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CAMBRIDGE TEXTS IN THE
HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT



L. T. HOBHOUSE
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CAMBRIDGE TEXTS IN THE HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

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L. T. HOBHOUSE

*Liberalism and
Other Writings*

EDITED BY
JAMES MEADOWCROFT

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Introduction

Leonard Trelawny Hobhouse was the most sophisticated intellectual exponent of the ‘New Liberalism’ which emerged in Britain in the closing years of the nineteenth century. A determined advocate of political and social reform, who worked for years as a journalist on the progressive liberal press, Hobhouse also had a distinguished academic career, occupying the first professorial chair in sociology to be established at a British university. As a political theorist, Hobhouse is most significant for his attempt to reformulate liberalism to recognize more adequately the claims of community, establish the centrality of basic welfare rights, and legitimate an activist democratic state.

Leonard Hobhouse was born in the Cornish village of St Ive in 1864. The son of Caroline Trelawny and an Anglican clergyman, Reginald Hobhouse, he was brought up in comfortable circumstances. Schooled at Marlborough, he went on to Corpus Christi College, Oxford, earning a first-class degree in Greats in 1887. After graduation, Hobhouse stayed on in Oxford, first as a Prize Fellow at Merton College, and later as a full Fellow of Corpus Christi. By the mid-1890s Hobhouse began to feel cramped by the confines of academia; and, eager to play some more definite part in the crusade for social reform, he abandoned his Oxford career to take up a position with the liberal *Manchester Guardian* in 1897. He remained with the paper as a full-time leader writer until 1902. Between 1903 and 1905 he worked as Secretary to the anti-protectionist Free Trade Union. Next followed another stint of full-time journalism – this time as political editor for the London-based, left-liberal daily, *The Tribune*. Then, in the autumn of 1907, Hobhouse re-oriented his

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energies back towards teaching and research by accepting the newly created chair of sociology at the University of London – a post he retained until his death in 1929. Hobhouse never abandoned his interest in the practical politics of reform, however, and for many years he continued to make a substantial contribution to the editorial pages of the *Manchester Guardian*.

Hobhouse was a prolific writer – a fact that occasioned snide comments from some academic quarters – and a collection of his journalistic pieces would fill several volumes. His substantive works spanned an impressive range of disciplines, dealing particularly with philosophy, politics, and sociology, but touching also on issues that might today be regarded as the preserve of physiology, psychology, and anthropology. Issues in political theory were addressed most directly in *The Labour Movement* (1893), *Democracy and Reaction* (1904), *Liberalism* (1911), *Social Evolution and Political Theory* (1911), *The Metaphysical Theory of the State* (1918), and *The Elements of Social Justice* (1922).

The period spanned by the publication of these volumes was one of the more turbulent phases of the modern British polity, during which many of the parameters of twentieth-century political life were established. Welfare and taxation policy, the regulation of trade union activity, the definition of the franchise, the constitutional position of the Lords and the Commons, the status of Ireland, and the conduct of Imperial policy were the focus of acute political struggles. Hobhouse lived through two major wars, the Boer War (1899–1902) and the First World War (1914–18). He experienced the high-tide of Edwardian Liberalism – with its innovative social legislation, the ‘People’s Budget’ of 1909–10, and the clipping of the Lords’ wings by the Parliament Act of 1911 – and he witnessed the rapid falling away of Liberal support as Labour came into its own in the early 1920s.

For Hobhouse, as for many of the educated young men who came of age in the late 1880s and 1890s, the liberalism which looked back towards principles elaborated earlier in the century held little attraction. There seemed to be insufficient recognition of the psychic and moral interdependence of the individuals who made up society. The ritual injunctions to self-help could be perverted too readily into an encouragement of indifference or selfishness. Above all, the idea

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that all social ills would vanish once the interference of government had been eliminated appeared frankly naive.

During the first phase of his development as a political thinker, Hobhouse was largely concerned with the critique of 'individualism' – both as a philosophical doctrine which ignored the intimate moral bond between individual and society, and as a political dogma which set narrow limits on permissible forms of state action. While still an undergraduate, Hobhouse had staked out a position towards the left of Liberalism, expressing sympathy for Irish Home Rule, the extension of the suffrage, and *The Radical Programme* – a volume of essays which served as something of a manifesto for Radical Liberals in the mid-1880s (Preface by Joseph Chamberlain, 1885). As his sojourn at Oxford continued Hobhouse became increasingly receptive to the claims of labour, entered into contact with a number of prominent Fabians, and began to class himself as a 'collectivist'. His first book, *The Labour Movement*, was a product of this period; ranging over a wider set of themes than the title might suggest, the volume not only discussed trade union and co-operative organization, but also advocated a significant extension of collective control of economic activity through state and municipal action. Of course, to be a 'collectivist' in the late 1880s and 1890s was not necessarily to repudiate liberalism – but it did imply rejection of the 'individualist' bias of traditional liberalism, and scepticism towards the cautious orientation of the Liberal leadership.

By the early years of the new century there had been a discernible shift in mood and emphasis in Hobhouse's work: his youthful enthusiasm for collectivism had been somewhat tempered, and he displayed a renewed appreciation for the virtues of earlier liberal thinkers. In the late 1890s Hobhouse became preoccupied with the relation between the Imperial reflex and domestic reform, and convinced that lust for Empire had served to drive urgent social questions from the political agenda. He opposed British intervention during the Boer War in South Africa, and was dismayed that leading Fabians and prominent Liberals sympathetic to a more activist state had been seduced by the Imperial dream. In *Democracy and Reaction*, Hobhouse discussed the obsession with Empire and examined the intellectual props of what he considered to be a revolt against sound humanistic values. He particularly targeted the pseudo-scientific application of

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the idea of the biological ‘struggle for existence’ to human social life (to justify the old claim that ‘Might is Right’), and Idealism – which, by considering ‘every institution and every belief’ to be a ‘manifestation of a spiritual principle’, threw ‘a gloss over stupidity, and prejudice, and caste, and tradition’ (pp. 78–9). Hobhouse praised the doctrines of earlier Liberal reformers like Cobden, insisting that although their hostility to the domestic responsibilities of government would now be misplaced, their resistance to Imperial aggrandizement remained pertinent, and he complained that ‘the socialistic development of Liberalism’ had to some extent ‘paved the way for Imperialism by diminishing the credit of the school which had stood most stoutly for the doctrines of liberty, fair dealing, and forbearance in international affairs’ (p. 12).

From this point on, Hobhouse generally identified himself as a liberal, a new liberal, or a liberal socialist, rather than simply a ‘collectivist’. To some extent this reflected a gradual change in the accepted usage of ‘collectivism’ – the term was increasingly deployed to denote support for the mechanism of generalized state ownership, and associated with the nascent Labour Party – but it was also evidence of a shift in Hobhouse’s concerns. Certainly he came to regard the struggle between ‘Democracy and Reaction’, rather than the contradiction between ‘Individualism and Collectivism’, as the fundamental political divide facing his generation.

In this context, a recurrent theme of Hobhouse’s writing became the need to reconcile what he described as ‘the two branches’ of the democratic and humanitarian movement – liberalism and socialism. On the one hand Hobhouse argued that only a practical alliance of progressive currents could block the forces of reaction, and on the other he emphasized the essential affinity between liberal and socialist goals: an entirely consistent liberalism would, he suggested, imply a considerable dose of the social provision, social regulation, and social ownership usually associated with socialism; while a reasonable and workable socialism would attach permanent value to the liberal ideals of individual freedom and political democracy. And yet, if Hobhouse freely admitted that his own approach accepted ‘many of the ideas that go to make up the framework of Socialist teaching (*Liberalism*, p. 101)’, he made it clear that his primary intellectual attachment was to liberalism; in a sense, he believed that liberalism was the stronger, more fundamental movement – that it had deeper historical roots and that its accomplishments were more solid.

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Two earlier liberal theorists with whom Hobhouse shared an obvious affinity were John Stuart Mill and Thomas Hill Green. Although critical of Mill's 'individualism', Hobhouse always had a warm regard for his determination to 'apply standards of rational justice to human affairs', and he praised Mill's insistence upon both 'liberation for the individual, and mutual aid as between individuals' (*The Nation* 7 (1910), p. 246). From Green, Hobhouse absorbed the ideas of a common good, of society as a more intimate moral union, and of liberty as a power to achieve self-expansion. Both Herbert Spencer and Auguste Comte influenced Hobhouse's idea of sociology as a positive science, with an emphasis on evolution passing down from the English theorist, and the image of a self-directing humanity being accepted from the French thinker.

Hobhouse was a well known critic of Idealism; indeed, his first major philosophical work, *The Theory of Knowledge* (1896), was intended as a Realist critique of the essential Idealist 'fallacy' – 'that consciousness must in some way sustain in its existence the reality that it knows, that what exists for knowledge exists only by our knowledge' (p. 539). And, in *The Metaphysical Theory of the State*, written twenty years later, he delivered a biting attack on Idealist political theory as represented in the works of Hegel and the English philosopher, Bernard Bosanquet. Yet despite his antipathy towards Idealism, Hobhouse drew upon Hegel, and this influence is evident in Hobhouse's conception of a universal developmental process in which a spiritual principle inherent in reality grows and achieves self-consciousness. Indeed, Hobhouse described

the whole course of . . . physical, biological, and social evolution [as] . . . a process wherein mind grows from the humblest of beginnings to an adult vigour, in which it can – as in the creed of humanity it does – conceive the idea of directing its own course . . .

(*Morals in Evolution*, 1906, p. 596)

Hobhouse's idea of upward development, of a movement of mind from lower to higher, was the product of a creative synthesis of strands drawn from Idealism and from the Darwinist evolutionary theory which so profoundly influenced late-nineteenth-century social thought. It is the essential theme which unites his contributions to various intellectual domains: in *Mind in Evolution* (1901) Hobhouse examined the emergence of higher mental powers in the course of

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animal evolution; in *Morals in Evolution* he presented a history of the expansion of human ethical consciousness; in *Development and Purpose* (1913) he offered an evolutionary ontology; and his sociological works, such as *Social Development: Its Nature and Conditions* (1924), were largely concerned with documenting the advance of human social institutions.

While acknowledging that history displayed no smooth pattern of advance, Hobhouse insisted that over the long haul progress was a reality – developed social forms, in which ethical principles were more soundly established, emerged and proliferated. With time, the rational elements of social life grew more substantial, and human beings acquired the ability to self-consciously orient society in the direction of further improvement. According to Hobhouse, belief in progress lay at the very foundation of the movement for social reform; indeed, he insisted that ultimately ‘every constructive social doctrine rests on the conception of human progress’ (*Liberalism*, p. 65).

In the years after the First World War Hobhouse lost something of his earlier optimism and experienced a degree of alienation from the ongoing process of party politics. The scale of the carnage in Europe severely tested his faith in social advance, while the electoral collapse of the Liberals and their turn away from social reform made prospects for revitalizing the Party remote. Like many a pre-war reform liberal, Hobhouse was drawn towards Labour – and yet he could never entirely accept the organization’s close association with the trade unions, or feel comfortable with the more doctrinaire socialists in its ranks. To some extent, Hobhouse found himself a theorist without a natural home: a reform liberal in a time when Liberal fortunes were waning.

Hobhouse’s Liberalism

Not the most elaborate or scholarly of Hobhouse’s writings, *Liberalism* is nevertheless his most enduring work. The book was one of three commissioned by the editors of the Home University Library of Modern Knowledge to introduce their readers to contemporary political argument. Ramsay MacDonald’s *The Socialist Movement* (1911) and Hugh Cecil’s *Conservatism* (1912) were its companion volumes. *Liberalism* appeared while the controversy over the 1909–10 budget (which increased death duties, imposed a super-tax on

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high incomes, and introduced a tax on profits in land transactions) was still fresh in the public memory, but before the Parliament Act of 1911 was finally accepted by the House of Lords. Although written in a popular style, it is a theoretical work of some subtlety.

The fundamental challenge Hobhouse had to confront in writing the book was to explain how the activist state he championed could be justified according to the essential principles of a creed which had for so long been associated with the struggle for freedom of the individual from state interference. To make good his case, Hobhouse invoked two basic stratagems: first, he presented a distinctive interpretation of liberal history – one which sought to establish the liberal interventionist state as the logical, indeed the inevitable, outgrowth of earlier liberal endeavour; and second, he provided his own positive theoretic reconstruction of liberal political doctrine.

To some extent these two arguments were developed sequentially: the early sections of *Liberalism* are largely concerned with history, while the later chapters of the book explicitly present Hobhouse's version of liberal theory. Yet the division is not so clear cut. Theoretical elements central to Hobhouse's reconstructive effort – such as the principle of citizenship and the idea of harmony – are introduced right from the outset, while only in the final chapter is the historical account completed.

Hobhouse made his argument about history by appealing to the ideas of continuity, change, and progress. In the first place, he suggested that the differences between the old and the new liberalism were less extensive than most critics imagined. The list of fundamental liberties introduced in the second chapter of *Liberalism* was one whose significance could be appreciated in the main by all liberals. Moreover, despite changes in the political conjuncture or in the theoretical articulation of liberalism, the rational and emancipatory character of the creed could be seen as a constant. According to Hobhouse, 'liberalism' was 'a movement fairly denoted' by its 'name – a movement of liberation, a clearance of obstructions, an opening of channels for the flow of free spontaneous vital activity' (p. 22). It was true that earlier liberals had mistrusted the state; but careful consideration of the principles on which the older liberals had based their activity revealed that these principles could legitimate a more comprehensive range of regulatory intervention than their originators had believed necessary.

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Hobhouse's second tack was to insist upon the great change in economic, social, and political circumstances which separated his generation from earlier liberals. Half a century of practical experience had taught liberals that free trade and freedom of contract were not, as originally had been hoped, sufficient to secure steady progress and universal prosperity. Above all, Hobhouse pointed to the altered character of the state itself. In the days of Bentham, or even Cobden, government had resembled a closed corporation, administration was inefficient, and power had been concentrated in the hands of the aristocracy. It was not surprising that liberals had mistrusted the state. By the outset of the twentieth century, however, British government had been transformed – through the growth of an efficient and relatively impartial professional civil service on one hand, and the progressive extension of the franchise on the other. Hobhouse spoke of a shift between two eras of liberal endeavour: during the first, more negative, phase the movement had been concerned with breaking the mould of traditional society; during the subsequent, positive phase of social reconstruction the liberal model of the social order would be fully worked out. A more active and 'positive' understanding of the state was appropriate to this later stage of democratic reconstruction.

Hobhouse's final point was to emphasize the advance of social philosophy, and to postulate a progressive deepening of liberal self-consciousness. It was not just that the state-shy liberals of the older generation had faced different circumstances, but also that they had accepted a somewhat one-sided view of social life, and that they had but partially grasped what was implied by the full development of the liberal ideal. The third, fourth, and fifth chapters of *Liberalism* trace the progress of liberal theory as a movement which passed from the 'theory of the Natural Order' formulated by thinkers such as Locke, Rousseau, and Paine to the utilitarianism of Bentham and James Mill, and then moved on through the hey-day of 'laissez-faire', to arrive at the more balanced views of Gladstone and John Stuart Mill. At each stage, Hobhouse suggests that 'partial solutions gave occasion for deeper probings' (p. 23): the strengths and weaknesses of each liberal variant prepared the way for the subsequent re-formulation of core beliefs.

Weaving together these three broad strands, Hobhouse arrives at a version of liberal history in which the new, state-reliant, social reform-oriented liberalism appears simultaneously as the authentic

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continuator, the appropriate contemporary expression, and the more profound outgrowth of earlier liberal thought.

This brings us to Hobhouse's own substantive reconstruction of liberal theory – formally presented in outline in the sixth chapter of *Liberalism*, and elaborated in the remainder of the book. The central unifying concepts which Hobhouse invoked to articulate his vision of liberal theory were those of 'the organic' view of society, and the 'harmonic' understanding of the good or the desirable.

Organic imagery was something of a staple in late-nineteenth-century British political argument. As Hobhouse deployed organicism, it was intended to counter the claims both of 'individualism' and of 'extreme collectivism' by establishing the subtle mutualism of the individual/social bond. Against those who endorsed an abstract notion of the individual and an atomistic conception of social constitution, Hobhouse argued that as a 'mental and moral being' the modern individual was largely a social product (p. 60). Furthermore, society could not adequately be conceived as an assemblage of pre-formed individuals – rather it comprised a more intimate union. Against those who would exaggerate the claims of society, Hobhouse insisted that the social whole was not some mysterious or transcendent power, but simply the members taken in their inter-connections.

With respect to ethical principle, Hobhouse argued that the 'organic' conception of the relation between individual and society could reconcile potentially conflicting appeals to individual right on the one hand, and to the requirements of social welfare on the other. He insisted that rights could not spring from the individual as an abstract entity; rather, they were socially grounded – with each right finding its justification as a condition of social well-being. According to Hobhouse the 'organic' perspective avoided undue subordination of the individual to society because it recognized that society itself was composed 'wholly of persons'. Thus, while the rights of the individual were relative to the requirements of social welfare, 'the common good to which each man's rights' was subordinate was 'a good in which each man' had 'a share' (p. 61). Hobhouse explained, 'this share consists in realizing his capacities of feeling, of loving, of mental and physical energy, and in realizing these he plays his part in the social life'.

Thus according to Hobhouse there was no fundamental or necessary contradiction between the rights of individuals and the require-

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ments of social welfare. An individual 'right' which conflicted with the permanent interests of society – which weakened the capacity of society's members to make the most of themselves – was not a genuine moral right. Not every form of individual self-expansion was desirable; freedom for some must not be predicated on stunted life chances for others. Society upheld those rights for individuals which, in balance, enhanced opportunities for self-development along lines compatible with the development of others. The challenge for social ethics was to discover that configuration of individual and collective rights and duties which would minimize friction and maximize generalized self-realization.

Hobhouse believed that each human being had a unique identity, the ability to accomplish a distinctive set of achievements, and the capacity to make a specific contribution to communal existence. Indeed, he claimed that

Liberalism is the belief that society can safely be founded on this self-directing power of personality, that it is only on this foundation that a true community can be built, and that so established its foundations are so deep and so wide that there is no limit that we can place to the extent of the building.

(p. 59)

For the individual, the good consisted in the realization of his or her potential in a balanced expansion of personality. For society, it lay in the simultaneous and mutually reinforcing fulfilment of each of its members. This was the essential bearing of Hobhouse's 'harmonic principle': on the one hand, the various dimensions of an individual life should be harmonized in a well-rounded personality; on the other, the trajectories to self-realization adopted by the different members of the community should harmonize in a general flourishing. Note that for Hobhouse it was not sufficient that collisions among individuals be avoided; 'true harmony' implied positive support – that for each person there be 'possibilities of development' so as 'actively to further the development of others' (p. 62).

Now Hobhouse was quite prepared to admit that, in this complete form, harmony represented 'an ideal . . . perhaps beyond the power of man to realize' (p. 65). Nevertheless, he insisted that the impulse to advance towards a more perfect harmony was an imperative for the rational subject. Above all, Hobhouse emphasized that to approx-

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imate true harmony it was necessary to deploy conscious effort. Earlier generations of liberals had been mistaken to assume that if each man acted according to the principles of enlightened self-interest, the outcome would necessarily be the best for the community as a whole. The 'harmonic' vision did not postulate that there was

an actually existing harmony requiring nothing but prudence and coolness of judgement for its effective operation, but only that there is a possible ethical harmony, to which, partly by discipline, partly by the improvement of the conditions of life, men might attain, and that in such attainment lies the social ideal.

(p. 62)

There were many possible lines of social development – but most led to suffering and conflict. The harmonic way was a narrow path, and to keep to it required conscious adjustment to reconcile the diverse moments of social life.

This deliberate displacement of liberty – and the positing of harmony at the core of liberalism – was the most striking formal innovation Hobhouse introduced in the course of articulating a liberal variant more sympathetic to the activist democratic state. But this was just one of a series of conceptual redefinitions and theoretical arguments which served to break any necessary connection between liberalism and minimal government.

When discussing liberty, Hobhouse emphasized that it was important relative to a specific end – the realization of personality; that a set of liberties that could assure opportunities for self-fulfilment to all depended upon a complex system of social restraints; and, that substantive freedom could be eroded by widespread economic inequality. In *Liberalism*, the state appears not as an external force ordering the lives of its subjects, but as an association of citizens collectively and consciously regulating the terms of their mutual interactions. State coercion is deemed legitimate not only to uphold rights – to prevent groups or individuals from injuring others – but also to make effective the will of the community in cases where necessary collective action would otherwise be frustrated by recalcitrant individuals. Moreover, making much of a point raised earlier by John Stuart Mill, Hobhouse argued that a great deal of state action is essentially non-coercive, representing the mobilization of social resources for collective ends.

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Responsibility was not to be viewed solely in terms of the individual, but also in terms of society. If the individual had a duty to be self-supporting, then the community had an obligation to assure employment opportunities for every citizen. Although it was not for the state to 'feed, house, or clothe' its citizens, it was its duty to assure that 'economic conditions are such that the normal man who is not defective in mind or body or will can by useful labour feed, house, and clothe himself and his family' (p. 76).

Property rights were to be subordinate to the requirements of the common good: if individual property was essential to the growth of personality, then all citizens must have access to such property. Furthermore, Hobhouse argued that property had a 'social' dimension, and that wealth was in part a collective creation. Taxation of income could therefore be presented as the social re-absorption of a common product, rather than state confiscation of the fruits of individual labour.

Considering the nature of economic justice, Hobhouse argued that it depended upon an 'equation between function and sustenance' – each economic element should receive a reward sufficient to 'stimulate and maintain' its activity throughout its life (p. 92). However, market-mediated pay rates did not necessarily assure this equitable reward for labour, because in bargaining with owners, property-less workers suffered structural disadvantage. Once again the ground was prepared for remedial government action. Hobhouse insisted:

the 'right to work' and the right to a 'living wage' are just as valid as the rights of person or property. That is to say, they are integral conditions of a good social order.

(p. 76)

In Chapter VIII of *Liberalism* Hobhouse applied these and other principles to support a greatly increased regulatory role for the state. Many of the specific measures he advocated – such as the introduction of old-age pensions and health insurance, taxation of land values, and maintaining a distinction between earned and unearned income – closely followed the Liberal legislative agenda. However, the comprehensive scope of Hobhouse's vision of an activist, redistributive, egalitarian state went considerably beyond the pragmatic adjustments favoured by the mainstream Party leadership.

Even as he advocated reform, Hobhouse made it clear that he

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did not favour an integral socialism which centralized all economic decision-making in the hands of the state. He argued that 'in production the personal factor is vital', and he defended those 'elements of individual right and personal independence, of which Socialism at times appears oblivious' (pp. 95–6, 101). Both 'Mechanical Socialism' (a term Hobhouse used to denote revolutionary or Marxist-inspired socialist variants) and 'Official Socialism' (an expression he applied to the Fabians) were explicitly rejected (pp. 81–2).

The final chapter of *Liberalism* reviews British political developments over the preceding half-century. Considering the prospects for popular government, Hobhouse argues that democracy is 'the necessary basis of the Liberal idea' (p. 109). Not that liberals regard this as the only legitimate form of government – for in some circumstances democracy may be inappropriate; rather it is that in the absence of democracy society suffers a permanent loss: for the people do not jointly assume responsibility for ordering the conditions of their common life. In other words, the process of collective self-government is itself part of the good life. With respect to its essence, Hobhouse understood democracy to imply the formation of a common will, something that is possible only when citizens take an intelligent interest in public affairs. As to its form, there was still much to be done to perfect the machinery of British democracy; among the measures Hobhouse considered were: proportional representation; reform of the powers and composition of the upper house; decision by popular referendum; and the substantial decentralization of powers to regional government.

Other writings

The other texts included in this collection originally appeared during a four-year period (1910 to 1913) which brackets the publication of *Liberalism*. They have been selected to round out the presentation of Hobhouse's political thought and provide further clarification of his views on a number of points raised by the longer work.

The first piece, *Government by the People*, was issued as a pamphlet by the People's Suffrage Federation in 1910. Written at the height of the constitutional wrangle over the Lords' veto, it is a straightforward plea for the speedy introduction of universal suffrage. Hobhouse makes his argument from social utility, insisting that

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democracy is less open to abuse than alternative forms of government; that it is the ‘natural guardian of popular rights’; and that it favours ‘government by public discussion’, secures the responsibility of public officials, and permits the expression of ‘larger social forces’ (p. 131). The work is particularly interesting in that it highlights how the concerns about democracy had shifted in the interval since the publication of John Stuart Mill’s *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861). It is not the danger of mob rule, or ‘tyranny of the majority’, that Hobhouse considers, but the risk that electoral politics will be dominated by an ‘oligarchy of wealth’, and the cynic’s argument that for the average citizen the vote confers such a minute share of political responsibility that it is virtually meaningless. On both counts, Hobhouse’s answer is to invoke the idea of democracy as facilitating the expression of groups and organized interests.

The next two selections – ‘The Growth of the State’ and ‘The Individual and the State’ – were published originally as Chapters VI and IX of *Social Evolution and Political Theory*. A re-write of eight lectures which Hobhouse had delivered at Columbia University in New York, this volume was centrally concerned with the nature of progress.

‘The Growth of the State’ is the pivotal chapter of this work in which Hobhouse attempts to prove that progress has been a real feature of human social evolution, by tracing the emergence of the state and the increasingly consistent application of the citizenship principle on which it is founded. This text provides a more detailed discussion of the three-stage classificatory schema of social types which makes a brief appearance in the first chapter of *Liberalism*, and clarifies Hobhouse’s view of the ethical foundations of the modern state. It brings out the teleological character of Hobhouse’s theory: for on his account, the modern democratic state – with its universal citizenship, elaborate individual freedoms, and complex system of rights and duties – is in some sense immanent within the citizenship principle as first tried out in the Greek city-state of antiquity. Taken in conjunction with the other texts included here, it also suggests that Hobhouse believed that the contemporary British state fell short of consistently embodying the citizenship principle in at least four ways: the Edwardian constitution was not fully democratic; the absence of welfare rights and the existence of exaggerated concentrations of wealth constantly threatened ‘to reduce political and civic

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equality to a meaningless form of words' (p. 147); the state continued to exercise despotic dominion over subject peoples in the Empire; and, self-government was denied to minority nationalities (like the Irish) within the metropole.

'The Individual and the State' is the concluding chapter of *Social Evolution and Political Theory*, in which Hobhouse considers how individual liberty and social control can be successfully reconciled in the modern polity. The discussion covers much the same ground as the sixth and seventh chapters of *Liberalism*, but the exposition is more concise and straightforward. Hobhouse defines the 'sphere of the state' to be 'securing those common ends in which uniformity or, more generally, concerted action, is necessary' (p. 159); and, invoking a phrase which would have pleased T. H. Green, he suggested that 'the further development of the state lies in such an extension of public control as makes for the fuller liberty of the life of the mind' (p. 164). This piece also features a clear presentation of Hobhouse's perspective on the relationship between the right and the good, as well as further commentary on progress.

'Irish Nationalism and Liberal Principle' was first published in 1912 in *The New Irish Constitution*, an impressive collection of essays – on Irish history, Irish nationalism, and the constitutional arrangements to be introduced under Home Rule – commissioned by the liberal Committee of the Eighty Club, and edited by J. H. Morgan, Professor of Constitutional Law at University College, London. Hobhouse's essay was written in the months leading up to the introduction of the third Home Rule Bill, before the Irish crisis had assumed its most acute form, with threats of Army mutiny, and civil war. The piece reveals a rather subtle appreciation of the reality of national sentiment, and of the futility of applying force to maintain irreconciled nationalities within a unitary state. According to Hobhouse, the 'test of nationality lies in history', and when history has established that a national group has a persistent desire for autonomy, liberals must recognize that only by satisfying this demand can the liberty of all concerned parties be enhanced.

The final selection, 'The Historical Evolution of Property, in Fact and in Idea', originally appeared in 1913 in *Property: Its Duties and Rights Historically, Philosophically and Religiously Regarded*, a volume of essays edited by Charles Gore, Bishop of Oxford. In this article Hobhouse presents a brief description of the development of property

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as a social institution, and a survey of some of the leading political-theoretic approaches to property rights. The most important distinction Hobhouse introduces is one between 'property for use' and 'property for power': on the one hand, property serves individuals as the material foundation for an ordered, autonomous life; and on the other, property is 'a form of social organization, whereby the labour of those who have it not is directed by and for the enjoyment of those that have' (p. 181). In the modern world, ownership is concentrated in the hands of a few, while most lack minimal access to productive resources. For Hobhouse, the solution lay not in the abolition of private property, which was valuable for the fulfilment of personality, but in restoring

to society a direct ownership of some things, but an eminent ownership of all things material to the production of wealth, securing 'property for use' to the individual, and retaining 'property for power' for the democratic state.

(p. 198)

To the modern reader many aspects of Hobhouse's discussion may appear unsatisfactory. His belief in progress as a palpable reality, as advance down a single line, jars with more cautious late-twentieth-century assessments. Universalist assumptions, agent-centred explanation, and the almost exclusively rationalist account of human behaviour typical of Hobhouse have been subject to much modern criticism. We may wonder whether Hobhouse did not underestimate the significance of endemic conflict in determining patterns of social life, and whether the economic and political reforms he advocated could have been expected to secure the free development of each along mutually beneficial paths. Certainly, Hobhouse's belief that 'no essential element of social value has to be purchased at the expense of . . . any other element of essential value' would be thought by many to have been overly sanguine (p. 165).

Most contemporary liberals would be repelled by the teleological dimension of Hobhouse's theory. Many would object to his easy slippage from the language of individual liberty into the idiom of collective freedom, and to his readiness to restrict the individual in order that 'majoritarian' freedoms may prevail. Some might query the degree to which Hobhouse makes individual welfare rights dependent upon the willingness to perform social duties – in particular the duty

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to strive to be 'self-supporting'. Others would question his brushing aside of the worry that state action might foster a culture of dependence. More fundamentally, it might be objected that Hobhouse exaggerates the unity of belief and purpose prevailing among the citizens of a modern democratic state, and that a liberal theory which is to give adequate recognition to the plurality of individual and group ends must abandon the politics of the common good for a right-prioritizing ethos.

Notwithstanding such objections, there is much to be gleaned from Hobhouse's political writings. In the first place, they provide valuable insight into the character of turn-of-the-century liberalism. They reveal the kinds of arguments invoked by the more thoughtful proponents of reform, as well as telling us something about the political beliefs of those with whom the New Liberals did battle. To read Hobhouse is to gain access to an important phase in the history of British liberal theory, and to encounter the intellectual controversy surrounding institutional changes which did much to shape the subsequent character of twentieth-century political life.

Liberalism and related writings also provide an illustration of how a political thinker, working within the framework of an established tradition, adapts inherited ideas to confront new circumstances. Existing conceptual categories are redefined; the relationships among concepts are adjusted; emphasis is switched from one element to another; and the result is a theory which in a sense is at one with tradition, but in another breaks new ground.

This suggests a further element to be gained from Hobhouse's writings: an appreciation of the essential complexity of the liberal political tradition. Today it is so often assumed that liberals can be easily categorized – as individualists, for instance; or as defenders of free markets, the existing property system, and quiescent government; or perhaps as advocates of a state which maintains strict neutrality with respect to competing conceptions of the good life. Hobhouse does not correspond to such stereotypes; and yet the general character of his thinking is recognizably liberal. Thus, his theory can encourage us to consider the particularities of modern liberal variants, and to reflect upon long-term continuities in the pattern of liberal belief.

Finally, Hobhouse's theorizing is sufficiently sophisticated that it can provoke us to reflect anew upon political problems of our own

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time. Hobhouse's discussions of the relationships between freedom and social control, and between individual self-reliance and collective responsibility; of the extent to which economic inequality and democratic citizenship are compatible; and of the possible reconciliation of liberalism and moderate socialism, touch issues which still preoccupy us today. And, while we may find Hobhouse's vision of progress no longer compelling, we may wonder whether there is not something to his suggestion that some theory of progress is an essential foundation for any sustained movement for social reform.

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Principal events in the life of L. T. Hobhouse

- 1864 Born, St Ives, Cornwall.
- 1877 Attends Marlborough College.
- 1883 Wins scholarship to Corpus Christi College, Oxford.
- 1885 Gladstone introduces Irish Home Rule Bill and Liberal Party splits.
- 1886 Conservatives win election and Lord Salisbury becomes Prime Minister with massive Unionist support.
- 1887 Hobhouse graduates from university with a First in Greats, and wins election as a Prize Fellow at Merton College.
- 1891 Hobhouse marries Nora Hadwen.
- 1892 Liberals form government.
- 1893 *The Labour Movement* published. Second Irish Home Rule Bill defeated in the House of Lords.
- 1894 Hobhouse elected Tutorial Fellow of Corpus Christi College, Oxford.
- 1895 Unionists return to power under Lord Salisbury.
- 1896 *The Theory of Knowledge* published.
- 1897 Hobhouse leaves Oxford for Manchester, to take up position as writer on the *Manchester Guardian*.
- 1899 Outbreak of Boer War in southern Africa.
- 1901 *Mind in Evolution* published. Death of Queen Victoria.
- 1902 Hobhouse leaves Manchester for London. For the next quarter-century he remains an active contributor to the *Manchester Guardian*.

Principal events

1903	Hobhouse becomes Secretary of the anti-protectionist Free Trade Union. Contributes to founding of the Sociological Society.
1904	<i>Democracy and Reaction</i> published.
1905	Hobhouse accepts post as Political Editor of the liberal daily <i>The Tribune</i> .
1906	Liberal Party wins landslide election victory under Campbell-Bannerman. <i>Morals in Evolution</i> published.
1907	Hobhouse takes up the Martin White Chair of Sociology at the University of London. Edits first issues of the <i>Sociological Review</i> .
1908	Asquith replaces Campbell-Bannerman as Liberal Prime Minister. Old Age Pensions enacted.
1909	Introduction of the Lloyd George Budget.
1910	Two general elections (January and December) return the Liberals to power and signal popular support for the Budget, and for the ascendancy of the Commons over the Lords. Death of Edward VII; George V becomes King.
1911	<i>Liberalism</i> , and <i>Social Evolution and Political Theory</i> published. Hobhouse becomes a Director of the <i>Manchester Guardian</i> . National Insurance Act introduces sickness and disability insurance. Parliament Act adopted.
1912	Third Home Rule Bill introduced by Liberal government.
1913	<i>Development and Purpose</i> published.
1914	Outbreak of Great War in Europe.
1915	<i>The World in Conflict</i> published. Coalition government established to provide war leadership.
1916	<i>Questions of War and Peace</i> published. Lloyd George replaces Asquith as Prime Minister.
1918	<i>The Metaphysical Theory of the State</i> published. Armistice concludes fighting in Europe. Hobhouse begins to assume responsibilities chairing Trades Boards.
1921	<i>The Rational Good</i> published.
1922	<i>The Elements of Social Justice</i> published. Coalition government falls; election returns Conservatives under Bonar Law; Labour becomes largest opposition party.
1923	Stanley Baldwin replaces Bonar Law as Conservative Prime Minister. General election reduces Conservative strength.

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Principal events

- 1924 *Social Development: Its Nature and Conditions* published. Minority Labour government lasts nine months. General election returns Conservatives to power and reduces Liberals to forty seats.
- 1925 Hobhouse elected Fellow of the British Academy. Death of Nora Hobhouse.
- 1929 Death of Leonard Hobhouse.

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Further reading

Works by Hobhouse

Readers wishing to extend their encounter with Hobhouse's political thought should turn first to *Democracy and Reaction* (2nd edition, London, 1909), next to the more complex and sharply polemical *The Metaphysical Theory of the State* (London, 1918), and then to Hobhouse's most comprehensive work of political theory, *The Elements of Social Justice* (London, 1922). Those interested in Hobhouse's perspective on sociology should consult *Social Development: Its Nature and Conditions* (London, 1924). *The Rational Good: A Study in the Logic of Practice* (London, 1921) provides an exposition of Hobhouse's ethical theory, while the more difficult *Development and Purpose: An Essay Towards a Philosophy of Evolution* (2nd edition, London, 1927) elaborates the teleological evolutionist framework of his philosophical system.

Hobhouse produced many essays and short articles. Among the more significant pieces which deal directly with politics are: 'The Ethical Basis of Collectivism', *International Journal of Ethics* 8 (1898), 137–56; 'The Foreign Policy of Collectivism', *Economic Review* 9 (1899), 197–220; 'The Constitutional Issue', *Contemporary Review* 91 (1907), 312–18; 'The Prospects of Liberalism', *Contemporary Review* 93 (1908), 349–58; 'The Lords and the Constitution', *Contemporary Review* 96 (1909), 641–51; 'The Contending Forces', *English Review* 4 (1910), 359–71; 'The New Spirit in America', *Contemporary Review* 100 (1911), 1–11; and 'The Prospects for Anglo-Saxon Democracy', *Atlantic Monthly* 109 (1912), 345–52. Many of Hobhouse's more important pieces on sociology have been collected in *Sociology and Philosophy: A Centenary Collection of Essays and Articles* (ed. Morris