Malcolm Bradbury says cleverly at the outset of his novel *The History Man*, published in the year that Margaret Thatcher became Leader of Britain's Conservative Party: "This fiction...is a total invention with delusory approximations to historical reality, just as is history itself."¹ The reader is amused because the novelist's words convey an important half-truth. For breathing meaning into the past, considered as `a seamless web', does indeed involve recourse to symbolic meaning and myth, to a finally irreducible element of invention. Yet `history', as distinct from `the past', cannot be said to be synonymous with the construction of a fiction. If the historian's story is to pass muster, it must scrutinise the surviving evidence as carefully as possible, evidence that as often as not will resist the story-teller's own point of view. That is, one assumes, the point of Edward Gibbon's confession that, in the course of preparing his *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, many `experiments' were made before he hit the `middle tone' between a dull chronicle and a rhetorical declamation.²

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Now, if individuals have biographies and family trees, the same might be said figuratively of institutions and ideas. And that quintessentially English writer, George Orwell, has recourse to just such a metaphor in attempting to capture the sense of England. "It resembles", he wrote in a well-known wartime passage,

"a family, a rather stuffy Victorian family, with not many black sheep in it but with all its cupboards bursting with skeletons. It has rich relations who have to be cow-towed to and poor relations who are horribly sat upon, and there is a deep conspiracy of silence about the source of the family income. It is a family in which the young are generally thwarted and most of the power is in the hands of irresponsible uncles and bedridden aunts. Still, it is a family. It has its private language and its common memories, and at the approach of an enemy it closes ranks. A family with the wrong members in control—that, perhaps, is as near as one can come to describing England in a phrase."

Circumstances may change, he says, but England will still be England, "stretching into the future and the past, and, like all living things, having the power to change out of recognition and yet remain the same."

The particularism of the family metaphor notwithstanding, the storytelling skills most helpful in characterising an historical tradition of ideas are often best displayed by a foreign observer inclined to a broadly sympathetic rendering, neither idealising nor debunking, of the tradition's familical strengths and weaknesses. Alexis de Tocqueville comes close to epitomising the desired attitude in an story-teller concerned to recount the historical and political traditions of a people, or of a family as it were, other than his own. Tocqueville is of course justly celebrated for his remarkable and prescient appreciation of the character of Democracy in America. But the same could be said of the disposition

that informed this French aristocratic liberal's admiration of the British political tradition, as is clear from a passage in a letter written to the political economist Nassau Senior late in life, where Tocqueville says: "So many of my thoughts and feelings are shared by the English, that England has turned into a second native land of the mind for me."\(^5\)

Tocqueville's admiration for Britain, combined with acute powers of observation and invention, led him to isolate for emphasis an enduring feature of the British political tradition, in a draft notebook compiled during a visit in 1835 to this "second native land" of his mind. "I see many things in this country which I cannot yet completely understand", he was to write, in a preliminary recording of his impressions. Among them were the following:

"Two spirits which, if not altogether contrary, are at least very diverse, seem to hold sway in England.

The one prompts people to pool their efforts to attain ends which in France we would never think of approaching in this way...

The other prompts each man and each association to keep all advantages as much as possible to themselves, to close every possible door that would let any outsider come in or look in...

I cannot completely understand how "the spirit of association" and "the spirit of exclusion" both came to be so highly developed in the same people, and often to be so intimately combined."

Tocqueville then goes on to sketch in the rudiments of a story-line with which to animate these apparently anomalous spirits:

"On reflection I incline to the view that the spirit of individuality is the basis of the English character. Association is a means suggested by sense and necessity for getting things unattainable by isolated effort. But the spirit of individuality comes in on every side: it recurs in every aspect of things...one might suggest that it has indirectly helped the development of the other spirit by inspiring every man with greater ambitions and desires than one finds elsewhere. That being so, the need to club together

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is more generally felt, because the urge to get things is more general
and stronger (a clumsy, obscure sentence, but I think the idea is
right and needs looking into again)."6

Here Tocqueville has recognised strong family traits, as it were, of the
British political tradition, traits discernible in the "spirit" of ancestoral historical
figures and in others still to come at the time Tocqueville wrote. A Briton of
Tocqueville's day, as of our own, must experience a certain familiarity in the
presence of the Frenchman's identification of an intellectual pedigree in which a
prominent place has been reserved for "the spirit of association" and "the spirit of
exclusion"---or, as Tocqueville alternatively styles this latter and in his view basic
spirit, "the spirit of individuality".

Now, while the `spirit' of a people is recorded perhaps in its history, its
atmosphere is only entered into through an appreciation of the conjunction of its
history with its vital myths and symbols. And the sense of 'England' and the
British is from time immemorial that of an island race whose destiny has been
inextricably linked with the sea. In his Crowds and Power, first published at the
dawning of the `swinging 60s', but which the emigre author asks his readers to
imagine as having been composed two decades before, in the far less auspicious
circumstances of 1940---the year in which, coincidentally, Orwell had composed
The Lion and the Unicorn---Noble Laureate Elias Canetti writes that

"Everyone knows what the sea means to an Englishman; what is not sufficiently known is the precise form of the connection
between his relationship to the sea and his famous individualism. The Englishman sees himself as a captain on board a ship...The sea
is there to be ruled...The Englishman's disasters have been
experienced at sea...and thus the sea has offered him
transformation and danger. His life at home is complementary to
life at sea: security and monotony are its essential characteristics.
Everyone has his place which, except to go to sea, he is not

supposed to leave for the sake of any transformation; everyone is as sure of his habits as of his possessions."7

Individualism; captaincy; hierarchy and deference; habits; security of possession. But one notes that it is captaincy, respect for skills of rulership, that is central to Canetti's seafaring imagery—as is the case with a not dissimilar imagery deployed to make a similar point in Act III of Bernard Shaw's Heartbreak House, when, with the crisis years of the First World War rather than the Second in view, Captain Shotover advises Hector to "Learn your business as an Englishman":

"Hector: And what may my business as an Englishman be, pray? Captain Shotover: Navigation. Learn it and live; and leave it and be damned."

Rule Britannia, Britannia rule the waves; and the island race, as Shotover intimates, has also been an imperial race. The English were the first Britons to learn the habit, in the school of domestic hard knocks, as 'governors' in succession to the Normans of an unruly Welsh, Scots and Irish 'Celtic fringe'—a project long since substantially realised, with one notable exception, in Britain's historical and political affairs, but never so as to have eclipsed and rendered strictly irrelevant the distinctive cultural myths and symbols of the respective nationalities jointly peopling the British Isles. Later, a seafaring nation possessed of a strong sense of assurance as to the superiority of the British way—and, like the Japanese, an island race oblivious to if not contemptuous of 'cosmopolitan' values—the British would forge a far flung geopolitical empire rivalling those of Athens and Rome in classical antiquity. And culturally (we are perhaps inclined to take for granted what is arguably the most impressive of British achievements) the British have imperial claims too, as the source, an enduring legacy of that

7. London, 1960, pp. 159-60. The passage occurs in the course of a discussion of the 'crowd symbols' of the major European states.
overseas empire, of what has become in the twilight of the twentieth century a virtually global cultural hegemony of the English language.

One can say too of the British that they have been a political, in the sense of a rule-attached race, moreso than an artistic people---a people with a notable pedigree of success in the art of governance, with an abiding commitment to constitutionalism and legality and to a belief in the law as something above the state and above the individual. "Both in a good and a bad sense", John Stuart Mill once suggested, "the English are farther from a state of nature than any other modern people. They are, more than any other people, a product of civilisation and discipline. England is the country in which social discipline has most succeeded, not so much in conquering, as in suppressing, whateve is liable to conflict with it. The English, more than any other people, not only act but feel according to rule."8 To which as Norman F. Cantor adds:

"The English achievement is in politics and law...Even without a personal commitment to those ideals of liberalism which were largely an English invention, it would have to be admitted that on strictly pragmatic grounds the English must be considered the most successful political society in world history. No other country has had such a remarkable degree of continuity in the history of its political institutions...the theme that gives value and meaning to the study of English history must in all eras be the ways in which this peculiar island people developed their governmental and legal institutions and ideas."9

It is hardly surprising then, that as Ralf Dahrendorf has recently suggested, "The desire to emulate Britain's social and political institutions is an old one.". He does so in the course of adumbrating his own catalogue of British

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8. J.S. Mill, 
cultural strengths that includes a love of liberty and a capacity for solidarity or liberty, institutional continuity and excellence.10

Dahrendorf’s point about ‘continuity’ reminds us that Great Britain is, after all, amongst the most historic of European states, with continuously modified cultural and civil traditions mythically symbolised in an ‘ancient constitution’ with roots in the mediaeval world. As a very old state, there is no question of Britain's being, as political scientists might put it, a product of ‘constitutional design’. In the literal sense, indeed, Britain stands alone amongst the member states of the U.N. in having no written constitution, no formalised charter or declaration of rights and freedoms. Seymour Martin Lipset has characterised the United States, as the title of a well-known book has it, as the "first new nation". But if Americans can pride themselves on being the first new nation, Britons can point to a not less impressive claim that theirs is amongst the oldest of continuous states. The very continuity of British institutional life reinforces a deep and abiding sense of patriotism. As Stanley Rothman has observed:

"The development of British social and political life has involved a uniquely British synthesis of traditional patterns and the forces that transformed them. The synthesis was possible not only because traditional British society was less "sticky" than its counterpart elsewhere, but because its patterns had taken on a national form before their transformation began. The result has been an organic community with its own peculiar political institutions. No wonder...the British tend to regard their institutions as peculiarly their own, while both Americans and Frenchmen identify themselves with universal ideas applicable to all peoples."11

If one had to name one underlying theme or thread in the British experience holding together these and other background considerations through time, in what might it consist? Now, as far as political life is concerned, Rodney Barker for one suggests at the outset of his 1978 study *Political Ideas in Modern Britain* that there has been "no single British political tradition unless it be everything that has ever been written". We must be content with what he calls "a large number of competing advocacies". Yet one ought not to dismiss lightly the claims of an arguably procrustean theme uniting into a sort of coherent `British political tradition' these several considerations and something besides---claims centred on the persistence, out of the `ancient [English] constitution' and continuous down to our own day, of the spirit of what one might call Liberal England. It is instructive to recollect the experience of Michael Oakeshott, a great story-teller of the British experience and of western civilisation when, in the late 1930s, he set out in a book of selections to characterise *The Social and Political Doctrines of Contemporary Europe*. Explaining why in the course of doing so he had reluctantly used the terms `Representative Democracy' to express the sense of the social and political doctrine under which, as he wrote, "the majority of civilised mankind still lives", he wrote that he had rejected the terms `Liberal Democracy' because `Liberalism' in England was apt to be understood as the creed of a party and to be contrasted with Conservatism and Socialism; whereas the doctrine he wished to find some statement of was, as he expressed it, "a tradition expressed, so far as this country is concerned, in the spirit of our laws rather than in the programme of any one party. Nevertheless, it is a Liberal doctrine." What he had in mind, he suggested, was "more in the nature of a tendency than a well-knit doctrine, and in consequence, more difficult to express

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12. Rodney Barker,
The complexity of the task, he suggested, lay in the difficulty of finding a way to "extract the true metal of the Liberal doctrine from the base ore from which it has never yet been successfully separated." There is no good reason to believe that, half a century on from when these lines were written, the circumstances of the British way of life and of the political traditions attendant upon it, have materially altered. It is noteworthy that in Britain the word 'liberal' has not had anything approaching the problematic history that 'the I word' has had in America.

At any rate, the character of the story-teller of a political tradition, its continuities and changes, is a character never fully achieved involving the recounting of stories of a certain sort in which materials are arranged in a conceptual space situated somewhere between a distant, even mythical or legendary past, and time present. The activity aims to bring shape and life to a history and to a past that is inferred from that history. And although the invention in advance of a manner of recounting a story and then finding evidence to support it, is acceptable and even perhaps unavoidable in an historical story-teller, his ought not properly to be a recounting of what might be characterised as a crudely ideological sort, in which, as the Staedtler underliner advertisement in the Piccadilly underground station has it, "You don't have to read the whole torrid tale to know who Sophie decides to marry". From a philosophical point of view, the historical story-teller's world is a world of contingency; and he must live with this complicating and unforgiving liability.

Some stories or recountings have been so powerful that their rhetorical underpinnings have become constitutive of elements of modernity itself. Such is the case, for instance, with the developmental notion of a renaissance,13 or, better

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still, with the story of history as progress, of which, in Britain, the celebrated and tenacious Whig theory of history is a notable variant.\textsuperscript{14} And Edward Gibbon's own famed and haunting imagery of imperial Rome as a civilisation declining and falling has of course been yet another, perhaps the most especially compelling and dramatic historical story-line of them all. Reworked and imitated in multifarious efforts of more or less moralistic historic reportage, this perennially recurrent Gibbonesque rhetoric has enjoyed an immeasurable influence on general public opinion in the two centuries which have elapsed since the first appearance of \textit{The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire}.

Gibbon was to complete his great labour of historical scholarship in the very year, 1787, in which America adopted the core constitutional document under which the then newly-born republic was destined to flourish, and, eventually and in important respects reluctantly, several centuries on, to assume the mantle of leadership of the western democracies. This was a role which had been enacted in the century and a half after Gibbon wrote by a now declining Britain, whose rather more self-confident imperial achievement at its late nineteenth and early twentieth century zenith, in the view of Britain's admirers and detractors alike, had then matched that of the sprawling Roman Empire of classical antiquity. And given the complex parental and familical relations of these two historic powers---one of them, even as the rebellious new world American republic was born, an ancient European state, a constitutional monarchy with civic \textit{mores} and institutional fabric more deeply rooted in the rule of law than in political democracy \textit{per se}---it is perhaps understandable that the breakaway Americans should prove themselves so especially susceptible to the

charms of characterising modern British history in a decidedly Gibbonesque rhetoric of decline and fall.

One very famous instance of this propensity which made its first appearance early in the present century was George Dangerfield's *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (1935), a vivid and brilliantly imaginative study of British politics in the period 1910-14. Dangerfield's theme is the sudden collapse of Britain's once great liberal movement of the nineteenth century---or at least, of the Liberal Party which had been its doctrinal home and its indispensible political vehicle. His book surveys the manner in which, during these four crucial years, the Liberals survived dual challenges from the political right and from the political left, only to lead the nation into the morass of the Great War and its own swift eclipse as a party of governance.15

At the time, H.N. Brailsford, reviewing the book in *The New Republic*, was led to comment:

"To Mr. Dangerfield's principal argument one might reply that English liberalism has not perished. As an attitude to life, based on an ethical and rationalist view of society, it survives in the main body of the Labor Party, in the Non-conformist churches, in a still influential press, and even in a wing of the Tory Party. It is still, with its mingled shrewdness and self-deception, the typical English way of thinking."16

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15. George Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England*, London, 1936. But Dangerfield's argument seems to embrace something broader than the Liberal Party itself. As he noted in his Foreword (vii-viii): "it was in 1910 that fires long smouldering in the English spirit suddenly flared up, so that by the end of 1913 Liberal England was reduced to ashes. From these ashes, a new England seems to have emerged. I realize, of course, that the word "Liberal" will always have a meaning so long as there is one democracy left in the world, or any remnant of a middle class: but the true pre-war Liberalism---supported, as it was in 1910, by Free Trade, a majority in Parliament, the ten commandments, and the illusion of Progress---can never return. It was killed, or killed itself, in 1913." He adds: "And a very good thing too."

16. Cited in Peter Stansky, "*The Strange Death of Liberal England: Fifty Years After*", *Albion*, Volume 17, no. 4, Winter, 1985, p. 402. Brailsford allowed, however, that "What did die in its hour of seeming triumph was the Liberal Party."
But however sound these observations might then have been, and indeed arguably remain, it was to be the dramatic message of the title of Dangerfield's book that would stick in the public mind long after the book itself had begun to gather dust on the library book shelves. And it was to be that message, and a more broadly encompassing version of the decline and fall story-line, that would enjoy a special vogue in transatlantic accounts of Britain's immediate post-imperial woes, accounts which appeared in danger of becoming a deluge in the troubled "Britain as the sick man of Europe" 1970s.17 Looking back, one is struck by a relentless sense of melodrama in books such as, say, Isaac Kramnick's edited collected of papers under the alarmist title *Is Britain Dying? Perspectives on the Current Crisis*.18 The Preface sets the scene:

"Mountains of garbage in Leicester Square; ambulance drivers on strike; attendants turning patients away from hospitals; terrorist bombings of gasoline storage tanks; schools closed; striking lorry drivers huddled around makeshift fires; civil servants refusing to work; trains idle; no Times; no TLS; a bewildered Prime Minister juggling election dates; a Trades Union Congress helpless before militant shopstewards, a peppery leader of the opposition shouting "Resign!." This was the British winter of discontent---1978-79."

The `peppery' Leader of the Opposition was, of course, the redoubtable Margaret Thatcher, whose first electoral victory in the very year of the book's appearance was, amongst its many consequences, to prove an embarrassment to the more doctrinaire sort of transatlantic decline theorist. Only two years later, one notes a somewhat different tone in, for instance, Geoffrey Smith and Nelson

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17. That the Americans are not above applying the decline and fall scenario to a sense of their own flawed achievement has of course been instanced from at least the date of, say, Theodore Dreiser's fictional account of the collapse of the American Dream; for a recent example, see Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*, Chicago, 1987. See too the best-selling Paul Kennedy's *The Rise and Fall of Empires*, New York, 1987, the intellectual product of a transplanted Englishman now teaching in America.

Polsby's *British Government and Its Discontents*, a book otherwise aimed at exploring the manner in which 'overwhelming problems' of low economic productivity, eroded social solidarity in light of intractable strife in Northern Ireland, the devolution debate and problems centred on immigration and race relations, have interacted to sap the confidence of Britain's leaders. Here the decline theory material is offset, as it were, by a prefactory quote from the Anglophilic American travel writer Paul Theroux, then resident in London, a quote so evidently admiring of the plain decency of the British way of life that the criticism presumably intended by its last sentence is disarmed by all that goes before:

"The British [he writes] do not say 'you're welcome' and they seldom shake hands. What they do best is empty trash...deliver mail and milk at dawn, run schools, provide dental and medical care and eyeglasses for a pittance, broadcast intelligent radio programs, plant pretty gardens, produce articulate debate, maintain the character of villages and parks, brew real beer, finance a spectacularly good library service, stand politely in line, avoid talking to strangers and make amateurism and uncompetitiveness the goals of nearly every endeavour. There is no money in this."

In *The Lion and the Unicorn*, to which reference was earlier made, George Orwell makes the point that "as Europeans go, the English are not intellectual. They have a horror of abstract thought, they feel no need for any philosophy or systematic `world-view", though he allows that "they have a certain power of acting without taking thought", observable in moments of supreme crisis. This is a persistent theme in the self-appreciation of Britons. "We British", D.W. Brogan once remarked, "don't take our intellectuals too seriously." And Tocqueville had himself noted a related if not synonymous point about the

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20. op. cit., p. 77.
English character, in suggesting that "Generally speaking, the English seem to me to have great difficulty in getting hold of general and undefined ideas. They judge the facts of today perfectly well, but the tendency of events and their distant consequences escape them." The political journalist and essayist Walter Bagehot, returning, as it were, an equivocal compliment of the Tocquevillean sort with another in kind, thought that in the most general of cultural senses the chief historical difference between England and France was that the French were, as he wrote, "too clever to be practical and not dull enough to be free". According to Bagehot, "What we opprobriously call stupidity, though not an enlivening quality in common society, is Nature's favourite resource for preserving steadiness of conduct and consistency of opinion". He added without hesitation, and approvingly so, that "in real sound stupidity the English are unrivalled". This, he averred, was a cultural strength. Being, in this regard, "stupid", Englishmen learned slowly only what they must. They did their duty, happily, because they knew of nothing else to do.

On this general theme, one recollects, closer to our own day, an instructive instance in an early Graham Greene essay in which the novelist includes "stupidity" on his own short list of qualities peculiarly British. "The pig in our literature", writes Greene,

"has always been credited with qualities peculiarly British. Honest, a little stupid, commercially-minded perhaps, but with a trace of idealism in his love affairs, the pig’s best nature is shown in domestic surroundings at a period of peace and material comfort. `They led prosperous uneventful lives, and their end was bacon', Miss Potter has written of Miss Dorcas and

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22. Alexis de Tocqueville (op. cit.), p. 80.
Miss Porcas, but the sentence might stand as the epitaph of the whole race..."24

The passage recalls to mind a similarly didactic reliance on porcine-like imagery, later to be more fully deployed by Orwell in his satirical *Animal Farm*, though here the moral seems to be that, when pigs become too clever by half, there are bound to follow predictably ominous events, a point differently detailed, but certainly in principle consistent with Greene's.

Coeval with the emergence in the distant British past of a bedrock prudential adherence to "real sound stupidity", there arose a related trait, a trait evoked in Elias Canetti's imagery of the ship captain cited earlier, centred on the manner in which the British tended to hold in high and deferential regard persons believed to be in possession of habitually practiced or time-tested skills: actually knowing how to do things and to get them done, as compared to merely having untried "theories" about them lacking solid foundation in experience. In a weak sense, this related trait was stupidity's ostensible antipode. But in another and stronger sense, it tended to develop alongside of it as stupidity's functional complement. The historical fit of the two can be illustrated by reflecting on the evolution of the English notion of "cleverness".

It is thus that, only in fairly recent British usage, has the term "clever" come to convey the pejorative sense of a certain glibness, superficiality or lack of depth. The full etymology of the English word "clever" is in fact obscure. But there is some apparent relationship with the middle English clivers, meaning claws, talons or clutches in the sense of nimble of claws, sharp to seize. For by the time the word "clever", already for long a fixture of local and colloquial use, first became in modern English usage a general literary word towards the end of

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the seventeenth century, it was firmly connected with the use of the hands, and was indeed to remain so inasmuch as the underlying notion of "cleverness" is of a kind of adroitness or dexterity signifying, in a word, "the brain in the hands". "Clever", then, originally entailed a strong sense of an actual doer or a thing actually done, just as the etymology of the possibly related word, "expert", is one bound up with an original sense of one who was actually experienced in or trained by practice. Here too, of course, one notes a later and typically more pejorative usage in which demonstrable experience or actually accomplished practical training has given way to claims based on a more theoretical learning.

It must have been a certain cultural feel for the historical evolution of words such as these that informed Walter Bagehot's prideful assertion, as a sort of corollary or complement to his delineation of the place of "stupidity" in the English character, that "Of all the nations in the world the English are perhaps the least a nation of pure philosophers".25 This tendency must be somehow connected, according to the usual surmise, with the sheer historicity of everyday life in a land where the seemingly inescapable presence of the past has for untold centuries been reflected in a rich and only recently self-consciously felt cultural panoply of inherited social practices and institutional traditions.

In an historical perspective, one important implication of the persistence down into the modern era from the late mediaeval world of this ineluctable cultural inheritance was that, in Great Britain, political life could not accurately be said to have been in primary formation, as it arguably was in varying degrees in so many newer and more consciously fabricated modern states, a species of ideological politics. Not so, at least, in any way involving considerations of "pure philosophy" in Bagehot's sense. Rather, the emergence of modernity in Great

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Britain entailed the arrival on the scene, only slowly and as a result of no evident rational design, of what might better be called a politics of policy or *doctrinal* politics, in which politics was the purview of the party of state and in which governing thus loomed larger than politics *per se*.\(^{26}\)

The premises of this older, early modern politics had first come to be tentatively articulated in the English Reformation, and shortly, more comprehensively so, in consequence of the epoch-making constitutional crises of the seventeenth century. Before then, as David Hume was later to write, the ancient English constitution "had lain in a kind of confusion; yet so as that the subjects possessed many noble privileges, which, though not exactly bounded and secured by law, were universally deemed from long possession to belong to them as their birthright."\(^{27}\) Amidst the tumult surrounding the Great Rebellion and its aftermath, competing interpretations of the confused constitutional status of this universally-admitted "birthright" yielded alternative understandings of the nature of the English constitution. And these understandings, identified with previously adumbrated dispositions of religious or moral character now co-joined with emergent social and economic interests, informed the beliefs of the Roundheads and Cavaliers, and in due course, of their political successors, the Whigs and the Tories. From these were descended the historic eighteenth century parties of Country and Court, rallying political supporters to their respective constitutional banners with combined appeals to doctrinal principle and socio-economic interest which were already at the time of their formalised articulation deeply rooted in a sense of the past.

\(^{26}\) Note the etymology of the English word ‘govern’, from the Latin *gubernare*, to steer, a shipboard activity adapted to express the notion of ruling with authority.

\(^{27}\) David Hume, "Of the Parties of Great Britain", in Charles W. Hendel (ed.), *David Hume’s Political Essays*, N.Y., 1953, p. 90.
These emergent parties of doctrine thereafter offered alternative, though as yet not expressly programmatic approaches, to the great questions of statecraft and policy in Great Britain, where the more ideological style of politics lay still in the future. *Doctrinal* politics, then, may be best envisaged as a gradually emergent politics situated against a background of already familiar or "given" practices. They are reflexive rather than constructivist politics, a politics more sustaining and defensive than offensive in mood. Such a politics is plainly distinct in principle from a politics of the *ideological* variety, this latter type involving an evidently more intellectualised world of imagined political practices. Strictly, that is, the term `doctrinal' denotes an exercise in which the `principles' of something have been extracted out of an otherwise more fully attendant character presumed to be given, already formed, in the larger world of experience. It is only then that the lessons, precepts or maxims of a certain understanding of moral and political conduct could have been given an identifiably doctrinal formulation. And even when fully elaborated, such doctrinal precepts would necessarily amount to no more than an abstracted, short-hand account of a fuller underlying character. How else might David Hume's eighteenth century audience have been expected to understand what he had in mind when he confidently assured them, for instance, in his celebrated definition of the difference between a Tory and a Whig, that while the Tory was "a lover of monarchy, though without abandoning liberty", the Whig was rather "a lover of liberty, though without renouncing monarchy"?28

In linguistic usage, it seems, the wider appearance of this sense of a kind of `text-book' or instructive meaning of the term `doctrine' had coincided with the constitutional crises of the seventeenth century which had formally ushered

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in the dawning era of a more self-conscious politics of combined principle and interest in England. Much later, beginning in the early years of the nineteenth century, another and newer term would come into common English usage, designating, pejoratively, a certain type of merely pedantic `theorist' who was bent upon applying some `doctrine' or other without sufficient regard to practical considerations. The word that was then employed, `doctrinaire', as is obvious, was a French term. One notes, instructively perhaps, that the English word `ideology', meaning `visionary theorizing' or `ideal and abstract speculation', a word which is of roughly similar etymological vintage, was likewise French in origin.

Yet looked at from a somewhat different, and even paradoxical perspective, intellectuals have in fact enjoyed a decidedly privileged position in Britain; and it is pretentious ideas, rather than ideas as such, of which Britons have long been wary. As John Stuart Mill once observed in the course of an ingenious apercu aimed at contrasting English empiricism with French rationalism (putting one in mind of Mrs. Thatcher's scolding of President Mitterand about the superiority of English to French liberty in the midst of the 'celebrations' of the Bicentenary of the French Revolution), "An Englishman's errors are negative, a Frenchman's positive. An Englishman fancies that things do not exist, because he never sees them; a Frenchman thinks they must always and necessarily exist, because he does see them."29 The designatory term `intellectual', then, somehow foreign and continental, has never enjoyed a wide general social usage in Great Britain. But this not to deny the important place throughout the modern period of ideas and of what might be called, for want of better terms, `men of ideas' in Britain's cultural and political affairs.

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Certainly Karl Mannheim's notion, in *Ideology and Utopia* (1936), of the free-floating or "socially unattached intelligentsia", outsiders whose very marginality held the key to their presumed objectivity, was received in the land of his refuge and even at the relatively late date of the English-language publication of his academically influential book, as the expression of a markedly foreign point of view. And one recollects that it was as recently as the end of the 1950s that Irving Kristol delivered himself of the only slightly tongue-in-cheek observation, looking back over his stay in London as an editor of *Encounter* magazine, that "what has astonished me and what astonishes any American, is the extent to which almost all British intellectuals are cousins".30

The British intellectual was historically, and in important respects has remained, an insider, sharing in cultural opinion-making and even directly political roles. The real heyday of this cultural phenomenon, of course, as Noel Annan has documented in a well-known article,31 had strictly-speaking occurred earlier, in the Victorian and Edwardian periods. And it was then, too, as John Gross writes, that "There were closer links between literature and public life...than can readily be realized in our own more complex, compartmentalised world."32 But as foreign commentators especially have been liable to observe, in British public life, former dons and active writers are still to be found in significant numbers among their parliamentary colleagues at Westminster, attaining to high office along with other Oxbridgeans while remaining equally at

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home in the House of Commons and the television studios, as contributors to the book publishers' lists, the newspapers, and the highbrow weeklies.

If then, as Orwell and Tocqueville and Denis Brogan suggest, the British appeared habitually to take neither general ideas nor their intellectuals seriously, they did so in part out of a sense that British intellectuals and their stock in trade, to put a crude sociological point, had not posed the same potential for mischief as they might have done in cultural arrangements under which they had been pushed more to the periphery. The prevailing institutional ethos had helped to sustain the allegiance of mainstream intellectuals to the established order. And the result was what Sir Ernest Barker, the doyen of British political theorists of the early and middle decades of the twentieth century, writing in 1953 in the first number of the journal of the then-fledgling Political Studies Association of the United Kingdom, was to characterise as the traditionally 'immersed' nature of political ideas in Great Britain. "English political theory", according to Sir Ernest:

"has long been what I should call by the name of 'immersed' theory. Our English political theorists, like our historians, have often been men immersed and steeped in the general current and sweep of affairs. If they have not been politicians themselves (and some of them have been), they have at any rate been in touch with politicians and the movement of politics...indeed, the connection between theory and practice, always notable in England, has worked in a double way. Not only have theorists turned to practical politics: practical politicians, reversing the flow of the stream, have also turned to political theory."33

33. Sir Ernest Barker, "Reflections on English Political Theory", Political Studies, Volume 1, 1953/54, pp. 6-12. The Political Studies Association had "about 130 members" in 1950, not a large number if compared proportionate to population with the much larger American Political Science Association, this latter the reflection arguably of a New World intellectual culture without a tradition of "immersed" political theory in Barker's sense. As if to illustrate the longstanding British cultural preference for knowing how to do a thing rather than theorising about it, it is interesting that Wilfred Harrison's "Editorial Note" introducing this volume points out that "until recently few British universities have had many posts to offer in specifically political studies". By 1971, with the creation of new Universities and more teaching positions, membership in the PSA had grown to some 540 and political studies in Great Britain had become more institutionalised, according to Norman Chester, "Political Studies in Britain: Recollections
In 1953, when he wrote these lines, Sir Ernest Barker was seventy-nine years of age; and he was to live on to see the dawning decade of the so-called Age of Aquarius, finally passing from the scene at eighty-five in February, 1960. Until then, Barker had remained, as it were, a lingering representative of Britain's figurative Great Generation, to borrow Karl Popper's admiring *Open Society* description of the Athenians of the period just before the Peloponnesian War. With the disappearance from the British intellectual scene of the Barker generation, something at least of the culturally elitist assumptions of the `immersed' tradition of British political theorising he had described in 1953 seemed to disappear with them. Twenty five years on from then, at any rate, reminiscing about more recent developments in in a special anniversary issue of *Political Studies*, the journal's original editor was to note of Barker's 1953 article on British political ideas that it "may seem odd to younger members of today's profession".34

Whether as cause or as effect of the increased professionalisation of political studies in Great Britain35 as elsewhere, this development reflected a decline of the older, more amateurish tradition. There had, as well, eventually grown up alongside the tradition which Sir Ernest had described, a potent alternative tradition of social and political theorising which, so far from being `immersed', involved the application of directly contrived principles to public affairs. And this was a development favouring the emergence, if not of an

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34. Wilfrid Harrison, "The Early Years of Political Studies", *Political Studies*, XXIII, June-September, 1975, p. 64. But even so, as Jack Hayward hints in the title of a recent survey article, "The Political Science of Muddling Through", in Jack Hayward and Philip Norton (eds.), *The Political Science of British Politics*, London, 1987, the older, immersive attitudes have persisted.
intellectual class *per se*, at least of a decidedly more critical, less immersive style of doctrinal or ideological political theory. In the late decades of the nineteenth century, such a style of political theorising had been generally restricted to marginal groups such as the early Fabians. But it was a style which, with its more selfconscious appreciation of the role of ideas in public life, would come in time to permeate the hitherto prevailing institutional ethos and eventually securely establish itself in Britain's universities.

Beginning in the 1930s, indeed, some British intellectuals set themselves off, sometimes ostentatiously so, from the `Establishment' from which they had not infrequently sprung. These included in their numbers those who might in earlier times have been *habitués* of a more immersive universe of political discourse. Often they registered their voices of dissent from such relatively late, and so, in a sense, entirely fitting institutional arrivals as the Fabian-instigated London School of Economics. But often too, they did so from within the cultural bastions of Britain's ancient schools and universities. That said, and as if to underline Sir Ernest Barker's point about what was for long the immersed nature of mainstream British political thought, there has always been about this dissenting intellectual constituency a certain tameness compared to its counterpart elsewhere. George Orwell, again, an Etonian and in some moods an interesting instance of the peculiarly British *genre* of dissenting political intellectual, seems to have had something like this in mind, in noting, in a wartime essay written in praise of Arthur Koestler, that England, for all her faults, was not a place where one found what he called a "concentration-camp

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literature”. On the continent things were happening to middle-class people, he reminded his readers, "which in England do not even happen to the working class."37

The story-teller of change and continuity in British political thought from Welfare State to Thatcherism cannot help but see his materials, to borrow terms deployed by Sir Isaiah Berlin in the course of a survey of political ideas in the twentieth century, "in terms of some sort of pattern".38 And yet, the story-teller can find no solace in a formula. One is reminded of a story about Winston Churchill, in whose intellectual biography and often stormy and illustrious political career there were so intriguingly to coincide those considerations of personality, or perhaps better, of character, idea and policy which tend in some combination perennially to reconstitute the framework of reference for the storyteller of political things, drawing to his enterprise the materials of myth and history. It is said that after the political disaster, from the Conservative point of view, of the 1945 British General Election, Churchill, as a sort of morale booster, adopted the practice of entertaining his colleagues in the Tory Shadow Cabinet to


periodic luncheons at the Savoy Hotel. On one such occasion, as Harold Macmillan was to recollect in his memoirs, the great man, presented for his inspection with a rather uninspired pudding, grumbled at the waiter in best Churchillian cadence: "Pray take away this pudding. It has no theme."39

Macmillan suggests that Churchill's admonition ought to stand as a warning to authors as well as to cooks. And certainly the story provides an especially apposite image against which to set out the challenge of accounting for the manner in which an enduring family of constitutive ideas which is at the heart of the British political tradition has persisted down into the contemporary world and displayed itself in the public life of Great Britain since World War Two. We will want to keep the moral of this Churchill story in mind as we further consider this rich intellectual pudding in its own right, in search of a theme.

It is a retrospective commonplace that the overwhelming Labour Party victory in the 1945 British general election amounted to nothing less than a sea change in the practices and the assumptions which had hitherto underlain political life in Great Britain—heralding, as that election had, the advent of the era of the welfare state. Whether it was changed practices which were to sire changed assumptions, or vice versa, is one of those nice questions of intellectual progenitorship which are not readily amenable to historical or philosophical resolution.

The practices and assumptions of British political life, after all, had been in a period of tumultuous flux dating distantly from the eclipse of the Liberal Party as the governing alternative to the Conservatives in the years following the Great War. In a somewhat less lengthy historical perspective, they had been so since at

least the Great Depression, or, to hang the point upon a more specific peg in Britain's stormy interwar political history, since the formation of the first of a series of all-party National governments beginning in the summer of 1931. Even more crisis-ridden years, of course, had immediately preceded the formation, in the outcome of the first general election since the electorate had returned Stanley Baldwin's "National" Government in November of 1935, of Mr. Attlee's 1945 Labour Government. The emergency planning which had been undertaken throughout Churchill's extended period of wartime coalition governance, from May, 1940 to early 1945, had necessarily required heavy and willing all-party reliance on radically innovative practices and/or assumptions.

It was in a sense inevitable that the political and administrative legacy of this long span of eventful years would be carried over into the political debates and the governmental realities of 1945 and beyond. It was a legacy which would leave in its aftermath, with the return to party-political normalcy in this first postwar election, only tattered remnants of an older consensus of received wisdom in public policy matters. It was to contribute to the substantial modification, some would say the virtual transformation, of a once-familiar institutional setting of British politics across a wide front. What might be reasonably said about the place of ideas in such events? What, more generally, has been the historical role of philosophers not only in intellectual life generally but also in the political affairs of Great Britain in the postwar era?

"For an idea to be fashionable is ominous", George Santayana once said, "since it must afterwards be always old-fashioned."40 The force of Santayana's aphorism derives from its unstated premise that there is a certain class of ideas concerned with the expression of perennial truths—ideas which, in their

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imperviousness to fashion, might be said, with a certain stretch of the imagination, to comprise "a pattern of timeless moments" of philosophical constancy.

With doctrinal beliefs, on the other hand, fashion has a way of being, in an important sense, everything. There is no denying that there are fashions in social and political doctrines, as there are fashions in clothes. And with doctrinal beliefs, as with clothes, it is not so much that current fashion is always afterwards old-fashioned, as that nothing is forever. With doctrinal fashion, the enthusiastic subscriber to what is today demonstrably all the rage is liable to find that tomorrow it will have fallen quite out of vogue.

The calamitous years of war which had preceded the 1945 general election in Great Britain, for instance, as indeed the apparent moral of the electoral outcome itself, were to have an immediate bearing on the fashionable theoretical presuppositions of the rising generation of postwar political intellectuals. Certainly there was an atmosphere of renewed hope in the wake of the horrific experiences of a global conflict which had entailed unprecedented sacrifices on the part of civilian populations. This renewed spirit of hope was reinforced by a generally-held belief that the impressive achievements of wartime planning and economic coordination could now be translated into a peacetime era of rebuilding and prosperity indebted to rational social engineering. Accompanying this renewed spirit of hope in domestic affairs, though, was an atmosphere of apprehension, born of an awareness of the realities of a system of international power which, in devastation's aftermath, had left the war's ostensible winner a much reduced player in a world still perilously divided into armed and ideologically-incompatible camps.

In the realm of general political ideas, the shared perception of sizeable numbers of the electorate at large, to judge by the crude measure of Labour's
landslide victory, was that the politicians as well as the theoretical expositors of the doctrinal right, comprising old-fashioned liberals as well as conservatives, were at war's end, however vigorous their dissent from the ascendant ideological vogue, the home of lost causes and reaction. A variety of moderate interventionist thought wedded to a hopeful belief in the efficacy of cooperative, welfare state meliorism was also the apparent creed of choice for many British intellectuals. In the first flush of arrival, the current doctrinal fashion in Great Britain was liable to declare itself indiscriminately "socialist"; in due course, it would come to be more subtly epitomised for its thinking adherents in such representative documents as C.A.R. Crosland's eclectic and revisionist *The Future of Socialism*.

At the end of the four decade period which had elapsed since 1945, it had become no less a standard assumption of current popular wisdom that the stunning electoral victory of Mrs. Thatcher in 1979, to be followed by a landslide 1983 return of her Government to office after the Falklands War and an equally convincing third successive victory over Labour in 1987, represented another and no less dramatic sea change—certainly in the rhetoric, if somewhat more arguably perhaps in the reality, of contemporary British politics. The managerial political and social premises which had been dominant in the public discourse of the broad middle period of the postwar era had by then become to a considerable degree, and by default, the preserve of an intellectually creditable but electorally frustrated Liberal/Social Democratic Party Alliance.

For its part, a troubled Labour Party parliamentary establishment found itself more than it might wish to be, four decades on from 1945, preoccupied with the politically embarrassing antics of its militant left adherents both nationally and in local council politics. Meanwhile, a new generation of mainstream socialist political theorists, motivated as much by Labour's less than satisfactory
electoral results as by any purely philosophical impulse, appeared to have edged towards a modification of the more straightforwardly egalitarian agenda of an older Croslandite generation.41 In the Conservative Party itself, the long dominant Tory or "wet" element had been dramatically undercut by Mrs. Thatcher's election-winning appeal as the political rhetorician of a combatively market-oriented strategy of economic freedom and privatization which had succeeded in carrying the political centre of gravity decisively to the right.

These developments amounted to nothing less than a sea change in the prevailing assumptions of British public life in the opposite direction from that effected in 1945; and like the earlier one, this latest sea change had come to inform the theoretical presuppositions of a newer generation of political intellectuals. While the immediate postwar period was one of ideological division and the broad ascendancy of the political and doctrinal left, four decades on from then, and following a long middle interlude of generally consensual political and intellectual assumptions, ideological division had become once again a notable feature of British public debate. The chief difference was that it was a now a doctrinally fashionable and more self-confident political right which presented itself as the champion of radical doctrines in the ascendancy.

If prevailing fashion in the popular public doctrines of the period stretching chronologically from Attlee to Thatcher had come figuratively full circle, from ideology to consensus and back again to ideology, in philosophical theory the period was also one given to recurrences of intellectual fashion. But

41. To judge at least from the emphasis of the very title of such widely-noticed recent restatements of socialist principles as Roy Hattersley's Choose Freedom, The Future for Democratic Socialism, London, 1987. Large remnants of the older argument remain, of course: Hattersley's case is that we ought to choose equality as a means to enhance liberty. But one notes in this formulation an unmistakeably instrumental attitude towards equality which is foreign to the immediate postwar generation of socialist writers.
the periodicity of the movements of fashion was, as one might expect, somewhat different in the two cases.

Thus, in the early postwar years, developments in popular doctrinal fashion appear in important respects to have been unfavourable to the continued appeal of classical liberal and conservative ideas in Great Britain. A wide general agreement on the efficacy of state interventionism reflected in prevailing ideological trends might be expected to have been accompanied in the theoretical realm by a keen preoccupation of the major philosophers of the day with the provision of a fully explicit and formalised political theory of social justice, welfare and needs. Yet one searches in vain for enduring works of theoretical insight on such themes produced by political philosophers at the time. Instead, the most significant publications of these years were theoretical works on decidedly non-socialist and non-interventionist themes written by political philosophers whose stature has since been amply confirmed, such as Friedrich Hayek, Karl Popper, Michael Oakeshott and Bertrand de Jouvenel. Each in his own way a critic of the new leviathan state, the first two of these four figures especially were to reach even at the time a wide and highly respectful audience. And of course, Sir Isaiah Berlin’s celebrated "Two Concepts of Liberty", delivered as his Inaugural Lecture as Chichelle Professor of Social and Political Theory at Oxford in 1958, was in its own idiom received at the time as a further contribution to this antistatist literature, inasmuch as, drawing a subsequently well-known distinction between the so-called ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ conceptions of liberty, Berlin had emphatically declared his own unswerving adherence to the ‘negative’, and so he asserted, essentially British conception of liberty. In instances such as these, the periodicity of fashion in philosophical trends seems to have been in a sense in the opposite direction from that
observable in the movement from left to centre to right of the more popular sorts of political and social doctrines.

It is a generally received commonplace, as already suggested, that the 1945 general election represented a virtual sea change in the political life of Great Britain. On the left, the significance of 1945 has come to assume near mythic proportions. In part this is as a consequence of the utter route of the Tories---and this is illustrated in the recent characterisations of the election of that year by a political historian broadly sympathetic to Labour as "one of the rare seismic landslides of British electoral history". In part, it is because 1945 represented, if not quite a final arrival at the New Jerusalem, the advent of the Labour-instigated welfare state. "No socialist who saw will forget the blissful dawn if July 1945", as Michael Foot, a future, and hapless, Labour Party Leader, was later to reminisce, in his affectionate biography of that near mythological giant of the Labour left, Aneurin Bevan.

In fact, polemical posturing and read differences of doctrinal outlook notwithstanding, there was a considerable degree of dovetailing in the manifestoes, resolutions, policy memoranda and speakers' notes of the three main political parties contesting the 1945 election, not only in foreign policy but in the main fields of domestic policy as well. Already in early 1943, having read the Beveridge Report in detail, Churchill had minuted to the War Cabinet: "This approach to social security, bringing the magic of averages nearer to the rescue of the millions, constitutes an essential part of any post-war scheme of national

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betterment."43 And in his 1945 Declaration of Policy to the Electors, Churchill had emphasized that the aim of his Government, on return to office, would be to carry forward into the peacetime statute books the Four Year Plan for British postwar reconstruction devised under the auspices of the great all-party coalition over which he had presided in the war years. And that plan envisaged a large national policy aimed at maintaining a high and stable level of unemployment, an aggressive public housing policy, a scheme of universal social insurance, a national health plan, improved educational services, a well-balanced agriculture and more efficient industry.

To be sure, in Churchill's depiction, the Four Year Plan had a decided cast toward theoretic individualism. He was insistent, in setting it forward, that now was the time for "freeing energies, not stifling them". Britain's greatness had been built on "character and doing, not on docility to a State machine."44 And yet, on close inspection, the Conservative Four Year Plan could be seen to be based, no less so than were Labour's policy panaceas, on an unstated premise that in an era of postwar social reconstruction on a monumental scale, this cherished enterprise of individuals must be somehow squared with an underlying acknowledgement of the necessity of a controlling direction provided by the state. In an editorial of the same date as the publication of Churchill's Four Year Plan, The Times noted that "The outstanding value of the declaration...is that it shows more clearly than ever how broad is the ground that all parties have in common." And in introducing his coalition's Four Year Plan in the Commons in 1943, Churchill had allowed that there was indisputably "a

broadening field for State ownership and enterprise, especially in relation to monopolies of all kinds."

All three parties, then, were committed in principle to extend the unfinished work of the wartime coalition Government White Papers on social services and economic management, and so, each alike was strategically interventionist of necessity. If there were real differences, they centred not the ends of postwar domestic policy, especially as regards social programmes, but on means, especially in respect of economic policy—and this was readily apparent from a perusal of Labour's ambitious ‘nationalisation' plans, under which big industry such as coal and steel would be brought into public ownership. It was in this need in the immediate postwar years for a coordinated, government-led effort of national reconstruction, for which the ground had been prepared by the war-induced, all-party cooperation of 1940-45, that the seed was sown for the so-called Buskellite managerial political thinking of the 1950s through the 1970s. In the historical rather than the mythical sense, what is interesting is to note the extent to which 1945 was a reaffirmation if Liberal England rather than a victory for anything approaching a truly ‘socialist' welfare state. And so it was that in the course of the 1945 general election, Winston Churchill was a Tory who professed to be a Liberal—"I am as much a Liberal as I am a Tory", he told the voters of Oldham, "I do not understand why Liberal pretend they are different from us. We fight and stand for freedom and we have succeeded in bringing forward a programme that any Liberal Government led by Mr. Lloyd George or Mr. Asquith would have been proud to carry through in Parliament." For his part, Sir William Beveridge (though not his party's Leader, its most celebrated ornament) was a Liberal who had for long flirted with ‘socialism'. While

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45. ‘Mr. Churchill in the North. Enormous Crowds...Prime Minister's Points', The Times, June 27, 1945.
Clement Attlee was a `socialist' Labour Party leader whose political instincts were barely distinguishable from the reformist Radicalism so close to the historical soul of the Liberal Party.

On VE Day, May 8, 1945, Winston Churchill had been mobbed when he spoke to a large crowd from a balcony in Whitehall, already as he spoke with his inimitable oratorical flair, in the eighth decade of a crowded life. And throughout the election at hand, Britons poured into the streets in their thousands to catch a glimpse of the great war leader as he passed in an open car, bow-tied, waving his hat, while they broke into spontaneous choruses of `Land of Hope and Glory' and `For He's a Jolly Good Fellow'. But there was, as eyewitness accounts suggest, something strangely unpolitical in these demonstrations. About to be decisively rejected at the polls, the great man had become a national institution. Larger than life, this liberal, patriotic, aristocratic Victorian warrior seemed somehow to epitomise all that was characteristic and commendable in what he called the English race. "Ladies of the Empire, I stand for Liberty", Churchill had asserted, embarking on his first public speech while he was still a cadet at Sandhurst. But the "Ladies" were not respectable matrons of the Imperial League. They were prostitutes. And the "Empire" was not the British Empire but the Empire Theatre, Leicester Square, London. Young Winston had gone there to speak out against what he called "prudes on the prowl", who, incensed by the activities of the "Ladies" in the Empire lobby, had demanded that the theatre be shut down. Here then was no exercise in grand ideas of the continental sort, but with a job at hand to be done. And notwithstanding this improbable setting for the launch of what was to prove an historic career in statesmanship, this opening salvo, with its linking of "Empire" and "Liberty", might well serve as an epitaph to the twin cornerstones of Winston Churchill's lifelong political philosophy, and to his characteristic virtues in
respect of the mythic symbols of British civilisation. How very English that in his *Memoirs* he should confess that, as a schoolboy, his Masters had found him "backward and precocious", but that as a consequence of remaining so long in the lowest Form, he had in fact gained an immense advantage over the cleverer boys. "They all went on to learn Latin and Greek and splendid things like that", he wrote. "But I was taught English...I got into my bones the essential structure of the ordinary British sentence." His passing from the scene in 1965, at the end of British Empire, was an occasion of national pomp and ceremony, something more than a mere historical event. The `Great Commoner' was by then a near mythic figure, assured, through his inspirational wartime leadership, of a prominent place in the pantheon of great heroes of an historic state, an island race.

In this sense, the significance of the phenomenon of `Thatcherism' in more recent times is that it has called Britons back to an important self-recognition in historical and symbolic terms eclipsed in the politics of decline of the postwar years. How might Mrs. Thatcher look in the retrospect of history? It is too early of course to tell. Not, it is clear, a figure of affection, the grocer's daughter from Grantham, who is said to be incapable of seeing an institution without swinging her handbag at it, certainly has claims to be one of the great British political leaders of the century. If Churchill was an essentially Victorian figure in formation, nowadays too we hear a good deal about `Victorian values', though these are now more methodist and `dry' than Anglican establishment and `wet' in point of reverence. Yet in each instance the appeal has been to recall England

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46. But "Empire" must be understood as a beneficent institutional arrangement for extending the civilising advantages of the rule of law to peoples otherwise enslaved, and "Liberty" as an individual right to follow ones' own star without interference from the state. For the central place of liberty in Churchill's thought, see Martin Gilbert, *Churchill's Political Philosophy*, London, 1981. See too Harry V. Jaffa (ed), *Statesmanship: Essays in Honour of Sir Winston Spencer Churchill*, Durham, N.C., 1981.
to her glory, to breath new life into the symbols and myths of the ancient constitution. "The counter-revolution of collectivist expectations of the Thatcher years", writes Peter Jenkins in a recent assessment, "may have excited other, individualistic expectations, for more liberty and greater equality. For, as even the Labour Party has begun to realise, these values are not exclusive to socialism and do not have to be cast in a socialist mode." If Churchill's walk with destiny was born of threats to liberty centred on the crisis of war, Thatcher's claims to greatness (setting the Falklands aside here) relate more to her decisive qualities of leadership born of civic crisis and the erosion of public authority. *U Turn if you want to. The lady's not for turning.* Of course, now, as in 1945, one must distinguish the rhetoric from the reality, and for all the shifting of the economic agenda in the direction of 'privatisation', there has in fact, in the realm of social programmes, been very considerable continuity throughout the Thatcher years in the institutional safety net of the welfare state.

In 1944, Friedrich Hayek had sounded a polemical warning in his *The Road to Serfdom* that in the era of postwar social reconstruction that grew daily closer to hand, Britons must resist the alluring tyranny of "planning". Doubtless wartime planning and coordination *had* made impressive contributions to what, from the vantage point of 1944, seemed must be the ultimate victory of the cause of freedom. But the fact remained, as Hayek reminded his readers, that wartime planning had entailed the suspension of the rule of law and the substitution in its place of an emergency regime of arbitrary governance under which Britons had foregone the exercise of cherished rights and freedoms. It was his view that planning in peacetime conditions, however well-intentioned, must necessarily require a similar tampering with the rule of law.

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Hayek's polemical wartime broadside was rebutted in the following year by Herman Finer, who was to describe *The Road to Serfdom*, in his own *Road to Reaction*, as "the most sinister offensive against democracy to emerge from a democratic country for many decades". Describing himself as a socialist "in the British sense, where democracy is first and socialism second", Finer argued the case for the responsibility of any future British government to fulfill the wartime coalition's promises to grapple in the coming peace with the abuses of the prewar system of private enterprise, a responsibility which it would be impossible to honour without heavy reliance on planning. Finer spoke feelingly of "two kinds" of freedom, only the first of which, he averred, Hayek apparently grasped:

"One is merely the absence of obstruction; it is essential; but it may be consistent with merepassivity. The second kind of freedom is strength or power, the ability to take action, or self-expression. It may be noted that there is in this second kind of freedom nothing which anyone would wish to restrict; on the contrary it is to the advantage of everyone to increase and use it...Freedom in this dynamic sense cannot come to men...unless they collectively manage a large proportion of the social resources and economic equipment."48

In 1945, the British people, a product of civilisation and discipline, had proved anew the mettle of their social discipline when the chips were down. And in return for their sacrifice, there was, in the immediate aftermath of war, a generalised expectation that, topping the postwar political agenda, there must be a concerted effort of massive social reconstruction. This, it was widely assumed, would require scientific state planning. It was also widely assumed that amongst its chief aims ought to be to ensure that individual Britons would be enabled hereafter more fully to realise that second sort of "dynamic" freedom, of which Herman Finer, in a spirit shared by many, had spoken in his rebuttal of Friedrich Hayek. Nothing essential has changed in the leading political debate of the

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1980s, except that latterly it has been the Hayekian sort of liberty, `privatisation' rather than `planning' which has been more in vogue.

In a London speech delivered in 1895, a date near enough to the zenith of the Liberal Party's electoral fortunes in Great Britain, the future King Edward VII had jocularly declared, with intent to shock entertainingly, that "Nowadays we are all socialists". By the summer of 1945, his remark, considered as a social scientific conjecture, could be said to have assumed a certain rough plausibility---if by "socialism" one meant not a relentless, Marxian determination to achieve a systemic structural alteration in the nature of the state to produce a common ownership of the means of production, but instead, a broad undertaking to build up a functional public system for redistributing benefits and services such that, through government intervention to reduce the socio-economic extremes, the less better-off might come to enjoy benefits and improved life chances hitherto denied them. Yet looked at in this manner, and from the further distance in time of 1990, the Duke of Wales' Edwardian assertion might as fittingly have been rendered in 1945 as "Nowadays we are are liberals", if by "liberal" is understood the Keynesian, interventionist and social reformist strain of liberalism then in the ascendancy, rather than that variety of more astringently market-oriented, classical liberalism, seemingly eclipsed at war's end, which has found renewed appeal in recent years.49

49. See Robert Eccleshall, *British Liberalism: Liberal Thought From the 1640s to 1980s*, London, 1986, for a recent selection of extracts from liberal thinkers. The compiler's conclusion to his lengthy "Introduction", pp. 1-66, is that "The collapse of the Liberal Party does not necessarily signify the decline of liberalism as a flow of values and principles embraced by people who wish to give substance to the claim that citizens have an equal right to freedom. It does mean, however, that the survival of liberalism in this broad sense largely depends upon the activities of individuals who are often anxious to proclaim their distance from the liberal camp." To this, however, he adds the arguable proposition that "To a greater extent than they concede, the task of creating a more liberal society now lies with those people who strive to lay the foundations of a socialist future within the existing framework of capitalism." (62). For a recent scholarly effort at disentangling the complex and interwoven strands of "left-liberal" and "centrist" liberal thought in the interwar years which is highly relevant to this vexed question of the connection between
In that special political springtime of 1945, there seemed to be abroad a novel sense of freedom as a "frisky thing which romps and capers in the spirit of April"---as, in rather different circumstances, it appeared so with the election victory of Mrs. Thatcher in 1979. But looked at in a broadly Hegelian retrospect, much that was old and persistent accompanied an apparent disposition, in the doctrinal fashion of the time, to entertain novel, even springlike developments. In this respect, the foreign observer's perspective, as we have seen with Tocqueville, is on occasion an indispensable supplement to that of the locals. The sociologist and eventual Director of The London School of Economics, Ralf Dahrendorf, for instance, arrived in England from Germany, in January, 1948, to discover a country with which, as he records, he had "fallen in love even before I first saw it". It was coincidentally the year in which Britain's National Health Service came into being; the War was still then very much on most English people's minds, especially when they met a German, and Dahrendorf was required to spend six weeks at Wilton Park being "re-educated". Some years on, his love apparently undiminished and his early impressions amply confirmed by liberalism and socialism in Great Britain, see Michael Freeden's *Liberalism Divided: A Study of British Political Thought, 1914-1939*, Oxford, 1986, a follow-up study to his earlier *The New Liberalism: An Ideology of Social Reform*, Oxford, 1978, and more generally, Peter Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats*, Cambridge, 1978. In party political terms, if the appearance in recent years of the Social Democratic Party/Liberal Alliance as rivals to the Labour and Conservative parties has added fresh impetus to the discussion of the similarities and dissimilarities between liberals and socialists, the ascendancy of Mrs. Thatcher's political star in the same period has brought fresh interest to the connections between liberalism and conservatism. In this respect, it is interesting to note Lord Beaverbrook's complaint about the internal tension in the Conservative Party in 1945 involving what one supposes would nowadays be called Thatcherites and "wets". "The battle within the party", Beaverbrook wrote in an electoral post-mortem letter sent to E.J. Flynn on October 11, 1945, "is fought between the Tory individualists who follow, ironically enough, the creed of nineteenth-century Liberalism and the Tory Reformers who raise the banner, or rather wave the pocket handkerchief, of Disraeli's Young England." The ideas of the latter, he added, "may be described as Socialism without Socialists. But they may also prove to be Toryism without Tories...I prefer the old Pretenders to the new. But that does not mean I believe the old guard of Tory Janissaries massed round the glorious but tattered banner of Free Enterprise are more likely to win a victory within the party or with the electorate. The suspicion clings to that splendid body that it is more concerned with freedom than with enterprise." Cited in A.J.P. Taylor (op. cit.), p. 569.
experience, Dahrendorf was to write that "For the participant observer of the British scene, few things are more bewildering than the extent to which the public debate is preoccupied with yesterday's world."50

In the depths of another, wartime winter setting, only half a dozen years before Ralf Dahrendorf's first arrival in England, another prominent adoptive Englishman, the American-born T.S. Eliot, was famously to take poetic note of this immutable presence of the past in a Britain he too loved:

"We die with the dying;
See, they depart, and we go with them.
We are born with the dead:
See, they return and bring us with them.
The moment of the rose and the moment of the yew tree
Are of equal duration. A people without history
Is not redeemed from time, for history is a pattern
Of timeless moments. So, while the light fails
On a winter's afternoon, in a secluded chapel
History is now and England.51

It is this constancy in the texture of British life of a sense of yesterday's world, and of the presence in it of the experience of history as "a pattern of timeless moments"---a phenomenon corroborated in the very different perspectives of a German sociologist and an American poet---which informs the traditional understanding of freedom amongst Englishmen. It was this understanding to which Herbert Butterfield alluded, only yesterday, when he said:

"One of the paradoxes of history has been the way in which the name of England has come to be so closely associated with liberty on the one hand and tradition on the other hand. It seems that freedom amongst Englishmen is not a frisky thing which romps and capers in the spirit of April. Rather it sits into the landscape and broods there like the trees of autumn, streaked with

red dyes, and mellow with the stain of setting suns. If in some countries liberty is valued as a recent acquisition---treasured as the reward of a battle which was won only yesterday---the British seem to hold it rather as an ancient possession, itself a legacy from the past, almost even the product of tradition. The word liberty is packed with meanings and implications for us---it comes with all kinds of subtle overtones---precisely because it is so ancient a thing and has gathered into itself so much history."\(^{52}\)