From Liberty Debate to Justice Discourse:
British Political Thought in Cosmopolitan Times

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1.

I propose, in what follows, to resume a discussion first broached in a seminar paper I presented earlier this year at the Institute of Historical Research, University of London, under the title `The Persistence of Liberal England: Political Ideas in Great Britain Since World War Two'. At the time, offering a title for my remarks to my host and seminar convenor, Professor Frederick Rosen, I had felt it necessary to register my concern that the topic I had chosen, and the title with which I had attempted to convey some comprehensive sense of its character, might appear, from anything like an exacting disciplinary standard, too wide-ranging, too contemporary, too speculative and philosophical, to be appropriate to a scholarly venue habituated, after all, to the exploration of the bona fides of general historiography on the one hand, and to the careful sifting of the minutiae of close historical research on the other. And similarly, this afternoon embarking on an investigation linked to my earlier paper, but now before a seminar self-selected from those whose intellectual interests centre primarily on issues of political philosophy rather than the history of political thought, it seems as apposite that I confess to my current host, Mr. John Charvet, a certain converse concern in a like matter of academic truth in advertising. It is that, in resuming the consideration of themes derived from my earlier paper, if now approached from the modified angle of vision intended to be conveyed by the title proposed for my remarks today---`From Liberty Debate to Justice Discourse: British Political Thought in Cosmopolitan Times'---I not find myself judged guilty of having aroused expectations of a philosophical paper of the type
usually performed before this forum, only to be seen in retrospect to have provided instead a narrative contrivance of contemporary political history without any readily apparent point of philosophical departure and return. Tactical notice is hereby given, then, of such an eventuality having been foreseen in advance. This is of course a patently self-serving gesture. In making it, I am reminded of the report of a nervous Mark Twain awaiting with anticipatory foreboding the verdict on his imminent performance of one of those inimitable Boston audiences of the unhelpfully disapproving sort.

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In the popular public doctrines of the period stretching chronologically from Attlee to Thatcher, prevailing fashion might in retrospect be said to have come figuratively full circle, from ideology to consensus and back again to ideology. In philosophical theory, the period was also given to recurrences of intellectual fashion. But 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. In instances such as this, 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.

In the immediate postwar period, political philosophy was conducted in an intellectual environment in which the general proposition that political ideas were an extension of the field of combat, unavoidably entailing, in a phrase later to gain wide philosophical currency, "essentially contested concepts", set the tone of the day. This was so in respect of topical disagreements centring on the respective claims of the welfare state and of liberty; and it was even more the case in a somewhat more encompassing sense reflective of the still precarious status of the international order at war's end.

Germany and German philosophy, for instance, were for entirely understandable reasons not popular in Britain in the years following the 1939-45 war. Post-mortem examinations of pernicious intellectual influences favouring the rise of European totalitarianism were common. And in them, a vulgarised rendering of Hegel's reasoned admiration for the Prussian state could be counted on to emerge as the most obvious bete noire. But Marx too, with the Cold War at hand, was to bear the brunt of much wholesale condemnation in the writings of leading liberal political theorists of the day. Was not the scientific or "vulgar" Marx of the Manifesto of the Communist Party (the Paris Manuscripts and the Grundrisse were unknown in the English-speaking world until the early 1960s)

1. See W.B. Gallie (op. cit.), Chapter 8, "Essentially Contested Concepts".
theoretical inspiration, by way of Lenin, of Stalinist Russia? In the writings of Hayek and Popper in these postwar years, Marx was an intellectual figure liable to be viewed as as much a lammergeyer as a hedgehog, in Isaiah Berlin's celebrated typology.² Both middle-European emigres to Great Britain deeply marked by the unspeakable barbarism of all-out war, they inclined alike to view the Soviet Union as a regime intellectually driven by what was tantamount to a cynical Marxist variant of an ultimately unified fascist theme.

Implicit, if not intentionally so, in this overtly polemical style of argumentation, was the assumption that one must take sides in defence of freedom---that disinterested political philosophy in an age of totalitarianism was in principle an impossibility. Coincidentally, by the early 1950s, a full frontal attack on what might be termed formal foundations was underway. This line of approach was centred on Oxford University where, under the intellectual authority of Gilbert Ryle and John Austin, analytical philosophy held sway. And it was there that the most exaggerated claims for the application of this style of analytical theorising to political philosophy were shortly to be set out, with a vengeance, in T.D. Weldon's *The Vocabulary of Politics* (1953).

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Weldon, hitherto a rather austere Kantian now become an enthusiastic convert to a new philosophical cause, had written a slim book with a bold thesis. Even at the time, the influence of his views among professional political philosophers was nugatory.⁵ As Bernard Crick, who certainly resisted the political implications of Weldonism, was to protest:

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Freedom was Cicero and Pericles,
Not T.D. Weldon on his knees,
Picking hairs off Oxford fleas.\textsuperscript{4}

In retrospect, one is tempted to conclude that the slimness and boldness of Weldon's book (combined with the fact it had been published as a Penguin paperback) played no small part in its more considerable general impact. At any rate, its unedifying argument was that the entire tradition of speculative philosophy suffered from an incorrigible methodological naivety. Weldon's aim was nothing less than a demonstration that the big questions put by the classical political philosophers were strictly unanswerable, that the theoretical foundations of democracy, Hegelian idealism and Marxism were all equally worthless, and that the proper if less grand task of philosophy was to expose and elucidate linguistic muddles.

In a gesture which inadvertently contributed to heighten the impact of "Weldonism", Peter Laslett, introducing in 1956 the first series of the Philosophy, Politics and Society papers which were thereafter to become a periodic feature on the calendar of academic political philosophy in Great Britain, was led to declare that "for the moment, anyway, political philosophy is dead...the winter has set in for the political philosopher".\textsuperscript{5} This same collection carried a paper by Weldon, setting out the argument, derived from Wittgenstein, that the proper function of moral and political philosophy is one more therapeutic than recommendatory. "We are plain, honest men", according to Weldon's rather sanguine description of the vocation of political philosophers, "who tidy up muddles and have no axes to grind."\textsuperscript{6}

\textsuperscript{4} Bernard Crick (op. cit.), p. 62.
\textsuperscript{5} Peter Laslett (ed.), Philosophy, Politics and Society, First Series, Oxford, 1956, pp. vii, ix.
Peter Laslett's report of the death of political philosophy was to prove premature; and at the outset of the second series half a dozen years later, he acknowledged that it was perhaps unfortunate that his earlier utterance had become "the text most cited for the volume as a whole". But it was not until the fourth series of these periodic essays that he was to issue a more specific mea culpa, noting that "it is arguable that we were never right to think in terms of such pathological metaphors." As one merciless commentator was subsequently to write:

"The device of dramatizing an issue or institution by announcing its death...has proved a felicitous device for gaining attention...In 1956, political philosophy was authoritatively declared extinct by a Cambridge don...Nothing better illustrates the instability of worldly things, than the confession...that the same authority had detected a slow pulse rate and a few heartbeats. The corpse was declared to be living once more: indeed, his very life was attributed to the very volume in which his death had been announced."

In fact, political philosophy had all along enjoyed a robust good health; and this state of affairs was to continue throughout even the alleged "end of ideology" and "exhaustion of political ideas" decade of the 1950s. At decade's outset, Michael Oakeshott's Inaugural Lecture as Professor of Political Science at The London School of Economics had invited the attention of an uninitiated general audience to the presence of an original philosophical voice in its midst, a voice at once deeply conservative and devoted to the values of liberal civilisation.

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10. The reference here is to the title and subtitle of Daniel Bell's influential *The End of Ideology*, N.Y., 1962.
Oakeshott's stylish work had already by then earned the admiration of a somewhat more restricted audience of academic philosophers in Great Britain; and it would shortly receive much greater attention as his writings became better known in Britain and abroad during the 1950s and 1960s and beyond.

Quite aside from the considerable presence of Oakeshott, this period of alleged "Weldonism" in British political thought also witnessed the appearance of Friedrich Hayek's *The Constitution of Liberty* (1960) and Herbert Hart's *The Concept of Law* (1961), alike works of classic stature destined in their separate ways to exercise a profound influence on the direction of future developments in their respective fields of political theory and jurisprudence.12 And in a somewhat more particular perspective on the course of political theorising in these years, one recollects the vigorous and protracted philosophical dispute over "the enforcement of morals" arising out of the 1957 Wolfenden Report and the liberalising legislative initiatives of the period. Here was a topic in which there was a clear convergence of moral and philosophical questions of immediate relevance and mutual interest to private citizens, political philosophers and students of jurisprudence. As is so often the case in Great Britain, there was about the ensuing dispute something irreducibly historical in character. When it thus found eventual focus in a vigorous argumentative encounter set in train by Patrick Devlin's 1959 Maccabaean Lecture in Jurisprudence on "The Enforcement of Morals", and pitting Devlin against H.L.A. Hart, the exchange bore an uncanny resemblance to a dispute involving a vigorous polemic in the nineteenth century, levelled by the jurist and political writer Sir James Fitzjames Stephen at

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12. Anthony Quinton (ed.), *Political Philosophy*, London, 1967, "Introduction", p. 2, was humorously to describe Hayek's book as a "magnificent dinosaur...seemingly impervious to the effects of natural selection". Quinton's point was that The Constitution of Liberty contradicted the claim of prognosticators that books in the grand tradition of political theorising were a dying breed.
John Stuart Mill's advocacy of the "self-regarding" principle in his essay *On Liberty*.¹³

By decade's end, a more fully self-identified liberal voice, that of Isaiah Berlin, was to use the occasion of his own Inaugural Lecture as Chichelle Professor of Social and Political Theory at Oxford to formalise the terms of what was already a vigorous debate over the contending claims in contemporary political discourse of distinct and ultimately opposed schools of liberty. These schools were reducible, on Berlin's suggestion, to two; and these came subsequently to be widely appreciated in terms of his now well-known distinction between the so-called "negative" and "positive" conceptions of liberty. In setting out their characteristic attributes, Berlin emphatically declared his own unswerving adherence to the "negative" conception of liberty. But this was to prove to be an argumentative strategy not without difficulty for British friends of liberty in Berlin's own preferred sense, who nonetheless continued to entertain well-reasoned reservations about any such dichotomising terminology.

Berlin had hardly been the first postwar political theorist to point out that there are contending schools of liberty. The contrasting 'Lockean' and 'Rousseauian' approaches to liberty had long since become an established staple of undergraduate political theory tutorials. And Friedrich Hayek's polemical wartime broadside, *The Road to Serfdom* (1944), for instance, had been rebutted in the following year by Herman Finer's own *Road to Reaction*, and in it, describing himself as a socialist "in the British sense, where democracy is first and socialism second", Finer had 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. In advancing his case, Finer had spoken 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 mere passivity. 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."14

Writing from a somewhat different perspective, five years before Berlin delivered his 'Two Concepts of Liberty' lecture, Maurice Cranston, in his widely-noticed Freedom: A New Analysis (1953), asserting that 'freedom' for an English liberal means 'freedom from the constraints of the state', was moved to observe that "To say that English liberalism is, to this extent, negative, is not to say that it has no positive side."15  The Franco-Swiss writer, Benjamin Constant, writing in 1819 in his De la liberte des anciens comparee a celle des modernes, had used the terms la liberte ancienne for the concept of freedom as participation which Rousseau had revived from antiquity, and la liberte moderne, for the concept of freedom as rights and immunities as expounded by Locke, in setting out his own taxonomy of liberty. But it had been left to Sir Isaiah Berlin to transliterate, as it were, Constant's la liberte moderne into his 'negative liberty', and la liberty ancienne into 'positive liberty'. And whereas Constant had concluded that certain elements of ancient liberty might beneficially be incorporated into la liberte moderne, Berlin was to prove himself, paradoxically for a liberal, a champion of 'negative liberty'

14. Herman Finer, Road to Reaction, Chicago, 1945, pp. v, 21, 221.
And subsequently, Berlin's use of the notion of 'negative liberty' was to have the unintended rhetorical consequence of serving as a sort of propaganda weapon against Berlin's own liberal philosophy, a phenomenon instanced in Charles Taylor's influential "What's Wrong with Negative Liberty", where adherents of Berlin's position are said to suffer from a "Maginot line" mentality and "fear of the Totalitarian Menace". Negative liberty, as anyone who has had the experience of expounding Berlin's thesis before an audience of novices can attest, does not sound so good as positive liberty. And arguably, philosophers who used the term negative liberty before Berlin adopted it were thinkers in important respects hostile to the English idea of liberty as freedom from the constraints of the state.

And when all is said and done, this last point remains of the greatest importance in any attempt at a fair retrospective contextualisation of the powerful advocacy of Berlin's 'Two Concepts' lecture. For, like Popper and Hayek, Berlin is a 'British' intellectual of primarily European cultural formation who has been indelibly marked by the civilisation-threatening upheavals of a tumultuous century of war. In his contribution to a special 'Mid-century Issue' of the American quarterly, Foreign Affairs, "Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century", the liberal philosopher and scholar of pre-revolutionary Russian letters chose to preface his remarks with a pithy quote from Leon Trotsky: "Anyone desiring a quiet life", it ran, "has done badly to be born in the twentieth century."16 There is irony enough in the juxtaposition of the Old Testament proper name 'Isaiah' and the word 'Berlin' in an essay whose subject matter is political ideas in the first half of the twentieth century. And the irony is only reinforced when both are combined with the word 'Trotsky'. The names

epitomise with a chilling economy of expression the dominant motifs of political extremism, and the very geopolitical centure of their eventual gruesome apotheosis in our time. Anyone sensitive to words, on perusing Berlin's essay at mid-century, must be struck by the poignancy that Isaiah stands for prophetic nationalism, Trotsky for revolutionary internationalism and Berlin itself for the fiery crucible in which the two millenarian vision were met and melded in the course of the Second World War.

Writing in 1950, with half of a turbulent century then behind, searching in its rubble for clues to the shape of the half yet to come, Isaiah Berlin had discerned, in a matter evocative of Orwell, the contours of a deeply disturbing intellectual phenomenon. For what he saw in the spent half century was the appeal of irrational forces against which the traditional defenses of reason, left or right, were no match. It had been the sad accomplishment of our time to have abetted the corruption of political language in such a manner as to obliterate questions and remove the problems which gave rise to them, so that there was no need for solutions since there were no longer problems. Both could be made to vanish from the questioner's conscience, vaporized like evil dreams that would trouble him no more. Politics, Berlin warned, were in danger of total eclipse. What loomed ahead as a poisonous legacy in the second half century from the first was a drab and menacing despotism penetrating men's minds and their souls. What were once regarded as political problems amenable to solution through reasoned acts of concerted common sense were now increasingly perceived as "dislocations which the expert can set right"; and if the danger signs were not heeded now, human needs would come to be thought of entirely in therapeutic terms, as if we were all "inmates of a prison or a reformatory or a
school or a hospital."17 It is in this frame of reference, then that the argumentative discourse of Berlin's 'Two Concepts of Liberty' needs to be set, such that his central conceptual notions of 'negative' and 'positive' liberty, for all their problematical implications, parallel, as it were, as dichotomising rhetorical images, Popper's 'open society' and its enemy, 'tribalism'.

4.

At any rate, the liberty debate centred on Berlin's seminal lecture was to be the subject of further contextualisation and development in the course of the newly-born decade of the 1960s. In Great Britain, the "swinging sixties" is remembered above all as the era of the New Elizabethans, of social experimentation and material promise, of the Beatles, Carnaby Street and mini-skirted "birds" in the King's Road; but across the Atlantic, it was a time of political upheaval and military tragedy. It was during the ferment of the 1960s that the New Left first made its appearance on both sides of the Atlantic; and young intellectuals in Britain, as in America, found themselves romantically drawn to the newly available early philosophical manuscripts of Marx, and to the task of resurrecting him as a more sociological and sympathetically Hegelian figure.

Mainstream liberal philosophical discourse persisted, of course, throughout these years. Indeed, a less hostile and generally more well-rounded depiction of Marx than that typically encountered in liberals of the classical variety whose influence had been pronounced in the 1940s and 1950s, had become by then the common currency of liberal intellectual exchange. This trend was instanced in, and perhaps encouraged by, Berlin's own and in many respects sympathetic biography of Marx. The same might be said by this time of the

17. Ibid, p. 35.
liberal appreciation of Hegel, who, stripped of much metaphysical baggage, now emerged as something closer to a champion of the constitutional liberal state than as a precursor of totalitarianism. That said, the mainstream liberal view of both Hegel and Marx, even if now expressed in a more measured rhetoric, remained still in essentials, as for example in the close analytical work of Berlin's eventual successor in the Chichelle, the donnish John Plamenatz, proponderantly critical.

Shortly, younger voices in Oxford philosophical debate, such as those of Charles Taylor, who would in time succeed Plamenatz, J.H. Cohen, who would follow on in the Chichelle Professorship in turn from Taylor, and Steven Lukes, were to be found directing their intellectual energies to the propagation of a philosophical outlook analytical in primary formation, but much more fully indebted to a sympathetic reading of Hegelian metaphysics and Marxian social thought. And this dissenting voice spoke of substituting for the vagaries of a merely "negative" or Berlinian conception of liberal liberty a more concrete expression of freedom understood as positive. The view of liberty now envisaged was one more fully socialised, more vitally participatory in action and more egalitarian in spirit: one tied, in short, to an enhanced sense of community.\(^{18}\)

In Cambridge, intellectual developments which seemed in certain respects to be corroborative of this newer Oxford political theorising were also underway in the same period. A younger coterie of Oxford political and social theorists, many of them former students of Isaiah Berlin, had sought, in adapting an analytical perspective to fresh appreciations of Hegel, Marx and continental thought more generally, to root an expressly radical political outlook in a philosophical frame of reference clearly indebted to sociological inquiry. But in

\(^{18}\) A clear sense of this is already evident in certain of the contributions to Alan Ryan (ed.), The Idea of Freedom: Essays in Honour of Isaiah Berlin, Oxford, 1979, notably Charles Taylor's piece, "What's Wrong With Negative Liberty".
Cambridge, a new generation of intellectual historians widely read in modern philosophy had set about elaborating a rigorous new historiography of political ideas.

The disenchancing upshot of the historical inquiries of Quentin Skinner, especially, was a recommendation to the effect that the time had come for political philosophers and historians of political theory to put away, as it were, their childlike wonderment in the presence of the Great Books, and to face up squarely to the more adult responsibilities which befell them in thinking of themselves properly as what he called "essentially...students of ideologies". It would be overstating the case to suggest that, in the new Skinnerian housekeeping historiography, ideological superstructures are to be construed as a straightforward outcome of their social base. But Skinner is clear that we ought nonetheless to pay less attention to the leading theorists of the past and focus instead on "the more general social and intellectual matrix out of which their works arose".

Elsewhere, he is emphatic that the business of the historian is to serve as a recording angel and not a hanging judge. But looked at from a certain remove, the direction of Skinner's own work, as that of his associate John Dunn, drawing attention as it does to a thwarted civic humanist ambition in the unfolding story of the early modern world, would appear to lend itself to deployment in the service of a vindicating variant of the theory of classical republican communitarianism and participatory citizenship. The import of the new Cambridge historiography, if this is so, may not quite be tantamount to a figurative pronouncement of the death sentence on Berlin's account of freedom.

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Suffice it to say that, in contemplating its implications, there is at the least a
dawning sense that one might save oneself the trouble of any close scrutiny of
the books of Professor Skinner's historian-as-recording angel. For we are not
likely to find evidence there of any intent to permit entry into heaven of the
paradigmatic concept of negative liberty.\textsuperscript{21}

Broadly, then, an underlying liberal political discourse, while not without
its detractors, had persisted, and, in effect, continued to underpin the agenda of
debate in Britain, throughout the period from war's end down to the early 1970s.
At the same time, prevailing topical fashions in ideas in these years could be said
to have followed an informal pattern. In it, an immediate postwar period of total
ideologies had given way to an alleged "death" of political philosophy interlude,
only to be in turn eclipsed by the resurgence of ideological politics---and of a
consequent refocussing of attention on the problem of distinguishing ideological
disputation from disinterested philosophical utterance. To put the point in other
words, an initial period dominated by the polemical advocacy of political
principles had been superceded by the rise of moral scepticism and an attack on
philosophical foundations; and this in turn had been latterly challenged by a
steady recrudescence, on the one hand, of vigorously contested political
principles, and on the other, of a renewed search for foundations.

Introducing the 1972 volume of \textit{Philosophy, Politics and Society}, the editors,
acknowledging the appearance of late of a "reanimated study of social and
political philosophy", thus went on to suggest that if there had been any one
distinguishing undercurrent since the appearance of the last volume it might best
be characterised as "a recognition of the fact that the study of ideologies, and the

\textsuperscript{21} See, for example, Quentin Skinner, "The Idea of Negative Liberty: Philosophical and
Historical Perspectives", in Richard Rorty, J.B. Schneewind and Quentin Skinner (op. cit.), pp.
problem of distinguishing ideological from genuinely philosophical or even 'scientific' social analysis, has become central to social and political science".22 The irony was presumably not lost on readers who recollected that the introduction to the first volume in 1956 had been written at a time when it seemed that ideology might be ending.

Equally ironic, reflecting on the years which had elapsed since 1945, had been the fate which had befallen Germany and German philosophy, and the reputations of Hegel and Marx in particular. As Maurice Cranston, writing in 1975, was led to observe of the reversal of philosophical fashion by then well underway:

"It is curious how the ghost of Hegel has continued to haunt modern political philosophy, even that of the English language into which his works have never been adequately translated...The history of political philosophy in the English-speaking world in the past half century has been the history of a transition from a phase where positivism was triumphant and metaphysics mocked to a time when positivism itself was discredited and demode, and with the recovery of metaphysics the great speculative theorists of the past from Plato to Hegel have begun to come back into their own."23

5.

By the early 1970s, the British Empire, on which the sun proverbially never set, and the easy self-assurance of the generation of Sir Ernest Barker regarding the hegemony of the British example in institutional practices which had gone with it, were things of the past---the precondition, as Hegel's philosophy of history had long since argued, for the owl of Minerva to spread its

23. Maurice Cranston, "Political Philosophy in Our Time", The Great Ideas Today, Encyclopedia Brittanica, Chicago, 1975, p. 103. A similar point is made by Brian Magee (ed.), Modern British Philosophy (op. cit.), p. 14, who speaks of the manner in which philosophical fashion "moves from German Idealism to German Idealism. We started at the beginning of the century with a predominantly Hegelian orthodoxy from which a couple of brilliant young men broke away---and now in the 1970s we're finding that the intelligent young have a renewed interest in precisely those rejected philosophers: Hegel, the young Marx, and then more recent German Idealists."
wings in flight, for philosophy to begin truly to understand. By then, Britannia no longer ruled the waves; instead, in the larger post-Suez world abroad, she was a historic European state still adapting to a new and unaccustomed role as a power more middling than Great. A pervasive sense of post-imperial dislocation and adjustment is captured in Philip Larkin's poem, "Homage to a Government", written at the time:

"Next year we shall be living in a country
That brought its soldiers home for lack of money.
The statues will be standing in the same
Tree-muffled squares, and look nearly the same.
Our children will not know it's a different country.
All we can hope to leave them now is money."\(^\text{24}\)

In domestic affairs, with the difficult years of postwar austerity only a distant memory, Britain was a nation nearing the end of an era of unprecedented material prosperity which had underlain and in some respects made possible the broadly consensual and interventionist "You've Never Had It So Good!" politics of the 1950s and 1960s. And beginning at around that time, as we can see clearly in retrospect, British intellectuals, regardless of their doctrinal stripe, were to find themselves more and more, like the growing trade imbalance of the British economy at large, as much apparent importers as exporters of ideas---ideas which were now American even moreso than German.

With the publication in the United States of John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* (1971), a rising generation of British political theorists was to follow the example of their American counterparts in discovering in this remarkable work new points of reference for a large-scale philosophical debate in the grand tradition. This American-inspired debate, however, was to be primarily centred, not, as had been the case with the major disputes of the immediately preceding decades

in Great Britain, on the contested characterisation of the concept of liberty, but on
the topic of justice---as the very title of Rawls' imposing and profoundly
influential book had so matter-of-factly broadcast.

In America, the Rawlsian account of justice spawned a quickly burgeoning
secondary literature, generally respectful of a work of unquestionable stature
while not unusually given to questioning certain of its specifics. It was also
shortly joined by Robert Nozick's important Anarchy, State and Utopia (1974), a
work written from a libertarian perspective and aimed at an uncompromising
refutation of the distributionist or social justice aspects of Rawls' argument.
Nozick's book, in turn, was soon joined by yet another substantial study, this one
by Michael Walzer,25 who, distancing himself from both Rawls and Nozick, was
concerned to articulate a more egalitarian or communitarian theory of social
justice than that implied in Rawls' own reformist liberal philosophical precepts
and rejected outright by Nozick.

In Great Britain, the philosophical agenda now increasingly in focus was
one which, though reminiscent in a general sort of way of the popular doctrinal
discourse occasioned by the foundation of the welfare state in the years following
World War Two, had not even then, as was earlier suggested, captured the
attention of the leading political theorists. Amongst them, the topic of social
justice had not, indeed, been given any very serious hearing since its vogue in the
early years of the century, when L.T. Hobhouse had attempted in his Liberalism
(1911) to effect a fusion of the main tenets of the political and social philosophies
of J.S. Mill and T.H. Green.

notes in his Acknowledgements, p. xvi, that, in 1970-71, he taught a course at Harvard with
Robert Nozick on "Capitalism and Socialism", adding: "half of that argument can be found in
Professor Nozick's Anarchy, State and Utopia (New York 1974); this book is the other half."
John Rawls' ambitious political theory had proposed a unique blending of contractarian and Kantian elements designed to defend the priority of what Rawls called the "liberty principle". But at the same time, his book championed a second, so-called "difference principle"---the notion that, in a just society, inequalities would be tolerated only if their effect was such as to benefit the least advantaged. In terms of its doctrinal implications, Rawls' recommendatory political theory seemed to his many admirers in the United States an unmistakeable statement of enlightened liberal principles, boldly directed at possibilities of reform never extensively countenanced in the comprehensive practices of American public policy. But from the British point of view, there were certain features of *A Theory of Justice* which had about them a distinct air of *deja vu*, in seeming to posit something very much like the ideals of an interventionist welfare state of the generally social democratic variety already in important respects not merely aspired to but actually in place, and arguably for both better and for worse, in the institutional fabric of postwar British political life in the period from roughly 1945 through the mid 1970s.

Perceiving this to be so, conservative and libertarian readers in Great Britain looking, as it were, for political messages between the philosophical lines, could be expected to be disposed to agree in thinking that Professor Rawls was, as far as they were concerned, flogging a demonstrably tired horse; while to their political left, the predictable reaction to Rawls was that the American philosopher had not flogged hard enough. Meantime, Robert Nozick's book, through its unflinching advocacy of a classical, even pristine model of the libertarian "minimalist" or nightwatchman state, a model at once more breathtaking in theoretical pretension and practical implication than anything currently in place in either Britain or America, appealed, not surprisingly, to enthusiastic readers in Great Britain likely to admire, let us say, what Mrs.
Thatcher stood for (she had become Leader of the Conservative Party in early 1975); who esteemed, warts and all, the mythology and the actual achievement of America's individualistic new world civilisation; and who habitually looked on any argument favouring an enhanced role for government with a decidedly jaundiced eye. But Nozick was denounced at the same time on both sides of the Atlantic by mainstream moderate advocates of the interventionist state who believed that his book, however clever it might be as an abstract philosophical treatise, was flawed by its lack of a sense of responsible political judgement. By decade's end, a very considerable amount of transatlantic intellectual energy was being consumed by the task of illuminating the pros and cons of the so-called Rawlsian and Nozickian models of justice as these bore on the question of the proper philosophical presuppositions of a modern liberal state.

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In the midst of a developing late twentieth century intellectual cosmopolitanism, there remained, in the discourse of political philosophers as distinct from that of doctrinal partisans throughout the English-speaking world, what had in historical origin been an identifiably British approach or point of view. And indeed, in the composition of A Theory of Justice, John Rawls had evidently seen himself, at least in part, as an American expositor of the spirit and even the letter of this time-honoured approach. Had not him aim, after all, as he acknowledged, been to develop a viable Kantian conception of justice by means of detaching the content of Kant's doctrine from its background in transcendental idealism and recasting it within the canons of what he called "a reasonable empiricism"?26

Latterly, this quintessentially British philosophical strategy had come to be widely, if not entirely accurately depicted, as constituting an "Anglo-American" perspective. Michael Sandel, for instance, one of John Rawls' leading "communitarian" critics, and himself an American philosopher of transatlantic intellectual formation, writes that "Rawls' project is to preserve Kant's moral and political teaching by replacing Germanic obscurities with a domesticated metaphysic more congenial to the Anglo-American temper". But whatever Rawls' aim, or Sandel's characterisation of it, a perusal of several British contributions to this ongoing Rawls-inspired and American-led justice debate, serves to remind us, notwithstanding the real convergence of English-language intellectual presuppositions in a cosmopolitan age, that no small significance continues to attach itself to the hyphen in "the Anglo-American temper".

Take, for instance, David Miller's Social Justice (1976). Miller acknowledges that British readers might be inclined to view the topic announced in his book's title as "nothing more than a useful ornament for rounding off party manifestos and reformer's tracts". But he aims to demonstrate that the idea of social justice has rather more substance than this. He approaches his topic from several angles. The first part of Miller's book examines the philosophical concept

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27. Michael Sandel, Liberalism and the Limits of Justice, Cambridge, 1982, pp. 13-14. Sandel speaks of "the Anglo-American tradition of moral and political thought in which Rawls' work is firmly installed". Sandel's own book, he tells us, "began life in Oxford in the late 1970s, a stimulating time for the study of political philosophy, especially so at Balliol College". He records his intellectual debt to Ronald Dworkin, Charles Taylor and Alan Montefiore, philosophers who in their separate ways had "broadened Anglo-American horizons". He might have added the name of Alisdair MacIntyre, a British philosophical migrant to America whose influence there among dissenting intellectuals, especially following publication of his After Virtue, Notre Dame, 1981, has been pronounced. On the other hand, other American political philosophers of stature, such as, say, Judith Shklar (originally a Canadian) and Richard Flathman, who has made substantial contributions to both the justice debate and the liberty debate, continue to be influenced by the more old-fashioned and mainstream British analytical tradition of broadly liberal political theorising: this is amply evidenced in Flathman's most recent book, The Philosophy and Politics of Freedom, Chicago, 1987.

of social justice and the related ideas of rights, deserts and needs. Part two, set in a history of political thought perspective, turns to a discussion of Hume, Spencer and Kropotkin, figures chosen as proponents respectively of conservative, libertarian and communistic theories of justice. The third part of the book analyses social justice from a more historical and sociological perspective, comparing the relevant social beliefs of primitive, hierarchical and market societies. Miller's intent here is to establish that it is only in market society that social justice is even possible---that we encounter conscious attempts to achieve the social distribution of benefits by reference to certain ideal standards of desert and need. He suggests that, in our own type of market society, predominantly individualist views have come gradually to be modified by what he terms an "organised" understanding of society, and this has in turn encouraged the concomitant appearance of more egalitarian and communitarian views of justice adumbrated by political intellectuals.

Now, for our purposes, an especially interesting feature of Miller's study of social justice is the author's conception of the philosophical implications of the empirical findings yielded by his book's method. Miller draws an explicit contrast between his approach and that adopted by John Rawls. While the Harvard political philosopher offers his American, and, one might add, Anglo-American readers *A Theory of Justice*, his Oxford and British counterpart is more at home exploring *theories* of social justice. Whereas Rawls' argument, that is, assumes a single conception of justice "upon which everyone's judgements of justice will eventually converge"---the world's biggest theory of justice', one is tempted impiously to interject, in the time-honoured tradition of American hyperbole---Miller stresses that the concept is made up of several conflicting principles, and that the weight assigned to these will vary markedly from one type of society to another.
Not surprisingly, then, Miller believes that the philosophical enterprise of attempting to construct a theory of justice on the basis of choices hypothetically made by individuals abstracted from society is fundamentally mistaken. As his book has argued, men hold conceptions of social justice as part of more general views of society, views acquired through "their experience in living in actual societies with definite structures and embodying particular kinds of interpersonal relationships". In Rawls' book, it thus transpires, individuals are given the attitudes and beliefs of men in modern market societies, or more specifically still, of liberal intellectuals in America's modern market society. Miller concludes his argument by noting that "Readers with a yearning for Rawlsian `moral geometry'" might find his own book disappointing.\(^{29}\)

A book which displays its British authorship in a somewhat different manner is J.R. Lucas' *On Justice* (1980). A reading of its contents tends to reinforce an impression created at the outset by the book's Greek subtitle. For Lucas is an individualistic British philosophical presence come, as it were, like the itinerant philosophers of conduct of old converging on Rome, to instruct an enthusiastically theoretical, if insufficiently worldly-wise, American audience. Barely has the book begun, when Lucas seems to dismiss Rawls' elaborate argumentation in favour of regarding justice as fairness, with a simple aside. It is to the effect that whereas the word "just" occurs most often in legal contexts and the courts of law, the word "fair" arises more usually "in games and families and other informal situations". Lucas' rendering of the Greek sense of justice as "the other chap's good", and his own, significantly more negative formulation of it, as "not doing people down", seem somehow very British—as does the emphasis throughout on reasonableness, and on a persistent affirmation of the close ties

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\(^{29}\) *Ibid*, pp. 340-4, for the quoted matter in this and the preceding paragraph.
between justice and law, on the one hand, and justice and liberty and "each person's individual point of view", on the other.\textsuperscript{30}

Still more British are the illustrative materials deployed at key junctures in the argument of Lucas' book. There is, to cite an obvious instance, a discussion of the problematic historicity of Nozick's entitlement account of justice, in which Lucas draws on the English schoolboys' old standby, William the Conqueror's victory at Hastings, by way of suggesting that there are in the bare historical facts scant grounds for any claim that the victorious Norman or his heirs might have entertained about their just ownership of the wealth of England. Elsewhere, Lucas attempts to show the unacceptableness, from a British perspective, of an aspect of John Rawls' account of justice the upshot of which would have been to deny the Duke of Marlborough the gift of Blenheim Palace from a grateful nation. And at another place in the text, we find him censuring as patently unjust the hypothetical imposition of a prohibitive tax on tea!

Even more telling, in a dexterous chapter devoted to the theme of "Rationality and the Theory of Games", is Lucas' identification of a "particularly illuminating instance of the way in which our good behaviour is conditioned on that of others"---an instance which is set out in a lengthy passage he reproduces from a book by B.G. Mitchell. In it, Mitchell recollects an incident which occurred when he was boarding the Rome-Paris express at Turin. \textit{There was no queue}: and twice as many people had gathered on the platform as could possibly secure seats. Could there be, one wonders, a more British dilemma? Mitchell quickly surmised that this was hardly the setting for a display of "the character of an English gentleman". Reluctantly abandoning an ingrained habit of civility, he afterwards confessed, he succeeded in securing two corner seats by the locally-

\textsuperscript{30} The quoted matter thus far cited in the discussion of Lucas will be found in J.R. Lucas, \textit{On Justice}, Oxford, 1980, pp. 2-3, 20, 68.
accepted means of kicking, shoving and elbowing his way to them. In such circumstances, Lucas comments, "gentlemanly second nature" would be irrelevant and "the original Adam takes over". The reader is left in no doubt that the British author of this book on justice shares Mitchell's evident preference for a convention in which, in rule-governed Britain, queuing has become, for the ordinary man waiting for the Clapham omnibus, as for the English gentleman, "a settled disposition". 31

Lucas devotes one of his chapters specifically to Rawls. And in it, we find him critical of what he regards, from his point of view, as the American philosopher's incipient egalitarianism and denial of any clear connection between justice and desert. In Lucas' judgement, moreover, the maximin strategy entailed in Rawls' adherence to both the liberty and difference principles, yields a rational reconstruction, not of justice, but of prudence. He comes close to suggesting that the appeal of Rawls, especially in America, where he is a figurative philosophical Founding Father, is that his point of view serves to assuage feelings of guilt about their privilege among liberal intellectuals. As Lucas asserts at one point: "Rawls' argument is, in fact, not so much with the worst off as about them. It gains force from its vicarious lack of actuality." Rawls is concerned, commendably, he notes, with the underdog---"but less commendably, exclusively so". It is a fair criticism of Rawls, Lucas surmises, that, like the utilitarians, he tends to regard people as pets, "who have feelings and ought to be cared for, rather than as rational agents, who act on their own responsibility". 32

If Lucas is critical of Rawlsian meliorism, he is as well, as already suggested, of Nozick's alternative and more radical entitlement theory of justice.

32. Ibid, pp. 185-96.
John Rawls' contractarian rendering of John Locke, Lucas might say, is as a social democrat, while Nozick's Locke is a radical libertarian; and Lucas intends to steer clear of each of these ambitiously staked-out alternatives. He suggests, for instance, that while he subscribes to a theory of justice as desert, and so in this respect opposes Rawls, there is nonetheless room in his own approach, contrary to Nozick, for a theory of what he calls contributive justice, a conceptual category which would argue for the justice in principle of the taxation system.

In Lucas' old world view, John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*, with its concern for fellow-feeling and fraternity and the elucidation of justice in terms of a simple rule or symmetry, of fairness, is tantamount to a new world yearning for a theodicy. Rawls' project, in the spirit of Charlie Brown, is to make justice out to be a "warm" virtue. But Lucas is insistent that it is a "cold" virtue, not unusually manifesting itself without feeling, and as concerned as not with the condition of humankind as separate individuals with their own point of view and interests which are distinct from one another. For Lucas, nothing less than a *complicated* theory of justice will do, one never reducible to a pat formula, but unthinkable, when all is said and done, without the concept of desert. And justice, at any rate, is for Lucas not, by itself, enough. Justice alone does not make a man happy or fulfilled; it is no guarantee of salvation in this world or the next. Nevertheless, he stoically opines, "it is not to be despised. It may not be everything, but it is something. It is a virtue, an important virtue, one of the cardinal virtues...it is the bond of peace, which enables the individual to identify with society, and brethren to dwell together in unity."33

One detects, in fact, a not dissimilar underlying *Britishness* in the books of David Miller and J.R. Lucas. The tendency of all three of these British

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33. Ibid, p. 263.
contributions to the transatlantic justice debate is to converge in a certain compatibility of mood and outlook. In it, abstract philosophical speculation is constantly drawn back to its contextualisation in a concrete cultural and historical setting. Only then is there any theoretical movement outward towards the attempted universalisation, as it were, of the particular. And this has the effect of toning down what might otherwise appear to be, imprudently, on the traditional British view, and especially so when political issues are at stake, compelling theoretical considerations of an inherently more abstract nature. One might say that, in consequence, each of these books is in its separate way expressly resistant, at least as far as English-language political philosophies are concerned, to the sheer self-enclosing ambition of grand theoretical projects such as John Rawls' account of justice. And the same would of course apply in principle to the sort of exclusory philosophical enthusiasm displayed in Robert Nozick's boldly libertarian political theory.

There are also, in these Anglo-American books, differences setting them apart from their Anglo-American counterparts in the underlying tenets of their respective political philosophies. From a British philosophical perspective, it is thus not only that the American books on justice are theoretically ambitious: they are at the same time infused with an implicitly pragmatic and instrumental spirit. And this has the perhaps paradoxical effect of exacerbating an already deep-seated British scepticism about the close interconnection of ideas and practices, at least insofar as theoretically programmatic ideas are held up as reliable guides to social and political practices.

In the competing political advocacies in contemporary American philosophical discourse of Rawls, Nozick and Walzer, moreover, the conceptual elaboration of the principles of a liberal social and political order is one in which argument proceeds from the topic of liberty towards a primary focus on an
architectonic and overarching concept of justice, more or less embracing of social or distributional justice. In the case of these representative British books, on the other hand, the rhetorical movement is away from rather than in the direction of justice thus abstractly considered. The argument moves from justice towards a more historical and philosophically foundational liberty---to a view of justice as something like the achievement, in effect, of the notion of an Englishman's liberty, a Lockean liberty synonymous with justice as the habitual enjoyment of standing rules to live which have been secreted long since into the everyday affairs of a free people.

7.

Peter Laslett was to find himself in a position to record with enthusiasm the continued recent "upswell" of interest in political and social theorising, in introducing yet another installment of *Philosophy, Politics and Society*, at the close of the 1970s. But in carrying out a now long familiar editorial duty, he confessed, he felt "a tinge of regret", as an Englishman, that the philosophical impetus had by that date so heavily swung to "the Western side of the Atlantic." And indeed, there was a certain poignancy in the fact that not only were a majority of the contributors to this latest collection Americans, but that the book had actually been published in America, by Yale University Press. At about the same time, Ronald Dworkin, in the course of an interview aired on the BBC 2 television network, was to suggest that, in the field of political philosophy in contemporary Britain, "there's been nothing by way of an arresting, novel, schematic theory that's been presented here recently." There was also a certain poignancy in these words, since Dworkin, who had succeeded H.L.A. Hart as Professor of

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34. Peter Laslett and James Fishkin (eds.), (op. cit.), p. 1.
35. Brian Magee (ed.), *Men of Ideas* (op. cit.), p. 212.
Jurisprudence at Oxford, was himself a former Yale University law professor and a transplanted American.

This increased transatlantic traffic in intellectual goods was, to be sure, a two-way street. If Americans, such as Ronald Dworkin, now frequented the British philosophical landscape in increased numbers, by the mid 1980s, a "brain drain" from Great Britain to America which had once been centred almost exclusively on the scientific community, had come to include in its numbers prominent British philosophers and social scientists. And these were not merely recent graduates lacking employment opportunity as philosophers at home. More typically, they were established figures in the middle of their careers, scholars of international reputation prepared to give up the congenial intellectual and social amenities of college life in Oxford and Cambridge and elsewhere in the British Isles in exchange for appointments at leading American universities—and they were presumably drawn to them not only by large financial inducements but by a desire to be where the action is.36 In Britain, great play was made of the adverse affect which these developments were claimed to have had on the morale of those who remained behind. Many dons perceived them to be directly linked to Britain's declining place in the world and to what was believed to be the misanthropic attitude of Mrs. Thatcher to non-vocational higher education in general. But it was too soon to say with any assurance precisely what this flight of intellectual capital from British academe might mean for the future quality and direction of the philosophical agenda there.

Meantime, from the American side, one wondered what the arrival in high profile numbers on prestigious American university campuses of intellectual figures whose primary philosophical outlook had been formed in British schools

and universities, might signify. Clearly, these developments were not going to have any such profound impact as the virtual sea change wrought in American cultural and philosophical life by the removal to posts at American universities of large numbers of displaced Jewish intellectuals from continental Europe earlier in the century. Yet this lesser and more recent intellectual migration, no forced and tragic outcome of war, but instead a voluntarist and indeed patently opportunistic post-imperial dispersal of marketable intellectual talent, might be expected to encourage a further insinuation into the steadily enlarging English-language intellectual firmament of a broadening philosophical eclecticism already well underway in the 1880s.

Of course, even at the height of Empire, Britain had been a large exporter of philosophical and literary talent. And then, as now, she had also been a notable importer of talent, and not only, as the obvious historical examples of such luminaries of British letters as the polish-born Joseph Conrad and the Anglophile Americans, Henry James and T.S. Eliot, suggest, from her colonies abroad. Cambridge’s bright star, Ludwig Wittgenstein, who, with Bertrand Russell was one of the two towering influences in British philosophy in the interwar years, had had anything but a British-sounding name. And it was to be a striking feature of British political philosophy in the postwar era that amongst its most distinguished practitioners were a large inventory of thinkers of rank who had come to Britain, admiringly so, from elsewhere.

Instances spring readily to mind. Hayek and Popper, to begin, who were to play so central a role in establishing the agenda of theoretical discourse in the

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immediate aftermath of war, were, like Wittgenstein, Austrian in origin, and they were hardly the only emigres to find their way to the London School of Economics. Ernest Gellner, for example, had been born in Paris of Czech parents, Elie Kedourie was from Baghdad, the Letwins from America, and Kenneth Minogue from New Zealand by way of Australia. In Oxford, Isaiah Berlin, dogged defender of what he took to be the quintessentially British notion of negative liberty, although entirely educated in England, had begun life in Latvia, a state which was to continue to exist only in memory for four decades following the Second World War. His successor as Chichelle Professor of Social and Political Theory, John Plamenatz, hailed from Montenegro. And Plamenatz's successors, Charles Taylor and G. H. Cohen, were both Canadians, as was Ted Honderich at University College, London.

As the gradual outcome of a long course of historical adjustment, the global English-language community which was to prove the most enduring legacy of Britannia's sprawling overseas rule, had come by the 1980s to be dominated by the United States, not only in consequence of her post-Second World War role as a superpower, but as a result of the broad cultural hegemony of America as well. Of course, in such things as clothing fashions and popular music, traffic in these more general transatlantic cultural goods also involved a two-way flow.

At the same time, as the family of western nation states approached the twilight years of a tumultuous century, Great Britain managed to project with some considerable success an image as a kind of contemporary counterpart to a culturally aristocratic Hellenic Athens in decline, in relation to a politically-ascendant America's socially republican Rome. This was perhaps more a reflection of Britain's rich historical cultural inheritance and of the persistence of
an insidious class-based elitism than of any conscious design. But certainly the image found steady reinforcement in sophisticated cultural messages emanating from Britain and communicated through what had by this time become world-projective techniques of mass artistic suggestibility.

The late Lord Clark's affable humanistic eridition was thus to win over untold numbers to the enduring old school charms of British cultivated taste, in the course of the telecasting to what became virtually a worldwide audience, of his remarkable and for our purposes appositely-entitled BBC television series, *Civilisation*. And even as the series ran, there were in the wings, as it were, figures such as Sir David Attenbrough and others, no less gifted than Clark in projecting their materials with that seemingly effortless theatrical flair at which the British excel, waiting their turn to take over from him the further propagation of what amounted to a pervasive image of understated British achievement in cultural matters. Other programmes originating in Great Britain and tending to reinforce this late twentieth century British cultural Hellenism were a prominent regular feature of the more high brow cultural screenings of the PBS in America. British-born and Cambridge educated Alistair Cooke, for instance, the urbane creator of radio's 'Letter From America' and host of the PBS's Masterpiece Theatre, was surely the very picture of a studied Anglo-Roman senatorial self-assurance and aplomb.

The point was in a sense only reinforced by the popularity, as great in America as in Britain, of such British television productions as *The Forsythe Sage, Upstairs, Downstairs*, and John Mortimer's memorable adaptation of Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*. The barely subliminal message of programmes of this sort seemed to be a fictive two cheers, at least, for an older, less democratic world where everyone knew their place and were not necessarily the less content for all that, a world not so very distant from us in chronological time. And other
television shows originating in Britain, less ambitious in scope perhaps than these but in a sense thematically related, were at pains to set out what amounted to an expressly comic defence, in the midst of the sometimes grimly humourless political life of a democratic age, of a more breathtakingly snobbish point of view. In this vein, one recollects the much admired theatrical tour de force of Penelope Keith in the role of a materially-reduced but otherwise audaciously self-assured landed aristocrat of the old school in To the Manor Born.

These years were also to witness the televising of pointedly Gibbonesque evocations of achievement and decline on a grand scale, principally, Robert Graves' I Claudius. At the same time, the mass nostalgic remembrance of the last days of British India shortly reflected in the televised dramatization of Lord Mountbatten's final viceroyship, and more influentially, of the highly successful production of Paul Scott's memorable The Jewel In The Crown, as well as the appearance of such award-winning films as Forster's A Passage to India and Ghandi, seemed to hint at attitudes perhaps more worldly wise, less given to the sort of moralisingly simplistic anti-British imperial sentiments which had been more the fashion in the immediate post-colonial period. Productions such as these showed to rave reviews in cinemas throughout the United States and were featured on American television's Public Broadcasting Corporation, where, since America was now, by dint of thankless circumstance, herself the leading English-language global power, such programming material took on an obvious added poignancy.

The moreso since they shared the same language, it was to be expected that there would be in an age of unofficial American imperium a large and even increased cultural interaction between Great Britain and America. And in any

38 Apropos the eclipse of Great Britain by America and Russia as the inheritors of empire on the scale of classical Rome, in power politics, and the arguably separate question of cultural
event, despite the collapse of Britain's hold on global power, the ancient-modern
city of London, having endured both the Roman and the British Empires, still
remained, even in the era of America's ascendancy, a world-class
communications, transportation and cultural centre. In the circumstances, and at
so important an international crossroads, there was simply much more exporting
and importing of intellectual as well as other goods than ever before in the late
years of the twentieth century.

In this context, the figure of Brian Barry presents an especially intriguing
case. There has, for instance, in one who seems in direct pedigree so entirely
British, an unusually keen attachment to social and political science in the
American sense of the terms---the prevailing British view remaining, one judges,
much closer to that captured in the work of the so-called Sussex School of
intellectual historians (Burrow, Collini, Winch), who have reviewed the
somewhat embarrassing materials for this periodically-recurrent enthusiasm
with such mordant relish. It is unlikely that anyone has ever had such a
ferocious commitment as Barry to the interdisciplinary social science promise of
the Oxford PPE. This Oxford-educated student of H.L.A. Hart and Isaiah Berlin,
is of course a onetime prodigal who left England at the beginning of the 1970s,
being at the time a sort of trendsetter, to spend a decade and more in America,
before returning recently to take up a Chair at The London School of Economics.
Since doing so, he has publically professed his belief in "The Continuing
Relevance of Socialism", the relevance in question being presumably intended as
a philosophical relevance, since its predictive force has been somewhat unkindly
treated by the actual results of the most recent British general election.

supremacy, does one imagine a message in code in A.H.M. James' cryptic comment to the effect
that "The Greeks never ceased to regard the Romans as barbarians..."? The Decline of the Ancient
Now, looked at from a certain angle, the justice debate which had been set in train by Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* was a debate about the imperial pretensions, intellectually-speaking, of contemporary American liberalism. And in the course of setting out his own view of liberalism in his first book-length study of justice, Barry, in a manner akin to David Miller, hypothesizes three possible "models" of society: the liberal, understood as a society of individuals who cooperate only when doing so furthers their own ends, the hierarchic, and the altruistic. Barry's own position is that any society is bound to be a mixture of the three models, that most people will find room in their thinking for all of them, though different people will give them different priorities. In Barry's view, John Rawls' account of liberal justice is deeply flawed by a tendency to presuppose the second and third of these models in the course of advancing the ultimate priority claims of the first. But if Barry is thus critical of Rawls, he is utterly exasperated, to judge from the contents of a decidedly vitriolic review of *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, with the breezy manner in which Robert Nozick appears to have squeezed out entirely two (at least) of these models of society in his own radical libertarian account of justice and the minimal state. Though Barry had at the time been long removed from England, he already felt confident enough of his transatlantic credentials to characterise Nozick as "the thinking man's Gerald Ford", depicting his arguments as articulating "the prejudices of the average owner of a filling station in a small town in the Midwest who enjoys grousing about paying taxes and having to contribute to `welfare scroungers' and who regards as wicked any attempts to interfere with contracts, in the interests, for example, of equal opportunity or anti-discrimination."39

As this passage makes clear, Brian Barry's argumentative style is not always notable for its tendency to suffer fools gladly nor for placing a high premium on mincing words. Barry has been an extremely prolific writer in the unadorned Oxford style, and for much of his career, until the launch in recent years of his ambitious project in progress of composing a three volume treatise on justice, his intellectual temperament, as has been observed, has displayed itself as predominantly analytical in formation, more powerfully critical than given to the concoction of grand theory. But even in his first book on justice he succinctly encapsulates, near book’s end, his own best considered views. And what do these amount to? "It will have required no great detective work to discover my own [priorities]", he writes:

"I feel a strong attachment to liberalism in relation to ideas while believing that in matters of political, social and economic organisation, altruistic collaboration is worth giving up a good deal of efficiency for, and fearing that hierarchy is more soundly based in human psychology than I would altogether like."

Barry is surely right in suggesting that it would require no detective inspector, let alone Miss Marple, Lord Peter Wimsey or Inspector Morse, to establish not only the priorities but even perhaps the nationality of the author of so "negatively" accommodating a passage as this, one so evidently "British" in sentiment that the man on the Clapham omnibus would presumably understand and heartily endorse it. At the same time, there is more than a little of `mid-Atlantic man' in the intellectual persona of Brian Barry, a figure at once Anglo-American, and Anglo-American, a point, admittedly superficial but somehow telling, illustrated in the final paragraph of the Preface to Theories of Justice, Volume 1, A Treatise on Social Justice (1989). It opens by informing us that "this book was written to the accompaniment of those excellent radio stations WFMT

in Chicago and KUSC in Los Angeles". It concludes with a somehow very English tribute to the silent companionship of his pet dogs.

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By the closing decades of the twentieth century, the bedrock social and political values of the imaginary man on the Clapham omnibus persisted, while accommodating as best they could, a broadening cultural environment more international and cosmopolitan than ever before. And the same was true of the dominant empiricist and analytical premises of the British political tradition drawn on by successive generations of political philosophers in Great Britain throughout the modern period. The impetus for this intellectual development had derived initially, in transatlantic university circles, from a westward-moving revival in the 1960s of general interest in German and continental ideas. Then, in the 1970s, it had been furthered by developments in American political philosophy focussed on the ambitious liberal constructivism of John Rawls. But Rawls' work, in drawing attention to the possibilities of bringing Kantian premises to bear on the adumbration of a moral perspective addressed to the human condition over time and regardless of cultural setting, had served in turn to further revive interest in what now amounted to an eastward-moving Americanization of German philosophy. In this instance, the philosopher chiefly in view, Immanuel Kant, was a figure who, unlike Hegel and Marx, had been for long more neglected than despised in the English-speaking world.

But while in Britain the cultural and intellectual milieu had become more international and cosmopolitan than ever before, in a larger, outward-looking perspective, the world, by the late 1980s, had indisputably become more and more an English-speaking world. And in such a setting, what was perceived to be lacking was a social and political philosophy of western man, or indeed of all mankind, that was not so much Kantian in inspiration, as some now suggested,
as indebted to the example of the Stoics. The Stoics had been the Greek teachers of Rome, theorising out of an originally Hellenistic philosophy of moral conduct an important strand of emergent Christian reasoning and what would become in the era of mature Roman Empire a virtually global understanding of the premises of enlightened jurisprudential discourse. Might not a late twentieth century generation of contemporary philosophers of stoicism articulate, in a lingua anglica which was now to all intents and purposes as hegemonic as was the language of the Romans of the ancient world, a moral understanding common to civilised men everywhere in the declining years of the second millenium?

There was an evident place for British thinkers, who ought, if anyone ought to know their way around the English language, in these latest intellectual fashions. And indeed, it is interesting to note, looking back to the very first of his series of occasional papers on contemporary political philosophy, the entirely British 1956 volume in which the subject had been notoriously declared to be close to death, that Peter Laslett had even then acknowledged in passing the problematical possibility of making "modern Stoicism a genuine political philosophy of the traditional sort". And this was a topic to which he had seen fit to return in the latest series, published in America in 1979.

The crux of the philosophical problem attendant on the elaboration of such a reinvigorated stoicism, of course, had been seen by the great British political philosophers of the early modern period stretching from Locke to Hume. It was the problem of establishing clear argumentative foundations acceptable to the sceptical modern understanding. The challenge was all the greater in a secular age the political and military history of which was a

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41. Peter Laslett (op. cit.), p. xiv.
42. Peter Laslett and James Fishkin (eds.), (op. cit.), p. 4.
monument to the fragility of human reason. What was lacking was nothing less than a system of firmly grounded philosophical beliefs cast in universal terms that would do the work for our world that the doctrine of natural law had done for the twilight world inhabited by the stoical philosophers of classical antiquity. Meanwhile, in popular doctrinal fashion, the shift away from an unexamined faith in the efficacy of the interventionist state reflected in the first Thatcher electoral victory of 1979, seemed further evidenced in the fourth successive Conservative electoral victory, now led by John Major, in April 1992. Privatisation, citizen's rights, and individual empowerment were prominent instruments in the government rhetoric of the day. But in Britain's universities, what was striking was an apparent preoccupation with the provision of a fully explicit and formalised political theory of social justice and community, welfare and needs.