Nietzsche and Treitschke: The Worship of Power in Modern Germany* (Oxford, 1914), pp. 3–4

conservatism'. The significance of Barker's wider belief in the impossibility of ancient political philosophy in the absence of the experience of Athenian democracy is also explored in the article by John Wallach included in this symposium.

Turning next to Barker's style, we may note that it served as a highly effective instrument of his thought; sharp, direct and clear, it held the reader's attention throughout. As well as a model of lucidity, it had deep roots in his own personality. Imbued with a strong romantic nature — one which he developed through 'solitary' immersion in a wide range of romantic literature and equally 'lonely' attraction to natural scenery as a youth<sup>8</sup> — his work was imaginative yet disciplined. He found much on which to feed his romantic imagination in classical political thought, not least in the work of Plato, whose later ideas he illuminated in *Plato and Aristotle* with reference to the poetry of Wordsworth.<sup>9</sup> As a result he well brought out the drama of Greek political thought as different philosophical and political schools fought for the soul of the *polis*. His literary style was also influenced by his conception of scholarship as a joint enterprise between author and reader, one which he captured in the opening paragraph of his autobiography by the French word '*causeuse*', or small sofa, the feminine of the *causuer* meaning 'fond of talking or conversation'. He imagined himself sitting down side by side with the reader, who was — like the past in his view — 'interrogatively and actively present'.<sup>10</sup>

Although very personal to Barker, his style also reflected the new democratic era into which he was born in 1874 and which came of age in the Edwardian era under the influence of a rejuvenated Liberal Party. His father had been a beneficiary of the Third Reform Act of 1884, an Act which sealed Barker's loyalty to Gladstone and the Liberal Party.<sup>11</sup> John Wallach makes clear in his article Barker's conception of the historical roots of British democracy in the unifying, ethical life of the *polis* as understood by Plato and Aristotle; consequently the legitimacy of recent developments but also their limits against the misguided understanding of democracy as the crude expression of popular will. Wallach especially brings out the contrast in this respect between Barker's use of Greek political theory and that of 'counter-cultural' commentators on the ancient Greek legacy in the 1960s and 70s: while Barker sought to strengthen the political establishment, his successors were more concerned to undermine it. Nevertheless, Barker's democratic commitment is

<sup>8</sup> He recalled his early solitude, absorption in books, romanticism, and exhilaration in exploring the dramatic countryside of the north of England in *Age and Youth*, pp. 264, 269, 280, 284–5.

<sup>9</sup> Barker, *The Political Thought of Plato and Aristotle* (London, 1906), p. 205.

<sup>10</sup> Barker, *Age and Youth*, p. 1. The *causerie* was central to Edwardian journalism of a liberal persuasion: see J. Macleod, *Liberalism and Letters: Politics, Journalism and Literary Culture, 1886–1916* (forthcoming).

<sup>11</sup> Barker, 'Mr. Gladstone', *The British Weekly*, 20 May 1948, pp. 7–8; *Age and Youth*, p. 263.

evident in his reprimand of Plato in 1906 for failing to realise that, although the institutions of the state are the product of mind, as he rightly maintained, they must be ‘thought and willed by the *whole* community’.<sup>12</sup> (The emphasis on the *rational*, institutional, whole basis of the state is significant against the voluntarism — the ‘cult of instinct’ — as Barker expressed it, with which democracy was associated in France, especially in the recent syndicalist movement.)<sup>13</sup> Aristotle naturally fared better in Barker’s esteem on this account and Barker often referred to him as ‘my master’,<sup>14</sup> albeit a servant who always had a weakness for Plato. Yet, as Quentin Taylor points out in his second article here, it was the greatly attenuated form of democracy advocated by Aristotle that drew Barker to him in this respect, often entailing significant tension with his liberal sympathies.

The ambience of democracy affected scholarship as much as politics. As a classicist Barker worked closely with his friend and mentor, Gilbert Murray, to enfranchise working men and women in the realm of learning as well as politics and economics through ventures such as the Home University Library.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, as John Wallach maintains in his article here, Barker regarded education, particularly political education as fundamental to the success of democracy. This was through its role in bridging the gap between theorist and citizen that proved fatal to the *polis*,<sup>16</sup> a chasm that was to re-open in the postwar political philosophy of Karl Popper, Strauss and Hannah Arendt. In this respect Barker’s work was in some ways analogous to that of Alfred Zimmern, another Oxford classicist and protégé of Murray, and author of *The Greek Commonwealth* published in 1911 to considerable popular acclaim in both Britain and the United States.<sup>17</sup> The book was praised by an American newspaper reviewer for ‘strip[ping] the classics of their crust of

<sup>12</sup> Barker, *Political Thought of Plato and Aristotle*, pp. 103, 114 (Barker’s italics). The reprimand is less severe in *Greek Political Theory: Plato and his Predecessors* (London, 1918), pp. 201, 207. Gone is the blunt reference to Plato’s advocacy of ‘benevolent despotism’ in favour of the softer, Hegelian language of *Sittlichkeit*. See Peter Simpson’s article in this issue for further analysis.

<sup>13</sup> Barker, *Political Thought in England from Herbert Spencer to the Present Day* (London, 1915), pp. 227, 248.

<sup>14</sup> Barker, *Age and Youth*, p. 156, where he goes so far as to say that ‘my life acquires some continuity through the continuous influence of Aristotle’.

<sup>15</sup> On the Home University Library, see J. Stapleton, ‘The Classicist as Liberal Intellectual: Murray and Alfred Eckhard Zimmern’, in *Gilbert Murray Reassessed: Hellenism, Theatre, and International Politics*, ed. C. Stray (forthcoming, Oxford, 2007).

<sup>16</sup> E.R. Dodds, as well as Barker, made this point, specifically in relation to Plato: see Robert B. Todd, ‘Plato as Public Intellectual: E.R. Dodds’ Edition of the *Gorgias* and its “Primary Purpose”’, *Polis*, 19 (2002), pp. 47–8.

<sup>17</sup> Barker drew on Zimmern’s book for the entirely new chapter of his *Greek Political Theory* on ‘The Greek State’, although he distanced himself from Zimmern’s denial that Greek slavery was actually slavery, and the more romantic aspects of Zimmern’s portrayal of the Athenian *polis* in its prime: p. 38, fn 1. This is wholly in keeping with his

scholasticism'.<sup>18</sup> In like manner, the reviewer in *The Nation* (London) thought that it was just what was needed by way of 'introducing the Greeks to Socialists', the subject, apparently, of a recent homily by the radical classics don at Oxford, T.C. Snow, and targetted directly at Oxford.<sup>19</sup> But (other?) academic reviewers in Britain were not quite so enthusiastic, thereby emphasising tensions that were already developing in the profession between the conflicting aspirations of specialization and cultural uplift.<sup>20</sup>

By contrast, in holding the line more effectively between these two imperatives, Barker's work seems to have enjoyed greater goodwill among academic reviewers. For example, his *Greek Political Theory* of 1918 was praised by an anonymous reviewer in *The Saturday Review* — a classicist steeped in ancient philosophy — for its dual qualities of accessibility yet scholarly rigour. On the one hand, the reviewer wrote, it avoided the kind of pedantry associated with German models of scholarship which militated against use of the thinkers of ancient Greece in modern political thought; on the other, it was quite unlike the 'brief handbook' that seemed all too common now, and which 'qualified the shallow-minded to suppose that they have mastered a subject' (a different, more lowly version of the populist malady from which Zimmern's book nevertheless seemed to suffer). Above all, the reviewer commended Barker as

a man moving in the world of to-day. *Tout savant est un peu cadavre*, is one of these French epigrams which hit the mark. The expert is apt to forget that his subject belongs to the world as well as himself.<sup>21</sup>

Despite the many late-Victorian and Edwardian writers with whom Barker compared and contrasted Plato and predecessors, *Greek Political Theory* remained in print for much of the twentieth century; it was reprinted six times between 1918 and 1960, when it was issued as a Methuen 'University Paperback' on both sides of the Atlantic.

Still, for all Barker's concern to bring discussion of Greek, and other historical legacies in political thought into the public domain, we need to be clear about the exact nature of this domain and his particular status within it. We rejection of Aristotle's defence of slavery, on which see Quentin Taylor's article on Barker and Aristotle in this special issue.

<sup>18</sup> Anon, *The Kansas Star*, MS Zimmern 181, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

<sup>19</sup> Anon, 'The Golden Age of Athens', *The Nation*, 4 November 1911, pp. 207–8. Snow was one of the few tutors at Oxford to have made a positive impression on the young Gilbert Murray: see his autobiography, *Gilbert Murray: An Unfinished Autobiography* (London, 1960), p. 88.

<sup>20</sup> On the diffident reception of *The Greek Commonwealth* among academic reviewers in specialist classics journals, and also the many 'English' touches to the work that took it outside of the normal classics genre, see P. Millett, 'Alfred Zimmern and the Greek Commonwealth Revisited', in *Oxford Classics: Teaching and Learning, 1800–2000*, ed. C. Stray (forthcoming, London, 2007).

<sup>21</sup> Anon., *The Saturday Review*, 21 November 1918, pp. 1086–7.

have been cautioned recently against the idea that even the most public of intellectuals ever address the ‘general public’ or the ‘public at large’; their audience is always specific and historically shifting, even if it does succeed in extending beyond a small circle of fellow scholars in a particular field of inquiry.<sup>22</sup> To which public did Barker bid farewell in his penultimate scholarly work four years before his death, *From Alexander to Constantine* (1956), and what was the basis of the relationship he forged with it?<sup>23</sup>

Clearly, Barker’s public was not monolithic: the readership of *Alexander to Constantine*, and the final one which followed a year later on Byzantium — both specialist editions of primary sources in the history of political thought — would have been quite limited in comparison with some of his earlier writings. Not least among these was his popular *Political Thought in England from Herbert Spencer to the Present Day*, which was written for the Home University Library in 1915 and was among its successes.<sup>24</sup> But even a popular work such as this fails to capture the high public profile that Barker achieved in his lifetime on the basis of his reputation as a classicist, one which extended to journalism and public service more broadly.<sup>25</sup> At the most fundamental level, this reflected his background in *Literae Humaniores* or ‘Greats’ at Oxford, the ethos of which is elucidated by Robert Todd below.

At this disciplinary and institutional level, what Barker represents, together with Murray, Zimmern and others, is the apotheosis of classics, particularly Greek, in British national culture. More precisely, it was Oxford, and even more narrowly, New College, with which all three figures were associated,

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<sup>22</sup> S. Collini, *Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain* (Oxford, 2006), p. 487.

<sup>23</sup> Barker, *From Alexander to Constantine: Passages and Documents Illustrating the History of Social and Political Ideas, 336 BC–AD 337* (Oxford, 1956). He took his cue here from the eighteenth-century travel writer, Thomas Pennant, who, in his preface to *An Account of London* (1790) quoted by Barker, felt within himself ‘a certain monitor that warns me to hang up my pen in time, before its powers are weakened and visibly impaired... I take leave of a partial public with the truest gratitude for its long endurance’ (p. xvii). Barker apologized for the premature nature of his farewell in *Alexander to Constantine* in his final book, *Social and Political Thought in Byzantium from Justinian I to the Last Palaeologus* (Oxford, 1957), p. ix: ‘All I can say is that another bud appeared on the tree which I had thought was barren, and the bud has grown into a book.’

<sup>24</sup> Barker was an obvious candidate for writing the projected book on Marx for the Home University Library in 1933. The Director of the series, Tresham Lever, wrote to one of the editors, H.A.L. Fisher, suggesting Barker, on the grounds that *Political Thought from Herbert Spencer to the Present Day* ‘goes very well, so he is known to H.U.L. readers’: Lever to Fisher, 14 July 1933, MSS Murray, 148 (157), Bodleian Library, Oxford. Barker declined the invitation, and the book was eventually written by Isaiah Berlin: see J. Stapleton, *Political Intellectuals and Public Identities in Britain since 1850* (Manchester, 2001), p. 118.

<sup>25</sup> For examples of his public service, see J. Stapleton, *Englishness and the Study of Politics: The Social and Political Thought of Ernest Barker* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 151–3.

that became what Barker termed the ‘fountain-head of Greek studies and the interpretation of the Greek genius’.<sup>26</sup> Classics was the cornerstone of cultural authority and deference up to the Second World War and even into the immediate postwar period: to be a scholar was to be first and foremost a classicist. This was despite growing pressures on Greek within the educational curriculum from 1918 onwards.<sup>27</sup> In turn, both Barker and Murray played up significantly what they regarded as the special affinity between England and ancient Greece.<sup>28</sup> Barker’s primary status as a classicist enabled him to gain the ear, not only of cultural and intellectual elites but readers of more limited education, too. Among these were subscribers to ‘middlebrow’ publications for which he wrote occasional pieces, for example *Britain Today* (a fortnightly then monthly journal depicting Britain in wartime to allies and neutral countries which continued until 1954), *England* (Journal of the Royal Society of St. George), and *The British Weekly* (the chief London nonconformist paper).<sup>29</sup>

Somewhat higher up the cultural scale, he published an article in *The Listener*, a BBC weekly publication. Based on a talk delivered on the Home Service (although not the more ‘highbrow’ Third Programme) in 1947, the article was entitled ‘The Power of Law’.<sup>30</sup> He there invoked Aristotle’s sense of law as ‘passionless mind’ — or conviction based on reason — the place of which in Aristotle’s wider reflections on law David Mirhady makes clear in his contribution to this special issue. Mirhady suggests that had Barker developed his early work on Aristotle beyond the translation of the *Politics* in 1946, he would surely have addressed the large and complex issue of the administration of justice in Aristotle’s thought. Barker certainly saw a clear contrast in this respect with Plato whom he chided for neglecting law as the basis of a just

<sup>26</sup> Barker, *Age and Youth*, p. 47.

<sup>27</sup> C. Stray, *Classics Transformed: Schools, Universities, and Society in England, 1830–1960* (Oxford, 1998), Ch. 8. On the sustained cultural authority of Murray and Zimmern, see Stapleton, ‘The Classicist as Liberal Intellectual’, n. 15 above. On classics at Oxford generally in the first half of the twentieth century, see *Oxford Classics*, ed. Stray, n. 20 above.

<sup>28</sup> G. Murray, ‘Greece and England’, a lecture given to the Royal Society of Arts, March 1941, in *Greek Studies* (Oxford, 1946), pp. 192–212; and Barker, ‘Greek Influences in English Life and Thought’, *Traditions of Civility: Eight Essays* (Cambridge, 1948), pp. 1–34. For a quite trenchant if somewhat tendentious review of the latter book by a Nietzschean on the English Right, see A.M. Ludovici, ‘The Meaning of “Civilized”’, *The New English Weekly*, 33 (1948), pp. 201–2. For example, Ludovici emphasized Barker’s failure to ‘probe too deeply. He keeps strictly to the more or less obvious, palpable and, above all, mentionable features of Greek thought and action which still rule our lives’. Barker, unlike Murray, Jane Harrison and other Edwardian classicists, did indeed ignore the darker side of Greek civilization. Ludovici also emphasized Barker’s propensity for ‘read[ing] a good deal of our own problems and solutions of them into Greek ideas’. I am indebted to Arthur Aughey for drawing my attention to this review.

<sup>29</sup> See Stapleton, *Englishness and the Study of Politics*, p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> Barker, ‘The Power of Law’, *The Listener*, 20 March 1947, pp. 420–1.

society in the *Republic*. He makes Plato favour instead a misguided, ‘absolutist’ belief in the ‘sovereignty of knowledge’, although credits him with correcting this error towards the end of his life in the *Laws*. But as Malcolm Schofield points out in his article, Barker’s reading of the two texts was deeply flawed, a product, we might speculate, of an over-zealous liberalism influenced by A.V. Dicey as well as T.H. Green.<sup>31</sup>

Barker’s postwar reflections on law were prompted by two recent events. The first was the libel case involving his former student, fellow political scientist, and leading socialist intellectual, Harold Laski. This Laski lost, but Barker upheld the judgement against him, despite, perhaps because of the hostile assumptions about intellectuals, especially intellectuals of the Left which informed the trial.<sup>32</sup> The second event was the refusal of the Labour Government to hold a public inquiry into the proposed New Town at Stevenage against much local opposition, until ordered to do so by the High Court, much to Barker’s delight. His far from dispassionate responses to these cases emphasise his readiness to condemn on good Aristotelian authority what he perceived as threats to British democracy and way of life more generally from extremist political creeds on the one hand, and high-handed governments on the other.

As the frontispiece to this special issue indicates, Barker was also introduced to the readers of *Picture Post* (a weekly with a strong suburban identity). His description there as ‘Cambridge Scholar and Economist’, rather than Political Scientist was obviously a slip, although reference to his credentials as a ‘scholar’ independent of the subject of his Chair is revealing of an equivalence between scholarship and classics mentioned earlier.

In addition, Barker wrote copiously for leading national newspapers such as *The Times* and *The Observer*, contributing a stream of letters, articles, reviews, and even editorials throughout his life.<sup>33</sup> His career culminated in a knighthood in 1944, prompted by his work as Chairman of the Books Commission of the Allied Ministers of Education.<sup>34</sup> This honour sealed his status as a ‘national figure’, and one, moreover, who seemed to be regarded with affection, as well as esteem by those whose readerships and organizations he served.

We might well speculate that something more than simply Barker’s establishment face rooted in classical scholarship was at play in the public acclaim

<sup>31</sup> For Dicey’s influence on Barker, see Stapleton, *Englishness and the Study of Politics*, p. 63.

<sup>32</sup> For an account of the Laski trial and its implications for understanding the status of intellectuals in Britain, see Collini, *Absent Minds*, pp. 130–3.

<sup>33</sup> He wrote the editorial marking the fiftieth anniversary of Marx’s death in *The Times*, 14 March 1933, 15b. He was a regular reviewer for the *Observer* during Viola Garvin’s tenure as literary editor in the 1930s. He wrote feature articles for the *Times* under the editorship of Geoffrey Dawson, for example on the preservationist movement in Cambridge, ‘The Salvaging of Gog Magog’, 25 May 1936, pp. 15–6.

<sup>34</sup> See Stapleton, *Englishness and the Study of Politics*, pp. 178–84.

he achieved: that there was a second, more personal factor. He certainly enjoyed his establishment contacts; he was well networked with what Noel Annan has termed the 'intellectual aristocracy' that was central to British intellectual life from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, although with none of the familial connections of which Annan made so much, nor always the untroubled relationship with government that Annan attributed to British intellectuals.<sup>35</sup> Barker was nevertheless close to the political elite of his day, as well as to leading intellectuals, from a future prime minister, Clement Attlee, whom he tutored at Oxford, to Sir Edward Bridges, Permanent Head of the Treasury and Head of the Civil Service in the postwar period. Membership of the Aethenaeum, in addition to his university links, kept Barker well within the orbit of the establishment. But he was also an outsider, a visitor as it were, which might well have enhanced his appeal to a broad public. For example, he was a popular member of the *Brains Trust* on BBC Radio in the immediate postwar period, prompting one magazine serving the autodidact community to seek his views on the importance of reading Plato — itself an indication of the continuing sheen of classics and its representatives in certain quarters of society. The learning of Sir Ernest, the editor wrote in introducing his article, was as 'natural and unaffected as his speech'.<sup>36</sup>

Barker's distance from the establishment had wider roots in a life-long sense of not belonging fully to a variety of institutional contexts with which he was associated, something which satisfied a deep-seated resistance in his personality to such incorporation. This was in turn a product of the self-contained life of the farm on which he grew up, and his isolation from his peers outside of school on account of the poverty of his home.<sup>37</sup> He was too bright as a boy, too northern and working-class at Oxford, a drifter among Oxford Colleges, a layman at the then Anglican King's College, London (which was still anomalous, even though his predecessor as Principal, R.M. Burrows, was also not ordained), and an Oxford man at Cambridge. It might also be added that he was an Anglican with a Nonconformist past (although one whose early hostility to the Roman Catholic Church, mellowed significantly).<sup>38</sup> Some of

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<sup>35</sup> Noel Annan, 'The Intellectual Aristocracy', in *Studies in Social History: A Tribute to G.M. Trevelyan*, ed. J.H. Plumb (London, 1955), pp. 243–87. For a devastating critique of Annan's assumptions about the nature and role of his 'intellectual aristocracy', see Collini, *Absent Minds*, pp. 140–5. Barker was uneasy in being leant on by a government department for which he had produced a pamphlet in 1949 to make changes. In response to Herbert Butterfield, who had criticised fellow historians involved in writing the Official History of the war for compromising their independence, he wrote that the experience 'taught me that my freedom was the dearest thing I had': Barker to Butterfield, 27 July 1949, Butterfield Papers, Cambridge University Library.

<sup>36</sup> Barker, 'Why should We Read Plato?', *John O'London's Weekly*, 19 April, 1946, p. 1.

<sup>37</sup> Barker, *Age and Youth*, pp. 268, 304.

<sup>38</sup> Quentin Taylor well highlights the animosity towards the Roman Catholic Church which is intimately bound up with Barker's negative appraisal of Plato in *Political*

these incongruities emerged when his name had been suggested in the press as a possible candidate for the Wardenship of New College, Oxford when it became available in 1924. He gave his reasons for declining to put his name forward to a colleague at King's and fellow Wykehamist, Julian Huxley, who had pressed him on the matter. In characteristic tones of cheerful acceptance rather than bitterness and regret, he wrote:

I am the son of a working man — no shame and no defect, but something of a drawback in Oxford. I have kept my Lancashire accent, and always shall. I have learned to mix with people; but I have some *gaucherie*. I have been a rolling stone among colleges, not through inconsistency, but through the fortune of my life; and New College is the last place for a rolling stone.<sup>39</sup>

Such circumstances help to explain a certain inward solitude about Barker and concern for the integrity of individual personality throughout his *oeuvre*.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, this was the only idea that he did not water down; on the contrary, although he came close to neglecting it on occasion in his early work, as some of the commentators here well bring out, he endeavoured to deepen it substantially in later years. This is the theme of Robert Todd's article in contrasting Barker's firm, Christian-centred view of the development of western thought with that of a later Oxford classicist, E.R. Dodds. In all other respects a propensity towards balance, compromise, fence-sitting, eclecticism and ambivalence was a hallmark of his thought, as Quentin Taylor reminds us.

A third factor in Barker's status as a national figure was the security of his national identity, and the confidence this gave him to cut across some of the cultural — and national — as well as class divides in Britain. It is important to emphasise that he identified with Britain as well as England. For example, as external examiner at the University of Edinburgh in 1933, he wrote to a correspondent, 'All the young Honours candidates ... cry up the Union, and pour scorn in their answers on Scottish nationalism. That seems to be the correct attitude.'<sup>41</sup> He himself played a major role in a more general attempt in the early decades of the twentieth century to contain a burgeoning English national consciousness within the cultural realm, with implications for the style rather than substance of intra-Union politics. Thus Englishness for him represented a particular mindset and pattern of interaction marked by

Thought of Plato and Aristotle in his article on Barker and Plato included here. On the intensity of Barker's Christianity later in life, see Robert Todd's article in this issue.

<sup>39</sup> Barker to Julian Huxley, 8 November 1924, Huxley Papers, Rice University.

<sup>40</sup> It was a message he preached more widely: at a speech day in Brighton for a Girls' School, he urged the pupils to 'Guard against *esprit de corps*!' 'Above all', he continued, 'learn to be yourself by cultivating loneliness'. Significantly, he expressed his belief that 'every girl must have career, a means of self expression, and of gaining the knowledge of the world which a job gives': *Brighton and Hove Herald*, 17 December 1938.

<sup>41</sup> Barker to Elisabeth Haldane, 20 June 1933, Haldane Papers, National Library of Scotland, MS 6037 (128); see also his *National Character and the Factors in its Formation* [1927], 2nd edition (London, 1928), p. 17.

moderation and flexibility, rather than a narrow political ideal of national self-determination or dominance within the larger national unit.<sup>42</sup> Englishness conceived thus is readily apparent in *Plato and Aristotle*, for example, as when Barker commends Aristotle for his greater sense of compromise than Plato.<sup>43</sup> He presented this quality as recognisably ‘English’, although, as Quentin Taylor emphasises, he had to recognise the limits of Aristotle’s English credentials in the highly conservative, not to say reactionary ‘compromise’ his master worked out for Greek society in equating ‘nature’ and ‘convention’ with regard to women, slaves, and so on. Such strains notwithstanding, Barker might well have said that Aristotle’s virtue in this respect was *liberal* through and through too far, as we shall see, liberalism became synonymous with Englishness during his formative years. This was the source of a powerful myth of social integration and accommodation with the ideal of the gentleman — in Barker’s case, at once ancient Greek and English — at its heart.<sup>44</sup> The resonance is patriotic rather than nationalist, and expressed as pride above all in the heroism yet innate reserve of the English people.

This note is apparent in Barker’s postwar eulogy to the English character in the aftermath of the Second World War, when the Whig liberalism to which he had always been susceptible eclipsed most other influences. The occasion was a book of celebratory essays he edited for Oxford University Press, *The Character of England* (1947). In a concluding chapter, Barker paid tribute to Churchill, and the English nation more widely. He wrote that, although the English were a supremely ‘amateur’ people, resisting the tension and rigidity of the professional, Churchill’s patriotism scaled ‘rare’ and ‘generous’ heights of professionalism. For Barker, Churchill’s steady nerve echoed a constant refrain in English literature of the last thousand years, the ‘note of the trumpet for the last stand, the fight against odds, the dogged retreat, death in the last ditch’. Its most recent expression as such was in G.K. Chesterton’s *Ballad of the White Horse* (1911). Always, however, it was counterbalanced by humour, ‘pity’, and a host of other, brighter themes, not least those which evoked the richness of the English landscape, as in the epic poem of F.B. Young, *The Island* (1944), which Barker much admired. But if this perspective on English patriotism was touched by a sense of melancholy, it was by no means morbid. Liberal optimist that he was, Barker took care to distinguish the elegiac mood of English patriotism from the fatalistic spirit of

<sup>42</sup> On the cultural rather than political expression of English nationalism at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, as a result of the continuing pressure of its ‘missionary nature’ but in new contexts, see K. Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity* (Cambridge, 2003).

<sup>43</sup> Barker, *Political Thought of Plato and Aristotle*, p. 162.

<sup>44</sup> On the liberal aspects of Englishness in this period, which Barker studiously upheld, and a view of their class rather than ‘national’ character, see R. Colls, *Identity of England* (Oxford, 2002), Chaps. 4 & 5.

*Weltschmerz*.<sup>45</sup> Historically, the English had counted their blessings and cut their losses, readily adapting to new circumstances.

Barker certainly wore his national identity lightly. The essential balance of his patriotic frame of mind might have been disturbed by war, as is evident in tracts such as *Mothers and Sons in Wartime* (1915), when he joined in the chorus of denunciation of Germany and the German spirit; also in popular works of the Second World War such as *Britain and the British People* in 1942, and *Ideas and Ideals of the British Empire* in 1944, which cast his country in the best possible light, thus irritating critics on the Left such as A.J.P. Taylor and Leonard Woolf.<sup>46</sup> But generally his Englishness was very much in tune with that of the Conservative Party leader and Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, and the popular historian, G.M. Trevelyan in the interwar period, both of whom celebrated British national character, the continuity of British history, and political liberty in Britain, while condemning national chauvinism abroad.<sup>47</sup> For all these figures, legitimate national pride was one thing; hubris quite another.

Italy meant a lot to Barker, as it did to Trevelyan, not least as the seed-ground of liberal nationalism in Europe in thinkers such as Mazzini and Cavour. It was a form of nationalism that was outward-looking in making contact with other nations and national traditions, but without becoming lost in the maelstrom of 'civilizations' in the abstract.<sup>48</sup> He was thus all the more dismayed by the rise of Italian fascism; it cost the lives of Carlo and Nello Rosselli, two prominent anti-fascist intellectuals to whom he was particularly close and with whose concern to develop a liberal form of socialism he would have felt some sympathy. Their assassination by Fascist partisans in France in 1937 was a blow.<sup>49</sup> Like many other British intellectuals of the interwar period Barker campaigned

<sup>45</sup> Barker, 'An Attempt at Perspective', in *The Character of England*, ed. Barker (Oxford, 1947), pp. 566, 556–8. For a brief account of his response in 'a little journal' to some of the criticisms of his tribute to England by a Scotsman who reviewed the book there, see his article, 'The English Character and Attitude Towards Life', *England* (September 1950), pp. 6–9. I have not been able to trace the original review and Barker's response, but it would be interesting to see how he handled the implied charge of the overbearing nature of England within Britain.

<sup>46</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, review of Barker's *Britain and the British People*, in *The Manchester Guardian*, 13 January 1943; L. Woolf, review of Barker's *Ideas and Ideals of the British Empire*, in *The Political Quarterly*, 12 (1941), pp. 351–2.

<sup>47</sup> J. Stapleton, 'Resisting the Centre at the Extremes: "English" Liberalism in the Political Thought of Interwar Britain', *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 1:3 (1999), pp. 270–92; see also A. Olechnowicz, 'Liberal Anti-Fascism in the 1930s: The Case of Sir Ernest Barker', *Albion*, 36 (2004), pp. 636–60.

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, his strictures on A.J. Toynbee's book, 'Civilization on Trial', *The Spectator*, 17 December 1948, p. 810. For Barker's support of Toynbee in the crisis over the Koraes Chair in Modern Greek at King's College, London, see Stapleton, *Englishness and the Study of Politics*, pp. 113–4.

<sup>49</sup> Letter from Nicolas Barker to the author, 10 September 1994.

vigorously against the growing censorship of intellectual life in Europe and attendant political repression, signing letters of protest in newspapers and helping to publicise Nazi propaganda used in German schools.<sup>50</sup>

The connection between Barker and the Rosselli brothers and his concern for political developments in Europe serve as a reminder that Barker defied the English national stereotype of insularity in matters of the mind and much else besides. Rather, he was a scholar who enjoyed close personal links with the European intellectual elite, particularly those members who combined a deep-seated patriotism with a wider European identity and consciousness. Examples include Elie Halévy, and his student, Paul Vaucher, with whom Barker edited a three volume work after the war entitled, *The European Heritage*;<sup>51</sup> also Thomas Masaryk, who was among a large number of prominent European intellectuals (and diplomats) who visited King's College, London when Barker was Principal.<sup>52</sup> Nor was he out of touch with developments in continental philosophy, that of Germany in particular: as well as immersing himself for several years in Otto von Giecke's *Genossenschaftsrecht* during the early-1930s for the purpose of continuing F.W. Maitland's earlier and partial translation, he seemed fully alive to Heidegger's work, as Peter Simpson emphasises in his contribution below.

The European identity that complemented Barker's patriotism is evident, too, in his role as visiting Professor of Political Science at the University of Cologne in the winter of 1947–8 when he was seventy-three. He had gone — reluctantly but out of a characteristic sense of duty — at the invitation of the Rector who had requested via the British Council the presence of a representative of English political science in the years of reconstruction, and when no-one else was available.<sup>53</sup> But despite the opportunity it presented he was determined not to press the virtues of British democracy on a new generation

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, a letter condemning the arrest of 27 Austrian citizens on a charge of high treason by the Austrian Government for disseminating socialist ideas and engaging in socialist activities, signed by Barker, Gilbert Murray, Harold Laski, Norman Angell, Ramsay Muir, R.H. Tawney and others, *The Manchester Guardian*, 12 March 1936, p. 18. He wrote a Foreword to *A Nazi School History Textbook, 1914–1933*, Friends of Europe Publications, no. 11 (London, 1934).

<sup>51</sup> *The European Inheritance*, ed. E. Barker, G. Clark, and P. Vaucher, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1954).

<sup>52</sup> Barker, *Age and Youth*, pp. 136–45.

<sup>53</sup> Barker, *Age and Youth*, pp. 203–9. Barker's predecessor in the role of British Council visiting lecturer in the autumn of 1946 was F.A. Hayek, who lectured to great acclaim in Cologne and other universities in the British and American zones. He was greatly moved to find that his recent book, *The Road to Serfdom*, published in 1944 had been hand-typed and circulated in advance of its publication in Germany: F.A. Hayek, *Hayek on Hayek: An Autobiographical Dialogue*, ed. S. Kresge and L. Wenar (London, 1994), pp. 105–6. Barker's successor was the Oxford classicist, M.B. Foster: see *Creation, Nature, and Political Order in the Philosophy of Michael Foster (1903–1959)*, ed. C. Wybrow (Lewiston, N.Y., 1993), p. 11.

of German students.<sup>54</sup> Instead, he lectured on the social and political ideas of European civilization in historical perspective. He was proud to embrace such a theme in the year of the 700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Albertus Magnus's first lectures on Aristotle in a European university and at the same venue, an event which kept his mind firmly focused on the 'common civilization of Europe'. He was satisfied as he left that 'the men and women among whom I had moved were back in that civilization — back from the *Urwald* and its ghouls'.<sup>55</sup>

The fourth and final factor in Barker's status as a national figure considered here is his liberalism, matched by membership of the Liberal Party for most, if not all of his life. It was a political creed with which he identified closely from an early age. He remained faithful to it until his death, unlike many of his own and subsequent generation of intellectual liberals who abandoned political liberalism in the early-twentieth century for socialism, communism, and the radical Right. A.D. Lindsay, C.P. Trevelyan, and Sidney Ball among his contemporaries, Laski, G.D.H. Cole and Stephen Spender among the succeeding generation, gravitated towards the Left, while Chesterton, Hilaire Belloc and other disillusioned Liberals moved to the Right. Like Trevelyan, Barker struck the keynotes of moderation and consensus in his liberalism, eschewing doctrinaire language, controversy and sectarian ends. His anxiety about the 'pushing of a principle to its logical extremes' is as evident in his first work as in his public performances later in life.<sup>56</sup> It underpinned his loyalty to Asquith in pursuing what he clearly regarded as a working compromise between the warring parties over Home Rule and amid the threat of civil disobedience in 1914. The crisis strained his Idealism considerably, albeit briefly, in the wake of Pluralism, a political theory with which he had much sympathy (although, characteristically, never unqualified) shortly before the outbreak of the First World War.<sup>57</sup> His response also showed up his impatience with Ulster, a part of the United Kingdom which never figured strongly in his account of

<sup>54</sup> Letter from Nicolas Barker to the author, 10 September 1994.

<sup>55</sup> Barker, 'Life and Learning To-Day in a German University', *The Times*, 10 April 1948, p. 5. From his limited experience of Germany he did not feel qualified to speculate on the future of the German nation as a whole, a community 'liable to do anything, according to the mood by which it is visited or the *Weltanschauung* impressed upon it'. The article further illuminates the contrast between British and German university traditions.

<sup>56</sup> Barker, *Political Thought of Plato and Aristotle*, p. 162.

<sup>57</sup> Barker wrote to Gilbert Murray, 'My mind is full of Asquith. I am glad I have somebody I can admire as much as I do him today'. Undated letter, but from New College, which he had joined as a Fellow in 1913, and mentioning, too, his impending visit to France on March 22: MS Murray 113 (57). In a letter to *The Times* (12 March 1914, p. 8d) he ardently defended the Liberal Government's recent action in framing a new Home Rule Bill. The letter highlights his fervent ('Oxford') belief in the power of thought to solve even the thorniest political problems, a belief that was condemned by Graham Wallas in a review of Barker's *Political Thought in England from Herbert Spencer to the Present Day*: see Stapleton, *Englishness and the Study of Politics*, pp. 84–5. Against Lord Hugh Cecil's emphasis upon the need for a 'single central [British] sovereignty',

Englishness and Britishness, although in this he was hardly alone.<sup>58</sup> His eschewal of logical extremes enhanced his appeal to those concerned about the increasing bitterness and divisions of political life in Britain, particularly in the murky and uncertain years between the wars.<sup>59</sup> It was equally evident in his hostility to the postwar Labour Government, with its ‘sweeping policies of nationalization; its consequent methods of bureaucratic control’.<sup>60</sup> Barker became increasingly disquieted by the Liberal Party’s own Progressivism in the 1930s, when he was also at odds with the Party’s attack on Chamberlain’s policy of appeasement in relation to Nazi Germany.<sup>61</sup> But he remained active in the higher echelons of the Liberal Party until the mid-1940s — as a member of the Liberal Council elected by the annual Assembly and also as vice-president of the Free Trade Union until at least 1946.<sup>62</sup> His tenure of the latter office underscores his sharp differences with Aristotle’s economic ideas outlined by Quentin Taylor in his article on Barker and Aristotle here, as befitted one who had breathed the air of Manchester liberalism on its home ground from an early age.

If Barker ever broke with the Liberal Party, it was never in so public a fashion as that of his contemporary, Gilbert Murray, who voted Conservative in the 1951 election and supported Eden over the Suez venture. Quite apart from a temperamental aversion to such publicity, his mood later in life was one of withdrawal into the realms of scholarship and its private satisfactions. Age was one factor in this retreat. As he wrote to Alfred Zimmern in 1949:

For myself I just use my pen. I like writing; and I think I am old enough (I am 75 this year) to do what I like to do. I have to talk occasionally — e.g. to

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giving no ground to Irish nationalists, he appealed to Pluralist arguments concerning the ‘multicellular’ nature of modern society to justify Home Rule, excluding Ulster for the time being. The people of Ulster would have to recognize Ireland’s ‘differentiation’ from England if they wanted their own, ‘living society’ recognized in turn. All now hinged on the question of ‘geography’ (the question of *which* counties would be excluded), but which would easily resolve itself, he believed, once the ‘principle’ of a living society with its own will was accepted. His qualms about Irish nationalism increased during the First World War: see Stapleton, *Englishness and the Study of Politics*, pp. 96–7.

<sup>58</sup> For an illuminating discussion of this, and other aspects of Barker’s Britishness, in the recent context of ‘the English question’, see A. Aughey, *The Politics of Englishness* (Forthcoming, Manchester, 2007), Conclusion.

<sup>59</sup> For this reason he was courted by the historian, Arthur Bryant, active in pursuit of a moderate, ‘national’ form of Conservatism after the fashion of Baldwin through popular ventures such as Ashridge College and the National Book Association in the 1930s: see J. Stapleton, *Sir Arthur Bryant and National History in Britain in the Twentieth Century* (Lanham, Md., 2005), Chs. 4 & 5.

<sup>60</sup> Barker, *Change and Continuity*, Ramsay Muir Memorial Lecture (London, 1949), p. 14.

<sup>61</sup> I have written about Barker’s estrangement from the Liberal Party in the 1930s in *Sir Arthur Bryant and National History*, pp. 91–94, 132–4.

<sup>62</sup> I am grateful to Jaime Reynolds of the Liberal History group for this information.

the Liberal Summer School — but I prefer to sit quietly in my study and to think (so far as I can) and to write in quietness. Is that escapism? I don't think so. Some people must do that sort of thing. May a man not be a monk when the end is near?<sup>63</sup>

But another factor in his retreat from public life, as the reference to monasticism in the last line of the quotation makes clear, was the Christianised form of Platonism to which he had been drawn from the First World War onwards; this is well illustrated in Robert Todd's article below. Stefan Collini has speculated recently on the force of Platonism in inhibiting adoption of the public role which he believes is 'constitutive' of the role of the intellectual; specifically this might be 'some disposition to find the world, with its messy mixture of the good, the bad, and the indifferent, wanting when judged by the highest ideals'. The suggestion was prompted by Iris Murdoch's failure to deliver personally on her call in an essay of 1958 for specialists to address the larger questions of human life — and in public forums, too — to the mutual advantage of both their own theories and public opinion, a failure which Collini believes resulted from her subsequent adoption of a 'loosely Christianized Platonism'.<sup>64</sup> But if it took increasing age on Barker's part to bring the instinct of withdrawal associated with Christianised Platonism (and a tighter form at that) into full play, this serves to underline the importance of *generational* differences as a key variable, perhaps greater even than those of temperament and profession. The strong ethic of public service and duty which had been instilled in Barker and his contemporaries at Oxford had relaxed considerably by the middle decades of the twentieth-century.

In general, the contributors below have approached Barker in a style of critical but appreciative inquiry, recognising the shortcomings yet also the merits of his work in the field of classical political thought, and the further directions it might have taken, had he devoted himself to it fully after 1918. Broadly considered, *The Political Thought of Plato and Aristotle* and its sequels are certainly period pieces now. Nevertheless, Barker's spirited engagement with the thinkers of ancient Greece and the philosophical and political concerns of his own society simultaneously is a model of its kind, and one which has endured more than most. As such, it is worthy of both exploration and commemoration.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Barker to Zimmern, 10 April 1949, MS Zimmern 56 (110–11), Bodleian Library, Oxford.

<sup>64</sup> Collini, *Absent Minds*, p. 163.

<sup>65</sup> I am very grateful to Quentin Taylor for suggesting a special issue of *Polis* to mark the centenary of Barker's first study of Greek political thought. I would also like to thank Kyriakos Demetriou for inviting me to become guest editor. I am indebted to Nicolas Barker for an informative letter he wrote to me in 1994, parts of which have inspired this introduction. Finally, my thanks are due to Robert Todd, for his helpful comments on the introduction.

### Major Works by Barker

- The Political Thought of Plato and Aristotle* (London, 1906).  
*Political Thought in England from Herbert Spencer to the Present Day* (London, 1915).  
*Greek Political Theory: Plato and his Predecessors* (London, 1918).  
*National Character and the Factors in its Formation* (London, 1927).  
*Natural Law and the Theory of society, 1500–1800*, by Otto Gierke, translated with an introduction by Ernest Barker (Cambridge, 1934).  
*The Citizen's Choice* (Cambridge, 1938).  
*Reflections on Government* (London, 1942).  
*Essays on Government* (London, 1945).  
*The Politics of Aristotle*, translated with an introduction, notes, and appendices by Ernest Barker (Oxford, 1946).  
*The Character of England* (Oxford, 1947).  
*Traditions of Civility* (Cambridge, 1948).  
*The Principles of Social and Political Theory* (London, 1951).  
*Age and Youth: Memories of Three Universities and Father of the Man* (London, 1953).  
*From Alexander to Constantine: Passages and Documents Illustrating the History of Social and Political Ideas 336 BC–AD 337*, translated with introductions, notes, and essays by Ernest Barker (Oxford, 1956).  
*Social and Political Thought in Byzantium from Justinian I to the Last Palaeologus: Passages from Byzantine Writers and Documents*, translated with an introduction and notes by Ernest Barker (Oxford, 1957).

### Further Reading

- A. Aughey, *The Politics of Englishness* (Forthcoming, Manchester, 2007).  
M. Grimley, *Citizenship, Community and the Church of England: Liberal Anglican Theories of the State between the Wars* (Oxford, 2004).  
A. Olechnowicz, 'Liberal Anti-Fascism in the 1930s: The Case of Ernest Barker', *Albion*, 36 (2004), pp. 636–660.  
Julia Stapleton, *Englishness and the Study of Politics: The Social and Political Thought of Ernest Barker* (Cambridge, 1994, 2006).  
Julia Stapleton, 'Third Generation Idealism: Religion and Nationality in the Political Thought of Ernest Barker', in *A Passion for Politics: Essays in Honour of Graham Maddox*, ed. T. Battin (Melbourne, Australia, 2005).

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