

THE CHRISTIAN SOCIALISM OF R.H. TAWNEY

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The Christian Socialism Of R. H. Tawney

Abstract

The thesis examines a particular application of Christianity to social and political theory in the thought of R.H. Tawney and the distinction between the Christian foundation of his thought, and the pragmatic or humanist expression of his argument. It considers a variety of criticisms of egalitarianism in so far as it casts a light on or challenges Tawney's arguments. It considers, too, the nature of his recommendations for a common culture as the basis for contemporary democratic socialism.

CHAPTER I

Why Tawney?

“The memory of the righteous is a blessing”

(After Proverbs, 10:7)

Michael Walzer (dedication in memory of his father)

Spheres of Justice, Basil Blackwell, 1983.

Why Tawney?

“Those who neither make after others’ goods nor bestow their own are to be admonished to take it well to heart that the earth they come from is common to all and brings forth nurture for all alike. Idly, then, for themselves the common gift of God. In not giving what they have received they work their neighbours’ death”.

St. Gregory the Great

In the closing years of the twentieth century British politicians of all parties have once again begun to reach for the high moral ground. Such attempts to “reclaim the ground”^{NB} serve to illustrate the tensions and the problems which arise when religious principles are invoked as a recommendation of political policy. Clearly the stronger the religious foundation the greater the moral force of the recommendation. But the more precisely located is the religious foundation grounded in a particular faith or even a particular denomination, the narrower the appeal. The problem, then, is how to base a broad political appeal on deep religious conviction in a multi-religious yet increasingly secular society. The strengths and weaknesses, the problems and the possible solutions of such a position are well illustrated in the thought of Richard Henry Tawney.

The social and political philosophy of Richard Henry Tawney derives from a tradition which Norman Dennis and Professor A.H. Halsey identify as ‘English Ethical Socialism’.ⁱ The tradition, grounded in moral teaching, is, they argue, the only brand of socialism which ever enjoyed the mass support of the English people. Such a socialism is inevitably concerned with social change. Yet, beyond a commitment to social reform its philosophy is permeated by the conviction that an equitable society necessarily demands a

^{NB} *Reclaiming The Ground, Christianity and Socialism, John Smith and others, edited by Christopher Bryant. Written in memory of R.H. Tawney, Christian Socialist Movement, 1993.*

ⁱ *English Ethical Socialism, Thomas More to R.H. Tawney, Norman Dennis and A.H. Halsey, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1988.*

moral foundation. In Tawney's case it is a philosophy of socialism motivated by Christian principles which seeks to combine the aspirations of a humanistic socialism with a code of moral conduct. It is a philosophy illuminated by a code of ethical values which "assert the superiority of moral principles over economic appetites".ⁱ It is, too, a philosophy dedicated to the provision of such social and political institutions as will extend to each individual the opportunity to develop to the fullest measure their intellectual, physical and spiritual capacities. It is, then, a humanistic, even pragmatic philosophy whose roots are nourished by Christian faith and Christian principles.

The tradition "is part of our history".ⁱⁱ It evolved out of a philosophy impelled by conscience and motivated by faith which nourished an ethos peculiar to a people which respected the rule of law and historically cherished the liberty of the individual. In Britain, the philosophy is frequently imbued with Christian moral principles. It demands that each social and all political organisation be motivated and judged in accordance with a body of moral teachings which proclaims that "we are all members one of another". (Eph: 4:25) Indeed, an eminent advocate of its aims and practices claims that "The Christian heritage calls on us to bring Christian ideals into every realm of life" (and) "establish a fellowship among all His people".

Richard Henry Tawney would not dispute this claim: his own socialist values are inspired by Christian faith. Yet, as David Marquand submits in his cogent analysis of the constitutional, political and social crises confronting the British State, "for most of this century the Tawneian tradition has been submerged".ⁱⁱⁱ Henry Dubb, Tawney's archetypal Englishman, has been confronted with three political orthodoxies.^{NB} He has been asked to accommodate a vision of 'whig imperialism' with its ideals of "balance between ruler

ⁱ *Religion and The Rise of Capitalism, R.H. Tawney, first published 1926, See Pelican Edition, 1938, p.279.*

ⁱⁱ *'The Twilight of the British State? Henry Dubb Versus The Sceptred Awe', David Marquand, Political Quarterly, Spring 1993, p.210-221*

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid, p.210-221.*

^{NB} *With reference to Tawney's apparent neglect of Henrietta, see Chapter VI.*

and ruled, progress and stability”.ⁱ Similarly, he has been presented with a vision of ‘democratic collectivism’, “in which political authority is rational and secular in character” ... “not sacral”. Clearly, too, the Tawneian tradition derived from Christian principles has been challenged by what Professor Marquand designates (with acknowledgement to Jonathan Clark) as ‘authoritarian individualism’ with its emphasis on order and discipline, its passion for ritual, its concern for property rights, its defence of social hierarchy, its support of libertarian values.

Yet, if the Tawneian tradition has ‘been submerged’, it is now, in one view, “the only tradition available to us that offers the possibility of re-fashioning the state and re-constructing identities through negotiation and debate rather than manipulation and force”.ⁱⁱ We are compelled, then, at the end of a century of carnage, conflict and confrontation to recognise the appeal of an ethical socialism which proclaims “an appeal to principles” as “the condition of any considerable re-construction of society”.ⁱⁱⁱ We are forced, in the face of failed policies, faded hopes and false recoveries to consider the notions of mutual obligation and collective responsibility. Such consideration is expedient, not only for the sake of equity, but also in the name of pragmatism. When the dictatorship of the proletariat has been exposed as the tyranny of the party, when the materialist interpretation of history has patently failed to produce material piety, it is time to re-examine the social philosophy of R.H. Tawney. When the ‘economic miracles’ of libertarianism have proved to be unsustainable, when cities decay, when drugs and disease, poverty and pollution, riots and racism are rampant, it is time to reassess a political philosophy which insists that man’s claim to equal rights, to equal respect and equal worth is established ultimately, not by his material wealth, but by his spiritual value.

ⁱ ‘The Twilight of The British State? Henry Dubb Versus The Sceptred Awe’, David Marquand, *Political Quarterly*, Spring 1993, p.210-221.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.210-221.

ⁱⁱⁱ *The Acquisitive Society*, R.H. Tawney, G. Bell & Sons Ltd, 1926, p.5.

There are, William Temple proposes, “three principles of a moral social order... Freedom, Fellowship and Service”.ⁱ Tawney fought for these principles. The ideal of fellowship, Ross Terrill submits, motivates his resolve to “reclaim fraternity for socialism”.ⁱⁱ Fellowship, Terrill insists, is at the heart of Tawney’s thought. He would support William Temple’s unqualified declaration that “to establish and secure true freedom is the primary object of all right political action”.ⁱⁱⁱ Freedom, Tawney would agree, “is the goal of politics”.^{iv}

Indeed, a critical analysis of Tawney’s work, and in particular EQUALITY which after sixty years remains the classic interpretation of the egalitarian case, plainly demonstrates that while his objective is to secure fundamental equalities, to equalise opportunities of education, of environment, of welfare, his essential concern is with the extension and more equal distribution of freedom. And, Tawney not only presses for freedom, he is prepared to define it. Liberty, for Tawney, is made effective not by the proclamation of formal rights or even by legislation which purports to guarantee it. Liberty, he argues, is secured by making men and women capable of freedom. It is made effective, when, through an equalisation of power, the individual has control over his or her economic life. It demands, too, such social and political arrangement as will allow every man and woman to develop their endowments, to employ their talents, to deepen their spiritual understanding.^{NB}

As for the third principle of moral social order - Service, Tawney advances the notion of Function. The confrontations, the resentments and the privileges of industrial capitalism, he argues, must give way to an industrial order motivated not by private

ⁱ *Christianity and Social Order*, William Temple, S.P.C.K., 1942, p.77.

ⁱⁱ *R.H. Tawney and His Times*, Ross Terrill, Andre Deutsch, 1974, p.199.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Christianity and Social Order*, William Temple, p.67.

^{iv} *Ibid*, p.67.

^{NB} *Freedom*, William Temple proposes, “is a great word sometimes superficially understood”. “To those who have enough of this world’s goods”, he suggests, “the claim to freedom often means ‘Leave us alone’”. “To those who have not enough”, he submits, “it means ‘Give us a chance’”. See *Christianity and Social Order*, William Temple, p.68.

interest but by public service. Industry, he insists, must be subordinated to the community. Its purpose, he proposes, “is to render service...it should find its satisfaction...in the end which it serves”.ⁱ “It’s function”, he declares, “is service; its method is association”.ⁱⁱ

For Tawney, industrial capitalism has no such function, no such method. It grants reward without contribution; its concern is with profits and property rights rather than with service. What it implies, he asserts, “is that the foundation of modern economic civilisation is found not in functions but in rights which are anterior to, and independent of, any service which an individual may render”.ⁱⁱⁱ Such a foundation destroys fellowship; such rights nullify freedom. For Tawney, where men and women enjoy fellowship, they freely serve: brothers and sisters do not exploit each other. Where there is equality there is mutual consideration. Where men and women, motivated by social responsibility, render service each to the other, they confirm fellowship; they establish rights; they respect rights. Tawney’s philosophy then, endorses William Temple’s postulation that “the combination of Freedom and Fellowship as principles of social life issues in the obligation of Service”.^{iv} It issues, too, in accordance with the Christian principle which commands all men... “Brethren, you have been called unto liberty...by love serve one another”. (Gal: 6:13)

It is this appeal to fundamental Christian principles which distinguishes Tawney’s thought and which at the same time creates its greatest problem. While in Britain the declared aims and aspirations of socialists have traditionally encompassed a distinct ethical component, Tawney’s socialism has a specific Christian content. His socialism is not only sustained by moral principles but by moral principles which he understands as specifically Christian. All forms of social and economic activity, he insists, “which hinder a Christian

ⁱ *The Acquisitive Society*, p.5

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p5-7.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.5.

^{iv} *Christianity and Social Order*, William Temple, p.5.

life, stand, ipso facto, condemned”.ⁱ A moral life, in accordance with “God’s purpose”, he asserts, demands of men and women “a distinctively Christian way of life”.ⁱⁱ His socialism is motivated by his understanding of Christianity as “a dynamic and revolutionary force” which, he submits, challenges “not only the vices but the conventional virtues of the established society”.ⁱⁱⁱ For Tawney, this ‘revolutionary force’ challenges that notion of charity which impels men and women to philanthropy in the belief that they are alleviating distress. For Tawney, such philanthropists act, in fact, to endorse an exploitive economic order, which, against all Christian principles, “refuses to treat men as ends or respect their personalities”.^{iv} Indeed, it is the respect for individual personalities, this commitment to the full development of such personalities which fuels his rejection of a Fabian inspired paternalistic, managerial social order. In England, he submits, “intellectual socialism has concentrated on state regulation; it has been collectivist; it has almost surrendered to the policy of communal ownership”.^v The middle class reformer, he insists, “is either moved to pity of the poor, anxious to relieve their suffering or tidying up regulations, etc.” For Tawney, sympathy for the poor is in its way commendable. Yet, ultimately, sympathy is not enough. It is empathy, an understanding of the miseries and frustrations of the disadvantaged, which will move men and women to demand such social and economic arrangements as will ensure the rights and restore the dignity of their fellow citizens. The ‘middle-class reformers’, Tawney asserts, “are convinced that principles are valueless”. Tawney, the Christian moralist, disagrees. “What we want”, he declares unequivocally, “is a restatement of principles”.^{vi}

ⁱ ‘A Note on Christianity and The Social Order’, 1937, see *The Attack and Other Essays*, R.H.Tawney, p. 172.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.172.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.168.

^{iv} *The Commonplace Book*, R.H. Tawney, edited by J.M. Winter and D.M. Joslin, Cambridge University Press, 1972, entry for Aug. 20, 1913.

^v *Ibid*, entry for Feb. 26, 1913.

^{vi} *Ibid*, entry for Feb. 26, 1913.

Yet while Tawney's social philosophy is grounded in his Christian faith, as Anthony Wright points out, "his writings are not generally framed in Christian terms or presented as exemplifications of Christian doctrines".ⁱ Indeed, his appeal for EQUALITY calls on the spirit of Humanism, which, he argues, is not the exclusive possession of any particular body of religious doctrine. Humanism, he insists, is the anti-thesis of materialism. The humanist spirit, like the religious spirit, he contends, "regards the whole fabric and mechanism of social institutions as means to an end...the growth towards perfection of individual human beings".ⁱⁱ The humanist spirit, he insists, upholds the dignity of man. It recognises "that the differences which divide men are less important and fundamental than their common humanity".ⁱⁱⁱ There is, therefore, for Tawney, a Christian *foundation* to the arguments which he recommends to Christians and non-Christians alike. In this way he addresses the obvious problem which arises from his proposals. If the arguments were dependent *solely* on Christian moral principles, they would have no relevance to non-Christians, and could to that extent be not only ineffective but divisive. If on the other hand the argument is presented in broad pragmatic or humanist terms, this difficulty is avoided.

For his own purposes and so far as Christians are concerned, Tawney, in the tradition of Christian Socialism rests his philosophy on this: recognition of men as brothers before God. This recognition, he holds, will move men and women to service, conscientiously extended in fellowship. Freedom, "the goal of politics", is actualised, he insists, through such institutional organisation as will equalise the opportunity of each individual to develop their distinct qualities, to exercise their particular powers. For Tawney, such development compounded by fellowship will not only activate a sense of obligation towards the community, it will foster the understanding of the individual as a responsible and participating citizen. This understanding endorses Tawney's own

ⁱ R.H. Tawney, Anthony Wright, Manchester University Press, 1987, p.19

ⁱⁱ *Equality*, R.H. Tawney, 1931, (1964 edition used throughout this thesis), George Allen & Unwin, p. 85/86, *passim*.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p. 86.

commitment to a moral social order in which change is achieved by debate and negotiation which will enlist the “intelligent collaboration of contentious human beings...whom mutual confidence alone can enable to co-operate”.ⁱ It is an order, W.H. Greenleaf proposes, of “collective responsibility for the welfare of all and the replacement of competition by co-operation”.ⁱⁱ It is an order which, for Tawney, “the social democrat par excellence”,ⁱⁱⁱ rejects the scientific, calculating and paternalistic tendencies of ‘authoritarian collectivism’ and replaces it with a democratic socialism of responsible and participating individuals. Such a socialism not only promotes individual development as an expression of a possible self: it seeks to establish a social order which will realise that possibility.

This concern to realise a possible self derives from a tradition of Protestantism which commands individual responsibility, respects diligence and demands self-discipline. From this tradition there evolves an ethic which emphasises community, enjoins charity and judges spiritual development more valuable than material wealth. It is a tradition which acknowledges that fallible man, tempted by sin, is equally capable of salvation, that all men, equally, are “one in Christ Jesus”. (Gal: 3:28) It is sustained by an unyielding belief in freedom of conscience. Its adherents cherish the ideal of individual liberty which R.H. Tawney, even as he demands equality, insists is “the supreme political good”.^{iv}

In insisting on freedom of conscience, Tawney thus detaches liberty from dependence on any particular Christian or indeed any other religious belief. He defines freedom in a way which makes it both precise and secular. There is, he submits, “no such thing as freedom in the abstract, divorced from the realities of a particular time and

ⁱ *Equality*, R.H. Tawney, 1931, (1964 edition used throughout this thesis), George Allen & Unwin, p.188.

ⁱⁱ *The British Political Tradition*, W.H. Greenleaf, (Vol. 1), *The Rise of Collectivism*, Routledge, 1983, p.293.

ⁱⁱⁱ ‘Postscript An Appreciation’, Hugh Gaitskell, see *The Radical Tradition* (essays by R.H. Tawney), George Allen and Unwin, 1964.

^{iv} *Equality*, p.225.

place". He rejects as invalid a concept of freedom which defines liberty in terms of the absence of state coercion and demands, in the name of freedom of choice and individual action, the minimum of restraint.^{NB} "The perpetual state of morbid irritation",... "the unnatural tension",... "the embittered struggle of classes, interests and groups"ⁱ within industrial capitalism, he argues, is engendered precisely through such an interpretation of liberty. For Tawney, liberty does not mean comparative freedom from regulation: it implies the equalisation of power. Without the power to choose, he would agree, "the right to choose has no value".ⁱⁱ For Tawney, then, a more equal distribution of economic power adds to the sum of effective liberty. It increases the opportunity for self-development; it promotes social cohesion; it fosters fellowship.

And fellowship is at the heart of Tawney's philosophy. Fellowship, he insists, will not only encourage co-operation, it will ensure the rule of law, which, Tawney recognises as the necessary condition for the free exercise of mutually respected rights. In a free society, he acknowledges, "the primary, essential and fundamental liberties are normally secured by law".ⁱⁱⁱ The same laws, he allows, protect life, limb and property against a brutish Hobbesian 'state of nature'. Law, he perceives, safeguards liberty. It is law which will guarantee the conditions for individual development just as law demands self-restraint in the interest of social harmony. Yet, for Tawney, liberty and the claim for "a life worthy of a human being which no decent man will withhold from his fellows"^{iv} is ultimately secured when, in fellowship, men and women in co-operative effort (are united) by moral principles.

NB Professor Frederick Rosen disputes this concept of negative freedom. "Those who fight for liberty", he argues, "are usually intent upon resisting oppression and tyranny. What they seek is not necessarily to be left alone by government, but another government which will not be tyrannical". see *Thinking About Liberty*, F. Rosen, Inaugural Lecture, University College, London, Nov. 29, 1990, p.13.

i *The Acquisitive Society*, p.223-224, *passim*.

ii See *Democratic Socialist Aims and Values*, Labour Party Pamphlet, 1988.

iii *Equality*, p.227.

iv *The Acquisitive Society*, p.5.

Henry Dubb, it must be conceded, has not had an easy ride. He has, Tawney submits, endured the excesses of Capitalism... "a juggernaut sacrificing human ends to the idolatry of material means".ⁱ Dubb has survived the barbarity of war, faced the fear of unemployment, the disadvantages of bad education, the miseries of ill-health. Henry has been tempted. Totalitarians of both left and right have appealed to his "muddled soul". Yet, Tawney contends, "the loveable, pigheaded, exasperating Dubb, will not lightly yield such fragment of equality and liberty as he has contrived to snatch from his masters".ⁱⁱ Nor, Tawney insists, will Henry support a Socialism which "puts him on a chain and prevents him from teaching manners to his exalted governors".ⁱⁱⁱ Tawney approves. "In the interminable case of "Dubb V Superior persons and Co.," he declares, "I am an unrepentant Dubbite".^{iv}

Henry, then, has no intention of surrendering the rights, which, so long denied, have been so reluctantly granted. Henry, Tawney reflects, has "respect for the elementary decencies". He is sensitive on the subjects of personal liberty, freedom of speech, tolerance, the exclusion of violence from politics, parliamentary government. He holds his independence dear; he resents paternalist interference,... "the way in which they make us ignorant people live in the way they think we ought".^v Henry (like Tawney) has no enthusiasm for the intrusions of "the progressive mandarinat which set the tone of British public policy"^{vi} in the immediate post-war period. Henry, "poor bloody infantryman", has fought a war: he has been witness to the tyranny of totalitarianism.^{NB} Now, in an economic crisis, Henry, never at ease in 'a culture of enterprise', is disenchanted with the

ⁱ 'Christianity and The Social Revolution', 1935, see *The Attack*, R.H. Tawney, p.163.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.163.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.164.

^{iv} *Ibid*, p.164.

^v *The Commonplace Book*, entry for April 19, 1912, record of conversation with John Elkin, miner.

^{vi} *Christianity and The Social Revolution*, p.163.

^{NB} "Our home-grown theorists" (who have sympathised with some very repressive authoritarian regimes) argue that "totalitarianism is distinguishable from authoritarianism by the state's need to conscript not just passivity, but assent and even enthusiasm, by its determination to abolish the private life". See Christopher Hitchens, *The Twilight of Panzercommunism*, *The New Statesman*, August, 1988.

neo-libertarians. Disturbed by 'the triumph of the economic virtues' he is uncomfortable with its social values; he questions its individualist ideology. As always, he is suspicious of those who trawl the wilder shores of political thought. Perhaps, as Professor Marquand suggests, in the late part of the twentieth century, "the Tawney tradition may have more to say to Henry than any other". Perhaps, Henry, "the common, courageous, good hearted, proletarian fool"ⁱ will now demand a social order which emphasises community and co-operation rather than economic egotism and the pursuit of self-interest.

Henry's confidence in the established order is eroding. Certainly, he concedes, his children enjoy material benefits he only dreamed of. They are better educated; some have travelled; they are healthier. Yet, Henry has been scarred by the past; he is insecure in the present; he is fearful of the future. He fears for his livelihood; technology dents his pride, threatens his painfully acquired skills. And class divisions persist. There still remain inequalities of education, of environment, of health provision, even of life expectancy.^{NB} Henry has seen privilege perpetuated; he has borne the 'insolence of office', suffered the cynicism of incumbency. Perhaps, now, at the edge of a new century, as Professor Marquand proposes... "it is time for Henry Dubb to come out of the cold".ⁱⁱ

The Tawney tradition as Professor Marquand suggests "is highly subversive". It questions every established political orthodoxy. It even challenges the views of those democratic collectivists who erroneously suppose themselves to be followers of Tawney. Indeed, there are those conscientiously dedicated to the ideals of social democracy who,

ⁱ 'The Twilight of The British State? Henry Dubb Versus The Sceptred Awe', David Marquand, (quoting Tawney).

^{NB} Tables in the Central Statistical Office show the gap between rich and poor to be widening. The relative income of the poorest fifth of households fell sharply from 6.9 of the total in 1989 to 6.6 in 1991. The post-tax income of the richest fifth increased from 43 percent in 1989 to 44 percent. In 1991 the poorest fifth paid 29.2 percent of disposable income on indirect taxes while this proportion dropped to 14.3 percent for the wealthiest 20 percent of households. See Central Statistical Office Publication, 'Economic Trends'...June 1993.

ⁱⁱ 'The Twilight of The British State? Henry Dubb Versus The Sceptred Awe', David Marquand, p.210-221.

in the interest of what they perceive to be socially equitable, do not, as did Tawney, apply the litmus test of moral principle to social action. There are those socialists, too, who develop “a rather personal theory of democracy. who adopt the role in politics that is best characterised as that of the intellectual as expert”.ⁱ such ‘experts’, John A. Hall proposes, tend to produce elitists political theories. Tawney, he argues, did not act as a political intellectual elitist but rather as a political intellectual moralist. The distinction is easily determined. “Where I think the Fabians go wrong”, Tawney contended, “is that they seem to think you can trick statesmen into a good course of action without changing their principles, and that by taking sufficient thought, society can add several cubits to their stature”.ⁱⁱ

Patently it is impossible to separate Tawney’s Christian principles from the social and economic policies which evolve from them: they are intertwined. The one is informed with Christian social theory, the other with a universal and non-sectarian humanism. The whole body is illuminated by the ideals of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, values which a celebrated defender of a hierarchical order cursorily dismisses as “the device of the Revolution” (The Social Theories of T.S. Eliot, see Chapter IV). Yet, for Tawney, these ideals which have been perverted by the tyranny of totalitarianism and emasculated by the inequalities of industrial capitalism are vital, imperative, worth the struggle. His Christian understanding of men and women as “one as children of God” (John 11:52) is confirmed in the ideal of equality. Fraternity endorses that understanding. It motivates men and women to charity and tolerance. It makes an appeal, in multi-cultured, multi-ethnic societies diverse in religions, moral and philosophic principles, to the problematic conception of community culture; it encourages “the notion of citizenship and the common good”.ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ *The Roles and Influence of Political Intellectuals : Tawney vs Sidney Webb', see British Journal of Sociology, Vol.28, No.3, Sept. 1977, John A. Hall, p.351-361.*

ⁱⁱ *The Commonplace Book, R.H. Tawney, see entry for Dec. 2, 1912.*

ⁱⁱⁱ *Philosophy, Politics and Citizenship, Andrew Vincent and Raymond Plant, Basil Blackwell, 1984, p.180.*

This notion of “the common good” does not demand that each individual plan of life be directed towards a democratically agreed common objective. Certainly to secure the interest of the powerless and establish equity, Tawney demands a redistribution of material resources and economic power. Yet, for Tawney, “the common good” is not satisfied merely by re-distributive measures. The notion resides in a teleological concept which seeks to provide equally the opportunities for individual self-development. For Tawney, the pursuit of “the common good” will foster the spirit of community, maximise individual liberty, and allow scope for the fulfillment of legitimate individual aspirations.

As for Liberty...

“When Liberty goes out of place it is not the first to go,
Nor the second or the third.
It waits for all the rest to go,
It is the last”.ⁱ

Liberty, then, for Tawney, “is the goal of all right political action”. He cherishes it. It is, he declares, “the supreme political good”.ⁱⁱ

Yet in spite of this unyielding commitment to liberty there are clearly difficulties with Tawney’s social and political philosophy. Even those who have shared his general political sympathies have worried about the practical application of an “appeal to principles” particularly when at the end of the twentieth century the notion of a unitary Christian Church is in no sense a feasible basis for social life. This thesis, therefore, will set out the principle features of Tawney’s moral argument and consider some of the difficulties associated with it. It will compare it with other political arguments stemming

ⁱ *To A Foil’d Revolutionaire’, Walt Whitman, 1848/1849, see Penguin Book of Socialist Verse, 1970, p.80.*

ⁱⁱ *Equality, p.164.*

from religious faith and assess the contemporary relevance of Tawney's thought, To this end use has been made of unpublished material together with subsequently published material such as Tawney's COMMONPLACE BOOK, (1912-1914) . Principal attention, however, has been given to the published works since this work constitutes the public as opposed to the private Tawney.

In Chapters II and III (and throughout the thesis) I will undertake a critical examination of Tawney's principle writings both as social theorist and economic historian (including his COMMONPLACE BOOK, 1912-1914). Whilst this section will stress the moral content and the influence of Christian faith on his philosophy, I will argue that an analysis of his writings reveal that his socialism was motivated by political pragmatism as well as by moral principles.

Since Tawney and his contemporary T.S. Eliot the poet, playwright, essayist and social theorist were both committed Christians, I will seek to demonstrate, in Chapter IV, through a textual examination of their writings, the philosophic differences which evolve out of their personal interpretation of Christian teaching. I will demonstrate Eliot's disapproval of democracy in contrast to Tawney's defence of the democratic ideal. I will argue that although both Eliot and Tawney were united by their rejection of the institutions and values of industrial capitalism, they were divided by their understanding of the nature of man and the concept of human perfectibility.

In Chapter V I will present the principal anti-egalitarian argument which in the last quarter of the Twentieth Century has been levelled against the egalitarianism which Tawney defended. I will critically analyse these arguments which reject egalitarianism as deriving from envy, reacting against industrial efficiency and contrary to the 'natural' social order. Referring to Tawney's writings and the views of various contemporary political philosophers, I will examine the pragmatic as well as the moral arguments for equality. I will, drawing on these writings, evaluate the anti-egalitarian argument which

dismiss as incoherent and a threat to liberty the egalitarian notions of equality of opportunity, equality of education and equality of environment.

In the Final Chapter I will address specific criticisms both sympathetic and censorious of Tawney's philosophy. I will indicate the tensions, weaknesses and strengths of Tawney's thought. I will emphasise Tawney's commitment to democratic process in conclusion, in a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural society beset by social, political, economic and environmental problems, I will argue the contemporary relevance of the appeals to both moral principles and pragmatic reasons which permeate Tawney's ethical socialist thought.

CHAPTER II

“The Significant Connections”

Religion, The Church and the Principles of Social and Economic Life. Puritanism

Mr. Griffith Jones: (prosecuting) “You described this as a puritanical book. Is that your genuine and considered view?”

Richard Hoggart: (defence witness) “Yes.”

Mr. Griffith Jones: (with gentlemanly superiority) “I think I must have lived my life under a misapprehension of the word ‘puritanical’. Will you help me?”

Richard Hoggart: (earnest and friendly) “Yes, I will. Many people do live their lives under a misapprehension of the meaning of puritanical. The proper meaning (in Britain) to an historian is somebody who belongs to the tradition of British Puritanism, and the main weight of that is an intense sense of responsibility for one’s conscience. In that sense the book is puritanical. Heavy with conscience.”

Mr. Griffith Jones: “I am obliged to you for the lecture.”

(From the transcript of the trial of LADY CHATTERLEY’S LOVER), Regina Versus Penguin Books, Ltd., 1960.

Chorus: “Nature sent man into the world alone without all company, to serve but one that I’ll do.”

Baterville: “True City Doctrine, Sir.”
‘The Shoemaker’s Holiday, published circa 1600, Thomas Dekker, 1570-1632.

“Thus far it appears what a vast circumference this world “Puritan” has, and how by its large acception it is used to cast dust in the face of all goodness, theological, civil or moral: so that scarce any moderate man can avoid its imputation.”

(Henry Parker) A DISCOURSE CONCERNING PURITANS. (2ND ED., 1641), P.60

quoted by Christopher Hill, SOCIETY AND PURITANISM IN PRE-REVOLUTIONARY ENGLAND; Penguin Books, 1964.

Introduction

Tawney had been witness to carnage. He had endured the horrors of trench warfare, he had been seriously wounded on the Somme in a battle of senseless slaughter. Yet in 1916 after the destruction of war, the world was not at peace. In Russia, the civil war had left the country devastated and on the brink of famine. At Versailles, the victorious allies had imposed harsh conditions on a defeated enemy; an army of occupation ruled over a hungry and resentful Saar and Rhineland. In Germany, there was fighting in the streets. Rosa Luxembourg and Karl Leibnecht had been murdered. In Bavaria, the premier had been assassinated, so too, had the Reich Finance Minister, Mathias Etzberger. In the east, the Baltic States were threatened by a 'Frei Korps' composed of disaffected war veterans led by officers of extreme right-wing views motivated not only by patriotism but by promises of land for settlement. In Berlin, a bloody and abortive coup d' état was staged by ultra-nationalists. The fall in the value of the Mark heralded the beginning of a runaway and crippling inflation. There was hunger, despair, disillusion. In Hungary, a short lived 'Soviet Republic' had been overthrown; its leaders had fled. There followed a 'white' terror of savage ferocity. In Italy, riots and widespread industrial unrest had led to the formation of workers' councils, occupation of the factories and a general strike. Meanwhile, the squadristi of Mussolini's Fasci di Combattimento were gathering the support which culminated in the 'March on Rome'. In Britain, as the discharged servicemen returned to the factories, fields and offices, they were confronted with a less idealistic reality than the 'Land Fit for Heroes' which they had been promised. There were already present the seeds of social unrest and the declining economic conditions which were to bring about mass unemployment, deprivation and social strife. It was then, an uneasy peace, and as for the Treaty of Versailles which was to uphold it, Tawney warned... "it is the Macht-Politik of the 'Acquisitive Society' writ large"... "the consequences of which is war". If, as Tawney declared... "the test of the objects of war is the peace which follows it", then the forecast he had made in 1916 was

prescient. ... "We have slaved for Rachel", he noted sombrely, "but it looks as if we have got to live with Leah".ⁱ

Yet, inspired by his Christian Socialist belief, Tawney, in spite of the disappointments and betrayed hopes, set out in books, articles, pamphlets and journalism the principles of a new equitable social order. In these writings, Tawney "brought to the study of economic history the same assumptions which underline his critique of social thought".ⁱⁱ The works, are informed by a central concern .. "to deepen the discussion of economic issues by reference to ethical dilemmas".ⁱⁱⁱ This central concern is made particularly apparent in his first full-length work of social theory, *THE ACQUISITIVE SOCIETY*, as it is in his most celebrated work of economic history, *RELIGION AND THE RISE OF CAPITALISM*.

Tawney and the Ethical Tradition in English Radical Politics

Tawney's work, both as social theorist and academic historian is always concerned with the ethical dimension. It evolves out of a socialist conviction which rejects a vision of society as merely an economic mechanism in thrall to unmonitored market forces. It derives from a tradition of English ethical thought which encompasses such thinkers as Thomas More, John Ruskin, Charles Kingsley, Wm Morris, Wm Cobbett, Robert Blatchford, L.T. Hobhouse, and more recently figures such as T.H. Marshall and Richard M. Titmuss. The writing is permeated by Tawney's understanding that ethical values cannot be divorced from social, political and economic issues. It derives, too, from a socialism grounded in the religious conviction that "morality is superior to dogma and that

ⁱ 'Some Reflections of a Soldier' R.H. Tawney, (first published in *The Nation*), Oct. 1916, see *The Attack*, p.22.

ⁱⁱ *The Agrarian Problem In The Sixteenth Century*, R.H. Tawney, first published by Longman Green, 1912, see Introduction by Lawrence Stone, 1967 edition, Harper and Row.

ⁱⁱⁱ Introduction to *Tawney's Commonplace Book*, April 1912 - December 1914, J.M. Winter & D. Joslin, 1970, Cambridge University Press 1972, p XIX-XX.

the *quality* of people's lives matters more than their material achievements".ⁱ Tawney's argument is illuminated by a Christian faith which demands, 'porro unum necessarium', the practical application of Christian morality into every sphere of human activity regardless of economic or political expediency. It is informed by... "a socialist Christian ideology in which", Donald Soper insists, "the ultimate value is always Christianity".ⁱⁱ The work, then, is an expression of a socialism so buttressed by Christian ethical thought, so impregnated with Christian faith, that Norman Dennis and A.H. Halsey are prompted to declare that... "Tawney's conception of the social order began with the New Testament".ⁱⁱⁱ

Tawney's Understanding of The Role of Ideas Values and Principles

While Tawney the historian is concerned to trace the ecclesiastic, economic, political and social changes which evolved out of the Reformation, Tawney the social theorist and Christian socialist is equally concerned to identify the consequences of these changes on contemporary industrial capitalism. But beyond the eloquence, beyond the facts and the findings, the assessments and the conclusions, his work is permeated by a sense of regret. The regret does not, however, evolve from a nostalgic longing for a 'Merrie England' that never was. Tawney had no illusions about the miseries, ignorance and superstitions of the middle ages. He did not yearn for the return of an idealised 'golden age' in which each man, might live his life within a 'chain of being', a hierarchy of responsibility and duty, of command and obedience according to God's divine will. Nevertheless a sense of regret persists throughout his historical works. It persists as he records how in the face of a changing social order the traditional Christian values were

ⁱ *The New Statesmen*, 'A Man For All Seasons', Obituary on the death of R.H. Tawney, Jan. 19, 1962.

ⁱⁱ 'Socialism...an Enduring Creed'. *The Reverend The Lord (Dr. Donald) Soper*, see 'Lecturers in memory of R.H. Tawney' and see 'Fellowship, Freedom & Equality', David Ormrod (editor), published by Christian Socialist Movement, 1990, p.47.

ⁱⁱⁱ *English Ethical Socialism*, Norman Dennis and A.H. Halsey, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1988, p.151.

eroded within a society which, "intoxicated by material possibilities, divorced economic from moral considerations".ⁱ It persists in *RELIGION AND THE RISE OF CAPITALISM* as Tawney records the triumph of economic individualism as homo credulous gave way to homo economicus. The regret is patent as Tawney chronicles how traditional social bonds were broken and long established ethical premises discarded. There is regret as the ... "appetitus divitiarum infinitus" prevails over recognised obligations of stewardship and service. It is manifest even as Tawney insists that... "the task of an historian is not to appraise the validity of an idea but rather to understand its development".ⁱⁱ It is, however, in the preface of the 1937 edition of *RELIGION AND THE RISE OF CAPITALISM* that the source of the regret can be most clearly identified. He wryly notes that eleven years after the book was first published, to employ the term Capitalism, once regarded as unsuited to an historical study, was no longer perceived as a manifestation of... "sinister intent" but was now acknowledged as a recognisable economic phenomenon. ... "Capitalism", he declared, "is a fact" and... "no historian will make much of the last three centuries if they ignore it".ⁱⁱⁱ There is another equally significant fact, he ruefully insists, which evolved from changes brought about by Capitalism. The premise that... "Trade is one thing, and religion another",^{iv} which, he claimed, would have been... "an audacious novelty" before the advent of Capitalism was now accepted as a commonplace. This distasteful premise, Tawney insists, rests on the notion conceived in the sixteenth century, encouraged in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and triumphant in the nineteenth, that religion and commerce were two separate spheres neither of which had the right to encroach on the other. It was a victory, Tawney grimly notes, which was... "a long time being won".^v Constantly propounded and commonly accepted during the great era of industrial expansion, Tawney ironically suggests that... "its early proponents would have felt some embarrassment at its later

ⁱ *The Agrarian Problem In The Sixteenth Century*, R.H. Tawney, First Published by Longman Green, 1912 see Harper & Row, 1967 edition, p. 408/409.

ⁱⁱ *Religion and The Rise of Capitalism*, Introduction, p.VIII.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.VIII.

^{iv} *Ibid*, p.VIII.

^v *Ibid*, p.VIII.

interpretations". The 'victory' had ultimately produced industrial capitalism. It had created an economic system which acted against fellowship, nourished self-seeking and rejected social responsibility. The seeds of the religious and social changes which were sown in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have blossomed into the ACQUISITIVE SOCIETY which Tawney, historian, Christian moralist and social theorist, so vigorously denounces.

The notion of the separation of religion and commerce, had, Tawney insisted, been historically opposed, first by the Schoolmen, then by the Reformation. It had been strenuously resisted by those Tudor Statesmen anxious to preserve the traditional religious sanctions. It had been reviled by the Calvinists who had sought to establish an economic order in keeping with their religious principles. However, Tawney argued, whatever differences of doctrine or ecclesiastic procedure divided the opposition, they were held together by one cardinal assumption,... "the institutions of property, the transactions of the market-place, the whole fabric of society and the whole range of its activities, stand by no absolute title"...but... "must justify themselves at the bar of religion".ⁱ The entire opposition was united, if not by Christian brotherhood, then at least by a Christian precept. Christianity, they all agreed... "has no more deadly foe than the unbridled indulgence of the acquisitive appetite". All would have denied a common understanding of Christian faith with those... "Who run greedily after the error of Baalam for reward" (Jude XI). The established order in which the authority of the Church had maintained social cohesion and imposed social discipline was challenged by a new philosophy which encouraged individualism and rewarded, not the obedient, but the enterprising. It was, as Tawney noted, an erosion of... "a social philosophy based ultimately on religion" (in favour of)... "an age of economic enterprise, which enclosed

ⁱ *Religion and The Rise of Capitalism, Introduction, p.VIII.*

land and speculated on the exchanges”; it led, he concluded... “to the collapse of public morality in a welter of disorderly appetites”.ⁱ

For Tawney, “tracing the significant -connections”, ‘the rise of capitalism’ was inextricable intertwined with the erosion of the traditional Christian values. The notion that in a Christian community... “the higher must consider the lower and the lower answer in like manner to the higher so that each is in turn a member of the other” gave way to an ethic which saw in economic prosperity a sign of spiritual grace. It is this lost notion of mutual responsibility, this idea of fellowship sustained by the Christian precept... “For we are members one of another” (EPH. 4.25) ... which Tawney regrets. The Church, he insists, in the face of the growth of individualism, expanding financial and commercial enterprise, was... “theoretically abandoned”. It was abandoned, he argues, because it had... “turned its face from the practical world”.ⁱⁱ In an age of new discoveries, new perceptions and new demands, it had nothing to offer save... “piety imprisoned in a shrivelled mass of desiccated formulae”ⁱⁱⁱ In the new environment of... “economic energy in action and realist intelligence in economic thought”, the Church was no longer effectual. Its social teachings discounted, its moral authority rejected, it slowly ceded its claims to spiritual and temporal leadership. Where society had been seen as a spiritual organism, there was now installed a doctrine which saw in the pursuit of economic self-interest the operation of... “the providential plan which is the law of God”.^{iv} The Church which had once been... “the keystone which held together the social edifice” had been relegated... “to one department within in”.^v In the two centuries from the Reformation to the Restoration, the secular and religious aspects of life which were once regarded as inseparable were now separate and independent provinces. The “struggles of moral resistance” which Anthony Wright argues Tawney admired and “sought to retrieve for his

ⁱ R.H. Tawney's introduction to *A Discourse Upon Usury* by Thomas Wilson, 1572, Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, London, 1925.

ⁱⁱ *Religion and The Rise of Capitalism*, p.189

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.189.

^{iv} *Ibid*, p.257.

^v *Ibid*, p.273.

own generation, were lost”.ⁱ The... “secularisation of political thought”, Tawney argues,... “had profound reactions of social speculation”. In England at least, he insists,... “the whole perspective had been revolutionised”. From this revolution, there evolved political liberty, democratic process, social progress. From this revolution in religious thought which... “helped to mould the social order and was in turn moulded by it”,ⁱⁱ there evolved those forces, political and economic, which prepared the way for industrialism - the ‘Rise of Capitalism’ and the ‘Acquisitive Society’.

In his inaugural lecture delivered at the London School of Economics in 1932, Tawney, in an attempt to define the task of the historian, argued that it was a Professor of Moral Philosophy, Adam Smith, rather than an “annalist or an antiquarian” who had first... “seen the clue to the progress of civilisation in Europe”. It was Smith’s attempts at philosophic history which had traced the emancipation of economic interests from... “the tyranny of custom, predatory class ambitions and the obstruction of governments pursuing sinister ends”. The central theme of the *‘WEALTH OF NATIONS’*, Tawney insists, is historical and no one who studies the work will doubt that, without... “several generations of historical investigation”, it could not have been written.^{NB} Similarly, he pays tribute to De Tocqueville and Saint Simon for their perceptions concerning the connections between economic and political history. He acknowledges, too, the contribution to the study of history by the young Marx particularly for his understanding that... “juristic relations and political forms are not to be understood by themselves but are rooted in the material conditions of life”. Tawney the historian, in spite of his disagreements with Marx the social theorist, argues, that as far as history is concerned with the economic foundations of society... “serious history today, whether Marxian or not, is inevitably post Marxian”.ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ R.H. Tawney, Anthony Wright, p.123.

ⁱⁱ *Religion and The Rise of Capitalism*, Introduction to 1937 edition, p.XII.

^{NB} Tawney (in 1932) remarks on the naivete of those ‘political populisers’ who select from Adam Smith’s writings those quotations and ‘snippets of doctrine’ which suit their interests. The practice, unfortunately, is still prevalent.

ⁱⁱⁱ ‘The Study of Economic History’, R.H. Tawney, 1933, see *History and Society*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978, p.48-65.

It is unreal, Tawney argues, for an historian to isolate political and religious development from its economic and social background; the only adequate history, is 'l'histoire integral'. In the same lecture Tawney argues that the study of history is not only concerned with... "a series of past events but of the life of society and with the records of the past as a means to that end".^{NB} Part of the historian's business, he argues, ... "is to substitute more significant connections for those of chronology". It is important to understand that if society...

"is to be master of its fate, if reason is to conquer chance, and conscious direction deliver human life from the tyranny of nature and the follies of man, the first condition is a realistic grasp of the materials to be handled and the forces to be tamed".ⁱ

The historian, Tawney claims... "serves on his own humble plane, that not ignoble end".

In the first of the Scott Holland lectures, Tawney argued that the most suitable beginning for a foundation established to commemorate the late Canon of Christ Church would have been... "either an examination of the spiritual problems concealed beneath the economic mechanism of our society or a philosophic discussion of the contribution which religion can make to their solution". Indeed, as Charles Gore reminds us in a prefatory note to the first edition of *RELIGION AND THE RISE OF CAPITALISM*, the course of lectures which were to be delivered triennially were to have as their subject "the religion of the reincarnation in its bearing on the social and economic life of man". Tawney, somewhat modestly, declared that he had chosen the humbler task of trying to... "give an account of the history of opinion during one critical period - the period immediately preceding the Reformation and the two centuries which followed it". Clearly this task is

^{NB} The lecture was subsequently published in 1933 under the title *The Study of Economic History*. It is now included in *History and Society*, a collection of essays by R.H. Tawney, edited by J.M. Winter, Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, London, 1978.

ⁱ *The Study of Economic History*, R.H. Tawney, 1933, see *History and Society*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978, p.54.

an expression of the economic historian's belief in the impact of ideas and the influence of moral values on the historical process. It is this belief compounded by Christian faith which motivates the commitment of the social theorist to a politics of moral principles.

An Appeal to Principles: The Functional Society and Social Reconstruction

Firm in the conviction that "social institutions are a visible expressions of the scale of moral values", ⁱ Tawney insisted that society re-evaluate the values of industrial capitalism. The confrontations, the inequalities of wealth, power, status and opportunity, he argued are the inevitable consequences of an economic order predicated on self interest and motivated by the spirit of acquisition. This economic order, he insisted, must give way to "The Functional Society" in which men and women in co-operation rather than competition fulfil the true purpose of industry and "provide the community with some service which it requires". Such a social order grounded in community entails the recognition of rights mutually extended of responsibilities mutually accepted. It must appeal to standards other than the demands of the market place or the pressures of economic expediency. It must, in short, have "recourse to principles" which for Tawney is a necessary condition for social reconstruction.

Tawney castigates the class-ridden structure of British economic and social life. He attacks an educational system which perpetuates class division and creates class conflict. He rails against an industrial system in which men who contribute neither labour nor expertise are permitted to enjoy the fruits of another's toil. Yet in this relatively early work, although Tawney is concerned with equity, he is not *primarily* concerned with equality, a value to which he gave much subsequent attention. Nor, except in a wider sense, does he present a case for liberty, although he insists that the industrial problem is a question "first of function, secondly of Freedom". There is, however, running through the

ⁱ *The Acquisitive Society*, p.13.

work an implicit plea which permeates everything that Tawney ever wrote, every battle he ever fought. It is a plea for fraternity. It is for the sake of fraternity, 'the right order of life' that Tawney insisted in 1912... "the industrial problem is a moral problem, a problem of learning as a community to reprobate certain courses of conduct and to approve others".ⁱ It is for the sake of fraternity that Tawney proposes a community of common purpose, a society directed towards agreed common ends.

Tawney's commitment to social unity is grounded in the belief that social organisation is an expression of moral values. Yet, if, as Hugh Gaitskell asserted, Tawney was "the best man I have ever known",ⁱⁱ he plainly demonstrates that apart from saintliness, he could also display the wrath of an Old Testament prophet.^{NB1} As Richard Crossman proposed, even as Tawney postulated a vision of an equitable and fraternal society, he denounced an "England of privilege in which a whole apparatus of class institution make not only the income, but the housing, education, health and manners, indeed, the physical appearance of different classes of Englishmen almost as different from each other as though the minority were alien settlers established among the rude civilisation of a race of impoverished aborigines".^{NB2} There is righteous anger for a society in which the rights of property are absolute, 'irrespective of any social function, any contribution to social purpose which the owner may perform'. There is contempt for

ⁱ *The Commonplace Book*, entry for June 10, 1912.

ⁱⁱ Hugh Gaitskell, 'An Appreciation of R.H. Tawney', see *The Radical Tradition*, p.214..

^{NB1} In the 1930's "when a Labour Government had tried and failed, Tawney became not the visionary preacher of Christian Socialism but a fierce Micah, castigating the chosen people for their shortcomings and prophesying doom unless their leaders repented". Richard Crossman, 1960, quoted by David Ormrod in *Introduction to Fellowship, Freedom and Equality*, published by Christian Socialist Movement, 1990.

^{NB2} Tawney's disgust with the social conditions endured by his fellow countrymen was shared by Robert Blatchford, 1951-1943, editor the *The Clarion*, "Britain", Blatchford asserted, comparing the owning classes to an "alien force" exploiting an "aboriginal" population, "does not belong to the British: it belongs to a few of the British, who employ the bulk of the population as servants or as workers". There exists, he argued, "among the owning classes a state of useless luxury and pernicious idleness, among the working class a state of drudging toil, of wearing poverty and anxious care". Like Tawney, Blatchford moved by moral indignation declared, "this state of affairs is contrary to Christianity ... justice and reason". See *Britain for the British*, Robert Blatchford, Clarion Press, 1902, (frontispiece). Ironically, this title, used as a slogan by the British Union of Fascists in the 1930's, is still employed, against every Christian principle of brotherhood, by racist groups.

“a society which values neither culture nor beauty but only the power which belongs to wealth”... “in which gain is divorced from service, in which privilege is established as a national institution”. Tawney’s indignation is fired by “a doctrine in which economic rights are anterior and independent of function”.ⁱ Such a doctrine, he insists, will surely find no place in a society of co-operation and common purpose. On March 26, 1913, Tawney wrote in his *Commonplace Book*... “Too much time is spent today upon outworks by writers who pile up statistics and facts, but never get to the heart of the problem”... “that heart is not economic”; it is a question of moral relationships. This is the citadel which must be attacked... “the immoral philosophy which underlines modern industry”.

Tawney attacks the citadel; he pillories the injustices of modern industrialism; he denounces the waste, the extravagance. He derides a philosophy which holds that private and public interests are coincidental, and that “man’s self-love is God’s Providence”.ⁱⁱ He rejects the notion that individual rights are the centre and pivot of society; he condemns the fact that such rights are still the “most powerful element in political thought, the practical foundation of industrial organisation”. He warns against the “fetish worship of economic activity”... “which Industrialism has elevated into the standard by which all other interests are judged”.ⁱⁱⁱ We have witnessed, Tawney claims a breakdown of the organisation of society in which individual rights are divorced from obligation. The Great War, he asserts, was a manifestation of that perversion of nationalism which produced imperialism just as the perversion of individualism is industrialism both of which are based on the defective principle that the rights of nations and the right of individuals are absolute. Here, Tawney’s warning is apocalyptic. In a world in a world of unlimited claims, where the possibilities of increasing military power is limitless, there can be no peace between nations. In the same way, in a community of unrestrained individualism

ⁱ *The Acquisitive Society*, p.23.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.30.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.48.

and absolute rights, there can be no harmony. For Tawney, individualism is the outwork of the citadel; it has not fulfilled the noble ideas of The Enlightenment; it has instead degenerated into a competitive and exploitive commercialism. As long as men move on this plane, Tawney argues, there is no solution to the economic and social ills which beset mankind. If society is to be healthy, if men and women are to live in unity and fellowship, they must first regard themselves as trustees for the discharge of functions, as instruments of social purpose.

In certain respects, Tawney's proposals for a Functional Society share an affinity with Guild Socialism as projected by S.G. Hobson or A.J. Penty. They even share some common ground with Hilaire Belloc's notion of 'distributism', although Tawney would reject the strong traditionalist and hierarchical elements of Belloc's system.^{NB} In the early 1920's, Tawney declared a broad sympathy for such schemes "... though possibly an unorthodox Gild (sic) Socialist", he stated, and certainly disagreeing with some of its opponents ... "I welcome it because it has drawn English Socialism into the mainstream of the socialist tradition which has as its object not merely the alleviation of poverty but an attack on the theory of the functionless society."ⁱ

Raymond Williams suggests that "the two most important elements in THE ACQUISITIVE SOCIETY are the general discussion of changes in social theory and an analysis of the idea of industrialism".ⁱⁱ The two elements, however, are interdependent.

^{NB} See *Restoration Of The Guild System* A.J. Penty, 1906 see also S.G. Hobson *National Guilds and other works*, *The Servile State*, Hilaire Belloc (1912), G.D.H. Cole, *Guild Socialism Restated and other works*. See also the writings of R.A. Orage, editor of the *Literary and Political Journal New Times*, who also wrote for G.K. Chesterton's *Distributist*, see Rodney Barker *Political Ideas In Modern Britain*, M. Methuen and Company, 1978, page 98-104 *passim*.

Curiously, Orage, an early Fabian and member of the Independent Labour Party "became an ardent Theosophist, a disciple of Gurdjieff". Hollbrook Jackson, the literary historian and critic (1874 - 1948) wrote in *The Windmill*, Volume 3, Number 11, 1948, that Orage wanted "to create a Nietzsche circle in which Plato and Blavatsky, Fabianism and Hinduism, Shaw, Wells and Edward Carpenter should be blended with Nietzsche as the catalytic". See *Madame Blavatsky's Baboon*. Peter Washington, Secker and Warburg 1993, page 202

ⁱ See *The Tawney Papers*, British Library of Political and Economic Science (speeches on various occasions, undated).

ⁱⁱ *Culture and Society*, Raymond Williams, Hogarth Press, 1987, p.217.

Certainly, Tawney the historian traces the changes in social and political thought which emerged in the 18th century. He analyses the economic, social and philosophic evolution of industrial capitalism, pointing to its genesis in the Enlightenment and its endorsement in the American Constitution and French Declaration of the rights of Man. Tawney identifies the roots of Industrialism as evolving from the just demands and social and economic freedom which resulted not only from man's changed perception of the world but also of their place within it. These legitimate claims for the abolition of economic privilege, which were the driving force for the demands for equality, he argues, have been largely counter-balanced by the growth of the inequalities springing from Industrialism.

The answer to these problems, Tawney argues, is not to be found by middle-class reformers seeking to alleviate the sufferings of the poor. The problem, he insists, (with a veiled reference to the Fabians), will resist paternalistic adjustment to the social order. He demands a radical moral transformation rather than a more benevolent Capitalism. ... "What is required", he declares, "is a restatement of principles". What is required is moral reform rather than social tinkering which left intact the ethical assumptions of industrialism. As for the working class, Tawney, in spite of his admiration for the good sense and common decency of Henry Dubb, is not optimistic. ... "They look to the recovery of the booty as the greatest social reform" ... but in a society where the... "moral relations are felt to be unjust. "there is no use devising relief schemes". Nor, Tawney insists, can we look to the English Labour Movement to correct the iniquities of functionless ownership. The 'Movement' he had written in 1914... "had made one tragic mistake"... "it has aimed at comfort, instead of aiming for their rights"... "they can be bought off by instalments of social reform".ⁱ This sad, rather than scornful assessment of The Labour Movement has its contemporary supporters among those who value social justice. ... "The Left", David Marquand asserts,... "has been in certain respects as individualistic in its assumptions and behaviour as the Right"... "it has advocated public

ⁱ *The Commonplace Book, entry for November (undated, 1914).*

intervention not in the interests of the community, but, as a means of satisfying private aspirations and sectional demands”.ⁱ The Left, in short, has shown a willingness to put the narrow interests of particular groups before the common good, an assessment which coincides with Tawney’s reflection that... “The Labour Movement aims at comfort, not rights, including the right to do their duty”.ⁱⁱ Industrialism, which creates dissension, also grants power, but for Tawney, it is power without moral purpose. Such power, he submits, cannot inspire men and women to value social duty before narrow self-interest.

In presenting his arguments for a society of Function, Tawney subjects the notion of functionless property to critical examination. His main thrust is centred upon what, he insists, is a substantive principle of Industrial Capitalism; its maintenance of the absolute rights of property. ... “Property Rights”, Tawney insists, are in essence, Rights secured by the state.ⁱⁱⁱ He sees such rights as instruments by which the economically powerful, can, in the name of individual liberty, determine the economic lives of the economically powerless. Against those champions of property who see any attack on such rights as a manifestation of the desire of egalitarians to create a system entirely wedded to the total abolition of private property, he argues that certain types of property must be protected. There must be no strictures against “the simple property of the small landowner, the small proprietor, the craftsman and especially the household ‘goods’ and ‘dear’ domestic amenities which is what the word property means to the guileless minds of clerks and shopkeepers when the cry is raised ‘property’ is threatened”.^{iv} Tawney insists that the free disposal of a sufficiency of personal possessions is the condition of a healthy and self respecting society. There will be, therefore, in a ‘Functional Society’ no desire to establish... “a visionary communism in which all property is held in common”. Property must be allowed to return to its true nature which has been perverted by a doctrine which

ⁱ ‘A Language of Community’, David Marquand, see *The Alternative*, edited by Ben Pimlott, Anthony Wright, Tony Flower, WH. Allen, 1990.

ⁱⁱ *The Commonplace Book*, entry for November (undated, 1914).

ⁱⁱⁱ *The Acquisitive Society*, p.92.

^{iv} *Ibid*, p.79.

insists that... “the particular forms of private property which exist at any moment are a thing sacred and inviolable”.ⁱ A theory of property which had been advanced by the English Parliamentarians and the French philosophers in defence of the small holdings of yeomen, the tools of craftsmen and the stock in trade of merchants against... “the hangers on at St. James or the country parasites at Versailles”ⁱⁱ had been hijacked in the name of economic development and acquisitive industrialism. This, he submits, is a false concept of individual rights. There is a difference, he argues, between property used by its owner in the conduct of his profession or in the upkeep of his household, and property which is in effect a claim on wealth produced by other men’s labour. Such claims are a product of ‘Functionless’ property; they act against fellowship; they cannot unite men, for what unites them is a bond of service to what they perceive as a common purpose. Functionless property, for Tawney, sustains a society which dissolves moral principles into a choice of personal expedience; a society which elevates the individual into the centre of his own universe. Functionless property is a denial of what for Tawney is the ‘essence of all morality’. ... “The belief that every human being is of infinite importance, and therefore no consideration of expediency can justify the oppression of one by another”.ⁱⁱⁱ

Yet if Tawney deplores the institution of property without function on moral grounds, he also lambastes it for its inefficiency and wastefulness. He is appalled at the reliance on the uncontrolled mechanics of the market place and the ensuing proliferation of luxury goods which fill the shop windows of Regent Street when there is so evident a need for basic necessities. Yet he does not propose a centralised productive system. His criticism of the arbitrary and profligate nature of Capitalism evolves from the belief that the institution of functionless property, compounded by the assumption that the free exercise of individual rights is the main interest of society, turns social life... “into a scene

ⁱ *The Commonplace Book, entry for November (undated, 1914).*

ⁱⁱ *Ibid, entry for November (undated, 1914).*

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid, entry for 13 Aug. 1913.*

of fierce antagonism"...and a... "barely disguised social war" within a society which holds that all economic activity is equally justifiable. This notion of property rights is perverse and wasteful. It makes unnecessary payments to superfluous middlemen, to owners of royalty rights, to beneficiaries of ground rents, all of whom receive in the name of property, none of whom contribute. Property thus becomes a sleeping partner, a residuary legatee without responsibility. ... "Possession", remarks Tawney (quoting Meredith's Sir Willoughby Patterne), "without obligation to the object possessed, approaches felicity".^{NB} A society so organised without social obligation or responsibility cannot be harmonious. Where there should be unity there is division. Where there should be common purpose there is rancour. Where there should be camaraderie there is conflict.

Ethics and Usury: An Emerging Order

Tawney, Lawrence Stone proposes, saw history as "a branch of moral philosophy"... he "saw moral judgement as central to the historian's task".ⁱ Nowhere, is this concern with moral judgement as evident as in Tawney's discussions of usury. For Tawney, the recognition of usury as a respectable tool of commercial enterprise destroyed a scheme of social ethics which saw economic interests as a secondary aspect of human life. That a man might without sin loan money upon interest set the scene for change which brought about a new social and economic order. These changes, Tawney argues, were revolutionary: fuelled by economic initiative and restless experimentation "they had no regard either for the word of God or the welfare of this realm".ⁱⁱ Yet while the economic historian argues that these changes "ushered in the modern world", the social theorist questions the benefits of modern commercialism and the modern conceptions of economic expediency. Social arrangements, the Christian moralist claims, which, in the

^{NB} See *The Egoist*, George Meredith, 1828-1909.

ⁱ *The Agrarian Problem In The Sixteenth Century*, R.H. Tawney, first published Longman Green, 1912, see Introduction by Lawrence Stone, 1967 edition, Harper and Row.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.409.

pursuit of self-interest have “contempt for the restrictions which fetter them”, must be challenged... “whether in the Sixteenth Century or in our own day”.ⁱ

Tawney, seeking the “significant connections” takes as a starting point the Christian attitudes of the sixteenth and seventeenth century towards the usurer ... “a great taker of advantages, an oppressor of his neighbour (who) fears not God, neither regards he man”.ⁱⁱ Indeed, Richard Baxter’s judgement provides inspiration for Tawney’s regret for a vanished, more Christian, more fraternal social order. It is lawful, Baxter, a pious and pragmatic Presbyterian asserts, to... “lend upon usury”... “when it does not violate either the rule of piety to God or is against justice or charity to men”.ⁱⁱⁱ It is sinful, he insists, “when it is used against justice or charity to our neighbour”...(for) ... “justice obligeth me to give him more than his own”.^{iv} As for lending, Baxter argues... “it is a duty when we have it and our brother’s necessity requires it”.^v Where a loan granted to relieve the temporary misfortune of an unfortunate neighbour was seen as an act of Christian charity, usury “the brat of heresy” was denounced as un-Christian, exploitive, extortion.

Usury, Tawney suggests in his introduction to Dr. Thomas Wilson’s ‘*A DISCOURSE ON USURY*’, was the most burning social question of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The practice of usury, he argues, in *RELIGION AND THE RISE OF CAPITALISM*, was, after the swift rise of a commercial civilisation, at the centre of the struggle for economic and social change. The issue at stake, was more than ... “a legal technicality” or even a matter of scriptural interpretation. Baxter’s answers, then, reflect a society in which the actions of men towards their fellows is determined not

ⁱ *The Agrarian Problem In The Sixteenth Century*, R.H. Tawney, first published Longman Green, 1912, see Introduction by Lawrence Stone, 1967 edition, Harper and Row., p.409.

ⁱⁱ *A Christian Directory*, Richard Baxter, 1673, Vol.1, p.111A, Soli Deo Gloria Publication, p.837-839.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.837-839.

^{iv} *Ibid*, p.837-839.

^v *Ibid*, p.837-839.

merely by self-interest, but is monitored rather by a system of ethics which insists that they respect and comply with Christian teaching. It is a social order in which considerations of economic expediency are subordinate to the moral authority of the Christian Church. As for the Church... "what man would be afraid to live desperately in that state of life that he seeth manifestly condemned by heathens, by Christians by the olde fathers, by the ancient counsels, by Emperors, by Bishops, by decrees, by Canons, by all sects of all regions and of all religions, by the Gospel of Christ, by the mouth of God", wrote John Bishop of Salisbury in 1569.ⁱ Yet, if a more temperate view of usury... "that most heinous (sic) offence against God and his Church"ⁱⁱ was at the source of the revolt on which was borne a new ethic, slowly with the growth of individualism and the erosion of the Church's moral authority the revolt became a stream, until with "the triumph of the economic virtues,"ⁱⁱⁱ the floodgates opened. A new commercial order embraced an ethic which recognised neither... "that justice obligeth me to give him his own", nor, that ... "charity obligeth me to give him more than his own". It was an ethic which responded to... "a brothers necessity", not with charity, for it saw in his distress a proof of dismerit and it judged his misfortune as punishment for... "idle, irregular and wicked courses".^{iv} It was a stern code; if it tightened the bonds of discipline it loosened the bonds of brotherhood.

The Historical Relationship: Ethical Principles and the Social Order

Tawney's examination of the origins of Industrialism in political works such as *THE ACQUISITIVE SOCIETY* is not detailed. His concern is not to render a full historical account of the rise of Industrialism, but rather to illustrate that the ideals of the Enlightenment, inspired by that high sense of human dignity which had desired that all

ⁱ See John Bishop of Salisbury's letter to Dr. Thomas Wilson, Dr. Thomas Wilson, *A Discourse on Usury*, (1572) reprint, Frank Cass, 1962.

ⁱⁱ See Thomas Cartwright quoted by R.H. Tawney, p.215 in *Religion and The Rise of Capitalism*.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Religion and The Rise of Capitalism*, title of Chapter IV, Part III.

^{iv} *Ibid*, p264.

men be free to become themselves, had been distorted by 'a deluge' which had changed the social and economic face of society and led to Industrial Capitalism. In his historical writings and in particular in *RELIGION AND THE RISE OF CAPITALISM*, it is with the impact of these changes brought about by this 'deluge' --- The Reformation --- that Tawney concerns himself. He examines the effects on social, political and economic life as the medieval theories of social ethics were confronted by the erosion of ecclesiastic authority and the ensuring secularisation of political philosophy which followed the Reformation. Yet, if Tawney the historian is concerned to demonstrate the development of religious opinion on questions of social ethics in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the intellectual changes which followed, Tawney, the social theorist, aware that these developments and changes... "ushered in the modern world" is concerned to show their effects on the twentieth century. Tawney examines the medieval background to the Reformation, analyses the role of the 'Continental Reformers' and evaluates the part played by the Church of England as defenders of the established order.

Tawney is faithful to the 'historian's business'. He seeks to substitute more 'significant connections than those of chronology'; at the same time he attempts to identify the 'materials to be handled' and the 'forces to be tamed'. Like Adam Smith, he understands how the history of the past can fashion and effect the conditions of the present. He recognised that the material and forces which shaped the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries continue to exercise an influence on contemporary society. For Tawney, the religious, political and economic changes which brought about... "the triumph of economic virtues" find current expression in industrial capitalism and the 'acquisitive society'. The new religious and social thought which loosened the bonds of duty and obedience imposed by the medieval Church have, in consequence, created an order which places more value on individual economic 'success' than on social cohesion. An organic conception of society, in the wake of the Reformation, has given way to the notion that the individual, protected by juristic rights, should pursue his own ends in competition rather than in co-operation with his fellows. A social unity sustained by both

custom and discipline had succumbed to a doctrine which proclaims individual rights and fosters individual autonomy. One of Tawney's continuous concerns as a historian is to trace the religious, social and economic changes which allowed for the final triumph of this 'individualist' doctrine. Even as he quotes John Locke's assertion that... "the great and chief end of men uniting in commonwealth and putting themselves under government is the preservation of their property"ⁱ, he perceptively notes that while the *political* significance of this development has often been described... "the analogous changes in social and religious thought have received little attention".ⁱⁱ^{NB} Tawney, however, in the belief that each generation... "steps into a social inheritance to which it adds its own contribution"... "which it bequeaths to its successors", is engaged not only to record the political changes; he is anxious also to examine the effects of these changes on social and religious thought. His evaluation of the influences of Luther and Calvin, the examination of the role of the Church, the analysis of the sources of Puritanism, do not therefore derive solely from an historian's concern with a chronological record. They evolve also from a search for the 'significant connections'. Tawney argues that the distinctive note of Puritan teaching was... "its emphasis on individual responsibility rather than a social obligation".ⁱⁱⁱ When, therefore, as in *CHRISTIANITY AND THE SOCIAL ORDER*, he quotes John Maynard Keynes' assessment that... "modern capitalism is absolutely irreligious without internal unity, without much public spirit, a mere congeries of pursuers and possessors"^{iv}, he has, in accordance with own judgement traced the 'more significant connections'.

ⁱ *Religion and The Rise of Capitalism*, p.20.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.20.

^{NB} Marx, Christopher Hill recalls, gave the matter some attention,..."*Cromwell and the English people*", Marx asserts, "had borrowed speech, passions and illusions from *The Old Testament*...When the bourgeois transformation had been accomplished, Locke supplanted *Habakkuk*", see Karl Marx *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, see *Selected Works of Marx & Engels*, 1935 Edition, Vol. 11, p.137, quoted by Christopher Hill, *The English Bible and the Seventeenth-Century Revolution*, Alan Lane, 1993, p.40.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Religion and The Rise of Capitalism*, p.270.

^{iv} '*Christianity and The Social Order*', 1937, see *The Attack*, p.170.

Tawney, asserts that the changes by which the secular State separated itself from the Church revealed themselves gradually... “the seeds sown by the Reformation” came to fruition in England, only after the Civil War. Only slowly, he insists, did... “reason take the place of revelation” and religious authority yield to political and economic expediency. The changes, however, were revolutionary even if their impact was not immediately apparent. In spite of a drawn out and sometimes fierce resistance, a ‘new economic order’ ultimately replaced a traditional society derived from the Bible, the teachings of the Fathers and the Schoolmen. Yet, Tawney argues, society is not only the product of economic and material circumstances; the religious and moral environment also sets its stamp upon it. Why and how, he demands, did changes in religious and moral perceptions create and endorse an economic order which was regarded as mechanistic, dependent ... “upon impersonal and almost automatic forces”? How did ‘individualism’... “first denounced, and, then triumphantly justified” succeed in overturning social doctrines enshrined in law and hallowed by custom? Tawney is anxious to examine the transformation as he is anxious to analyse the results. He acknowledges the revolutionary impact of Machiavelli’s social philosophy and argues that they were... “at least a powerful solvent of traditional, ethical restraints, as was Calvin”.ⁱ He recognises in Locke’s theories of property and rights the ideological foundation for economic individualism. The... “economic categories” of modern society are a part of its... “intellectual furniture” as are its political conceptions. Yet there was a schism, between the medieval conception of society and that of the late seventeenth century. It was a schism, he insists, (no doubt anticipating his Marxist critics) that... “no theory of the permanence or ubiquity of economic interests can bridge.” The schism evolved from two opposing views of society. It derived on the one hand from the notion that economic activity was... “one among other kinds of moral activity”, and, the contrary view that “business was one thing, religion another”. The division, Tawney claims, confronted men with three moral questions. Should society be regarded as... “a community of unequal classes with varying

ⁱ *Religion and The Rise of Capitalism, notes on Chapter IV, p.312/313, passim.*

functions organised from common ends"? or as a self-adjusting mechanism, which, through the play of economic motives, creates a market to satisfy economic needs?"ⁱ Should the doctrine that one must not take advantage of a neighbour's necessity persist or should it give way to the Puritan belief that... "man's self-love is God's providence"?ⁱⁱ Should economic appetites be restrained in accordance with religious principles? or, should man embrace an attitude which ... "regards expediency as the final criterion"?ⁱⁱⁱ

There was, Tawney insists, action and reaction between a burgeoning commercial environment and changing religious perceptions, and, while a movement such as Puritanism helped to mould the social order, it was, in its turn, moulded by it. Weber's thesis, Tawney argues, is that a new conception of religion encouraged a parvenu class to ... "regard the pursuit of wealth not only as an advantage but as a duty". The significant fact about the ensuing challenge to the established aristocracy of land and commerce was not that it was motivated by self-interest, for Tawney insists, such motivation has never been absent from the affairs of the man. It was rather that the radical change in moral standards now come to recognise as virtue that which had traditionally been regarded as vice. Weber's objective, Tawney submits, was to establish that western Christianity as a whole, and in particular certain varieties of it, which acquired an independent life as a result of the Reformation had been more favourable to Capitalism than some other creeds. Tawney, however, is concerned not only to demonstrate the fundamental changes in religious perceptions and economic behaviour which resulted from the Reformation; he is prepared to condemn a system in which "economic interests are still popularly treated as though they formed a kingdom over which the *Zeitgeist* bears no sway".^{iv} For Tawney, then, the Reformation not only altered the relationship between religious assumption and economic practice. It endorsed an ethic of self interest and individualism...it created

ⁱ *Religion and The Rise of Capitalism, notes on Chapter IV, p.312/313, passim.*

ⁱⁱ *Ibid, p.26.*

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid, p.26.*

^{iv} *Ibid, p.271.*

Capitalism, and, he insists... "Capitalism was the social counterpart of Calvinist theology."ⁱ

Christianity and a Social Vision

Tawney's conception of a social order, Anthony Wright argues, is "concerned with the moral premise of Christianity" which demands that Christian principles be extended to the realm of social and economic affairs (and) that there must be... "a unity of personal and social life".ⁱⁱ It is this conception of a social order which motivates Tawney's challenge to the values of the acquisitive society which he perceives as... "a juggernaut sacrificing human ends to the idolatry of material means".ⁱⁱⁱ The conception is crucial to an understanding of Tawney's attack on a society whose whole tendency, interest and pre-occupation is to promote the acquisition of wealth; a society "without principle beyond the pursuit of self-interest without discrimination between different types of activity"... "between enterprise and avarice, energy and unscrupulous greed, property which is legitimate and property which is theft".^{iv} Such a society of atomic individualism with its encouragement to personal gain, its appeal to make self-interest is, for Tawney, against the Christian concept of brotherhood.

Tawney's socialism demands in the name of equity an equalisation of power and such political and economic measures as will extend to each individual the equal right to liberty. His socialist understanding recognises that it is only by such equalisations that the illegitimate exercise of power may be prevented. Yet ultimately, Tawney's socialist convictions are inextricably intertwined with his Christian understanding. Atomistic man, he perceives, bereft of ethical principles, seeks, within industrial capitalism, to exploit his

ⁱ 'Max Weber and The Spirit of Capitalism', R.H. Tawney, 1930, see *History and Society*, Routledge and Kegan, Paul, 1978, p.192.

ⁱⁱ R.H. Tawney, Anthony Wright, 1987, p.93.

ⁱⁱⁱ 'Christianity & The Social Revolution', R.H. Tawney, see *The Attack*, p.165.

^{iv} *The Acquisitive Society*, p.34.

fellows.^{NB} A society bound by the Christian precept of brotherhood will not tolerate such exploitation or suffer that one man may rob another of his dignity. Fellows, Tawney's Christian faith proclaims, neither demean nor exploit each other. They extend, each to the other, respect and consideration without servility, without coercion.

Tawney's plea for fellowship, then, is engendered by an understanding which condemns the values of the Acquisitive Society as "not so much un-Christian as anti-Christian". Industrial Capitalism, he argues, "shares with its totalitarian rivals some of the characteristics of a counter-religion".ⁱ To a Christian, he insists, employing the language of moral judgement rather than the statistics of the economist or the theories of the political scientist, "the qualities which Capitalist societies hold to be all important are more ruinous to the soul than most of the conventional immoralities".ⁱⁱ For Tawney, the divisions between the human family which evolve out of the competitive nature of Capitalism are an affront to the Christian imperative which rejects as morally repugnant the notion that a man may use his fellows for his own ends or place his individual appetite before the interest of society. Such an imperative, grounded in fellowship, demands of men that they acknowledge that "all ye are brethren" (Math 23:8). This Christian injunction, while it cannot ensure perpetual and universal social harmony, will, for Tawney, create the conditions for justice, equality and authentic liberty. It is an injunction grounded in Tawney's personal understanding of God "as a fact of experience" and of Christianity as a manifestation of God's nature. Christianity, for Tawney, is not only the personification of an imminent God, but the basis of true morality. This belief is sustained by what he identifies as the unique and characteristic Christian contribution which proclaims that God not merely exists "but that the God who exists is like Christ"...a man,

^{NB} *Tawney's attitude to individual interest as opposed to common purposes is firmly rooted in Christian theology. The essential point was made by Archbishop Laud preaching before the King on June 19, 1621..."If any man is so addicted to his private, that he neglect the common state, he is void of the sense of piety, and wisheth peace and happiness to himself in vain". Quoted from The Social Hope of the Christian Church, Canon Stanley Evans. Hodder & Stoughton, 1965, p.227.*

ⁱ 'Christianity and The Social Order', R.H. Tawney, 1937, see *The Attack*, p.170.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p. 170.

an individual, limited and defined. This belief underpins Tawney's entire social philosophy even if, as Anthony Wright points out, "Tawney's writings are not generally framed in Christian terms or presented as exemplifications of Christian doctrine".

This perception is undeniably valid. Tawney's writings, are however, informed by Christian principles. Tawney, as Wright acknowledges, "was no less attentive to questions of means, even while ensuring that the discussion did not lose sight of the fundamental values and ends involved".ⁱ Yet, Wright submits, in his "efforts to get the principles right first", Tawney was "forced to adopt a flexible stance in relation to methods of implementation and machinery". In this way, it was possible and desirable to combine "a dogmatism about ends with a pragmatism about means".ⁱⁱ Yet, as Wright argues,^{NB} Tawney's "agreement about ends did not preclude fundamental disagreement about means". Indeed, it may be ultimately argued that it is this obsession with values and ends rather than with methods and mechanics which distinguishes Tawney's social philosophy from those of most contemporary liberal theorists. Tawney is a Christian Socialist: his socialism demands in the name of equity and morality the extension of individual liberty, the equal opportunity of self development. It demands that all organisation and policy be directed to these ends, be motivated by these values. His ethical socialism rejects those "enlightened friends with philosophies of history". A socialism, "free of dogmatic petrification", will, in pursuit of its "obstinate and unashamedly ethical" ends, pragmatically "adopt a flexible stance in relation to the difficulties of machinery and implementation".ⁱⁱⁱ Such a socialism, inspired by Christian principles, will never lose sight of its fundamental values, will never compromise its objective ends, will always "get the principles right first"

ⁱ R.H. Tawney, Anthony Wright, p.94/5.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.94/5.

^{NB} Leaving "aside Tawney's failure to say anything substantial about how a socialist economy may operate", Anthony Wright draws attention to Tawney's "flexible stance" with reference to questions of public ownership, educational provision and in particular Tawney's attitude to Public Schools.

ⁱⁱⁱ 'British Socialism Today', 1952, see *The Radical Tradition*, p.168/169.

Yet, ultimately for Tawney, this recognition that in Christ 'God is made flesh' exposes the infinite smallness of man and reveals the infinite greatness of God. This recognition permeates Tawney's social vision : it demands that "each man and his neighbour" acknowledge themselves, subject to "a higher power above them both", so that each individual must be regarded as an end in him or herself. For Tawney, then, "the essence of all morality consists in the belief that "no consideration of expediency can justify the oppression of one by another.ⁱ Yet, he insists, moral conduct is not enough: it demands "a spiritual basis". Such a basis, predicated on a belief in God, illuminated by the example of the living Christ, will, he argues, reject the notion that men be estimated simply by their place in a social order and sacrificed to that order in the name of material benefit or economic advantage.

Ultimately, it is to ethical principles that Tawney turns. He may insist on a society of co-operation, united by collective responsibility; he may advance a theory of Function and Obligation to achieve it, but underpinning his socialist demands for political and economic reorganisation is his understanding of Christian faith.^{NB} This understanding derives from the special new and characteristic contribution of Christianity which proclaims that "God became, or was fully expressed in, a particular historical individual as to whose life we have records". This God, "who exists", he asserts, "is like Christ". Christianity shows HIM, not as universal, but as individual, not as infinite but as limited and defined, not as a principle but as a man".ⁱⁱ Tawney's Christianity is predicated on this understanding of God, since, he argues, it reveals to us what kind of God he is "and what he is like in ordinary human intercourse". This revelation, is at the heart of Tawney's

ⁱ *The Commonplace Book*, entry for August 13, 1913.

^{NB} Perhaps a contemporary Christian Socialist most succinctly encapsulates Tawney's political philosophy and his Christian understanding. We are, *The Reverend the Lord Soper* insists, "ultimately moral or immoral beings and (for Christian Socialists) the question of morality must take precedence over political suitability"... "what is morally right", Lord Soper insists, "can never be politically wrong", see 'Fellowship, Freedom and Equality', p.47, 'Lectures in memory of R.H. Tawney', edited by David Ormrod...published by the Christian Socialist Movement, 1990, see *Socialism, an Enduring Creed*, Donald Soper, 1980.

ⁱⁱ *The Commonplace Book*, entry for July 12, 1914.

Christianity for it demands of men and women that they live their “ordinary human lives” in accordance with Christian teachings and in accordance with Christ’s example. For Tawney, then, the essential characteristics of Christianity are unique. Christianity must be ‘lived’ it is not, he insists, “some kind of personal, naturalistic, semi- mystical religion”.ⁱ

There are signs, Tawney proposed, of... “an attempt to restate the practical implications of the social ethics of the Christian faith”. There have been periods in history, he insisted,... “which excluded economic activities and social institutions from examination or criticism in the light of religion”.ⁱⁱ For Tawney, however,... “after the last seven years both in international affairs and in industry, of the breakdown of the organisation of society based on rights divorced from obligation”, there was a pressing need to re-examine the role and the duties of the Church. In a world of nationalism, imperialism and industrialism in which, Tawney argues, confrontation was permanent and war inevitable, contemporary man, perplexed and disillusioned, demands answers to the fundamental questions of personal morality and economic practice. ... “Men”, Tawney insists, “were asking the same questions, though in different language, throughout the sixteenth century” ⁱⁱⁱ before the ultimate triumph of individualism and the ‘economic virtues’. If men had asked of Richard Baxter^{NB} in the tremendous storm of the Puritan movement... “directions about contracts in general and about buying and selling, borrowing and lending, and usury in particular”, how much more does modern man, alienated, an atomistic individual, need guidance in a more complex, competitive and acquisitive society. Tawney’s understanding of the duty of the Church are clearly stated both in *CHRISTIANITY AND THE SOCIAL REVOLUTION* and in ‘A NOTE ON *CHRISTIANITY AND THE SOCIAL ORDER*’. There is, he asserts, a distinctively Christian way of life and it is the duty of the Church... “to affirm openly and ceaselessly

ⁱ *The Commonplace Book, entry for July 12, 1914.*

ⁱⁱ *Religion and The Rise of Capitalism, p.18.*

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid, p.27.*

^{NB} *A Christian Directory, Richard Baxter,(1615-1691), published 1673, Part IV, Chapter X, questions XII - XIII - Soli Deo Gloria Publications. Reprint 1990, p.837-839.*

that men can fulfil the purpose of God only in so far as they follow that life”.ⁱ Religion, he agrees, is... “a thing of the spirit”, but so too, he insists, is the social order. The Christian Church, Tawney argues in *RELIGION AND THE RISE OF CAPITALISM*, abdicated its authority over those spheres which it had traditionally claimed and which men had traditionally recognised. It surrendered in the face of a system of ideas which was destined to revolutionise all traditional values. To examine the struggle of individualism, to see it triumphant” justified in the name of economic liberty is not, in our age, to indulge a vain curiosity”. It is rather to... “stand at the source of rivulets which are now a flood”.ⁱⁱ To stand at the source of the rivulets, to trace the causes of the flood, to analyse its economic and social consequences is as important for Tawney, the moral philosopher, as it is for Tawney the economic historian. Indeed, Anthony Wright suggests that for Tawney ... “economic history was at bottom a branch of moral philosophy”.ⁱⁱⁱ Tawney, a Christian socialist, convinced that men can only fulfil God’s purpose in a life of Christian duty, seeks not only to identify the ‘source of the rivulets’. He seeks also to restore to modern man... “sick through the absence of a moral ideal”, the Christian morality which asks of men ... “Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one another?” (Acts 7.26).

Puritanism and Service: Analysis and Prescription

The notion of service and social purpose is central to the tradition of Ethical Socialism. It is a tradition inimically opposed to the libertarian view which so recently proclaimed that “there is no such thing as society”, for its vision of community coincides with the dream of ‘the new day of fellowship’ for which William Morris yearned. It is necessary, Tawney argues, after the catastrophe of war, to reassess the structure of England’s economic and social order. He calls for a moral regeneration. ... “There can be

ⁱ ‘Christianity and The Social Order’, 1937, see *The Attack*, p.172.

ⁱⁱ *Religion and The Rise of Capitalism*, p.27.

ⁱⁱⁱ R.H. Tawney, Anthony Wright, p.25.

no reconstruction of society”, he argues, without an appeal to principles”.ⁱ The whole direction of society, its economic and social institutions are, he insists, “visible expressions of the scale of moral values”. The problems of industrialism will not respond to the exhortations of those ‘commercial teachers’ who demand higher production, for as important as productivity is, it is not the answer. The problems can only be solved by co-operation. ... “Plenty”, Tawney contends, “depends on co-operative effort and co-operation on moral principles”. It was the lack of a unifying social ethic which had prompted Tawney to write in 1912... “it is through the absence of a moral ideal that modern society is sick”... “to cure this by politics is like making a surgical experiment on a man who is dying of starvation”.ⁱⁱ

Function, Tawney asserts, “is an activity of social purpose; it is performed not merely for personal gain but as a responsibility to some higher authority”. For Tawney, the higher authority is the community, and all industry, all property, and all economic activity should be tested at every point by their relation to social purpose. The purpose of industry is plain, Tawney insists. It is to... “supply men with things that are necessary, useful or beautiful and thus bring alive body and spirit”.ⁱⁱⁱ An industry, Tawney insists... “is in essence nothing more mysterious than a body of men associated in various degrees of competition and co-operation to win their livelihoods by providing the community with some service which it requires”.^{iv} For Tawney, this definition of the principles upon which industry should be based is self evident;... “it is capable of being apprehended by the most elementary intelligence”, he asserts. The first principle is that industry should be at the service of the community; that “those who faithfully serve should be honourably paid and those who render no service should not be paid at all”.^v The second principle is that the direction of an industry should be in the hands of persons who are responsible to

ⁱ *The Acquisitive Society*, p.3.

ⁱⁱ *The Commonplace Book*, entry for April 29, 1912.

ⁱⁱⁱ *The Acquisitive Society*, R.H. Tawney, p.9.

^{iv} *Ibid*, p.6.

^v *Ibid*, p.7.

those engaged in the industry, to those who are directed and governed because ... “it is the condition of economic freedom that men should not be ruled by an authority which they cannot control”.ⁱ These two ‘elementary’ principles incorporate the values of function and service within an economic and social structure in which men and women, in concert, may attain the control and direction of the industry by which they live. It is a structure designed, Tawney insists, quoting Bacon, ... “For the Glory of God, and the relief of man’s estate”.

Tawney’s understanding of the purpose of industry, then, evolves from an ethical, as well as a material foundation. He is concerned not only with the provision of service and goods, (for the relief of man’s estate) but also with the system of values, the moral direction, the concepts and ideals within the community (For the Glory of God). Industrialism, Tawney argues, has overlooked the principles on which industry should be based. ... “Its function is service”, he insists,... “its method is association” and “within the association different parties have rights and duties towards each other”.ⁱⁱ By its very nature, Industrial Capitalism, with its perverted notion of individual rights, has created conflict and division. Duties towards the association are neglected or ignored as each party strives to receive what they perceive to be their entitlements and just rewards. This conflict will persist’ it is socially, morally destructive; it engenders class warfare; it will end in chaos.

Puritanism: Its Sources and Effects

While Tawney acknowledges the importance of Max Weber’s *THE PROTESTANT ETHIC AND THE SPIRIT OF CAPITALISM*, there are differences between his conclusions concerning the social and economic consequences of the Reformation and Weber’s. Weber claims his work is an attempt to trace the face and

ⁱ *The Acquisitive Society*, p.8.
ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.6.

direction of 'ascetic Protestantism' (Puritanism) on the 'spirit of capitalism'. It is further necessary, he allows, to investigate how Puritanism was in turn affected... "by the totality of social conditions especially economic". In the United States, he argues, where ascetic Puritanism is most fully developed, the pursuit of wealth stripped of religious and ethical content tends to ... "become associated with purely mundane passions".ⁱ Concerning Capitalism, the last stage of this 'cultural development', Weber suggests it might well be truly said ... "Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilisation never before achieved."ⁱⁱ But, he insists,... "this brings us to the world of judgements of value and of faith, with which this purely historical discussion need not be burdened".ⁱⁱⁱ Yet Tawney, the Christian moralists, is under no such restraint. As he investigates the sources and the strengths of 'ascetic Puritanism', as he chronicles its development, as he traces the connections between piety and property, he neither hesitates nor retreats from the world of judgement, of value and of faith.

Puritanism, Tawney insists, was not one single social philosophy. It contained several elements whose social outlook was widely different. The battle between collective discipline and individualism had, in fact, to be fought out within it. He recognises that within Puritanism there was... "an element which was revolutionary"... "a collectivism which grasped at an iron discipline and an individualism which spurned the savourless mess of human ordinances".^{iv} If the qualities of thrift, sobriety and frugality were diligently applied, there was, too, a... "reckless divinity" ready to sweep away the established order. This 'element' out of the crucible of Reformation, fired by religious fervour, fuelled by mysticism, by asceticism and redemption did not disappear. It was subsumed rather, within a comprehensive ethic which determined not only methods of

ⁱ *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*, see Chapter V, 'Asceticism and The Spirit of Capitalism', Max Weber first published 1904/5 (first translated by Talcott Parsons, 1930), George Allen and Unwin, 1990, p.182.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p 182.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.182.

^{iv} *Religion and The Rise of Capitalism*, p.212.

worship and Church government but political direction, commercial relationships, family life, personal duties and all aspects of social conduct. For the Puritan, the revelation of God was made manifest to his individual soul. His eternal salvation rested on his response to this communion with his Maker. His moral self-sufficiency must guard him from the temptations of extravagance or the sin of sloth. Only through self-discipline, through industry, prudence and piety might he find Grace. He was enjoined to... “Be ashamed of idleness as thou art a man but tremble at it as though art a Christian”.ⁱ The same stern doctrine which sanctioned labour and enterprise as service to God, saw in poverty and idleness not only a denial of Heavenly favour but sufficient grounds for earthly contempt.

... “What more wretched estate can there be in the world? First to be hated of God as an idle drone, not fit for His service; then through extreme poverty to be condemned of all the world”.ⁱⁱ

Puritanism was a doctrine for the disciplined and the dedicated. A ‘calling’, which requires of each adherent a life of quiet application, of modesty, of piety. It is a doctrine of personal responsibility in which all men are answerable to God, the Father, and each man is accountable to God the Judge. In isolation, the Puritan engaged in a battle of the spirit seeks a solitary salvation from an awesome God who will reward the industrious and punish the feckless. Alone, there is no power between each man and the Almighty, neither meditating Church of close community. By God’s will, and, in God’s service, in a hostile world of vanities and vain glory, he applies his heart and soul to prayer, and his acumen and energy to the practical affairs of man. His actions and his conduct will determine God’s Grace: he will be rewarded or punished according to his application and his devotion. ...

ⁱ *The Mother’s Legacy to Her Unborn Child*, Elizabeth Joceline, 1632, see *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England*, Christopher Hill, Penguin Books, 1964, p.121.
ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.121.

“Whatever, Lord, we give to thee
 Repaid an hundredfold shall be
 Then gladly, Lord, we give to thee”.ⁱ

It is an uncompromising creed - austere, demanding. ... “Be wholly taken up in diligent business of your lawful callings, when you are not exercised in the more immediate service of God”.ⁱⁱ It is a doctrine of thrift and prudence in which prosperity is a sign of the favour of God, in which improvidence invites the disdain of man. It is an ethic of diligence, for... “God hath commanded you some way or other to labour for your daily bread”.ⁱⁱⁱ Character is all; poverty is not misfortune but a sign of moral failing. It is a faith for the independent of spirit, for those who will submit to the unyielding judgement of God will not patiently submit to the restraints of man. The Puritan who will suffer no intercession in his transaction with his Maker will not lightly allow interference in his transactions with his neighbour. As he demands liberty of conscience, so he demands other wider liberties for... “Where the Spirit of Lord is, there is liberty” (Cor. II.3.17). If he is a willing servant of the Lord, he will not willingly be a servant to man. ... “Art thou called being a servant. Care not for it, but if though mayst be made free, use it rather. You are bought with a price; be not ye servants of men” (Cor. I.7.23). It is action and reaction... “L’esprit Calviniste et L’esprit des hommes nouveaux que la revolution economique de temps introduit dans la vie des affaires”.^{NB} Out of the Reformation, the expansion of commerce, the growth of the money market came a new ethos. Out of the new ethos came a new ethic, which, though its demand had been individual discipline, its practical result was individual liberty. Yet, Tawney argues,... “if the moral self-sufficiency of the Puritan nerved his will, it corroded his sense of social solidarity”.^{iv} An

ⁱ *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England, Words of Hymn quoted by Christopher Hill, p.282.*

ⁱⁱ *A Christian Directory, Richard Baxter,(1615-1691), published 1673, Part IV, Chapter X, questions XII - XIII - Soli Deo Gloria Publications. Reprint 1990, p.839.*

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid.*

^{NB} *H. Pirenne, Les Perodes de L'Histoire Sociale Du Capitalisme (Quoted by R.H. Tawney in the Preface to 1937 edition, 1914, Religion and The Rise of Capitalism.*

^{iv} *Religion and The Rise of Capitalism, p.229.*

individualism more conducive to the world of commerce than Christian brotherhood threw up a theory of individual rights, which, Tawney insists,... “secularised and generalised, was to be among the most potent explosives that the world has known”.ⁱ

It was an explosion which gave birth to a new force and a new system of ideas which prepared the way for the commercial civilisation which... “finally triumphed at the Revolution”. It created a new scale of ethical values, which, Tawney argues, almost reversed the traditional Christian virtues. Where there had once been compassion, there was now ‘impatient indignation’ at those who had... “sinned their mercies”. Where Christians had recognised that... “the greatest of these (virtues) is charity” (COR. I.13.13), there were now those who looked with dismay at the Puritan’s response to his brother’s misfortune. ...

“And when the poor his charity entreat

You labour not, and therefore must not eat”.ⁱⁱ

A new order determined that where once men had heeded the warnings and denunciations against worldly ambition, against power, against pride in possession, a new ethic had transformed the traditional vices into economic, and therefore, hallowed virtues. The Puritan, Tawney insists, with his ideal of personal responsibility, his dedication to the... “punctual discharge both of his public and private duties” was a spiritual aristocrat... “who sacrificed fraternity to liberty”.ⁱⁱⁱ Yet if liberty is not to be despised, liberty, for Tawney, must be monitored. Tawney rejects the notion of liberty proposed by those who see in individualist enterprise the discharge of a duty imposed by God and argue that to restrict such enterprise is to restrict liberty. Such a definition of liberty, Tawney insists, in its modern manifestations militates against the weak and disadvantaged. It is a liberty

ⁱ *Religion and The Rise of Capitalism*, p.229.

ⁱⁱ *London’s Charity Inlarged (sic) Samuel Hartlib, 1650, p.1, see Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, p.262.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Religion and The Rise of Capitalism*, p.247.

which, unrestrained and unthwarted, fosters a society in which... “a systematic and methodical accumulation”... “encourages a shrewd calculating commercialism which tries all human relations by pecuniary standards, an acquisitiveness which cannot rest while there are competitors to be conquered or profits to be won”.ⁱ It is a bleak and uncharitable prospect, a Hobbesian vision of life as... “a race in which we must suppose to no other good, nor other garland, but being foremost”. In a doctrine of work and worship, of prayer and property, Tawney has traced the “significant connections”. He has identified the roots of *THE ACQUISITIVE SOCIETY* in a philosophy in which... “the conscientious discharge of the duties of commerce is amongst the loftiest of religious and moral virtues”.— calculation, a religion of austerity and abstinence. Tawney, the historian, again seeking the ‘connecting link’, enlists the perceptive insight of John Maynard Keynes. ... “Victorian England”, he quotes, “the great cockpit of industrial capitalism”... “was inducted to the austere splendours of her ascetic shrine by the pious hands of Puritan moralists”.ⁱⁱ It was, for Tawney, “an ascetic shrine” at which individualism took precedence over common purpose and self-interest over fellowship.

Tawney argues in *‘THE STUDY OF ECONOMIC HISTORY’* that the evidence of a character of a society derived from a single century is misleading. Yet, he insisted, such materials are indispensable... “because they are specimens cut from a continuous life of which past and present...are different aspects”.ⁱⁱⁱ History impinges upon the present, informs it and forms it. Society today reflects the past; our codes of conduct, laws, institutions evolve over the centuries, affected by social, political and economic changes, influenced by new ideologies, intellectual theories, religious beliefs. Tawney records not only a series of past events, he analyses the records of the past in order to present and comprehend the *character* of a society. If he is concerned *with* England *then*, he is concerned *for* England *now*. With erudition and insight he has examined the materials of

ⁱ *Religion and The Rise of Capitalism*, p.247.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.249.

ⁱⁱⁱ *‘Study of Economic History’*, p.48-65, 1933, see *History & Society*, published 1978, Routledge and Kegan Paul.

the past, and, in the perception that they are “specimens cut from a continuous life”, he has illuminated the present. He has demonstrated how Puritanism helped to mould the social order of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and how it was in turn moulded by it. Indeed, his own understanding of Christian teaching allows for a judgement which no ascetic Puritan would dispute. “If a man has important work, and enough leisure and income to enable him to do it properly”, he proposes, “he is in possession of as much happiness as is good for any of the children of Adam”.ⁱ NB Yet, while Tawney freely acknowledges that Puritan ethics made an enormous contribution to political freedom and social progress, the assessment is not altogether free of censure. It was Puritanism, he submits, with its emphasis on individualism which led, insensibly, to an individualist morality. It is, he insists, this morality which led to the loss of the traditional sense of community. In the victory of Puritan individualism, it must be acknowledged, Tawney identifies not only seeds of industrial capitalism, he traces the erosion of Christian values.

The Responsibility of the Church

It is this erosion of Christian values which prompts Tawney’s demand that a Christian church must proclaim Christ’s Gospel without concessions or apologies to materialism or temporal powers. The church must win converts to common social purpose... “not because membership involves no change in their lives, but because it involves a change so complete as to be ineffaceable”.ⁱⁱ This ‘ineffaceable change’ will permeate the consciousness of society; the Church must recover, reassert and exercise its moral authority and endeavour to create a new kind, a Christian kind of civilisation. The Church must not allow its “sphere to be determined by the convenience of politicians or by the conventional ethics of the world of business” in a society dominated by a feverish

ⁱ *The Acquisitive Society*, p.239.

NB Nevertheless, Tawney’s social vision is not infused with the spirit of Puritan abstinence. “A society is free”, he wrote, “in so far ... (as) ... its institutions and policies ... enable all its members to grow to their full stature, to do their duty as they see it, and, ... since liberty should not be too austere, ... to have their fling when they feel like it”. *Equality*, concluding paragraph.

ⁱⁱ *Acquisitive Society*, p.239.

concern... “a transitory, irrational obsession...with economic issues”. Instead, the Church Militant .. “has a duty to harmonise the discords of industrial capitalist society by relating its activities to the spiritual purpose from which they derive their significance”.ⁱ If, as Anthony Wright perceptively argues, Tawney’s appeal is... “to moral sensibility which needs to be cultivated rather than to a philosophic sensibility requiring argument and explanation”,ⁱⁱ then, it is to a committed and engaged Church that Tawney looks to “cultivate the moral sensibility and expel the poison which inflames every wound and turns every trivial scratch into a malignant ulcer”.ⁱⁱⁱ Furthermore, if as Wright also argues,... “Tawney is engaged in the politics of moral exhortation rather than of social explanation”,^{iv} then it is the Church which he perceives as the instrument of exhortation, and it is the Church which must instil into the hearts and minds of men and women the fundamental moral axiom, ... the key to everything else in Tawney’s thought, that there is a moral imperative in treating people as ends not as means. The duty of such a Church is clear, it is to oppose exploitation and propagate the ideals of service and community within a regenerated moral order in which fellowship is the vital expression of Christian faith.

Certainly, in contemporary Britain the notion of the Church Militant successfully demanding and effectively sustaining a crusade of moral regeneration appears unrealistic. Yet it may be argued, that in 1921 (when the *Acquisitive Society* was published) The Church of England commanded a greater moral authority and a greater respect that it can presently claim. Indeed the presence and the pressures from non-Christian religious groups were minimal. The Anglican Church might in such circumstances, achieve through its unique relationship with State and Crown an ecumenical pluralism composed of different Christian sects dedicated to a moral crusade, which, William Temple insisted...

ⁱ *Acquisitive Society*, p 240.

ⁱⁱ *R.H. Tawney, Anthony Wright, 1987, p.107.*

ⁱⁱⁱ *The Acquisitive Society*, p.242.

^{iv} *R.H. Tawney, Anthony Wright, 1987, p.107.*

“would affect people not only as private individuals but in their social attitudes as well”.ⁱ Indeed, in 1942 William Temple while conceding that “the Church has to recover lost ground”, nevertheless proposed a set of Christian principles which he argued provide a Christian interpretation of the Church’s social duties. To the question “How should the Church interfere?” he insisted; 1) its members must fulfil their responsibilities and functions in a Christian spirit; 2) its members must exercise their purely civil rights in a Christian spirit; it must itself supply them with a systematic statement of principles to aid them in doing these two things and this will carry with it a denunciation of the customs or institutions in contemporary life or practice which offend against those principles”.ⁱⁱ Currently, it may be argued, Tawney’s social philosophy, *precisely* because it is grounded in the Christian ethic of mutual tolerance and fellowship demands, within a multi-religious, multi-cultural society, a Church dedicated to achieve through ecumenical measures, social unity rooted in moral values which are communally respected by all creeds. Such a Church, a contemporary Anglican intellectual proposes, must advocate “a model of education which will introduce the values of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, scientific humanism et al because these are the genuine constituents of our religious scene in Britain”.ⁱⁱⁱ Further, he submitted, in 1989 “we are educating children who will will-nilly be citizens of the world”.^{iv}

Tawney’s charge that the Christian Church, had failed, and was failing in its duty to uphold Christian values in the face of “the growth of individualism” and “the triumph of the economic values” is more than an historical judgement. The charge must be seen as a reflection of his demand that the accepted values of ‘the acquisitive society’ must be challenged by a militant Christian leadership dedicated to the restoration of the traditional

ⁱ See *Address to The Church Assembly, 1917 Report, William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1881-1944, a lifelong friend of R.H. Tawney.*

ⁱⁱ *Christianity and The Social Order, William Temple, Shephard-Walwyn, 1942, p.43.*

ⁱⁱⁱ See *Religion, State and Society in Modern Britain* edited by P. Badham Lampeter, E. Mellen Press, 1989.

^{iv} See ‘Church, Party and State’, as above, Ninian Smart, p.381/393 *passim*.

Christian ideal of fellowship; an ideal which proclaims the superiority of moral principles over economic appetites.

Tawney's purpose, however, is not only to identify the roots, economic, political and religious of Puritanism; it is also to demonstrate the contemporary relevance of Christian teaching as... "the line of division between the spheres of secular business is shifting"... "and the boundaries are once more in motion". Tawney recognised that the Church had lost the power, and, abnegated the traditional responsibility to impose a cohesive social ethic. The social economic relations of Capitalism, he perceived, "had produced a distorted Christianity that in turn gave support to the established order".ⁱ The Church had surrendered to the pressures of economic and social changes supported by new religious precepts which lauded self-reliance and encouraged individualism. For Tawney the Church had failed to accommodate itself to the changes. It had failed to retain its moral leadership in the face of new doctrines which challenged established Christian ethics and established social order. The Church had failed to uphold traditional Christian values which had sought to unify the social life of those whose guardian it claimed to be. Instead, it had yielded to a morality which fostered individual independence and encouraged self-interest. This failure had opened the way to atomic individualism; it had allowed for the triumph of self-interest at the expense of social harmony. Yet, after the carnage of war, the ravages of revolution, amid the waste of mass unemployment, of malnutrition, of exploitation, Tawney, sustained by Christian faith, firmly held that hope lay in the Christian message of brotherhood, of community, of common purpose. For Tawney, the Church has an obligation to persuade men to reconstruct the social order in accordance with Christian faith. A Christian has a responsibility to his fellow men, he insists, and the Church must not allow this responsibility to be repudiated. Christianity, he asserts... "must not be ruled out as irrelevant when the problem of organising society more justly is under consideration".

ⁱ 'The Gospel and Marxism', Irene Brennan, see *Fellowship, Freedom and Equality*, published by The Christian Socialist Movement, Lectures in memory of R.H. Tawney, 1990, p.72.

While he decries the past failures of the Church to respond to social and political changes, he also demands of the Church that it fulfils its present duty to assert itself on behalf of Christian values. It demands that in an age dominated by socially *destructive* egoism, the Church dedicate itself to socially *constructive* Christian fellowship.

Tawney poses some fundamental questions. He asks whether... "religion can admit the existence of a sharp antithesis between personal morality and the practices which are permissible in business"?ⁱ He asks, too, if the Church should propagate a standard of social ethics? and whether it had a duty to enforce it as among the obligations of its members? He insists that if in the past the Church has... "regarded questions of social organisation and economic conduct as irrelevant to the spirit",... does it now, in fact... "endeavour to make a Christian civilisation"?ⁱⁱ Tawney, then, inspired by the ethical standards derived from the traditional teachings of the Christian Church, has written both an historical study and at the same time, in what Dr. Charles Gore^{NB} describes as... "a just and well grounded judgement", delivered a moral message and instigated an ethical inquiry.

In Tawney's historical writings the research is prodigious; the perceptions are original and astute; the language crackles with wit and irony. There is a Biblical sweep and grandeur. The great historical moments are matched with majestic prose. Tawney's gift of narrative, his sensitive response to the drama of the age find deliberate expression

ⁱ *Religion and The Rise of Capitalism*, p.27.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.27.

^{NB} Charles Gore, 1853-1932, Canon of Westminster, 1894-1902, Bishop of Worcester, 1902-1905, Bishop of Birmingham, 1905-1911, Bishop of Oxford, 1911-1919, Dean of Theological Faculty, London University, 1924-1928, see Prefatory Note to 1937 edition, and *Religion and The Rise of Capitalism*, Peregrine books Reissue 1984/7. While at Balliol Tawney was influenced by "the socially oriented religious liberalism of Charles Gore", see Ross Terrill, *R.H. Tawney and His Times*, Andre Deutsch 1974, p.24. Tawney's friend at Rugby and Balliol, William Temple (1881-1944) was also influenced by Gore's "social idealism". Temple who was President of The Workers Educational Association in 1906, later became Archbishop of Canterbury. When a friend said to Temple one day... What we need are more men like Tawney", The Archbishop replied "there are no men like Tawney", see reprint of the Memorial address to R.H. Tawney, delivered by Hugh Gaitskell (Leader of the Labour Party) St Martin's in The Fields, 8 February 1962.

in memorable descriptive passages as he records... “the tremendous storm of the Puritan Movement”.

... “The forest bent; the oaks snapped, the dry leaves were driven before the gale, neither all of winter nor all of spring, but violent and life giving, pitiless and tender, sounding strange noises of yearning and contrition, as of voices wrung from the people living in Meshech, which signifies Prolonging, in Kedar which signifies Blackness, while amid the blare of trumpets, and the clash of arms, and the rendering of the carved work of the Temple, humble to God and haughty to man, the soldier saints swept over battlefield and scaffold, their garments rolled in blood”.ⁱ

Yet, beyond the passion and the poetry, Tawney seeks to answer some fundamental questions concerning the role of the Church. In medieval times, he argues, the Church had accepted responsibility over all the affairs of man. Slowly he insists the Church abdicated its authority and forgot its responsibilities. Even today, he notes regretfully, men in search of spiritual guidance turn in vain to a Church which is uncertain as to its duties, its province and its mission. For medieval thinkers, Tawney asserts, the questions posed no problems; they saw society as a spiritual organism, not as an economic machine. They regarded economic activity as one element within a complex unity which needed to be ... “controlled and repressed by reference to moral ends”. That these ‘moral ends’ were threatened by self-interested economic appetite seemed to them so self-evidently true that they insisted that ... “no sane philosophy would allow them free rein”. As for Tawney, his understanding of the duty of the Church, it is as unequivocally advanced in his political writings as it is in his historical studies. The duty of the Church, he insists, is not only to act on the individual conscience, it is also to condemn ... “all forms of economic and social organisation which hinder a distinctly Christian way of life.”ⁱⁱ

ⁱ *Religion and The Rise of Capitalism*, p.197.

ⁱⁱ ‘A Note on Christianity and The Social Order’, see *The Attack*, p.172.

Yet, Tawney does not yearn for the re-establishment of the medieval order; he recognises that... “economic ambitions may be good servants”. Harnessed to a social purpose, he agrees... “they turn the mill and grind the corn”. He acknowledges the achievement of science, the contribution of practical energy and technical skill which have beneficially transformed... “the face of material civilisation”. Only an incorrigible sentimentalist, he argues, would depreciate the significance of economic efficiency; it is, he asserts... “a necessary element in the life of any vigorous and sane society”. Nevertheless, he warns, to make a fetish of efficiency is to destroy it, and Tawney, the social theorist, returns to a theme which illuminates his entire work. The condition of effective action in a complex society, he insists, is co-operation... “and the condition for co-operation is agreement, both as to the ends to which effort should be applied, and the criteria by which its success is to be judged.ⁱ A standard of values is therefore necessary; men in co-operation, taking into account the resources available and the economic possibilities, must reorganise society in the interest not only of economics but of those other qualities which are truly valuable. Certainly, Tawney argues, economic factors are important, but men in co-operation will sacrifice material goods in order to ... “extend leisure or develop education or humanise toil”.ⁱⁱ A philosophy which appeals only to economic benefit, he had long argued, can never win men’s souls. Tawney perceives in industrial capitalism a society in which isolated individuals strive in their own self-interest to achieve maximum economic advantage. The existing order, in its pursuit of material increase, neglects the truism that... “even quite ordinary men have souls”. Benefits interpreted in terms of quantity and mass do not then sufficiently compensate for social organisation which... “insults their self-respect and impairs their freedom”.

For Tawney, then a revitalised Church must once again commit itself to a code of social ethics. It must, in accordance with the Christian message, encourage co-operation for it is only in a co-operation in which men acknowledge their common humanity that

ⁱ ‘A Note on Christianity and The Social Order’, see *The Attack*, p.277.
ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.277.

moral principles will supplant economic expediency. A common environment can only be realised when men in co-operation agree to common ends which create the conditions for dignity and mutual respect. It is in such an environment sustained by Christian principles, Tawney believes, that isolated individualism will give way to communal solidarity.

Tawney attempts to evaluate the consequences of the changes social, religious and economic he has examined. Judiciously and critically he seeks to establish how in the two centuries between the Reformation and the Enlightenment a new doctrine of economic conduct and social theory gradually supplanted the traditional values of the Christian Church. This doctrine, he argues, not only created an order in which... "pecuniary gain" was enthroned as the... "idol of the philosophers", but, as it came to be increasingly respected, as the motivating force of society, so, too, was the authority of the Church gradually dissipated. The Church, Tawney argues, was overwhelmed by... "the storm and fury of the Puritan revolution". It neither recognised the potency of the new religious beliefs or the strength of the new social forces. With a singular lack of common sense, it refused to revise the old formulae - refused, perhaps failed, to comprehend the new spirit of the age. The Church, Tawney insists, had in the past asserted "the superiority of moral principles over economic appetites".ⁱ Yet against the new commercialism and the new creed of individual responsibility, it was unable to translate this principal into a practical code of ethics. Its authority over the spiritual and temporal lives of man contracted; it yielded "territory" to a doctrine more committed to economic interest than to the spiritual destiny of human kind. Where all human activities had been treated as falling into a 'single scheme' in accordance with Divine Will, there now existed a dichotomy. Men now recognised a realm of religion and a world of business, each with its own accepted sphere of interest, each with its own standards of morality. The hegemony of the established Church was challenged by a philosophy which conveniently, but with firm conviction, held the view that to involve religion in the everyday affairs of man was to

ⁱ *Religion and The Rise of Capitalism*, p.279.

tarnish and degrade it. The established Church, Tawney sadly concludes, without the vigour or the creative energy either to withstand the onslaught, or, effectively restate the traditional doctrine of social ethics, succumbed before a more complex, more aggressive, and,... “more mobile social order”.

Yet if sorrow is evident, so too, is understanding, so too is charity. Men, Tawney suggests, must be judged... “by their reach as well as their grasp”. Charitably, he proposes, the Church of England, if it had failed to... “work the Christian virtues into the spotted texture of character and social conduct”,ⁱ deserved respect for the ends it aimed at, even if those aims were defeated. There is an understanding, too, of the Nonconformist Churches which, Tawney insists, were prevented from reasserting the social obligations of religion not through weakness but rather by the most distinctive of their virtues. They saw the world of commerce and society as a battlefield on which the faithful might temper their characters and thereby more resolutely serve God’s Will in the patient pursuit of commercial success. It did not occur to them, Tawney sadly comments, that... “character is social, and society, since it is expression of character - spiritual”.ⁱⁱ But if there is regret for the past, there is also a plea for the present and a warning for the future. There is, too, a condemnation of the naive assumption shared by both the defenders and the opponents of the existing order, that the attainment of wealth and material riches is not only... “the supreme object of human endeavour” but also the final criterion of human success”.ⁱⁱⁱ Such an assumption, he insists, is sharply opposed to the teachings of the Founder of the Christian Faith. Furthermore, he argues, ... “between the idolatry of wealth”... (“the practical religion of Capitalist society”) (and)... “the Church of Christ, there can be no compromise”. Such a ‘practical religion’ of acquisition and accumulation is, he declares,... “the negation of any system of thought or morals which can be described as Christian”.^{iv} In a world of limited resources, Tawney urges that men

ⁱ *Religion and The Rise of Capitalism*, p.279.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.275.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.280.

^{iv} *Ibid*, p.280.

reach agreement as to ends and engage in co-operative effort to achieve those ends. A standard of values must be agreed, which is based on some conception of human nature as a whole. A society of social cohesion must replace a society of competition, which for all its conquests of the environment,... “has not yet learned to master itself”. It is a plea for a society which taking account of economic possibilities, recognises that there are social benefits and moral objectives beyond the satisfaction of material needs. It is a plea for a society in which men may express their true natures, and in co-operation, are ready to make sacrifices in order to... “develop education, extend leisure, humanise toil”. It is a plea for a social order which recognises in Ruskin’s declaration that... “there is no wealth but life”.ⁱ a confirmation of an ideal which will encourage fellowship rather than the isolated pursuit of self-interest. It is, too, a plea to the Church, to once again restate and reassert the social obligations of religion, and demand, in accordance with its Christian mission that men and women... “work the Christian virtues into social conduct”. ... “When to speak is unpopular”, he asserted, in tribute,... “rashness is more agreeable than cowardice; it is less pardonable to be silent than to say too much”.ⁱⁱ In a later age of ‘possessors and pursuers’... “without internal union or much public spirit” an age in which brothers “profaned the covenant of our fathers”, Tawney, historian, moralist, philosopher and Christian socialist, did not stay silent.

Towards the Spirit of Community

Yet the authority of a church presiding over a community united in a common faith is curtailed within a multi-cultural pluralistic society. Furthermore, men and women within an economic order which has encouraged a tradition of atomistic individualism pursue many and varied ends. They have different, sometimes opposing values and are encouraged in the name of individual freedom and self-fulfilment to pursue their own ends. Legislation may prevent those abuses of personal liberty which militate against the

ⁱ ‘Unto This Last’, John Ruskin, *Essay IV, Cornhill Magazine* 1862, p.77.
ⁱⁱ *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, p.281.

rights of others. Certainly, the absolute right of the citizen to dispose of income without regard to social obligation is curtailed. The obligation to contribute through taxation to the defence the nation, to education, to health care, to welfare and those services which are perceived to be a communal benefit is either generally accepted or legally enforced. But how to arrive at agreement of the common purposes for which each individual is prepared to subordinate self interest? How to achieve common purpose without recourse to collectivist authoritarianism? How to reconcile the claims of individual freedom and social equality, of private interests and the demands of the wider community? Certainly, there exists the general recognition that for the majority of citizens such fundamental 'social goods' as roads, hospitals, welfare services, etc., can only be maintained by collective provision so that in such circumstances there is no tension between the common good and individual self-interest.

Yet, how to inspire the co-operation which contribution to common purpose entails? The answer, for Tawney, lies in 'a moral renaissance', 'a change of heart'. The belief in the primary rights of the atomistic individual must give way to a perception of a society based on common interests and common objectives. This demand, Tawney insists, is not 'Sentimental Idealism'. Those who have endured the nightmare years, 1914-1918, will have not only realised the futility of war, but will question the assertions of the right to unlimited economic expansion both for individuals and nations which has resulted in "mankind tearing itself to pieces every century or oftener since 1648".ⁱ Tawney, the historian, may identify what he perceives as the roots of war; he may pin the blame for the discontents of man onto a competitive industrialism driven by a distorted conception of individual liberty perverted in the interest of property and privilege. Nevertheless, for Tawney, the Christian moralist, a society motivated by the atomistic pursuit of individual appetites must give way to a society fraternally committed to the achievement of democratically agreed social ends. Such ends, however, are not to be

ⁱ *The Acquisitive Society*, p.224.

achieved through the agency of an all powerful state nor must they be determined by a governing elite within a society in which individual democratic responsibility is superseded by collectivist action. Nor can they be achieved by an appeal to Christian principles in a multi-religious society in which the moral authority of the Christian Church is acknowledged only by those who profess the Christian faith.

Tawney's "appeal to principles" derives from his Christian faith. Yet it is addressed to a wider moral constituency. It is an appeal to the "spirit of universal humanism" which for Tawney rests on the faith that the differences that divide men are less important than their common humanity, their common moral understanding. Yet if the appeal is to a universal moral sensibility, it has a pragmatic as well as an ethical dimension. Tawney's critical analysis of industrial capitalism had re-inforced his conviction that the system is not only unequitable, inefficient and wasteful by a catalytic agent of social disorder. He demanded therefore, a reassessment of the purposes of industry; he challenged the accepted patterns of ownership and control. He proposed a new system of industrial relationships which will foster fraternity where there is now confrontation and create equity, where there is now exploitation. Tawney, is engaged, as Anthony Wright properly asserts,... "in the politics of moral exhortation". Yet, his critique of industrial capitalism, his proposals for its fundamental reorganisation, constitute more than 'moral exhortation', for as Isaiah Berlin proposes... "beliefs about how life should be lived, the relations of human beings to each other, the systems of values on which ends of life are based when applied to groups and nations are called political philosophy ... which is but ethics applied to society".ⁱ

Since Tawney identifies 'Functionless' ownership as a principle defect of industrial capitalism, he is confronted with the problem of how to replace it with a society of function and obligation. How to eradicate the fear, discipline, 'social war' and selfish

ⁱ *Isaiah Berlin quoted in New York Review of Books, April 1989.*

individualism of 'The Acquisitive Society' and create a new economic and social psychology of social responsibility and efficient co-operation? Tawney analyses the methods by which functionless ownership can be replaced. He rejects the call for the total nationalisation of industry which many socialist theorists regard as the fundamental panacea against the exploitive nature of private ownership. Nationalisation, Tawney insists, is only one method of gaining public accountability and preventing private exploitation. It is not in itself a cure-all; it may be suitable for some industries but not for all industries. The peculiarities and special factors which obtain in each industry must be recognised, and, accommodated within its ownership structure.^{NB} Nevertheless, he insists, the fundamental purpose of industry must not be forgotten, nor its duty to the community it serves, neglected. Tawney, although convinced of the benefits of nationalisation in some industries, argued in 1952 that... "industrial control was after all no more than machinery"... "what matters is the kind of life people lead and the satisfaction they find in it".ⁱ To encourage this sense of satisfaction and to obviate the bureaucratic strictures which may be placed on it by a central administrative authority, Tawney insisted that nationalised industries should be managed and controlled by those engaged in them. For Tawney, nationalisation is not an end in itself; it is a means by which, in some industries, (but not all industries) the best interest of the community may be served, the best service provided.

Tawney examines alternative methods of abolishing existing functionless property rights. He is wedded to no particular or sacrosanct method. He proposes no doctrinaire or ideologically motivated programme. He considers guild committees which will allow for workforce participation and control so that those engaged in notoriously seasonal trades, will enjoy a livelihood even when conditions made their work impossible. He

^{NB} *There are as Ronald Preston points out various forms of ownership, "centralised state corporations, autonomous state corporations, varied forms of co-operative enterprise, private companies, public companies and one man freelance businesses", see 'Church and Society in the Late 20th Century'. The Economic and Political Task. The Scott Holland Lectures for 1983. S.C.M. Press Ltd, 1983.*

ⁱ *'British Socialism Today', R.H. Tawney, 1952, see Socialist Commentary, June 1952.*

considers a policy of attenuation by which in accordance with pragmatic judgement, participating directors of certain expropriated enterprises may, in the interest of efficiency, continue to contribute at a salary, to the management of the company's affairs. However, the right to own or control any enterprise without consultation must not be granted to non-working investors or bearers of royalty rights. His objective is to create a more efficient, less wasteful, industrial system, subordinated always to the public interest and public need, a system in which there is neither private profit nor functionless control. The combination of function and obligation, he insists, demands new attitudes and calls for the conscientious application of the experience and expertise within each industry. It requires a code of practise, a standard of efficiency which will ensure reliable and responsible service. Tawney turns to the established professions as examples of those occupations in which personal gain is not the first consideration. The Professions, he argues, have a tradition of service; they are not motivated solely for profit. The esteem of one's colleagues, pride in one's work, the respect of the public, acknowledgement of social contribution all serve to cultivate an ethic of conduct, a culture of responsibility. A professional body will demand of its members standards of qualification and skill in the interest of its reputation and the public it serves. Industry, in Tawney's view, should be organised and imbued with the spirit of public service as are the professional associations. The social responsibility, the ensuing public trust, would restore to the workforce, management and technicians, a sense of self-respect and professional pride. They would, in consultation with consumer bodies be obliged to give priority of both investment and production to those goods and services mutually agreed as satisfying consumer needs. Such responsible co-operation would give authentic purpose to their work, give dignity to their labour. Thus, while Tawney rejects 'Marxist materialism' in favour of 'an appeal to principles' as a condition for any radical reconstruction of society he shares Marx's perception that under Industrial Capitalism the worker is "alienated from the produce of his labour" and "degraded to the most miserable commodity".ⁱ Tawney's doctrine of

ⁱ *The Economic & Philosophical Manuscripts, Karl Marx, circa 1844 (first translated and published in English 1932), Viking Press, 1983, p.131.*

Function and Obligation is designed to end this degradation and create in its place a culture of fellowship, a society of social responsibility, and co-operation.

Tawney's criticism of The Labour Movement, therefore, is not accompanied by a demand for more militant action, or a call for a 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. Even though he demands the abolition of obstructive property rights, his plan of industrial reconstruction has no recourse to property seizure without compensation. The expropriated proprietors will receive the commercial value of their assets either as a fixed salary commensurate with their contribution should they continue to work, or receive a reasonable rate of interest based on the capital value of their expropriated property if they are unable or unwilling to participate in the ongoing enterprise. In all cases, however, a share in *profits* (as opposed to compensatory payment) is precluded, as is the unmonitored responsibility for control and organisation. If he agrees with the Marxian forecast that... "capitalist society was doomed because the worker did not receive the equivalent of what he produces", he argues that this is not the paramount condemnation of the Capitalist spirit. The condemnation, he thundered, is... "contained in a barbarous, inhuman, sordid doctrine that would weigh immortal souls and scale them down because they are not economically useful".ⁱ In this polemic against Capitalism, Tawney shares with Marx the perception that the system degrades all that are subject to it, both the exploited and the exploiter. ... "The exploiters", he insisted, "are more to be pitied than those that envy them".ⁱⁱ He rejects, however, the Marxist materialist solution. ... "The heart of the matter", he wrote in 1912, "is not economic"... "it is a question of moral relationships...the need to find some moral standard in economic life".ⁱⁱⁱ In the notion of Function and Obligation, Tawney believed he had found it.

ⁱ *The Commonplace Book, entry for Sept. 10, 1913.*

ⁱⁱ *The Acquisitive Society, p.39.*

ⁱⁱⁱ *The Commonplace Book, entry for Aug 27, 1912*

Tawney saw a world torn apart; he feared for its future. He saw in Christian teaching the ethical foundation of an equitable and moral community to which all might contribute in which man would be exploited, in which all would be respected. It is this vision which prompts him to insist that it is necessary for the Church... “to define the lines of conduct and organisation which approaches most nearly to being the practical application of Christian ethics in the various branches of economic life”.ⁱ It is this vision of a democratic socialism illuminated by his understanding of the Christian message which informs both his life and his work. Yet Christian faith and moral exhortation do not necessarily persuade men and women to share an ethical vision. How, then, to convince his fellow-citizens to embrace the values and aspirations of democratic socialism? Confronted with this problem Tawney the moral theorist, compounding “an appeal to principles” with the language of pragmatic persuasion, presents his case for equality.

ⁱ *The Acquisitive Society*, p.239.

CHAPTER III

Equality

“Of the three great European democratic principles, most working-class people have not spoken much about *LIBERTY*. They have always fought for it when the need came. They have a deep seated belief in *EQUALITY* in so far as that means that each of us is at bottom, in basic humanness, as good as every other; and that is different from a populist levelling. As for *FRATERNITY*, they have lived that out day by day for centuries. It is the strongest working class principle.”^{NB} Richard Hoggart.

Introduction

In 1931, thirteen years after the war to make the world safe for democracy, democracy was not thriving. In Italy, the Fascisti were in power, the opposition silenced, Matteotti murdered. In Austria, the failure of the Oesterreichische Kredit-Anstalt had led to financial crisis and economic slump throughout Central Europe. In Spain, as the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera collapsed, the divided and unhappy country squared up for bitter, bloody conflict. In Germany, a weak and unloved government watched ineffectually as opposing extremist factions fought in the streets preparing the way for the vicious triumph of National Socialism. In the United States as the Depression deepened, industrial production fell by fifty percent; one third or one fourth of the work force (no one knew exactly) was out of work. In Britain, as a perplexed economist posed the question... “Can Government Cure Unemployment?”, John Maynard Keynes published his ‘*Treatise On Money*’. Then, as industry contracted and unemployment ballooned, hope subsided and fear flourished; the nation grimly surveyed

^{NB} “I know I wrote this passage but I can’t remember where. Perhaps you can say since forgotten by author”. Letter from Richard Hoggart to E.M. Passes, March 3, 1993.

“Smokeless chimneys, damaged bridges, rotting
 wharves and choked canals,
 Rails buckled, smashed trucks lying on
 their side across the rails,
 Power stations locked, deserted, since they
 drew boiler fires,
 Pylons fallen on subsiding, trailing dead
 high tension wires”ⁱ

It was at this “particular hour of crisis and dismay” that Tawney published *EQUALITY*, his attack on ‘the religion of inequality’, which he insisted... “inflicted upon England a class system so venerable, so sanctified and hallowed by tradition, so permeated by pious emotion, and, so all pervading that foreigners remarked that England was not one country but two”.ⁱⁱ No assessment of Tawney’s contribution to socialist thought can disregard the importance of the principle of equality to his socialist vision. His understanding of the ideal as the necessary condition of an equitable society permeates even those writings which are not directly concerned with egalitarianism. *EQUALITY*, informed as it is with moral passion, presented as it is with pragmatic argument, remains after more than sixty years Tawney’s most celebrated work of social theory, the classic presentation of the egalitarian case. Yet, Tawney, in *EQUALITY*, did not, as in his other major works, emphasise his belief in the transforming power of Christian principles. His arguments, “are not generally framed in Christian terms”,ⁱⁱⁱ nor do they derive directly from Christian doctrine. His appeal for equality is not addressed solely to those who would accept the precepts which motivate his own Christian Socialism. The appeal is addressed, rather, to the universal spirit of humanism, which, Tawney insists, “is not the anti-thesis of Christianity or theism.” For Tawney, such a spirit

i ‘Get There If You Can’, W.H. Auden, April 1930, see *British Writers of the Thirties*, Valentine Cunningham, Oxford University Press, 1988, p.37.

ii *Equality*, p.36.

iii R.H. Tawney, Anthony Wright, p.19.

is compatible with his Christian faith. Humanism, he argues, “rests on the faith that the (differences between men are less important and fundamental than their common humanity”.ⁱ

In *THE ACQUISITIVE SOCIETY*, Tawney demands “a recourse to principles” as “a condition of any reconstruction of society”. Industrial capitalism, he argues, “must appeal to standards more stable than the monetary exigencies of its commerce and industry”. A Christian Socialist, firm in the belief that there is an interaction between ideas and social condition he appeals to the Christian Church to reassert its moral authority. Society, he argues, “must have a clear apprehension of both the deficiency of what it is and the character of what it ought to be”.ⁱⁱ The Church, he insists, must militantly restate its ethical principles so that it may become, once again, an organ of collective thought, the agency of a common moral will. Again, in *RELIGION AND THE RISE OF CAPITALISM*, convinced that a moral regeneration will bring about social change, he urges the Church to re-establish its traditional authority and re-affirm those Christian values which, he asserts, were eroded in the face of “the triumph of the economic virtues”.

The work of the social theorist and the work of the economic historian both derive from Tawney’s understanding of Christian teaching. Yet while the same moral vision illuminates all of Tawney’s writings, and while, in *EQUALITY*, he is, as always “engaged in the politics of moral exhortation”, the work is not, in essence, an appeal to Christian values. The work expresses the pragmatic understanding that equality will create the conditions for fraternity. Such conditions, Tawney believes, will eliminate exploitation and foster that spirit of mutual obligation and responsibility which will, in fellowship, secure social harmony. The appeal for equality is not specifically addressed to those who share Tawney’s Christian faith. It is an appeal, rather, to that universal spirit of

ⁱ *Equality*, p.86.

ⁱⁱ *The Acquisitive Society*, p.2/3.

humanism, which Tawney insists, rests on the faith that “the differences between men are less important and fundamental than their common humanity”.ⁱ

For Tawney, equality will solve the problem of the imbalance of power. Equality, as a practical policy will provide the conditions in which the powerless majority may find protection from the economically powerful. Further, he proposes, equality will sustain such social arrangements as will make available to all the means of self-development, intellectual, spiritual and physical. Equality, he perceives, is an instrument of empowerment; it will enable each citizen to responsibly contribute to what is democratically recognised as the common good. A society of equals, he holds, will engender that sense of self esteem which, in industrial capitalism, derives principally from material acquisition within the competitive market. A strategy of equality will ensure that each citizen has access to all those amenities which are necessary for a life of human dignity. Equality, he insists, will provide the conditions of fraternity in which men and women, in co-operation, may create a moral community.

The Concerns Of Equality Two Levels of Argument:

Faith and Pragmatism

While Tawney’s socialism clearly derives from his Christian faith, his appeal for equality, since it is not predicated on an acceptance of Christian principles, is not grounded in Christian teachings. Indeed, the appeal for equality is an expression of the pragmatic understanding that the conditions of an equitable social order are tied to an equitable distribution of material resources and economic power. Ultimately, such an appeal is not addressed to specifically Christian values but to the wider constituency of universal humanism. Such an appeal serves to underline the tensions which exist between Tawney the moralist seeking to persuade by reference to Christian principals and Tawney

ⁱ *Equality*, p. 86.

the pragmatic scholar seeking to instruct by reference to empirical evidence. Tawney, as Richard Titmuss asserts, did not write of equality in the naive sense of equality of talent or merit or personality. His concerns, rather, are with ... “equality before the law, the removal of collectively imposed social and economic inequalities, the equalising of opportunities for all to secure certain goods and services, the education of all children to make them capable of freedom and more capable of fulfilling their personal differences; the enlargement of personal liberties through the discovery of each individual of his own and his neighbours endowments”.ⁱ Tawney himself, in his Preface to the 1938 edition, protested at social and economic inequalities which involved a perpetual misdirection of limited resources and an economic and social structure which allowed... “human energies, the source of all wealth” to be systematically underdeveloped in the case of the majority... “from birth to maturity”. Tawney denounced inequalities as producing inefficient industrial practices; he saw them as constituting an economic liability. He noted, too, that those who had traditionally benefited by inequalities would stubbornly resist all attempts to reconstruct the social and economic order on more just, or more rational lines, in the belief that reconstruction will diminish their profits and lower their social status.

Yet, Tawney’s argument is more than a plea for equality; it is a plea for a moral order, a manner of life, a type of society. Such a moral order will “substitute the canon of convenience for the canon of right or wrong”.ⁱⁱ This appeal to “the canon of right or wrong” is at the heart of Tawney’s philosophy of equality. Ultimately, it must be argued, there can be no full understanding of Tawney’s social vision without a recognition of the overriding importance of this moral dimension. Indeed, the Christian moralist is equally anxious to “see set out the conditions of a moral scheme of the universe” ⁱⁱⁱ as is the economic historian concerned to trace the significant connections between moral

ⁱ See ‘Introduction’, Richard M. Titmuss, *Equality*, (1964 Edition), George Allen and Unwin, p.15.
ⁱⁱ Handwritten notes for the *New Leviathan* (circa 1919-1920), R.H. Tawney, see *Tawney Papers*, Box 11, File 10/10. British Library of Political and Economic Science.
ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid.*

standards and economic and social change. Essentially, the appeal to the “canon of right or wrong” is an appeal motivated by a moral conviction which extends beyond the demands for equality of economic power, of opportunity, of environment, education and welfare provision. It is an appeal underwritten by an article of Christian faith which proclaims “all men and women as equally children of God, equally heir to eternal life, equally possessing rights which are superior to the claims of the temporal order”.ⁱ Such a proclamation *demand*s equality. It serves to endorse a “moral scheme” which repudiates the assumptions of the existing order, rejects its institutions, rebuts its moral values. Bound by “a body of Christian principles it insists that human methods of procedure and conduct”ⁱⁱ be judged by moral precepts. Such a “body of principles”, is, of necessity, concerned with equal rights; it is concerned with equal respect and equal consideration. It is concerned, too, with fellowship.

Equality for Tawney, engenders fellowship. Indeed, it is proposed that “this dialectical relationship between equality and fellowship is one of Tawney’s major contributions to socialist thought”.ⁱⁱⁱ Equality is more than a political ideal. It is an expression of Tawney’s Christian faith, the vital component of his socialism. It confirms his belief that “the laws by which man is to seek well-being”^{iv} are animated by “divine principles”, and sanctioned by an immanent God. From these principles, Tawney submits, “may be deduced a conception of the nature of man and his relationship with God”. From these laws “may be deduced the notion of duties and rights, of freedom and responsibility, of justice”.^v From this submission, may be deduced the strength of Tawney’s Christian faith and its contribution to his Christian Socialism.

ⁱ *Handwritten notes for the New Leviathan (circa 1919-1920), R.H. Tawney, see Tawney Papers, Box 11, File 10/10. British Library of Political and Economic Science.*

ⁱⁱ *Ibid.*

ⁱⁱⁱ *R.H. Tawney And His Times, Ross Terrill, Andre Deutsch, 1973, p. 171.*

^{iv} *Handwritten notes for the New Leviathan (circa 1919-1920), R.H. Tawney, see Tawney Papers, Box 11, File 10/10. British Library of Political and Economic Science.*

^v *Ibid.*

Patently though Tawney does not always present his philosophy of equality in the language of Christian morality. He demands “that the quality of all practical activity be tested by reference to principles”,ⁱ nevertheless, his case for equality employs pragmatic arguments; he is concerned to demonstrate its practical advantages; he argues its economic, as well as its social benefits. Yet, while the social theorist disputes the libertarian proposition of inequality as the engine of economic efficiency, the Christian moralist rejects the proposition as not only economically unsound, but as morally perverse. Ultimately, it must be argued that notwithstanding the pragmatism, the realistic appraisals, the prudent judgements, “a deduction from divine principles” is never absent from Tawney’s notion of democratic socialism.

Yet, Tawney attacks inequality, *not only* out of a sense of justice and morality *but also* because of the economic inefficiencies which he argues it inevitably produces. The established order sustains a perpetual class struggle which is ... “fatal to the mobilisation of common effort”. Equality, Tawney argues, is an essential condition for an economically efficient, just and harmonious society. Yet he does not argue for a primitive equality in which “all men, strong and weak, sane and insane, capable and incompetent should be offered identical provision”. *Equality* of treatment, he insists, is not necessarily the same as *identical* treatment. It is, instead, an equality predicated on the Christian moral precept which insists that “all men merely because they are men, are of equal value”. It is an equality, which, in fellowship, demands of men, “to make for all, the provision appropriate to their needs”.ⁱⁱ It is an *enabling equality* which will maintain such social arrangements as will provide equally to each individual, the opportunity to develop their *particular* talents and achieve their individual spiritual, physical and intellectual potential.

ⁱ *The Acquisitive Society*, p.1.

ⁱⁱ ‘Christianity and The Social Order’, see *The Attack*, p.183.

If, as Professor, Titmuss insists, the fundamental equalities which Tawney demands... “will enlarge personal liberties through the discovery by each individual of his own and his neighbour’s endowments”,ⁱ then equality, as Bernard Crick has noted, will not only need to be related to liberty but also to that “most rhetorical, potent, but politically less defined of values, fraternity”.ⁱⁱ Tawney’s vision is of a society which fosters individuality but discourages individualism ... a society which generates mutual respect and mutual consideration. It is a society in which inequality needs moral and social justification; a society in which equality is not only the guarantor of equity but a necessary condition for a participatory, responsible, democratic society.

Furthermore, as Nick Ellisonⁱⁱⁱ insists, Tawney believed that the improved social and economic conditions, while contributing to greater material equality, would also ensure a measure of real freedom for the great mass of the people. For Tawney, equal rights demand not only that they be proclaimed and legally granted, but, also that they may be effectively exercised. They are rights which will allow men and women control over the economic circumstances of their lives. Such rights will enlarge the practical liberty of the many, just as they will contain the license of the powerful few. Such equality will not only disprove Lecky’s melancholy assurance “that liberty and equality are irreconcilable enemies”,^{iv} it will serve, too, as the bedrock of a fraternal society.

Fraternity is central to Tawney’s socialism and at the heart of his vision of society. In EQUALITY, he sets out to expose, with the moral indignation of an Old Testament prophet, the eloquence of Milton and the irony of Swift, that obsolete tradition of class subordination and class superiority ‘which frustrates that vision and denies fellowship’. He castigates “the ruinous vices of our existing social system”. ... “The odious business

ⁱ *Introduction to Equality, Richard M. Titmuss, 1964 edition, p.15.*

ⁱⁱ ‘Equality’, Bernard Crick, see *Fabian Essays in Socialist Thought, Ben Pimlott editor, 1984, p.164*

ⁱⁱⁱ *The Idea of Equality in The British Labour Party, 1931/1964, see Nick Ellison, L.S.E. Ph.D. Thesis, 1988.*

^{iv} *See Introduction, Democracy and Liberty, William E.H. Lecky, 1838-1903.*

of class advantages and class disabilities". He sought to lay the ghost of that 'mentalite hierarchique' ⁱ that English disease which strikes observers according to their temperaments, as amusing, barbarous or grotesque. But Tawney is concerned with more than the naive English idealisation of class as the final and infallible criterion of public expediency and private judgement. Inequality, he insists, with its class distinctions and its class confrontations, represents not only a threat to social cohesion, it poses a threat to democracy. An equality of effective political and civil rights which is the essence of democracy, does not easily combine with inequalities of economic power or inequalities of social opportunity. A system which encourages the acquisition of individual wealth and the accumulation of capital resources must necessarily create an imbalance of economic and political power to the detriment of that democratic principle which demands that civil and political rights be equally effective. Tawney recognises that there are liberal democratic societies which possess and respect representative institutions and enjoy both wide franchise and responsible government. Yet, he insists, while such 'democracies' in which the mass of the people "exercise little influence on the direction of economic enterprise and where economic and cultural graduations descend precipitately from one stratum of the population to another" ⁱⁱ may be recognised as "political democracies" they should more properly be described as "social oligarchies". To ignore the profound differences which exist between those "democracies" in which class divisions are all-pervasive and those in which they play a comparatively unimportant part in the life of society is, Tawney insists, "to do violence to reality".ⁱⁱⁱ

As for the working-class movement, Tawney fears that its ideals are being eroded in a society in which money and power are the supreme values. It does not fight to change the social order but will instead allow itself to be bought off with the small advances in wages, small social benefits and a more advantageous distribution of money

ⁱ *Equality*, p.37.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.79.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.78.

and power. The workers are cowed, compliant, insecure. Fearful that they may lose their jobs, they lose their dignity as human beings. They come to believe that their masters possess a mysterious wisdom, that the ruling class has a magical influence which can bring about prosperity or misfortune. For Tawney, such attitudes represent a moral humiliation; they are a betrayal of the principle of the equal worth of each man and woman which is fundamental to his Christian faith. But beyond economic powerlessness and the tyranny of money, these victims of the “religion of inequality” are denied adequate education, decent living conditions; they are deprived of security; they lose initiative and self-respect. In a society which prides itself on individual liberty and equality of opportunity, both liberty and opportunity are limited by economic restraints. In a nation in which political and legal rights are fiercely defended, many are disbarred by economic circumstances not only from the means of self-development, but also from participation in that common culture which marks a society concerned to promote the dignity and refinement of all the citizens who compose it.

It is true, Tawney concedes in the Preface to the 1951 edition of *EQUALITY* that... “the last decade has seen a considerable expansion of collection provision of common needs”. Tawney recognises that in many cases such provision had been reluctantly and grudgingly granted. The provision was certainly not made either in the spirit or in the conviction that the purpose of democracy was to enable each individual, within the limits set by nature, knowledge and resources to grow to their full stature. Clearly, in his judgement, a society in which some children are obliged to “end their education just when their powers are beginning to develop” and are “sometimes encouraged to believe that the qualities most desirable in common men are docility, and a respect for their betters”ⁱ is an abomination. For Tawney, an economic system which treats the mass of mankind not as partners in the co-operative enterprise of subduing nature to the service of man but as instruments to be manipulated for the pecuniary

ⁱ *Equality*, p.79.

advantage of a minority of property owners is morally repugnant. Tawney's demands for the elimination of all forms of privilege, of all unjustifiable inequalities, education, environmental or economic, his demand that economic power be converted into a servant of society with clearly defined objectives are expressions of that moral repugnance. They are also manifestations of Tawney's understanding and insistence that men and women have the capacity to become 'responsible partners' in the co-operative enterprise of subduing nature to the service of mankind rather than victims of a system which dehumanises existence to the degradation of both exploiter and exploited. Equality then, for Tawney, is an instrument; it will prepare the ground for an equitable society of equal responsibility in which men and women may work together in co-operative enterprise towards agreed common ends. It will provide the base for a true democracy; it will maintain a system not only of formal rights but of mutual respect and fellowship. It will seek to achieve the ultimate objective of Christian socialism; the socialisation of Christianity and the Christianisation of socialism.

Equality Identified

Equality, Professor Bryan Turner insists, is almost as difficult to define clearly as it is to achieve politically. Nevertheless, he argues, "there is some consensus concerning the dimensions along which equality should be measured"ⁱ There are, he suggests, four commonly identifiable types of equality. The first is ontological, based on the fundamental equality of persons. Secondly, there is equality of opportunity to achieve desirable ends. Thirdly, there is equality of condition which attempts to make the conditions of life equal for the relevant social groups. Fourthly, there is equality of outcome or equality of result. Certainly, there are contemporary social theorists who will accept Turner's somewhat concise yet serviceable definition of the types of equality. As for Tawney's definition, it derives, as does his entire social philosophy, from his Christian

ⁱ *Equality*, Bryan S. Turner, Ellis Harwood, 1986, p.34.

faith predicated in the belief in God and holds, as the essence of all morality, that every human being is, in the sight of God, of infinite and equal importance. Such a definition precludes as an article of faith the exclusion or subordination of any individual on the grounds of race, religion, gender or creed. Such a definition insists that “no consideration of expediency can justify the oppression of one by another”.ⁱ Yet while for Tawney such a definition clearly derives from his understanding of Christian morality, his arguments for equality do not draw directly on Christian teachings. Instead, his case against “the religion of inequality” and his “strategy for equality” is predicated on a pragmatic demand for “the conditions of economic freedom” which is addressed to that “universal humanist spirit” whose end he insists, “is the growth towards perfection of individual human beings”.ⁱⁱ His argument, then, is on two levels; it is both moral and pragmatic. Yet while his own demand for equality clearly derives from his Christian faith, his appeal is directed to an ethical understanding which is not the exclusive possession of those “who accept or reject some particular body of religious doctrine”.ⁱⁱⁱ

Yet, notwithstanding Turner’s four identifiable types of equality there are many theorists who, in their recognition of the complications which the ideal of equality presents, have critically probed its various social, economic and moral implications. Michael Walzer, for instance, is concerned to demonstrate in “a defence of pluralism and equality”, that even within a society dedicated to democratic and egalitarian principles, justice demands that “different social goods ought to be distributed for different reasons, in accordance with different procedures, by different agents”.^{iv} These differences of procedure and agents, Walzer judiciously argues, are determined by different understandings of the ‘social goods’ themselves and their distribution derives from “historical and cultural particularism”. Each ‘social good’ fulfils specific individual needs or rights, which Walzer proposes, do not follow from our common humanity but follow

ⁱ *The Commonplace Book, entry for 13 August, 1913.*

ⁱⁱ *Equality, p.85.*

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid, p.85.*

^{iv} *Spheres of Justice, Michael Walzer, 1983, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, p.6.*

instead from shared cultural conceptions of 'social goods' which are not universal "but local and particular in character". For Walzer, the aim of political egalitarianism is to create a society "free from domination", whether political economic or social. Equality, he asserts, does not derive, as its opponents often claim, from envy or resentment "but from the experience of personal subordination". Walzer, then, committed to the notion of an egalitarian, pluralistic and democratic society argues that equality does not require the repression of persons. It requires, instead, the control and distribution of 'social goods' in respect of the exercise of particular powers, particular privileges and benefits so that no individual or group shall be dominant in any sphere of 'social good'.

In respect of a just distribution of needs D.D. Raphael argues that while philosophic analysis cannot provide a universal standard, the egalitarian idea of just distribution according to needs implies a positive notion of equal rights and a positive notion of *factual* equality among men. Yet, Professor Raphael suggests, a commitment to the "equal satisfaction even of basic needs does not always imply the equal distribution of the material means to such satisfaction".ⁱ Particular circumstances, Raphael argues, determine that a particular need is greater than is normal, so that the distribution of benefit is in one sense unequal. It is a distribution, he submits, derived from equity not from arithmetic equality. Indeed, Professor Raphael argues in defence of both equality and equity that the ideal of universal equality requires that the inequalities of nature be mitigated or rectified. Within an egalitarian society, he proposes, social policy should aim to compensate those who are disadvantaged and seek to redress the balance between those born with superior talents (for which, it is argued, they can claim no merit) and their less gifted fellows. Raphael's proposal differs from Walzer's in respect of the notion of particular cultures defining their own 'social goods', coincidental to historical and cultural particularisms. Yet, clearly both Walzer and Raphael regard the equitable distribution of 'social goods' in accordance with egalitarian principles as being directed not only to

ⁱ *Problems of Political Philosophy*, D.D. Raphael, Macmillan, 1970, p.183.

redress unjustifiable inequalities but also to nullify those specific social arrangements which endorse and perpetuate them.

Similarly, David Miller who seeks to demonstrate that the equal distribution of income is “an imperfect expression of equality”, argues that in spite of accusations by its critics, egalitarians are not moved by a desire to create a uniform, undifferentiated society. Their overriding objective, Miller argues, is “to achieve a state in which, as far as possible, each man enjoys the same level of well being as every other”.ⁱ Miller examines the relationship between the principle of equality and the principle of individual need, the satisfaction of which, he proposes, can be regarded in two ways: “either as a matter of justice or as a matter of humanity”.ⁱⁱ Humanity, Miller submits, demands that human suffering should be avoided. Justice, he argues, demands the understanding that while men differ in moral virtue, in merit, in personal success, in usefulness to society, there is an underlying equality which consists of the fact that each man is a unique individual with his own aims, ideals and outlook on the world, and that consequently he must be treated as such.

Yet, while Miller evaluates the claims of justice and humanity, his concern is to ensure “as a matter of justice” an equitable distribution of essential human needs, which extends beyond providing the conditions which allow each individual the equal opportunity to carry out his or her plan of life. It is concerned, also, to provide for those non-essential needs which, while they differ from individual to individual, serve to express the individuality of each individual which, he argues, “violate the principles of human respect” if they are not equitably distributed.

People, Miller insists, have varied needs and wants and “no serious egalitarian thinker” believes that “physical resources”... “should be assigned in equal quantities, but

ⁱ *Social Justice*, David Miller, Clarendon Press, 1975, p.146/149 *passim*.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.146/149 *passim*.

rather in different proportions to different people according to their peculiar characteristics". Egalitarian principles, he concludes, demand that justice consists (minimally), in a distribution of resources according to individual needs. Miller's view serves to endorse the egalitarian principle of distribution in accordance with specific, identifiable and socially legitimate needs. It serves, also, to ensure the equalisation of those 'social goods' which Tawney perceives to be essential ingredients of a full and dignified human life.

Clearly, beyond appeals for what Professor Turner identifies as "ontological equality",ⁱ - that is the equal consideration due to all men because they are men, there are demands for equality in respect of specific social issues. There are demands for racial equality which reject any social arrangement which denies to human beings on grounds of skin pigmentation, cultural or religious affiliation, the inalienable rights which Jefferson claimed as self-evident. There are demands for gender equality which insist that men and women (the latter comprising one half of the world's population) are treated as equals in every realm of public activity. There is, too, central to egalitarian doctrine, the demand for that equality which extends to every individual the equal opportunity to develop to the fullest extend their human capacities irrespective of race, religion, gender, social or economic position. There are demands, also, for such social organisation as will obviate those inequalities of environmental conditions, of education facilities, of health care provision, which, in equity, are held to be unjustifiable. There are demands for equality predicated on the distribution of economic resources which allow not only for an equitable distribution of *economic* power but, it is argued, will result in a consequent equalisation of effective *political* power.

Tawney's egalitarianism as Michael Quinn argues, does not derive from the claim that men are identical, but, rather that they share an equivalence of value" (which)

ⁱ *Equality*, Bryan S. Turner, Ellis Harwood, 1986, p.34.

“assumes a core capacity for reflective self conscious choice as definitive of mature human agents”.ⁱ From this understanding of “equivalence of value”, Tawney, like David Miller, recognises the underlying principle of equality which acknowledges “the unique individuality of every man”. Like Michael Walzer and D.D. Raphael, he calls for a society “free from domination” in which social policy is directed against those inequalities which divide those with special talents from their less gifted fellows. He distinguishes, too, between the individuals right *to equal treatment* and the right which Ronald Dworkin claims is fundamental, “*the right to treatment as an equal*, that is the right to be treated with the same respect and the same consideration as anyone else.”ⁱⁱ

Tawney, then, like “other serious egalitarian thinkers” recognises that there is no equality which does not relate to a particular power, a particular benefit or a specific social circumstance. Equality, therefore, can have no abstract or absolute meaning. Nevertheless, equality for Tawney, in accordance with his Christian understanding, does have a *moral foundation*. While his most celebrated work of social theory is concerned with the practical rather than the moral application and meaning of equality, it clearly demonstrates the two levels, ethical and pragmatic, of Tawney’s thought. Indeed, Tawney’s case for equality is presented through the pragmatic arguments of the social theorist rather than by the exhortations of the Christian moralist. Ultimately, for Tawney, equality demands the equal ability to exercise specific powers. It is this recognition which motivates his understanding that equality is a necessary condition of individual liberty. “The fundamental idea of liberty is power’, he insists, “power to control the conditions of one’s own life”.ⁱⁱⁱ

Equality for Tawney, then, is authenticated within a social order which provides the conditions in which men and women, regardless of class, status or wealth, may

ⁱ *Justice And Egalitarianism, Formal and Substantive Equality in some Recent Theories of Justice*, Michael Quinn, Garland Press, 1991, p.32/35 *passim*.

ⁱⁱ *Taking Rights Seriously*, Ronald Dworkin, Duckworth, 1977, p.277.

ⁱⁱⁱ *The Commonplace Book*, entry for July 21, 1912.

effectively exercise those rights which constitute individual liberty. That such liberty may be exercised in the pursuit of self-interest is evident. The aim of equality, Tawney argues, is not to provide the conditions for individual *self-advancement*, it is to offer to all, equally, the maximum conditions for individual *self-development*. Its emphasis is on solidarity, on communal, rather than individual purpose. Its aims are clearly consistent with Tawney's concept of a Christian life. The emphasis, however, is more than an expression of Christian faith. It underlines Tawney's vision of the ends to which human nature may aspire. We seek, he insists, "a society in which men (and women) are happy to continue in familiar surroundings, because they enjoy, not only economic security, but the dignity, the social contacts, and, if they please, the intellectual interests and culture, which human nature demands".ⁱ

It may be argued that this notion of equality within a Christian Social Order shares the aspirations of a purely secular socialism. Nevertheless, Tawney's vision of equality derives directly from his Christian belief. It is, then, a Socialism which denies that the ideal of equality is relevant only in man's relation to God. It demands, in the name of Christian morality, that the ideal persists in man's relationships with man. It is a socialism which believes, as the essence of all morality, that every individual is of infinite and equal importance. It is a *Christian Socialism* which holds, as an article of faith, that "to believe in equality, it is necessary to believe in the greatness of God".ⁱⁱ Yet while his socialism is inspired and motivated by Christian faith, Tawney's case for equality does not directly invoke Christian values. Its appeal, ultimately, is to the common humanity which, for Tawney, is the instrument by which men and women may, in fellowship, be united in justice and common purpose.

ⁱ 'A Note On Christianity and the Social Order', R.H. Tawney, 1937, see *The Attack*, p. 191.
ⁱⁱ *The Commonplace Book*, entry for August 10, 1913.

Equality And Class Structure

Tawney acknowledges that there have been a variety of theories advanced to explain the facts of class formations and class differentiation. War, the institutions of private property, biological characteristics, the division of labour, Tawney insists, have all been claimed as factors in determining and justifying class relationships and class divisions. There is, Tawney argues, no simple or single explanation; each factor may in particular circumstances be wholly or partially responsible for creating class hierarchies. Yet, Tawney insists, class is not necessarily defined by economic organisation and even a group which shares economic interests may not necessarily be described as a class. Class is more difficult to define than the simple division imposed by occupation or shared economic interests. It... “relates to a totality of conditions by which several sides of life are affected”. In England, ^{NB} Tawney insisted,... “it is elusive and fundamental”; it makes a rough division of individuals according to their... “resources and manner of life, their income, both the amount and its source, their ownership of property or their connection with those who own it, the security or insecurity of their economic position, the degree to which they belong by tradition, education and association to social strata which are accustomed, even on a humble scale, to exercise direction ... or be directed by others”. Conventional usage, Tawney argues, with all its crudity, has come nearer to grasping certain significant sides of the reality of class than those who see in the idea of class merely the social expression of the division of labour between groups engaged in different types of economic activity. Class divisions, Tawney asserts, have... “a vitality and momentum of their own”.ⁱ They create differences of status, differences of power. Within industrial Capitalism, Tawney insists, society, is seen as an ‘economic mechanism’ the main elements in whose structure correspond to different classes. Yet, it is evident, as Tawney notes, that this ‘economic mechanism’ and the different classes within it have

NB Tawney, it must be noted is specifically, perhaps curiously concerned with 'England', he does not extend his class arguments even as far as Great Britain.

i Equality, p. 61

created varying traditions, manners and habits of life. Different classes attend different types of school, create different types of social institutions, live in different environments.

It is, then, over-simplistic to see society as a mere 'economic mechanism', a productive machine; it must be seen, rather, as an organism composed of groups each with its varying standards of life. There are certainly, *economic* groups consisting of employer and employed, capitalist and wage earner, farmer and labourer. There are a series of *social* groups distinguished from each other by different standards of expenditure and consumption, varying not only in income but in education, environment, social standing, family connections, their leisure and their amusements. There exists a separation between the small and powerful group which owns, organises and directs the material apparatus of industry, and those, the majority, who accept direction and perform the routine work. This system of class relations, in England, because of its particular historical development, is marked by two sets of division evolving from the rapid industrialisation of the nineteenth century and the remnants of a feudal past softened by the social changes of the democratic era. There exists (in England), almost uniquely,... "a blend of crude plutocratic reality combined with the sentimental aroma of an aristocratic legend". Tawney, at his most ironic, pronounces the English class system to be at once as... "businesslike as Manchester and as gentlemanly as Eton; its hands can be as rough as those of Esau; its voice as mellifluous as that of Jacob"... "a god with two faces, hypocritical, elusive".ⁱ It answers ... "social protests and obvious economic grievances with admonitions to social respectability".ⁱⁱ It separates and divides; it creates and sustains varying standards of life and culture. It prevents the establishment of a *common culture*, a culture in which... "each citizen might participate with his fellows in a shared enterprise which serve each first and foremost because it serves all".

ⁱ *Equality*, p.64.
ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.82.

Clearly, Tawney's understanding of a common culture extends beyond a belief in a more equitable distribution of material goods. ^{NB} For Tawney, a common culture is necessarily a classless culture in which each citizen not only shares in civic responsibility but is bound to uphold such social and economic organisation as will provide the conditions in which he and his fellows may develop to the full their human potential. Tawney regards the English class system with its peculiar toughness and cohesion, its endorsement of unjustifiable inequalities, its own petty snobberies, social nuances and hierarchical graduations of men, not as personalities but as tools, as the "essence of slavery". It is, Tawney insists, the consciousness of such injustice, the moral abhorrence against such treatment, that, even more than poverty causes men to strike when they have everything to lose and nothing to gain. Such treatment is an affront to what is sacred in man, - the sense of human dignity. It is a denial of what Tawney argues is the essence of all morality, the belief that every human being is of infinite importance, and therefore, no consideration of expediency can justify the oppression of one by another. For Tawney, therefore, such disregard for the infinite importance of each human being is not only a betrayal of moral principles; it is also an abnegation of brotherhood. It perpetuates a society of narrow self-interest; it props up a house divided in which the ideals of fellowship and individual self-development are ... "muffled and blunted", strangled even,... "by the arithmetical criterion of profit and loss".ⁱ In such a society power is exercised not for the common benefit but in order that privilege and special advantage may be maintained and consolidated. Tawney recognises that some people sincerely hold that such a class system is inevitably the raw material out of which civilisation had to be made, but, he insists, such a perception is neither lovable nor admirable. Nor for Tawney, is it acceptable. Privilege breeds tyranny, he insists, and together they create a spirit of domination and servility which promotes callousness in those that profit from them and resentment and suspicion in those that do not. The attack is a reflection of Tawney's

^{NB} Indeed, David Reisman suggests, see *State and Welfare*, Tawney, Galbraith and Adam Smith, Macmillan 1982, "the first thing to remember about Tawney is that he regarded material prosperity not as an end in itself, but as a means to some higher end", p.23.

ⁱ *Equality*, p.64.

conviction that such treatment denies to men their humanism - a term which he uses to mean... "their superb sense of the dignity of man".ⁱ Humanism, Tawney argues, has many meanings, but it is not, as some claim, the antithesis of theism or of Christianity and its essence is simple. ... "It is the attitude which judges the externals of life by their effect in assisting or hindering the life of the spirit".ⁱⁱ It is the belief that the 'machinery of existence' - property, material wealth and industrial organisation - is to be regarded as a means to an end. It is this 'humanist spirit' which recognises what is *truly* valuable in the life of mankind. It is this 'human spirit' which will promote that 'spiritual life' which, Tawney argues will liberate 'the divine and unique personality' of each individual and cultivate those individual powers which make for energy and refinement in *all* men. Humanism, as Tawney defines it, rejects "material prosperity as of secondary and instrumental importance";ⁱⁱⁱ clearly, he respects its aspirations. Nevertheless, firm in his own Christian faith, he declares, "in order to believe in human equality, it is necessary to believe in God".

This view may be rejected; there are many who defend equality who do not share Tawney's Christian faith or his belief in God. Yet, for Tawney, it is only when one contemplates the infinitely great that is God, that human differences appear to be "so infinitely small as to be negligible". It is because modern man had ceased to believe in the greatness of God, and therefore, the infinite smallness (or greatness - same thing) of man, Tawney argues, that mankind had to invent or emphasise the differences between men. It is this Christian perception of each man as God's creature, that leads Tawney to insist that man has claims on man, because men are men and that nothing can justify... "my using my neighbour as a tool".^{iv}

ⁱ *Equality*, p.84.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.84.

ⁱⁱⁱ *David Reisman, State and Welfare, Tawney, Galbraith and Adam Smith, David Reisman, Macmillan 1982, p.23.*

^{iv} *The Commonplace Book, entry for March 6, 1913.*

Patently, Tawney's demands for equality are rooted in his revulsion at "the plague of class"... "the obsolete tradition of class superiority and class subordination".ⁱ Yet, his protests against "the tranquil inhumanity" which engenders "servility and resentment on the one hand and patronage and arrogance on the other"ⁱⁱ are expressed in a language which is not confined to the vocabulary of Christian Socialism. Tawney in *EQUALITY*, employs a language which is shared with secular but no less morally motivated social visions. Such visions place the same emphasis on human dignity, make the same demands for equity, the same call to brotherhood. Yet, while Tawney, in the interest of equality, employs the language of a universal humanism, his own socialism ultimately rests on a fundamental Christian injunction ... "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love in honour preferring one another". (ROM. 10:12)

Property, Power, Equality And Freedom

Tawney, in his concern for equality and liberty, promotes ideals that have often been seen as antipathetic. His response is that within industrial capitalism both values have been subverted by an economic and social stratification which has created and sustains "a hierarchy of industry and labour".ⁱⁱⁱ This hierarchy, invested with, and supported by economic power, exercises a tyranny and sustains organised forces, both of labour and capital, each intent, on curbing the power of the other, each intent on consolidating and extending its own power. From the confrontation between these powers, between that power which would maintain inequality and that power which would diminish it, evolves the frictions, the collisions and breakdowns which divide Industrial Capitalist society.

Equality as Tawney defines it involves an equalisation of economic power just as it requires a large measure of economic equality. His demand is not for an identical level of

ⁱ *Equality*, p.35.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.37.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.158.

pecuniary income, but of equality of environment, of access to education and the means of civilisation of security and independence ... “and of the social consideration which equality in these matters usually carries with it”.ⁱ Equality, he argues, requires the deliberate acceptance of social restraint upon individual expansion; it involves constraints legally imposed and recognised to prevent extremes of wealth and power in the interest of the public good. This understanding of equality must necessarily be in conflict with an interpretation of liberty which allows the individual the freedom (within the rule of law) to indulge without restraint his appetites, to pursue his self-interest without regard to the social or economic consequences for his fellows. Equality, too, as Tawney defines it, is founded on a mutual respect and mutual consideration which cannot tolerate an infringement on the freedom of one’s fellows in the name of individual liberty. Furthermore, equality cannot exist in a society in which the economically powerful, can exploit to the full extent of their economic strength their less economically powerful fellow citizens.

For Tawney, inequalities of power not only frustrate individual liberty; they threaten the democratic process. Inequalities of power, as Michael Quinn argues, overlap with inequalities in education, in environment “even, with the effects of deprivation on the awareness of the individual, even on the conception of what his or her legitimate interests are”.ⁱⁱ They create a society in which equal rights, bereft of equal power, initiate and sustain a substantive inequality of status and class, even of self respect. There evolves, and we are witness to it, a powerless underclass which, resentful and alienated, not only threatens social stability, but calls into question the notion of a civilised society. While citizens in such a society share equally the rights of citizenship, they are denied an equal share in public power. For Tawney, this denial negates authentic equality which can only

ⁱ *Equality*, p.43.

ⁱⁱ *Justice And Egalitarianism, Formal and Substantive Equality in some Recent Theories of Justice*, Michael Quinn, Garland Press, 1991, p 250.

exist when each individual can equally assert his or her rights, can equally enjoy their effective exercise, can equally participate in responsible citizenship.

Tawney concedes that there are circumstances in which inequality is a necessary condition of liberty. Organisations invested with the authority of consensus and recognised as agents with the right to act in the interest of society necessarily require extraordinary powers in order to effectively perform their duties. Conversely, inequality of power can be a menace and in order to preserve civil liberties, there must be legal requirements which serve to protect the individual from the power of the State. Yet, Tawney insists, while there are rules of law to restrain political power ... “the dangers arising from the inequalities of economic powers have been less commonly recognised” “and they exist recognised or not”.ⁱ The abuses of power are, Tawney argues, not confined to political organisation; there are abuses of power from which political rights offer no protection. It is only in unity that a worker may purchase security against exploitation; it is only in association that he may demand that the conditions of his employment be specified, his rights and his duties defined. In such circumstances, the struggle for a livelihood becomes not only economic, but also social and political. The whole productive process, the provision of those goods and services which men need to fulfil their desire for a civilised life, Tawney argues, demands co-operation.

Furthermore, Tawney argues, the accelerating tendency towards merger and association, towards financial and industrial alliances have created groups so dominant in their industry that it is impossible, unless one is engaged in their service, to find employment in their particular field. They are effectively fiefdoms, with power and influence, politically and economically, over the nation, over its policies domestic and foreign and certainly over the work force whose economic and social environment they have the power to determine. This plutocracy therefore defines, within the limitation of

ⁱ *Equality*, p.165.

the law, the direction of industry; they act in accordance with their own interests even if such interests do not coincide with the interests of the community or of their work force. Certainly there are trade unions, who, on behalf of their members fight for better working conditions, higher wages, shorter working hours, larger entitlements, etc. Inevitably, there are confrontations, often prolonged, often bitter, always dominated by the spirit of

“The good old rule
Sufficeth them, the simple plan,
That they should take, who have the power
And they should keep who can”.ⁱ

Such confrontations do not make for social harmony; they defeat common purpose; they destroy fellowship.

Freedom, for Tawney, then, is not freedom as the libertarians understand it; it is not adequately guaranteed by formal equality before the law, or by political franchise. Even the paradigm, so beloved by libertarians, of freely contracted agreement between parties equally free to accept or reject particular arrangements, is invalid if one party has the advantage of economic power. Realistically, there can be no freely contracted agreement in which one party can dictate the terms, demand and obtain concessions by reason of its superior economic strength. As C. Perelman rightly argues ... “When relations are economically and socially unequal, freedom leads to the oppression of the weaker party”.ⁱⁱ A society, therefore, dedicated to preserve freedom and protect, in the name of equal rights, “the weaker party” must legislate so that liberty does not become license. As for political equality, while it may be formally proclaimed it cannot be effectively realised in the absence of the necessary resources of education, time and

ⁱ *'Memorials of a Tour in Scotland', 1808, Rob Roy's Grave, Stanza XI, William Wordsworth.*

ⁱⁱ *'Liberty, Equality and The Public Interest' see Equality And Freedom, Past, Present and Future, C. Perelman, Weisbaden, 1977, p.2.*

money which are the requirements of sustained political engagement. Similarly, a declaration that all are equal before the law has no substance when one party to legal action has the financial resources to engage in costly litigation against a party who, for lack of funds cannot adequately pursue a legitimate grievance.

For Tawney, property equals power and power equals privilege and privilege, he insists, reacts against the spirit of community. While he approves the independence which small scale ownership engenders, large scale ownership, he argues, irresponsibly exercised, promotes exploitation and economic dependency. The liberal philosophy of property, he demonstrates, protects, in the name of equal rights, the inequalities of power which ownership authenticates. In spite of its proclaimed respect for the individual and the rights of the individual, he argues, it is reluctant to interfere with the rights of property. Yet, as Anthony Arblaster argues, "consistent regard for the equal rights of all individuals, requires such interference".ⁱ Indeed, it must be argued, such a system of rights cannot equally protect each individual. Large scale ownership, through the economic power invested in it, inevitably sustains inequalities of economic power. Clearly, to distribute power unequally, is to unequally distribute liberty. Certainly, where the rights of property are inviolable, the rights of the unpropertied are prejudiced by the economic power which property generates.ⁱⁱ Indeed, even the right to small property ownership is insecure against the power of large economic interests. Ultimately, this tension between formal rights and effective freedom exposes a contradiction between the political system and the economic dynamics of industrial capitalism. While it proclaims equal rights, its economic structure is sustained by inequality.

Freedom, then, must be concerned not only with political power but also with economic relationships. Ultimately, it is this economic relationship which defines the

ⁱ *The Rise And Decline Of Western Liberalism*, Anthony Arblaster, Blackwell, 1984, p 88.

ⁱⁱ *In The Agrarian Problem In The Sixteenth Century*, Tawney had demonstrated how "the political and economic omnipotence of the landed aristocracy" had overridden, "with obstinate indifference, the vested interest of the weaker rural class", see p.2/3 *passim*.

conditions of both freedom and equality. Furthermore, it may be argued against the libertarian champions who regard the free market as the self-evident guarantor of liberty, that while “it may be true that equality is inversely related to the freedom to dispose and make use of property under the social arrangements of Capitalism, the latter condition is not simply to be identified as freedom”.ⁱ Certainly, freedom is more than the right to buy and sell, to acquire and dispose, although restrictions against such activity without reasons of public interest are constraints on liberty. Yet, as Tawney insists, liberty demands that the economically weak shall not be at the mercy of the economically strong; it demands that control of economic life should be ... “amenable to the will of the community” not solely motivated by reasons of hope and fear in the interests of the powerful. Tawney’s conditions for liberty and equality are inextricably bound up with the ideal of fellowship and, in his judgement, the very nature of industrial Capitalism invalidates this ideal. How can there be a community of interests when the interests of one power group is contrary to the interests of the other? How can there be common purpose when one group imposes its purpose against the will of the other? How can there be a common culture where disparities of wealth create educational, social and economic divisions? How in a society of self-interest can social cohesion and communal responsibility thrive? How may a society “concentrated all in itself” live in brotherhood?

Tawney’s perceptions of liberty and equality, then, are founded on a deep sense of social justice, compounded by the firm conviction that to deny fellowship is to violate both principles. Justice and morality he insists, cannot allow that one individual may exploit a fellow human-being for his own ends. If he demands of liberty more than the formal recognition of the right to pursue self-interest, the demand is engendered by the notion that such pursuit may result in the disregard of the interest of others. For Tawney, liberty, which is defined merely as freedom from restraint, cannot create and sustain social

ⁱ ‘*Language Development, Human Intelligence and Social Organisation*’, Noam Chomsky, 1976, *The Chomsky Reader*, Serpents Tail, 1987, p.186, Chomsky quoting David Ellerman, ‘*Capitalism and Worker’s Self-Management*’, 1973.

harmony. Furthermore, Tawney would argue, the powers and the privileges which derive from such a definition will ensure that ... “the notions of freedom and equality which must be taken together in the idea of the equal value of individuals as free or self-determining human beings”ⁱ is incoherent within a society of atomistic individuals free of the ideals of social co-operation and fellowship. Yet, while Tawney supports ... “the idea of the equal value of individuals as free or self-determining beings”, as an essential ingredient of freedom and equality, the idea would not fully satisfy his understanding of the principles. For Tawney, freedom and equality require not only self-determination, but such social organisation as will encourage the moral development of each individual within a community motivated for the common good and nourished by a common culture. Tawney would agree with Charvet’s perception that ... “Crudely, not individuals but men’s associated wills in community constitute the basis of our ethical experience”.ⁱⁱ He would however, extend it to encompass the notion that “men’s associated wills in community” are most effective within a society in which there exists a mutual respect for the liberty and the equality of each individual. He would argue that it is only when the social and political structure is so organised that such respect is the inalienable right of every individual that a moral order and a fully civilised life can evolve.

Tawney suggests that the theory that liberty and equality are in an unyielding opposition derives from a pre-industrial Europe and should be re-examined in the light of the conditions of industrial civilisation. Liberty, he declares, “is composed of liberties”.ⁱⁱⁱ Some liberties are fundamental, others are secondary. If equality is indicted as an ... “assassin of liberty”, he argues, then it must be plainly shown which particular liberty is threatened. There are liberties which, in free societies, are regarded as essential; they are

ⁱ *A Critique of Freedom and Equality*, John Charvet 1981, p.1.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.1.

ⁱⁱⁱ Tawney shares this perception with Michael Oakeshott. There are, Oakeshott asserts, “many species of liberty which compose the freedom we enjoy, amplifying and making more secure the whole. Some he argues, “may be more general or more settled and mature than others”. There are, he insists, “a coherence of mutually supporting liberties, none of which stands alone”. ‘Rationalism in Politics’. See *The Political Economy of Freedom*. Michael Oakeshott, Liberty Press. First published Cambridge Journal, Volume II, 1949, p.384/406.

secured by law to every citizen and are recognised as ... “the principles on which the State is based”. There are other less crucial freedoms; these may be seen as expedients or devices. They may be extended or curtailed according to circumstances. These ‘secondary’ freedoms do not, therefore, represent the inviolable principle on which the State is based. Such a ‘secondary’ freedom, Tawney maintains, is the right to the private ownership of the means of production, an opinion for which he turns to the authority of Sir William Beveridge who had argued that such ownership “is not enjoyed, never has been enjoyed, and is unlikely to be enjoyed by more than a small proportion of the British people.”ⁱ In industrial societies, he insists, the practical realities determine that economic power is firmly controlled by privileged classes, and for the State to intervene in order to curtail it is deemed an infringement on liberty. Yet, Tawney argues, when the State does not intervene, it is not freedom that remains; quite frequently it is tyranny. Tawney asserts that the freedom most commonly- claimed to be menaced by State intervention is that freedom of the economically powerful to make decisions and execute policies in matters relating to their economic interests. Tawney advises that when there are protests against an alleged curtailment of freedom, the first question which must be asked is ... freedom for whom”? Because, he insists, “there is no such thing as freedom in the abstract divorced from the realities of a particularly- time and place”.ⁱⁱ Liberty, then, lie a formal declaration of equality is in Tawney’s view an abstract concept; without meaning since liberty, like equality always depends on the individual’s ability to equally pursue self-determined ends.

It may be argued that such an ability is dependent on the structure of the power relationship existing at a particular time, and within a particular society. This power relationship may prevent the pursuit of the particular end either by laws which forbid it, or by economic pressure which frustrates it. The structure of the power relationship, therefore, may either inhibit or extend liberty in accordance with the objectives, or, in the

ⁱ *Equality*, p.228.
ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.228.

interest of those who control it. Freedom, Tawney submits, involves ... “the power of choice between alternatives, a choice which is real, not nominal, between alternatives which exist in fact, not only on paper.” “Liberty”, he insists, “is the ability to do or refrain from doing definite things, at a definite moment, in definite circumstances”.ⁱ The question which must be asked, therefore, is whether this liberty has been increased or decreased by those measures which correct or nullify inequalities? The answer, as Tawney has argued, is dependent upon a definition of liberty. Again a question must be posed. Who benefits from this liberty? Tawney’s position is clear. Liberty and equality which many have declared to be implacable foes can ... “live as friends” if the measures taken to increase equality extend the range of alternatives open to ordinary men and women. If the measures ensure that the chosen alternative is in fact realisable, then equalisation has enlarged the sphere of freedom. Tawney recognises that there still exists within Industrial Capitalism a ‘hierarchy of authority’ which by the very nature of the system is actuated by its own economic interests. This ‘hierarchy’ exercises extensive economic power on countless human lives. It is a power which can be arbitrary and autocratic, and, Tawney insists, it must be made accountable and brought under public control. Tawney acknowledges that historically there has been powerful resistance to such control, but he argues, there appeared to be a growing recognition that in many circumstances public control was not only desirable, but, in many instances a necessary safeguard against an infringement of liberty. Furthermore it may be argued, such restraint furnishes a practical and equitable contribution to democratic process. A democracy, as Tawney insists must not only proclaim formal rights and incorporate them as primary principles on which the State is based, it must create such conditions as allow for their effective exercise. It is also an essential condition of democracy that the exercise of what might be perceived as a right does not impinge on the rights of others. Equality demands that each citizen has an equal right to exercise these rights, providing there is not breach of this condition. If there is such a breach, then the right cannot be exercised, for just as there must be

ⁱ *Equality*, p.228.

equality of the right to freedom of action, so must there be equality of restraint. It may be properly argued that rights of action and rights of restraint demand also an equality of economic and political power and without a redistribution of such powers the rights are merely formal and ineffective. Thus, for Tawney, equality entails a redistribution of power so that Henry and Henrietta Dubb may be protected from its illegitimate, socially damaging and inequitable misuse.”^{NB} Insofar as this redistribution has been implemented, Tawney argues, no primary liberty has been lost, although, he concedes, the ability of particular groups and individuals to conduct economic operations at their own discretion has been circumscribed by legislation and taxation. However, he insists, freedom for the majority has been extended, and, what for many wage earners were merely formal rights can now, in practice, be exercised. The erosion of certain secondary liberties, such as the automatic entrance into certain public schools based on ability to pay rather than scholastic merit has not, Tawney insists, resulted in the death of freedom. Indeed, he insists, as long as only a minority enjoy the conditions which allow for a civilised life, many so called ‘freedoms’ may properly be seen as privileges. If freedom implies the power of self determination, then “any action which causes such opportunities to be more widely shared is twice blessed. It not only subtracts from inequality, it adds to freedom”.ⁱ

Freedom, Tawney insists, must always be defined; its beneficiaries always identified. Freedom for whom? is always the question. But a freedom which makes possible a life worthy of human beings for ordinary men and women is certainly “twice blessed”. Indeed it is thrice blessed. It not only extends opportunity and recognises the equal value of every man and woman, it also recognises the right of every individual to pursue, without hindrance, their self-determined, legitimate ends. Yet Tawney provides more specific definitions of liberty. Civil liberty, he submits, depends on “freedom of worship; freedom of speech and writing; freedom of meeting; freedom in the choice of

^{NB} Curiously, and welcomely, Tawney has been almost exclusively confined to Henry Dubb now turns his attention to “the mental and moral traditions of plain men and women.”, *Equality*, p.200.

ⁱ *Equality*, p.235 (concluding sentence of 1938-1950, Epilogue).

occupation; freedom to combine". Political liberty, he insists, depends "partly on civil liberty, partly on the existence of constitutional arrangements for the maintenance of representative and responsible government". The sole security for the preservation of both civil and political liberty", he asserts, "is a public opinion which is determined to preserve them".ⁱ

For Tawney, such determination grounded in Christian values, will serve to sustain those social structures and those social relationships which he holds as essential components of a moral order. The concern of British Socialism, he insists, is to establish the conditions for a civilised, self-respecting life which is available to every individual. It must seek to create a community which gives priority to "the activities of the spirit" and encourages the institutions which promote them. British Socialism, he argues, must regard civilisation not as a matter of possessions but of a quality of life. It must recognise that the most important aspects of human beings are not the superficial circumstances of income or wealth which divides them ... but the common humanity which unites them". In the essay 'British Socialism Today' Tawney argues that the impulse behind the British Socialist movement as far as the rank and file is concerned ... "has been obstinately and unashamedly ethical".ⁱⁱ It has evolved out of hatred of ... a system which corrupts human relations" by allowing the exploitation of one man for the gain of another. We must replace this system, Tawney demands ... (with) "a community of responsible men and women working without fear in comradeship for common ends, all of whom can grow to their full stature, develop to the utmost limit the varying capacities with which nature has endowed them."ⁱⁱⁱ This demand is an expression of Tawney's Christian faith which exhorts men to fellowship in the conviction that fellowship will maintain justice, endorse equality and extend liberty. This exhortation is compounded by an appeal to the Humanist values of charity and tolerance. It derives from the conviction that liberty

ⁱ 'Social Democracy in Britain', 1949, see *The Radical Tradition* 1964, p.165.

ⁱⁱ 'British Socialism Today', 1952, see *The Radical Tradition* 1964, p.168.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.168.

demands that each individual may freely pursue (or not pursue) in accordance with their conscience, their legitimated ends, may freely develop their intellectual and spiritual capacities, freely exercise their religious faith. For Tawney, the Christian Socialist, his social philosophy sustained by Christian principles, freedom of worship is a necessary condition of democracy.

Equality Of Opportunity

For libertarians equality of opportunity is most equitably expressed within a social order which allow each individual, in fair competition, to exercise his or her capabilities. The argument recognises that there are differing human capacities but, they insist, guarantees of equal political rights and equal economic liberty ensure equality of opportunity. By application and talent, it is argued, each individual has an equal opportunity to gain reward. It is acknowledged that such arrangements, will, necessarily engender economic inequalities. In a system of free enterprise, it is admitted, chances are not equal, since such a system, “based on private property and inheritance, necessarily creates differences of opportunity”.ⁱ This advocacy of free-market capitalism grants that within the system the man who starts poor is less likely to succeed (in terms of amassing wealth) than is a man who has inherited property. Nevertheless it is argued, a free-market ultimately defines a free society. The free-market, they claim, is the guardian of individual freedom, a bulwark against the coercive, all powerful state. The system, it is proposed, needs disparities of wealth and income in order to function. They act, it is claimed, as an engine of economic efficiency. Furthermore economic inequalities are part of a natural order which are, (or ought to be) outside explicit political decision. As for formal rights, there is a clear dividing line between the allocation of resources and fundamental constitutional rights. Politics, must not be allowed to corrupt economic transactions or interfere with the market mechanism. This insistence on the separation of politics from

ⁱ *The Road to Serfdom, F.A. Hayek, 1944, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979 edition, p.77.*

economics, it must be argued, does not make for social harmony. The market system, while it may vigorously respect equal rights, unarguably favours, in terms of economic advantage, the exceptional few. There are, it is conceded, winners and losers. No one can predict who will identify or create or satisfy a new demand or even when changes in demand force others out of the market. We may judge the results to be unfair, but it is argued, our complaint is unwarranted. The outcome is not due to the actions or intentions of any definable group. The market, neutral, and, the final arbiter, has decided. Who, then it is asked, has been unjust?

Yet, while the champions of the free-market system concede that it inevitably results in inequalities they neglect to emphasise the consequent imbalance of economic power. Yet, as Tawney argues, it is precisely this imbalance of economic power which reacts against social cohesion and the spirit of community. It is this imbalance which, in industrial capitalist societies, underline the division between constitutional rights and the exercise of effective power. Ultimately, it is this imbalance which negates the libertarian argument. Patently, constitutional rights and equality of economic liberty do not secure, equitably, equality of opportunity. Indeed, it must be argued inequalities of economic power endorse those distinctions of class and status which sustain 'the religion of inequality'. such distinctions create social conflict; they fuel envy and resentment. They destroy fellowship; they breed privilege.

Tawney concedes that the ancient forms of privilege have been overthrown. Privilege, he asserts, is now thought to belong to an age of darkness which has vanished. Indeed, he argues, men regard it as extravagant and fantastic when it is suggested that there exists an element of privilege in industrial society which "cripples their energies and poisons their spirit". Yet he asserts within Industrial Capitalism, even without legal barriers, even with franchise, the concept of a hierarchical social order survives and thrives. The defenders of the order, the opponents of education for the 'lower orders', the upholders of submission to superiors still revere inequality as an article of social faith,

and, in the name of that faith exercise political, social and economic authority. For Tawney, the issue is clear; formal rights, both civil and political are acceptable and desirable, but without powers they are always enfeebled, sometimes unavailing. Furthermore, the proclamation of formal rights, the abolition of the traditional privileges do not, by themselves, guarantee equity or create a harmonious society. While the champions of the established order insist that where economic liberty and legal equality are recognised, an equality of opportunity exists in which all may by application and enterprise aspire to be rich and powerful, Tawney argues that such a notion of equality where there are disparities of economic power are, in effect, equal opportunities of becoming unequal. Equality of opportunity within our social system, Tawney insists, is a concept honoured by all... “even by those who most strenuously resist attempts to apply it”. The idea of equality of opportunity .has been determined by its history ... “it was formulated as a lever to overthrow legal inequality and juristic privilege”.ⁱ It has been presented in negative terms as freedom from restraints rather than as the possession of power. It is uncertain, Tawney mischievously reflects, whether the powers that be, would... “be more horrified if the principle of equality of opportunity was denied, or if an attempt was made to apply it”.ⁱⁱ For Tawney, the notion of equality of opportunity, so defined, leaves the way open for social and economic inequalities within a society of atomistic individualism in which

“Each for himself is still the rule,
We learn it when we go to school,
The devil take the hindmost”.

ⁱ *Equality*, p.103.
ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.103.

It sustains a society of US and THEM, and Tawney comments “what a view of human life such an attitude implies!”ⁱ It debases any notion of common purpose and common humanity; it negates Tawney’s vision of... “ultimate and profound fellowship”.

The concept of equality of opportunity has thrown up a vast literature not only by advocates and adversaries, but also by those who seek to define it. Tawney, too, held strong views on what he argued was a misinterpretation of the concept. The concept, he insisted, can have no reality except within a society in which every member, irrespective of birth, social position or occupation, has in fact (and not merely in form) the equal opportunity of using and developing to the full their natural endowments of physique, of character and intelligence. Within Industrial Capitalism the idea of equality of opportunity was ‘purely formal’ for as long as some are... “stunted and sterilised by their social environment” and others by poor education or inadequate health provision, the concept had the... “unreality of a majestic phantom”.ⁱⁱ Certainly there was small chance of fraternity in a society in which ... “a beneficial private war makes one man strive to climb on the shoulders of another and stay there”.ⁱⁱⁱ

Tawney’s concept of equality of opportunity is far removed from the misrepresentation of Darwinian theory advanced by the advocates of economic libertarianism. In Tawney’s view, equality of opportunity does not exist by the mere proclamation of formal equality, abolition of legal privileges or the absence of restraints on individual enterprise. He rejects the claim that equality of opportunity gives each individual an equal chance to... “ascend and get on”. As for the argument that an educational ladder provides the means by which talent can be recognised and rewarded and, that therefore, the... “skimped quality of our primary education, the over-crowded classes, the mean surroundings and the absence of amenities” were matters of secondary

ⁱ *Equality*, p.105.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.103.

ⁱⁱⁱ R.H. Tawney, *critical remarks with reference to Popular Government*, Sir Henry Maine, 1885, *Equality*, p.104.

importance, Tawney, with the aid of statistical evidence, shows the falsity of this claim.ⁱ But Tawney's contention against this concept of equal opportunity does not only rest on the success or failure rate of Industrial Capitalism to provide social mobility. Tawney recognises that the encouragement and exercise of fresh talent is necessary in order to... "avoid economic and social stagnation". He also argues that to deny some individuals the opportunity to 'rise' while others through wealth, birth, education, social and social connections are able to do so, is injurious not only to individual happiness, but also to social well being. But, he insists, opportunities for some to 'rise' are no substitute for a large measure of *authentic* equality because, he argues, a community requires unity as well as diversity. It is, Tawney argues, important to... "discriminate between different powers", but it is even more important to... "provide for common needs".

The foundation of Tawney's concept of equality of opportunity is clear ... "equality of opportunity", he insists,... "implies the establishment of conditions which favour not only the expansion of the opportunity to assert oneself in the market place but also the conditions in which men should be able to lead a life of dignity and culture".ⁱⁱ ... "whether they 'rise' or not". Equality of opportunity, for Tawney, does not end merely with the opportunity to 'rise'; it implies a... "high level of general culture"... "a strong sense of common interest" within a society that acknowledges not only that ... "exceptional men should be free to exercise their exceptional powers" but also that... "common men should be able to make the most of their common humanity".ⁱⁱⁱ Tawney's concept of equal opportunity acknowledges that talent and the qualities of leadership should be respected and rewarded, because they promote the well-being of society. The concept is buttressed, however, by the conviction that society depends on solidarity and cohesion and that civilisation is a common enterprise to which each individual is obliged to give of his or her best to which all, in fellowship can contribute. His concern,

ⁱ *Equality, see Appendices, p.246-250.*

ⁱⁱ *Ibid, p.108.*

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid, p.108.*

ultimately, is how to unite the values of fellowship and common purpose with an effective and exercisable liberty which will extend to every individual the opportunity of realising their human potential. His notion of equality of opportunity is permeated by the belief that men and women must not sacrifice 'the cultivation of spiritual excellencies', which are possible for all, to the acquisition of riches which he suggests is possible, "happily, for a few".ⁱ This conviction that economic success can not, by itself, provide the spirit of community and fellowship is dictated by a faith which urges that men be "No more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and the household of God". (EPH. 11-19).

Education And Equality

Tawney's arguments for social change, as it has been noted, "are not generally framed in Christian terms".ⁱⁱ Yet, his understanding that equality demands equality of *educational* opportunity is deeply informed by religious conviction. "Knowledge", he asserts, "like religion, transcends all differences of class and wealth"; "to sell education for money", he insists, "is like selling the gifts of God for money".ⁱⁱⁱ In the eye of learning, he argues, "as in the eye of God, all men are equal". For Tawney, knowledge, "the gift of God", is in itself "a centre of moral authority". It upholds a moral standard "by making the discipline of learning accessible to all who will submit to it". It unites men and women in an understanding "of what is false and what is true".^{iv} It provides the framework for an ethical appeal to equality in its commitment to truth, which, transcends all the differences of religious belief. It confirms Tawney's commitment to knowledge as the agency through which men and women regardless of faith may respond not only to the pragmatic arguments but to the moral appeal of equality.

ⁱ *Equality*, p.108

ⁱⁱ *R.H. Tawney, Anthony Wright*, p.19.

ⁱⁱⁱ *The Commonplace Book*, entry for 30 October, 1912.

^{iv} *Ibid*, entry for 30 October, 1912.

Yet while Tawney's arguments derive from religious faith, they are pragmatic as well as evangelic. Inequalities of educational opportunities, he submits, not only frustrate talents which react to the disadvantage of the individual; they impede that process of self development by which men and women may equally contribute to a common culture; and equally participate in the responsibilities of citizenship.

For Tawney, the English education system, or as he censoriously describes it ... "The two systems" - one private - one public - represent perhaps the most vicious, unjust and unjustifiable expression of the English class system. It creates and perpetuates class divisions; it acts against social solidarity. It ... "thwarts the very purposes of education", which, Tawney declared, "was partly at least, the process by which ... we transcend the barriers of our isolated personalities and become partners in a universe of interests which we share with our fellow men, both living and dead alike".ⁱ Education, he insists, is plainly a question of Knowledge, but it is still more ... "a question of imagination, reflection, of the mental initiative which sees through shams to realities". In the field of education, out of regard for the qualities common to all mankind, out of their common humanity, Tawney insists, the spirit of equality should ... "establish its kingdom". Since, as Tawney argues, the purpose of the educationalist is to aid the self-development of all human beings, this perception of man's common humanity demands a common effort which will create an educational system which extends, equally, the opportunity to cultivate the powers with which nature has endowed them. Furthermore, Tawney argues the purpose of education apart from the question of knowledge and self-development is to strengthen the spirit of social solidarity and to prepare men for the better service of their fellows in order to raise the general level of society.

Education then, for Tawney, is not only an instrument for the imparting of knowledge, nor is it solely a training ground for the encouragement of individual

ⁱ 'The W.E.A. and Adult Education', R.H. Tawney, 1953, see *Radical Tradition*, 1964, p.84.

achievement without regard for social responsibility. An educational system must recognise the equal worth of each individual; it must, in this recognition, foster and seek to nourish a common culture in the best interest of the nation, in the best interest of social harmony. To the Federation of British Industry which had declared support for an improved educational system yet had found economic reasons for frustrating it, Tawney reserved his most ironic comments. He denounced their objections to the recommendations of The Board of Education which had proposed a statutory minimum school leaving age at fourteen and “comprehensive measures to provide some form of education for all children until the age of sixteen and eventually to the age of eighteen”.ⁱ He enthusiastically supported the subsequent Education Bill which preceded the Fisher Education Act of 1918. It is impossible to reconcile Tawney’s ideals of fraternity and equality in a society in which the majority of children leave school at fourteen amidst warnings from industrialists against ... “creating a class whose education is unsuitable for the employment they will eventually enter”.ⁱⁱ Where is the conviction that education is ... “a partnership in a universe of interests” when it is argued that eight hours taken out of the working week for the education of juvenile workers would impose on industry a burden it would be ... “quite unable to bear”? Can a society in which powerful interests insist that education should not be extended to the majority of children beyond the age of fourteen claim to be civilised in accordance with Tawney’s conditions for a civilised life? Where, in such a society is mutual regard, mutual respect, common concern, common provision? Where is *fraternity*? Where is *equality*? Where, Tawney demands, is the heritage into which to welcome the children of men ... “who fell in the illusion, that in their humble way they were the servants of *freedom*”?ⁱⁱⁱ Education, Tawney argues, which should act as an agent of social unification, was, under industrial Capitalism,

ⁱ *Education and Politics (1900-1951), A Study of the Labour Party: Rodney Barker, Clarendon Press, 1972, p.28.*

ⁱⁱ ‘Keep The Worker’s Children In Their Place’, R.H. Tawney, *see Daily News, 14 August 1918, see Radical Tradition, p.47-51.*

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid, p.47-51.*

perpetuating the division of society into the exploiters and the exploited. In a society of ... “masters and servants”, how could there be a common language, a common purpose?

Tawney reserves perhaps his most scathing attack for the English public school system; it is, he insists, “grotesque”, “repulsive”, “barbarous”, “an educational monstrosity”, “a grave national misfortune”, and educationally vicious”.ⁱ Socially, he argues it is disastrous, for more than any other cause (apart from Capitalism itself) it creates class divisions so that, within the nation one class is “almost unintelligible to the other”. In a political democracy, he insists the publicly provided educational system should provide an education ... so excellent and so generally esteemed that all parents desire their children to attend it”. It is English snobbery, English class attitudes which allows the economic lines between parties to coincide with education lines. It is the isolation of one class from another which allows even some members of Parliament to regard ... “the children of common persons as not quite human in the same sense as their own”.^{NB} In a society in which such class attitudes persist, is it to be expected that an improvement of the educational system will be seen as a priority? Can it be assumed, notwithstanding the declarations of commitment to a classless society that the objective will be vigorously pursued?

It may be argued that in the exclusive attention paid to the specific inadequacies, anomalies and injustices of the English educational system Tawney’s social and educational concerns are curiously parochial. However, if he deplores the system which perpetuates the “Them and Us syndrome”, he has firm convictions about the direction and

ⁱ *Equality*, p.145.

^{NB} *The ingrained nature of English class division is illustrated by George Orwell ... "Here I am a typical member of the middle-class. It is easy for me to say that I want to get rid of class distinctions, but nearly everything I do is a result of class distinctions" ... "to get outside the class racket, I have to suppress not merely my private snobbishness but most of my other tastes and prejudices as well". The Road to Wigan Pier, 1937. Virginia Woolf wrote in her diary, 13 Dec. 1917 ... "the poor have no chance, no manners or self control to protect themselves with, we have a monopoly of all the generous feelings". Diaries of Virginia Woolf, Vol.1, Hogarth Press, 1977, p.91.*

the requirements of an egalitarian educational system. He contrasts the requirements necessary for social cohesion and even economic efficiency with what, in a society of self-interested individualism, is shamefully made available. In England, he insists, an elementary school education has always meant, and still means, a cheap education. There is a deficiency of school libraries, playing fields, laboratories, a shortage of books, mean, sometimes unhealthy buildings, under-staffing. Such surroundings, such conditions, Tawney argues, “poison the soul” “cause the spirit and temper to be smitten by a blight of social inferiority”.ⁱ For Tawney, the English educational system with its organisation along lines of social class is a powerful force actively obstructing social unity, actively endorsing class division. This ... “hereditary curse” which plunges so many children of the working class into premature employment, denies to the over whelming majority the opportunity for self-development.^{NB1} It also deprives the community of the contribution, which, cultivated and encouraged, their developed talents might make.

Inequality of educational opportunity, then, stunts the self-realisation of the individual, robs the nation of talents and capacities, frustrates the ideal of social solidarity. The ‘hereditary curse’, its emphasis on social class, can never accept that every human being is of infinite importance and each is of equal worth. Such a ‘curse’ reacts against the notion of Christian brotherhood, which irrespective of ‘class’, extends to all mankind equal respect and consideration. Curiously, in view of Tawney’s antipathy to the private public school system, he does not demand its complete abolition.^{NB2} It is perhaps the recognition that there ... “are diversities of gifts which require for their development diversities of treatment” that make him insist that such institutions should be required to

ⁱ *Equality*, p.142.

^{NB1} *Almost sixty years after the publication of Equality, the 'staying on rate' for higher education in the United Kingdom is still the lowest among the major industrial nations. In the age group 16-18, 35% of British young people enjoy full-time higher education as against 77% Belgium, 47% Germany, 77% Japan, 66% France, 76% Sweden, 79% USA. Source: Department of Education Statistics, 1986.*

^{NB2} *Nevertheless, Tawney argued (in 1943), "I think ... " at least half of the Public school population, should, at the end of five years, be ex-elementary schoolboys", see 1943 Committee on Public Schools. Note on Draft to Finance Chapter 22, see R.H. Tawney Papers, London School of Economics, Archives.*

hold a license from the Board of Education specifying certain conditions which make them equally accessible to all children qualified to profit by it irrespective of the income or social position of their parents. Tawney, in his COMMONPLACE BOOK, had written, “we must think of knowledge like religion, as transcending all differences of class and wealth, and in the eye of learning, as in the eye of God, all men are equal because all are infinitely small” “to sell education for money”, he added, “is the next thing to selling the gifts of God for money.”ⁱ For Tawney, ‘a humane education’ should be open to all, and a university, he argued, is not simply to be regarded as a ... “professional school of the brain-working classes”.ⁱⁱ

Tawney, then, does not propose a uniform school system. Clearly, he is appalled by the effects which the class system imposes upon English education, which, he asserts, “exists in no other country on the same scale”.ⁱⁱⁱ For Tawney, however, equality and social solidarity require more than equality of educational opportunity. He demands an educational system which will provide the means not only for “*la carrière ouverte aux talents* but also *egalite de fait*, a universality of provision”.^{iv} Such provision, Tawney asserts, will not only enable men to develop those human faculties, which, he insists, are “the attributes of man, not the attributes of any particular class or profession of men”. For Tawney, the purpose of education is “to give equally to all classes of the community a greater opportunity of entering into those great heritages of literature, art and beauty that should enrich the lives of the community.”^v To this end he demands that higher education should be available not only to those who enter it for specialised avocations but also to

ⁱ *The Commonplace Book*, entry for October 30, 1912.

ⁱⁱ *Notes on a confidential paper of the Home Policy Sub-Committee of the Labour Party (sent to Tawney by Lena Jagger MP) April 1961, shows that 55 % of entrants to the University of Cambridge were ex-Public School pupils. The statistic for Oxford was 45% , see R.H. Tawney Papers, London School of Economics Archives.*

ⁱⁱⁱ *Equality*, p.145.

^{iv} ‘An Experiment in Democratic Education’, R.H. Tawney, see *The Radical Tradition*, p.73-74. First printed in *The Political Quarterly*, May 1914

^v *Secondary Education for All: A Policy for Labour*, edited for the Education Advisory Committee of the Labour Party by R.H. Tawney, 1922, quoted in *Education and Politics, 1900-1951*, Rodney Barker, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1972, p.139.

those whose goal is not material success but who seek education not to become something else but because “they are what they are”. For Tawney, a society must be judged by its educational system, by its dedication to provide equal and adequate educational facilities so that each individual may equally be afforded the opportunity for self-development. Tawney asks a question of society, “if its schools are sordid will its life be generous”?ⁱ Perhaps, too, we may ask ... and if they are underfunded? and if their staff is underpaid? and if their professional skills are not respected? ... will they be able, properly, to undertake that most responsible of all social tasks ... the education of the young for useful, self-fulfilling lives? Surely the words of St Paul are apposite? “Be not deceived: God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he reap” (Galatians 6:7).

Redistribution, Communal Provision and A Strategy For Equality

Tawney, proposes a ‘*Strategy of Equality*’. The strategy incorporates methods of wealth distribution; it examines the growth and significance of communal provisions and sets out the necessary measures for the extension of the social services. He addresses the arguments against redistribution, communal provision, extension of social services and submits a programme of priorities which he claims would eliminate ... “the most shocking of existing inequalities” ... “in which the penalty of the poor is not merely poverty” ... “but ignorance, sickness and premature death”.ⁱⁱ The English, Tawney argues, have learned that to dogmatically oppose any notion of equality is liable to create some practical social inconveniences. They have come, therefore, albeit unwittingly, to mitigate or even end, some forms of inequality. But, he insists, the privileged classes have put up a determined resistance against every method and every measure which would realise the ideal of equality. Tawney argues that the means of achieving a greater degree of equality are no mystery. Progressive taxation, increased death duties (which will react against the

ⁱ *Equality*, p.145.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.149.

privileges of inherited wealth) and an extension of the social services are, he insists, obvious methods. So, too, are legislative measures designed to curb the powers of those whose economic muscle allows them control over the economic lives of their fellows. For Tawney the equalisation of economic power will release men and women from the tyranny of unaccountable authority. It will free them, too, from paternalism which however well intentioned or scientifically informed, inhibits men and women from the free exercise of their own intellectual and spiritual capacities.

As long as private interests control the key positions of the economic system, Tawney insists, resistance to welfare provision will be fierce and progress will be slow. There are those, Tawney recognises, who argue that the provision of social services and adjustments to the laws of taxation are merely palliative. He admits that such measures do not achieve the necessary and desirable degree of equality, but confronted by a determined and ruthless ruling class which will check and oppose every step towards the ideal of equality, such measures, even if not wholly effective, are instrumental in relieving many of the miseries and anxieties which confront large sections of the population. Furthermore, such palliatives are not to be derided, for they provide practical assistance in the everyday lives of the sick, the needy, the unemployed and the aged. Tawney's answer to those who deprecate these mere palliatives is an expression of his disagreement with those militant political factions which demand drastic action, even the use of force to overthrow the Capitalist system. Tawney, in obedience to his Christian principles rejects the notion of violence, just as in accordance with his Fabian principles he accepts that the assault on Capitalism will demand ... "a prolonged effort of intelligence and resolution". But, he argues, even if the measures which he has proposed do not produce the desired radical social changes, they are to be seen not as alternatives but complementary to more stringent methods. Meanwhile, Tawney asserts, such measures do more than solve stricken consciences or alleviate the more glaring social injustices. They create conditions in which men and women, relieved of some of the pressures which result from competitive individualism, may be rid of the social humiliation which inequality engenders. Ultimately,

it may be argued, such measures serve to create relationships in which men and women may acknowledge, and seek to strengthen, the bonds between the isolated individual and the community.

For Tawney, the redistribution of wealth represents an important step towards equality. He dismisses as an ... “argument won over shadows” the argument which insists, in defence of the status quo, that an arithmetical division of wealth would yield an insignificant improvement to the existing order. Furthermore, Tawney submits, it is not only the nominal value of the *amounts* transferred in redistribution which are important but also the uses from which they have been diverted. Unearned income from urban ground rents, from mineral rights, from dividends received without either participation or responsibility, create class divisions. They do not make for social equity nor do they contribute to social welfare or common purpose. It is possible, Tawney proposes, that a society even with a lower average income but greater equality may be happier than one with a higher average income with less equality. For most men and women, he argues, a sense of self-respect and a general acknowledgement of their human worth is ultimately more important than material benefit.

Redistribution, for Tawney, involves the pooling of the nation’s surplus resources by means of taxation. It is through this pooling, rather than the division of wealth and income into equal fractions, that inequalities of opportunity and circumstances will be overcome. It is, Tawney claims, ... “the economies of collective effort and massed expenditure” utilised for the ... “advantage of the whole community” which can create the “grand achievement of industrial society”.ⁱ ‘Collective effort’, ‘pooled resources’, ‘common advantage’, - these, for Tawney, are necessary elements of a civilised life. Yet a civilised life, beyond the benefits of welfare provision, demands mutual respect, the opportunity of all for self development; it demands spiritual as well as material ends. The

ⁱ *Equality*, p.124.

heritage of our common civilisation, Tawney contends, must be equally available to all. Man, "that timid staring creature", he insists, "needs not only money, but light, air and water". He requires also those precious uneconomic goods, "tranquility, beauty and affection".ⁱ

Tawney not only demands an egalitarian society, he proposes the extension of communal provision towards that end. There are, however, vociferous and dissenting voices against the notions of equality and communal provision. There are those who fear that the spread of egalitarianism will threaten that tradition of culture, preserved by an elite "against the hooves of the multitude".ⁱⁱ There are those who argue that advantages shared are no longer advantages, and that in a society in which everybody is somebody, nobody will be anybody. There are those who argue that public provision will create dependence, rob men and women of the initiative, allow them to abnegate their personal responsibilities, weaken the fibre and morale of the nation. For Tawney, however, inequality is not only socially unjust; it is a catalyst of social division and class resentment. Furthermore, his experiences in the Workers Educational Association, his work at Toynbee Hall and his army service had convinced him that inequality was wasteful of human talent.^{NB} In 1931, the year in which *EQUALITY* was published, the majority of school children were forced at fourteen years of age into the labour market, into shops, offices, factories or workshops. An equal opportunity for self-development, the chance to discover and extend their capabilities was denied them to the detriment both of the individual and of the community. For Tawney, only egalitarian measures will redress this needless waste of human talent. "A strong sense of equality", The Christian moralist insists "is a necessary corollary of The Christian concept of man." ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ *Equality*, p.126.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.126.

^{NB} "We crossed three lines that had once been trenches and the man beside me ... the bravest of friends" ... "whom no weariness could discourage or danger daunt" ... "a bricklayer by trade, but one who could turn his hand to anything, the man whom of all others I would choose to have beside me at a pinch, but he's dead". *The Attack*, R.H. Tawney, August 1916, published in the *Westminster Gazette*

ⁱⁱⁱ 'A Note on Christianity and The Social Order', see *The Attack*, p.182.

Yet the Christian concept which insists on the equality of man does not present a plan for a moral, social, economic and political order. Such an order requires a practical programme as well as an ethical foundation. To achieve this objective, Tawney, the social theorist, set out a strategy which demands the allocation of such public provision as is necessary to eliminate poverty and ignorance and guard against sickness and premature death. It is, in effect, a demand for an efficient and classless educational system and a national health service both equally in the service of the whole community.^{NB} He endorses the recommendation of Hugh Dalton for the public provision ‘as a *civil right*’ and therefore ... “detached from any odour of charity or patronage” of funds to alleviate the distress caused by abnormal circumstances which unhappily arise ... “in different stages of social development”. Such provisions, Tawney insists, should be recognised as vital elements in the national well-being; they are in the public interest and it is desirable to make them as adequate as the resources of the nation at any time allow. Tawney realises that changes in the taxation laws, an extension of public expenditure to fund welfare provision, indeed any method which proposed even a gradual redistribution of wealth and reallocation of resources would encounter fierce and powerful opposition. He dismisses the notion, still defended by libertarian economic theorists that every million spent for social purposes was an additional burden on industry. He argues instead that social expenditure is for the most part an investment rather than a liability, since, free of the anxieties which public provision allays, there is created an atmosphere of co-operative effort and strengthened individual energies. He calls for a National Investment Board to guard against the misuse or waste of capital in the best interest of industrial efficiency. He insists that the state must concern itself with determining the division of available economic resources in order to balance future productive efficiency with necessary social requirement. Certainly, his suggestion that a National Investment Board should be

^{NB} *In 1937 death from bronchitis was about eight times as frequent among the poor as among the rich, while tuberculosis killed three of the former to one of the latter. A National Health Service, which was vigorously opposed by many champions of individual responsibility, has done much, in spite of its deficiencies, to correct these alarming statistics. (Figures provided by Dr H. Roberts, Daily Herald, 4 August 1937).*

responsible for an overall strategy of national investment would be seen as an intolerable interference by the champions of laissez-faire enterprise. To suggest, also, that such a Board should ... push forward the transference of the major industries to public ownership^{NB} did not meet with the wholehearted approval of the majority of the recipients of dividend income. True, there were those who opposed nationalisation because, they argued, it would detract from efficiency, create bureaucracy and deprive the consumer of the choice which a free market economy engendered. There were those, however, who opposed nationalisation on what to them were the compelling and unanswerable arguments of their self-interest and the preservation of the existing order which safeguarded it.

Tawney proposes a national programme of social expenditure publicly funded through taxation and insurance contribution. Each individual, in sickness and in health, in employment and unemployment, in old age and adversity would be entitled to the benefits of communal provision ... "from the cradle to the grave", an expression which, depending on social or political viewpoint, could be one of disdain or of approbation. The strategy advanced in the name of equality is designed to eradicate those social and economic injustices which result from an industrial system which upholds the advantages and privileges based on the power of capital and which are sustained by a socially divisive class structure. Yet if it is a 'strategy for equality', if it seeks to succeed by redistribution of wealth, by a national policy of investment and by the public provision of amenities which are necessary for a self-respecting life, for Tawney it is also a strategy for fellowship. It is true, Tawney argues pragmatically, that an investment in social provision, in education, in health is to the benefit not only of the individual, but to the economic efficiency of the nation ... "to under-invest is", he insists, "the most stupid, the most cruel

^{NB} *With reference to the nationalisation of industry, Tawney argues ('Christianity and the Social Order' (1935)) that ... "the question is not whether the State owns and controls the means of production. It is also who owns and controls the State". Economic control will not by itself guarantee democratic process or efficiency nor will it ensure a degree of service in the best interest of the community.*

of extravagances”.ⁱ But beyond the claims of industrial efficiency, there is the plea for ... “a common affection for the qualities which belong not to any class or profession of men ... “but to man himself”.ⁱⁱ It is this ‘common affection’, this sense of a common humanity which permeates Tawney’s demands for the acceptance of communal responsibility for the welfare of others. Communal provision of health, of education, a communal undertaking to end squalor, to create living conditions which will allow for a life of dignity will, Tawney insists, increasingly dissipate that sense of social inferiority which has paralysed the working class in the past. It will increasingly stimulate that sense of social responsibility and active social participation which Tawney had advocated in *THE ACQUISITIVE SOCIETY*. It will, too, for Tawney, satisfy that Christian injunction which demands “that because men are men they are bound to acknowledge that man has claims on man”.ⁱⁱⁱ

Socialism: A Moral Crusade

Tawney postulates ‘*THE PREMISE OF SOCIALISM*’ and sets out ‘*THE TASK BEFORE THE LABOUR PARTY*’. He acknowledges the divisions within the British Socialist movement; he attacks the extremists of the ‘Left’ who sneer at social democracy and civil liberty as “illusions of *bourgeois* ideology”. He castigates the “Bloomsbury intelligentsia”, who in their anxiety to be seen as ultra-revolutionaries call for impractical and unrealistic action. He acknowledges the split between the trade union leadership which does not seek confrontation yet fights for improved pay and better conditions for its membership and the mostly middle-class militants who would cultivate the communists, (whose programme, Tawney insists, they do not properly comprehend) in order to bring about a social revolution. On the one hand, Tawney asserts, the Labour Party is denounced for the mildness of its socialism; on the other hand because of its

ⁱ *Equality*, p.155.

ⁱⁱ *The Commonplace Book*, entry for March 6, 1913.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, entry for March 6, 1913

reluctance to accept into its ranks those liberals who share with them common objectives, it is accused of intransigence. Meanwhile, as it tears itself apart with internal quarrels and talmudic disputations, the electorate lose all confidence in this patently divided party's ability to govern. The Labour Party, he insists, compounding his appeal for moral regeneration and moral standards with hard-headed, political pragmatism, can never win an election until it is able to convince its fellow countrymen that it is united behind a programme that is attainable, that its idealism is realistic, and its methods are practicable. The factions must take cognisance of the fact that it is a British public to whom they must appeal and the socialism it offers must pay respect to the political and social tradition from which it evolves; it must, he insists, "wear a local garb".^{NB} The Labour Party must be able to persuade the British public that its policies recognise the particular circumstances of British life and that they offer solutions relevant to the particular problems of British society. British Socialists must remember that for two centuries Britons have lived within a liberal tradition; that they are sensitive to issues of personal liberty, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and all the benefits of parliamentary government. It may be, Tawney argues, that meaningful liberty has been hamstrung by lack of economic power; yet, he insists, if the electorate is presented with the choice between 'capitalist democracy' (with all its nauseous insincerity) and an undemocratic socialism, it will always choose the former. Henry Dubb, that archetypal Englishman deserves a socialism which will uphold the rights for which he and his forefathers had so vigorously fought.

Ultimately, Tawney insists, the Labour Party must choose. It can either be the agent of the trade unions and engage itself in factional interest, or it can engage in a

^{NB} *Tawney is always aware of the particular character of Dubb's Socialism just as he understands that an appeal to principles is valid within the British political ethos. These qualities are nicely captured by Philip Snowden (1864-1937). "Now look here, Fred, don't be trying any of that scientific socialism, Karl Marx, surplus value, that sort of stuff. Put in a long word now and again so as to make them think tha' knows a lot. When tha'art finishing up, tha mum put a bit of Come to Jesus in" Quoted from the 'Autobiography of Philip Snowden', see 'Christian Socialism', John C. Cort, Orbis Books, 1988, p.168.*

crusade not for sectarian advantage, but for radical, social change. For Tawney, even while he welcomes any political measure or any material gain which alleviates the hardships of the working class, the choice is clear, “the cause of the present unrest”, he had confided to his *Commonplace Book*, “is not simply economic nor party political, but moral” ... “Modern Society”, he insisted, “is sick through the absence of a moral idea”.ⁱ

But Tawney the political theorist is also the political realist. “Politics”, he declares, “has a business side and political business must be efficiently done”. If his socialism is fortified by Christian principles, the principles are reinforced with practical political judgement. He understands, pragmatically, that the necessary conditions for equality require effective political action, and effective political action demands effective political and economic power. As John A. Hall submits, while Tawney’s appeals for moral regeneration and Christian principles are ... “eloquently expressed”, (they are) “not by themselves much more than the staple of many previous Christian Socialists”. Tawney’s significance, Hall therefore argues, “lay in the interaction of Christian principles with the practical experience he had gained through early involvement in the labour movement - in particular in the work he did in adult education.”ⁱⁱ

It is this interaction between moral principles and political pragmatism which distinguishes Tawney from many of his Christian Socialist contemporaries. His advice to the Labour Party, Anthony Wright perceptively argues, ... “combined both Fabian rationalism and socialist moralism”.ⁱⁱⁱ It is an appeal not only to technicians, administrators and the professional classes but to all those exploited by ... “the oldest, toughest plutocracy in the world”. The Labour Party, Tawney insists, has a constituency beyond the sectional interests of the trade unions. Its function is not only to win votes ... “it must set hearts and wills to work”. It must demand on behalf of ... “capitalism’s chief

ⁱ *The Commonplace Book*, entry for May 6 1912.

ⁱⁱ ‘The Roles and Influences of Political Intellectuals, Tawney Vs Sidney Webb’, John A. Hall, *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol.23, No.3, September 1977, p.356.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Socialisms*, Anthony Wright, Oxford University Press, 1987, p.113.

victims a life that is worthy of human beings and which no decent man will withhold from his fellows". It is a protest against a premise which holds that ... "every group and every individual should be free to grab what they can get, and hold what they can grab".ⁱ It is, then, not only an appeal for pragmatic political action; it is a demand for a moral crusade.

ⁱ *Equality*, p.210.

CHAPTER IV

Contrasting Views; T.S. Eliot & R.H. Tawney

Introduction

Tawney's social vision, his arguments for equality, his demands for society of responsible and participating citizens organised around the notion of function derived from his Christian faith. Clearly, the nineteenth rather than the twentieth century was the age in which social theorists sought to apply religious doctrine to social and political life. Nevertheless, in the last months "of a low dishonest decade",ⁱ Tawney's contemporary, the poet, essayist and social critic, Thomas Stearns Eliot, was concerned with "the idea of a Christian society". Although there were fundamental differences between their concepts of a social order predicated on Christian principles, Eliot, like Tawney, attacked as immoral the practices, institutions and values of industrial capitalism. Indeed, he acknowledged "a debt to several Christian economists and sociologists (and) in particular, R.H. Tawney".ⁱⁱ Tawney, in return, made brief references to Eliot when after the second World War he reflected on the progress of equality ... "if equality is the poison to culture suggested by Mr. Eliot, the small doses of venom hitherto injected need time to do their deadly work".ⁱⁱⁱ Yet, Eliot's attack on the existing social order, like Tawney's, was uncompromising, ... "a great deal of the machinery of modern life is merely a sanction for un-Christian aims ... it is not only hostile to the conscious pursuit of Christian life in the world by the few but to the maintenance of any Christian society".^{iv} Eliot and Tawney, therefore, shared an abhorrence of what they both perceived to be the social evils and the moral bankruptcy of a system which raised ... "profit into a social ideal" and created a society whose ... "real ideals were materialistic efficiency".^v Similarly, if Tawney was ... "engaged in the politics of moral exhortation", Eliot, too, called for a moral reassessment

ⁱ 'Sept. 1, 1939', W.H. Auden, see *Collected Works, Faber and Faber, 1964*.

ⁱⁱ *The Idea of a Christian Society, T.S. Eliot, Faber and Faber, 1939, 1982 edition, p.83.*

ⁱⁱⁱ *Equality, Epilogue 1938-1950, p.226.*

^{iv} *The Idea of a Christian Society, T.S. Eliot, Faber & Faber 1939, 1982 edition, p. 61.*

^v *Ibid, p.53*

... “a change of spirit” ... “a change in social attitudes”. Both men, committed Christians, argued for a society motivated by Christian principles, dedicated to Christian values. If Tawney looked to the Christian Church to cultivate the moral sensibility and expel the poison generated by THE ACQUISITIVE SOCIETY, Eliot, in turn, demanded ... “a Christian organisation of society” to ... “dispel the dominating vice of our time ... Avarice”. Both men decried the ... “machinery of modern life” and its consequent ... “mechanisation and atomisation of individuals”.ⁱ Both men demanded that the Christian leadership oppose the increasing secularisation and materialism of contemporary society. Yet, if there were social issues on which they agreed, between Eliot the self-proclaimed ... “classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and Anglo-Catholic in religion”^{NB} and Tawney, “the social democrat par excellence”, there were also profound differences. These differences, it may be argued, derive from their respective interpretations of the values and traditions of the Church to which both Eliot and Tawney were deeply committed. Eliot’s Catholicism evolves from a tradition of discipline and obedience. Indeed, he acknowledges that “the inappropriate application of the catholic ideas of authority, of hierarchy, of discipline and order into the temporal sphere, may lead to some error of absolutism or impossible theocracy.”ⁱⁱ Tawney’s Protestantism evolves out of a less authoritarian, more individualist tradition.

Eliot’s ‘Christian Community’ is grounded in a traditional order. It is predicated on a pessimistic understanding of man as sinful, fallen from grace. It is a community monitored by authority guided by an intellectual and spiritual elite “dedicated to the

ⁱ *The Idea of a Christian Society*, p.105.

^{NB} Eliot subsequently qualified this statement. In the Page Barbour lectures delivered at the University of Virginia in 1934, Eliot admitted that ... “as it stands the statement is injudicious. It may suggest that the subjects are of equal importance to me, which is not so, it may suggest that I accept all three beliefs on the same grounds, which is not so, and it may suggest that I believe that they all hang together or fall together, which would be the most serious misunderstanding of all” ... “I now see the danger of suggesting to outsiders that the Faith is a political principle or a literary fashion, and the sum of all a dramatic posture”. From: *After Strange Gods*, Faber & Faber, 1934, (out of print).

ⁱⁱ ‘Catholicism And The International Order’, *Essays Ancient And Modern*, T.S. Eliot, Faber & Faber, 1936, p.118.

development of Christian life and the salvation of souls”.ⁱ Tawney ‘s Christian Socialism rejects this notion of mankind as wicked and beyond redemption. Christianity, he insists, “is a religion for sinners”.ⁱⁱ As for an authoritarian order, those who accept it, he asserts, “have bartered their dignity as citizens and men, have abandoned their initiative, their responsibility, their right to live their own lives --- for a shot of morphia in the soul”.ⁱⁱⁱ Further, while Eliot’s ‘Christian Community’ pre-supposes a hierarchical order, Tawney’s Christian Socialism perceives “equality as a morally binding value”.^{iv} Eliot’s ‘Christian Community’ proposes “a small number of conscious human beings to live a conscious Christian life on its highest social level”.^v Tawney’s ‘Christian Community’ extends beyond a coterie of an elect. In contrast to Eliot, his Christian Socialism is permeated by an ideal of individual, spiritual and intellectual development in which *all* are encouraged to participate. This ideal evolves from an understanding that “character is social, and society, because it is an expression of character, is always spiritual”. For Tawney, individual spiritual development may be starved or fostered by the institutions of society. Such development, he holds, may flourish or perish in response to the moral principles which sustain the accepted political, social and economic arrangements. For Tawney, moral principles are best expressed within “a framework of collective common purpose and opportunity in which fellowship is the bond of a community of equality”.^{vi} Such “a community of equality” recognises the equal importance of each individual: it demands, too, an acknowledgement of equal individual responsibility.

Eliot’s concern, as Maurice Cowling proposes, is with the education of an elite as distinct from the great mass of humanity. Eliot’s ‘Christian Community’, Cowling argues,

ⁱ ‘Catholicism And The International Order’, p.132.

ⁱⁱ ‘Christianity and the Social Order’, see, *The Attack*, p.168.

ⁱⁱⁱ ‘Social Democracy in Britain’, see *The Radical Tradition*, p.164.

^{iv} *English Ethical Socialism*, Dennis & Halsey, p.115.

^v *The Idea Of A Christian Society*, p.58.

^{vi} ‘Christianity And Socialism’, *Christian Socialist Movement*, John Smith, Spire Publications, 1993, p.127.

“will preserve education within the cloisters uncontaminated by the barbarism without”.ⁱ Tawney rejects such elitist preservation. The aim of education, he insists, “has a terrible simplicity”. It is, he declares, “to secure to all the equal opportunities of cultivating the powers with which nature has endowed them”. Such opportunities, he argues, must be extended in fellowship, in a “common affection for the qualities which belong, not to any class or profession of men but to man himself”. “Here, if anywhere”, he submits, “the spirit of equality might be expected to establish its kingdom”.ⁱⁱ Yet, Eliot’s ‘Christian Community’ *demands*, “as a condition of culture, the persistence of social classes”. The ideal of egalitarianism, he argues, is inevitably in conflict with the growth and survival of culture. If “anyone finds it monstrous that anyone should have ‘advantage of birth’, he declares, “I ask him to stop paying lip-service to culture”.ⁱⁱⁱ Tawney’s Christian Socialism evolves from the acceptance of “the greatness of God and therefore the than another”.^{iv} It is a Socialism committed to an ideal of human relationships between equals in which equal respect is extended, equal opportunities afforded, equal conditions created. Eliot, as Anthony Wright asserts, attacks “the equalising trends of contemporary society”. In contrast, Wright proposes, Tawney in his “conception of social unity, cohesion and integration” dismisses Eliot’s notion of “equality as cultural poison” in favour of “Arnold’s assessment of equality as cultural tonic”.^v

Yet, perhaps the difference between Eliot’s Christian understanding and Tawney’s is most clearly demonstrated by Eliot’s defence of the epigraph of St. John of the Cross with which he introduces his unfinished work, ‘Sweeney Agonistes’.

“Hence the soul cannot be possessed of the divine union, until it has divested itself of the love of created beings”. NB

ⁱ *Religion & Public Doctrine in Modern England*, Maurice Cowling, Cambridge University Press, 1980, p.120.

ⁱⁱ *Equality*, p.141.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, p.15/16.

^{iv} *The Commonplace Book*, entry for March 6, 1913.

^v R.H. Tawney, Anthony Wright, pages 78/79.

NB *St. John of the Cross, Spanish Mystic Poet and Carmelite Friar, 1549/1591*.

“This doctrine that insists that one must divest oneself of the love of created beings in order to arrive at the love of God”, he wrote to Bonamy Dobree, “was written for people seriously engaged in pursuing the way of Contemplation. I believe it to be UNTRUE (Eliot’s capitals) that only through the love of created beings can we approach the love of God. I don’t think that ordinary human affections are capable of leading us to the love of God, but rather that the love of God is capable of informing, intensifying and elevating our human affections, which otherwise have little to distinguish them from the ‘natural’ affections of animals”.ⁱ

This doctrine affirms Eliot’s belief that only an intellectual and spiritual elite can, through abnegating the love of their fellows, find the love of God. It is a doctrine which denies to those many who are incapable of a life of contemplation and prayer, “the divine union with God”. It is a doctrine which disregards what for Tawney is a fundamental principle of Christian faith, that in the love of one’s neighbours one may find the love of God. Indeed, it is precisely this Christian principle which informs Tawney’s demands for a Christian way of life in which men and women, bound by bonds of mutual service, may create the conditions of a moral community. Eliot, drawing on his Christian understanding, declares “the mass of the population should not be exposed to a way of life in which there is too sharp and frequent a conflict between what is easy for them and a Christian life”.ⁱⁱ Tawney, in contrast, believes that ordinary men and women guided by Christian principles will, in community, extend each to the other, the opportunity for spiritual and intellectual development. In such a community, grounded in democratic ideals, each individual, he believes, may equally participate as free and responsible citizens in the democratic process.

ⁱ T.S. Eliot letter to Bonamy Dobree, 1936, see T.S. Eliot, *The Man and His Work*, edited by Allen Tate, Faber & Faber, 1967, p.84.

ⁱⁱ ‘A Christian Community’, 1939, see *Points of View*, T.S. Eliot, Faber and Faber, 1941, p.140.

Eliot and Tawney, then, are divided not only by their understanding of the traditions of their church but also in the perception of what constitutes a Christian society. They are divided, too, on such vital questions as the purposes of education, the concept of equality of opportunity, the benefits of democracy. These divisions are fundamental. They reveal dissensions not only over the aims and values of a Christian society but also disagreements over the interpretation of Christian ethics. It is in these differences of interpretation, these differences of belief concerning the application of Christian principles to the social order, that their opposing visions of a Christian society is most clearly identifiable.

A Christian Society

From a series of lectures delivered at Cambridge in March 1939, Eliot, in September 1939, published an essay *The Idea of a Christian Society*. The essay, Eliot insisted, is not a plea for a religious revival in the usual sense. It is concerned, he asserted, with two fundamental questions. "What, if any, is the idea of the society in which we live now"? ... and ... "to what end is it arranged"? Eliot, then, is not only examining the values of industrial capitalism, he is questioning the existence, beyond materialist accumulation, of its spiritual, moral and philosophic basis. He insists that it is not his purpose to present a 'blueprint' for social change. His objective rather is to identify the *idea* of a Christian society, to bring into focus what such an idea means, to understand what are its values, to specify its aims, its direction. Eliot conducts this inquiry cautiously. His method is indirect, hesitant, as though reluctant to commit himself to a positive position. Sometimes his very purpose is obscure; while he claims to be concerned to establish the *idea* of a Christian society, he is not only unwilling to propose a concrete programme for its achievement, he also appears to be loath, except in most nebulous terms, to define it.

We are confronted, Eliot insists, with a choice between Paganism and Christianity. The industrialised nations are in danger. They will either succumb to totalitarian dictatorship or continue to drift towards a consumerist society of mass conformity. It is a choice between two evils, Eliot argues, and only a society rededicated to Christian morality, Christian discipline and Christian precepts can save western civilisation from decline and disintegration. Christianity, Eliot proposes, is the only alternative between a pagan totalitarianism and any equally pagan liberal democratic society. If there are objections ... “in the economic and political spheres” to Fascist doctrine, he suggests liberal democratic societies are ... “also not without fault” and ... we cannot with dignity object until we have set out own affairs in order”. We, in the Anglo-Saxon countries might be persuaded that we have a Christian society, Eliot insists, but this merely ... “disguises the fact that our aims like Germany’s are materialistic”.ⁱ NB In all the industrialised societies, Eliot warns, “a materialistic philosophy will create bodies of men and women of all classes - detached from tradition, alienated from religion, susceptible to mass suggestion: in other words, “a mob”. This fear of the mass, of mass education, mass production ... “mass society organised for profit” permeates Eliot’s work. It is manifest in THE IDEA OF A CHRISTIAN SOCIETY, “a mob will be no less a mob”, Eliot insists, “if it is well fed, well clothed, well housed and well disciplined”. In Eliot’s poetry, too, this hostility to ... “mass-made thought” is apparent; there is a sense of horror of ‘the mob, the crowd’, of the “so many” (that) ... flowed over London Bridge ... “the so many which Death had undone”. There is a pervasive pessimism for the condition of contemporary man.

“We are the hollow men

We are the stuffed men

ⁱ *The Idea of a Christian Society*, p.52.

NB In March 1939, this was a particularly ill-considered judgment. In fear of their lives, like so many others, Einstein had fled to Princeton, Freud to London, Thomas Mann to Los Angeles, Karl Popper to New Zealand, Schoenberg to New York. Whatever the faults of the liberal democracies, they had not consigned to the bonfire the works of Heinrich Heine, Franz Kafka, Erich Maria Remarque, Alfred Döblin, Walter Benjamin, Marcel Proust, Emile Zola, etc.

Leaning together

Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!"ⁱ

And there is despair for mankind's sterile, purposeless destiny,

"Birth and copulation and death

That's all the facts when you come to brass tacks:

Birth and copulation and death

That's all, that's all, that's all says

Sweeney Agonistes."ⁱⁱ

Yet, if in the verse there is fear ...

"I will show you fear in a handful of dust

The backward half-look

Over the shoulder toward the primitive terror,"ⁱⁱⁱ

there is in the prose, nostalgia; for while Eliot accepts that a Christian society ... "Can neither be medieval in form nor be modelled on the seventeenth century", there is, patently, a regret for an age before ... "the machinery of modern life destroyed the traditional habits of the people". Eliot looks back wistfully to an order before industrialism and the ideals born of the Enlightenment challenged the established tradition. The 'royalist in politics' does not disguise his disdain for ... democracy ... in which he believes ... "the middle class are morally dependent upon the aristocracy, and the aristocracy are subordinate to the middle class which is gradually absorbing and

ⁱ *The 'Hollow Men', T.S. Eliot 1925. see Complete Poems, Faber & Faber, 1980 Edition, p.181.*

ⁱⁱ *'Fragment of an Agon', Unfinished Poem, T.S. Eliot, (undated).*

ⁱⁱⁱ *'The Waste Land', T.S. Eliot, 1922, see Collected Works, Faber & Faber, 1980, p.66.*

destroying them”.^{NB} The disdain is certainly a manifestation of a ‘classicist’s’ contempt for middle class values and middle class culture, yet it is more than that. It is also an expression of the deeply held conviction that the European Christian cultural heritage is under threat from what he perceives as the corrosive and corrupting power of democracy and the attendant triumphant expansion of mass culture.

“Much is your reading, but not the word of God
 Much is your building, but not the house of God
 Will you build me a house of plaster, with corrugated roofing
 To be filled with the litter of Sunday newspapers?”ⁱ

In Eliot’s view it is only through prayer and humility, by the exercise of discipline within a hierarchic order dedicated not only to temporal power but also to spiritual rebirth that the Christian heritage may be salvaged.

Eliot’s account of Christian sociology deals very precisely with the layered character both pragmatic and moral of Tawney’s argument even though he does not specifically attach his analysis to Tawney’s case. He insists that his interest in THE IDEA OF A CHRISTIAN SOCIETY ... “is not with spiritual institutions in their separate aspects” but rather with the organisation of values and the direction of religious thought which he acknowledges ... “must inevitably proceed to a criticism of political and economic systems”. His concern, he insists, is not with the means of bringing a Christian society into being, nor, he adds, puzzlingly, is he “primarily concerned to make such a society appear desirable”.ⁱⁱ His purpose, he asserts, is to identify a ‘Christian Society’ “to

^{NB} In December 1928, Eliot in defense of Charles Maurras wrote in *Criterion*, “In theory, the ‘Action Francaise’ does not contemplate a powerful dictator and a nominal king but the powerful king and the able minister’.

ⁱ ‘Choruses from *The Rock*’, T.S. Eliot 1934. Verse III see ‘*Complete Poems and Plays*’ Faber & Faber 1969, p.154

ⁱⁱ *The Idea of a Christian Society*, p.44

make clear its differences from the society in which we are now living”.ⁱ Eliot respectfully recognises the writings of those Christian sociologists who criticise the economic system in the light of Christian ethics. Yet, if Eliot is prepared to commend the appeal of Christian sociologists to ... “that spirit of justice and humanity with which most of us profess to be inspired”, he also concedes that such sociologists appeal also to pragmatic reason. They demonstrate that much of our economic system is not only exploitive and iniquitous ... “but also in the long run, unworkable and conducive to disaster”. If the changes which Christian sociologists advocate are indeed ... “deductible from Christian principles”, they also, Eliot insists, “recommend themselves to any intelligent and disinterested person”.ⁱⁱ The changes, therefore, he suggests, require neither a Christian society to carry them into effect nor Christian belief to make them acceptable. But while Eliot grants that the changes ... “would make it more possible for the individual Christian to live out his Christianity”,ⁱⁱⁱ he claims that he is concerned only secondarily with economic organisation and the life of the devout Christian. His primary interests, he declares, are with a change in our social attitudes, a change ... “only as could bring about anything worthy to be called a Christian society”.

Eliot then, like Tawney, is concerned with moral regeneration. Like Tawney, he denounces a contemporary industrial capitalist society in which “the acquisitive rather than the creative and spiritual instincts are encouraged”. Unlike Tawney, he is not concerned to examine the purpose of industry, nor does he question the organisation of economic life. His purpose, Eliot claims, is different from either the social theorists or the economists. Certainly he recognises that Christian principles applied to the social and economic life of society would compel changes in the organisation of industry as well as affecting the commercial and financial arrangements of society. Such changes, he admits ... “would facilitate the life of devotion for those who are capable of it”. But, he

ⁱ *The Idea of a Christian Society*, p.44

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.45

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.45.

reiterates, his concern is not to specify the defects of contemporary society or even to expose its injustices and abuses. It is rather, he insists, to ... “understand the end to which a Christian society, to deserve the name, must be directed”.ⁱ Yet, if he is unwilling to indict, he is prepared to warn; if he will not advance solutions, he is alert to dangers. If ... Christianity goes”, he argues in *NOTES TOWARDS THE DEFINITION OF CULTURE* (1948), “the whole of European culture goes with it. We will return to many centuries of barbarism”. Christianity, Eliot claims, has created and sustained ... “a common European cultural heritage”.ⁱⁱ It is this ‘common heritage’, he argued, which has developed systems of law based on common perceptions of justice. From this heritage, he insisted, there has evolved an art and a literature permeated by Christian values, made significant and meaningful by Christian thought. Indeed, he declares, the public and private morality of the Western World is essentially a consequence of two thousand years of Christian heritage. For Eliot, this Christian culture is the central and unifying element of western civilisation. If this bond disappears or is dissipated, Eliot insists, ... “all the organisation and planning of the most ingenious minds will not help us or bring us closer together”. Eliot warns against ... “the Puritanism of a hygienic morality in the interest of efficiency”. He is fearful of the conformity which will create ... “uniformity of opinion through propaganda” of ... “an art which is only encouraged when it flatters the official doctrines”. Western civilisation, then, must choose between its Christian heritage or the barbarity of the ‘massenmensch’ with its ‘regimentation’ “with its conformity without respect for the individual soul”. It is a stark choice, but Eliot is uncompromising; for ... “here, as in the hereafter, the alternative to hell is purgatory”. Against the erosion of Christian values, against the ‘hygienic morality in the interest of efficiency’ there stands, for Eliot, only Christian faith and the ... discipline, inconvenience and discomfort” which must sustain it. We live, he insists, in a society driven by ... economic determinism” which is ... the god we fall down and worship”.ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ *The Idea of a Christian Society*, p.43.

ⁱⁱ *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* T.S. Eliot, Faber & Faber 1948, p.122

ⁱⁱⁱ *After Strange Gods*, Faber & Faber, 1934, p.17.

Yet Eliot's position is ambivalent, even confusing. He argues on the one hand, discounting the social consequences of Christian teaching, that Christianity "is primarily a Gospel message, a dogma ... which demands of man a response of faith and repentance".ⁱ There is, he asserts disapprovingly, "a tendency to view the problems of the day in the light of what is practically possible", "rather than in the light of that truth to which the Church is set to bear witness".ⁱⁱ On the other hand, he acknowledges that a society motivated by Christian principles would not only compel changes in social, economic and political organisation but would also influence the conduct and beneficially determine the relationship between individuals. Yet Christianity, he insists, is concerned ... "with the Glory of God and the sanctification of souls".ⁱⁱⁱ It is not, then, to be construed as a religion which solves the problems of the day; it imposes a discipline, the necessity of living by Christian truths; it provides no practical panaceas. Eliot, then, is not concerned, as is Tawney, with industrial and social organisation or with the complex (social and political) machinery through which society expresses itself. His demand is not for equality or a society without privilege but rather for ... "a sense of proportion in the light of Christian doctrine". It is this demand for repentance and 'the spirit of discipline' which inspires Eliot's poetry and his social vision. It is this appeal to tradition which serves him as a defence against what he perceives as the vacuous sterility of the mechanisation of modern life.

"And you see behind every face the mental emptiness deepen
Leaving only the growing terror of nothing to think about."^{iv}

It is, too, in this austere understanding of the Christian message that Eliot seeks spiritual refuge against the chaos of the wasteland.

ⁱ 'Postscript to *The Idea of A Christian Society*', 1939, see *The Idea of a Christian Society*, p.101.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p. 101.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.101.

^{iv} 'East Coker', T.S. Eliot, *The Four Quartets*, 1940, Faber & Faber, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 1969 Edition, p.180.

“Houses rise and fall, crumble, are extended,
Are removed, destroyed, restored, or in their place
Is an open field or a factory or a by-pass.”ⁱ

It is a stern and exacting interpretation of Christianity. It demands ... “thought, mortification, study, sacrifice”. “The humblest Christian layman must live what in the modern world is comparatively an ascetic life”.ⁱⁱ It is an expression of the pessimistic conviction that man is endowed with original sin (and that) while he can occasionally accomplish acts which partake of perfection, he can never himself be perfect”. ... “Le monde moderne avilit”, Eliot had declared; ... it debases, provincialises and corrupts”.ⁱⁱⁱ The machinery of modern life, he insists, has destroyed the traditional social habits of the people, dissolved their natural consciousness of individual constituents. Yet Eliot, unlike Tawney, does not look to fellowship and co-operation to restore ‘the traditional social habits’; he looks instead to order and discipline.

Man, he argues, (quoting T.E. Hulme with approval) “is essentially bad; he can only accomplish anything of value by discipline - ethical, heroics or political. Order is thus not merely negative but creative and liberating. Institutions are necessary”.^{iv} NB It is an argument which evolves from a conservative tradition, unbroken in France since the Revolution; an argument grounded in the notion of the common man as innately sinful, irresponsible, undisciplined. It is a tradition which sees the established order threatened by the rationalist philosophy and the democratic tendencies engendered by the

ⁱ ‘East Coker’, T.S. Eliot, *The Four Quartets*, 1940, Faber & Faber, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 1969 Edition, p.177

ⁱⁱ *After Strange Gods*, T.S. Eliot, 1934.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, preface

^{iv} ‘Specifications’ *Essays in Humanism and the Philosophy of Art* T.E. Hulme, Edited by Herbert Read, Faber & Faber, 1924, see *After Strange Gods*, p.28

NB T.E. Hulme, Eliot asserted, was “classical, reactionary and revolutionary, the antipodes of the eclectic, tolerant and democratic mind of the last century”. See *The Life and Opinions of T.E. Hulme*, A.R. Jones, Victor Gallancz, 1960, p. 14. “At the centre of his thought (T.E. Hulme) was a violent opposition to humanism, the concept of human perfectibility and the idea of progress”. See *The Birth of Fascist Ideology*, Zeev Sternhill, Princeton University Press, 1994, p. 240.

Enlightenment. A tradition which seeks to preserve what it perceives as the European cultural heritage through discipline imposed by a hierarchic authority which will act as guardian and ensures social stability. It is a tradition which, in France has found its champions from Joseph De Maistre to Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, a tradition in which France ... “daughter of God, humiliated, defeated, bleeding, ashamedⁱ exchanged the exhortation of the Revolution for a sterner, more austere demand, “Work, Family, Country”.

It is Eliot's fear for the disintegration of the European cultural heritage which prompts him to assert that ... “tradition necessarily demands stability”. It is this longing for ‘stability’, for discipline and order which invoked the declaration from ... “one who had never been an admirer of Republic Government in France” that ... “the device Liberty, Egalite, Fraternity is only a memorial of the time of revolution; Famille, Travail, Patrie, Eliot argued, have a more permanent value”.ⁱⁱ Such an endorsement of Petainist values delivered when the Swastika flew triumphant from the Eiffel Tower, derives from his sympathy for the monarchist and hierarchical political philosophy of Charles Maurras^{NB} of which Eliot had written ... “Sa conception de la monarchie et de la hierarchie, plus qui a beaucoup d'autres m'est proche, comme ces conservateurs anglais donc les idees demeurent intacte malgre le monde moderne”ⁱⁱⁱ It is such expressions of Eliot's ... anti-democratic and anti-perfectionist strain” which provoked George Orwell to accuse him in 1942 of ... a negative Petainism which turns its eye to the past, accepts defeat, writes off earthly happiness as impossible”.^{iv} Tawney's demand for a liberty which is not merely formally proclaimed but practically exercisable, his advocacy of an effective equality, his

ⁱ ‘Words To The Marshall’ - Paul Claudel, December 1940, see *The French Right, Roots of The Right*, edited J.S. McClelland, Jonathan Cape 1970.

ⁱⁱ ‘Christian Education in France’, *From Christian News Letter*, 3 Sept. 1941

^{NB} Charles Maurras (1868-1952), Monarchist spokesman for the Catholic Nationalist Right, Editor of *L'Action Francais*. After the liberation of France, he was sentenced to life imprisonment and national degradation for collaboration. He was released on medical grounds in 1951.

ⁱⁱⁱ ‘Aspect’ ‘loc cit’, quoted by Roger Kojecky, *From Social Criticism*, T.S. Eliot, Faber & Faber, 1971.

^{iv} ‘Review of *Burnt Norton*’, George Orwell, see *Collected Essays*, Vol. 11, p.236/242

emphasis on fraternity as a social value contrast sharply with Eliot's perfunctory dismissal of ... "la devise revolutionnaire". For Tawney ... "the whole fabric and mechanism of social institutions is to be regarded as a means to an end ... the growth towards the perfection of individual human beings".ⁱ Eliot, however, has little faith in man's perfectibility and a distinctly pessimistic view of progress. ... "The state of affairs that we enjoy today", he asserts bitterly, "illustrates what happens to the aspirations of each age for a better one".ⁱⁱ Yet these opposing visions of social purpose and the spiritual ends of man, do not derive only from the differences between an optimistic and a pessimistic interpretation of the Christian message. They evolve, too, from the differences between a religious doctrine which assumes man's innate fallibility, and, in humility, recognises the authority of the Church to mediate between sinful man and almighty God, and a theology which demands of men not only that they accept responsibility for their actions, but questions the right of a priesthood to impose ecclesiastic discipline.

A Christian Culture

Eliot proposes, as if seeking to recreate Plato's REPUBLIC in defence of the European Christian heritage, a hierarchic order of distinct groupings, each with distinctly defined social responsibilities. The 'Christian State', as Eliot conceives it, is a society ... "under the aspect of legislation, public administration, legal tradition and form". The leaders of such a state, he suggests, are not necessarily chosen because of their ... "eminence as Christians" although, he insists, they must be committed to a ... "Christian framework".ⁱⁱⁱ Their authority, he asserts, must ... "comply to Christian traditions"; their actions must be in accord with ... the temper of the people which they rule". NB While

ⁱ *Equality*, p.85.

ⁱⁱ *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, p18.

ⁱⁱⁱ *The Idea of a Christian Society*, p.56.

NB Karl Popper is not alone in discerning "the seeds of totalitarianism" in ... "The Great Leader, The Great Classes or The Great Ideas" ... "if our civilisation is to survive", he insists "we must break with the habit of deference to great men" (Preface to first edition of *The Open Society and its Enemies*).

Eliot suggests that the leaders do not have to be philosophers, he nevertheless recommends that they be neither self-educated ... “nor submitted to that system of miscellaneous or specialised instruction which passes for education”. They would, he insists, have received a Christian education which would train them to think in ... Christian categories” in order to create ... policies for the government of a Christian society”.ⁱ These ‘guardians’ of Christian values would rule over a Christian Community in which the Christian faith would be ... “ingrained” and a Christian ethos prevail, although Eliot argues, it requires from the great mass of humanity only ... “a largely unconscious (Christian behaviour)”. This ‘great mass of humanity’, Eliot argues, has little capacity for ... *thinking* about the objects of their faith”.ⁱⁱ Their attention, he remarks, “is occupied mostly by their direct relation to the soil, or the sea, or the machine”.ⁱⁱⁱ From this ‘mass’ Eliot expects only ... “customary and periodic religious observance ... and ... “a traditional code of behaviour towards their neighbours”. Their religious and social life, he suggests, “should form a natural whole” ... “so that the difficulty of behaving as Christians should not impose an intolerable strain”. It is, however, from ... “a small number of conscious human beings” that Eliot expects “a conscious Christian life on its highest social level”. It is on this ‘Community of Christians’, a body composed ... “of both laity and clergy of superior intellectual and/or spiritual gifts”^{iv} that Eliot places the responsibility of creating and maintaining a society in which ... “the natural ends of man -virtue and well being in community - is acknowledged for all” “and the supernatural end - beatitude - for those who have the eyes to see it”. The exact function of this intellectual and/or spiritually gifted elite is not designated; how they will influence the workings of society is not specified. They will be expected, it is supposed, to give moral guidance, uphold Christian values, advance education ... “in accord with the Christian aims of society”, that is towards a Christian philosophy of life. It is in this demand for an elite, in the proposal for a social system

ⁱ *The Idea of a Christian Society*, p.57.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.58.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.58.

^{iv} *Notes Towards The Definition Of Culture*, p.61

which would effectively divide the great mass of humanity from the Community of Christians that the differences between Eliot's understanding of Christian doctrine and Tawney's are most discernible. For Tawney, the notion of an elite is contrary not only to his socialist convictions but also to his Christian understanding that ... "in the eye of God all men are equal because all are infinitely small".ⁱ Eliot's patronising accusation that Henry Dubb (Tawney's archetypal Englishman), cannot cope with the difficulty of behaving as a Christian would have been rejected by Tawney whose Christian faith was grounded not in human division but in human fellowship. It may be argued that Eliot's accusation is an expression of his conviction that ultimately the capacity for an authentic 'Christian Life' depends on a conscious and reflective spirituality to which only an intellectual elite might properly aspire. Certainly, Tawney would concede that the monotony and drudgery which were features of much of industrial production did not inspire a life of conscious, contemplative religious reflection. However, his respect for those working men and women who after a day's work in mine or mill attended evening educational courses was boundless, as was his contempt for those who asked ... What does a workman want with theatres, or books, or time to himself?"ⁱⁱ For Tawney, a Christianity which exempts the 'mass of humanity' from full Christian participation and social responsibility is incomprehensible. His own Christian Socialism was sustained by the belief that ordinary men and women, in an equitable rather than an acquisitive society, could, in co-operation, create a moral social order. Tawney's belief in the Gospel is inconsistent with a Christianity which marginalises ... "those occupied mostly by their direct relation to the soil, or the sea, or the machine."ⁱⁱⁱ Nor would he accept that the sons of Zebedee^{iv} were incapable of that religious faith which would grant to them "the supernatural end - beatitude".

ⁱ *The Commonplace Book, entry for Oct. 30, 1912, p.43*

ⁱⁱ *Ibid, entry for Oct. 30, 1912*

ⁱⁱⁱ *The Idea Of A Christian Society, p.55*

^{iv} "He saw James the son of Zebedee and John, his brother ... and they left their father and went after Him". (Mark I 19:20)

Eliot does not propose practical measures for the achievement of these somewhat nebulous ends. He insists that he is ... “not investigating the possible lines of action by which such a society can be brought into being”.ⁱ He has little hope in effective social action. He warns: we are faced with either ... “slow decay or sudden extinction”.ⁱⁱ Mass society, mass culture, mass education which has come to mean mere instruction, are threatening cultural standards. He notes with regret ... “the disappearance of a class of people who recognise public and private patronage as a responsibility”ⁱⁱⁱ The profit motive, he insists, rather than artistic merit, has been allowed to determine what is artistically meritorious. Under the assault of this ‘clericalism of secularism’, the Christian heritage can only be preserved within a society in which a Community of Christians will recreate a respect for the religious life “for the life of prayer and contemplation”. This same spiritual and intellectual elite, Eliot asserts, must help us ... “recover the sense of religious fear so that we may be overcome by religious hope”.^{iv}

In the aftermath of Munich, Eliot overwhelmed by feelings of ... “humiliation, repentance and amendment” confessed that he was forced to confront the unpalatable notion that our ... “democratic society was nothing more than a congeries of banks, insurance companies and industries interested only ... “in compound interest and maintaining dividends”. In the face of Fascist aggression, he sadly concluded our democratic’ society had neither the moral superiority nor the social cohesion with which to oppose the convictions of totalitarian paganism. It was this sense of humiliation, Eliot insisted, which had prompted him to examine THE IDEA OF A CHRISTIAN SOCIETY. He insisted that he had only confined himself to a ‘slight outline’ of the essential features of such a society. He acknowledged, too, that he ... “may have seemed to wander off course”. Yet, even in this ‘slight outline’ Eliot’s astringent conception of a Christian society is manifest. His vision is austere, his emphasis is on discipline, humility, order. A

ⁱ *Notes Towards The Definition Of Culture*, p.55

ⁱⁱ *The Idea Of A Christian Society*, p.66

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.66

^{iv} *Ibid*, p.79

quality of ascetic renunciation, of penance, informs his social criticism just as a sense of fear for the Christian heritage permeates his poetry and dramatic works.

“The Church is bereft
Alone, desecrated, desolated, and the heathen
shall build on the ruins.
Their world without God. I see it, I see it.ⁱ

Whereas Tawney’s writings express an optimistic hope that men and women can create, in concert, the conditions for a life of human dignity, Eliot’s sees the world as defiled. “We are soiled by a filth that we cannot clean, united to supernatural vermin. It is not we alone; it is not the house; it is not the city that is defiled, but the world that is wholly foul”.ⁱⁱ Eliot’s “common man ... the men and women who shut the door and sit by the fireside”ⁱⁱⁱ may be redeemed “by the blood of martyrs and saints”, but Eliot’s God, he informs us ... “is a jealous God,”^{iv} and they must pray for mercy.

“Christ have mercy upon us, Lord have mercy upon us,
Blessed Thomas, have mercy upon us.”^v

Eliot, ‘royalist, classicist, elitist’ argues, at a moment of national crises, that ... “democracy does not have enough content to stand alone against the forces you dislike ... it can easily be transformed by them”.^{vi} Tawney, however, argues for a democracy in which Christian teaching and Christian fellowship would be reflected in the social laws and the social institutions of the commonwealth. Eliot, fearful that western civilisation may succumb either to totalitarian paganism or “democratic mediocrity” calls for an elite

ⁱ ‘Murder in the Cathedral’, Part II, T.S. Eliot, 1935, see *Collected Poems and Plays*.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, Part II

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, Part II

^{iv} *Ibid*, Part II

^v *Ibid*, Part II

^{vi} *The Idea of A Christian Society*, p.82

to preserve the Christian heritage. No longer tentative, vague or ambiguous, he authoritatively declares ... “if you will not have God, you should pay your respects to Hitler or Stalin”.ⁱ

Eliot, then, had served notice on western civilisation. Democracy, he insisted, will not preserve it from tyranny; indeed, he argued, democracy is in itself an insidious tyranny. Western civilisation, he asserted, must entrust its Christian heritage to an elite - put its faith and its fate in an intellectual and spiritual leadership which will stand as guardian over its ethical, cultural and religious life. Western civilisation, he insisted, must re-embrace ... “the eternal truths of Christianity ... “return to the eternal source of truth or perish.”ⁱⁱ In nineteen thirty nine, as the world plunged into war, Eliot had delivered a warning against the vitiating effects of democracy and a classless society’. Ten years later he returned to the same subject. if, in the intervening years, the immediate danger of totalitarianism had been overcome, for Eliot, the Christian heritage was still imperilled.

“To rescue the word culture is the extreme of my ambition”, Eliot remarked. But the remark concealed a larger ambition. Although Eliot admits that he is not without his own political convictions and prejudices, he insists that in the course of his investigation, he has no intention of imposing them. He is using the word ‘definition’, the frontispiece informs us, (quoting the Oxford English Dictionary) as ... “setting the bounds; limitations; (rare) 1483”. His opening claim is that of an objective and unprejudiced researcher. “What I say is this; here are what I believe to be the essential conditions for the growth and for the survival of culture”. Yet, Eliot, having first denied political intent and then modestly defined his brief - “to rescue the word culture”, continues, not by dispassionate exegesis but by dogmatic assertion. If the reader, he suggests, “finds it shocking that culture and egalitarianism should conflict, if it seems monstrous to him that anyone should have ‘advantages of birth’, I do not ask him to change his faith. I merely ask him to stop

ⁱ *The Idea of A Christian Society*, p.82
ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.82

paying lip-service to culture”.ⁱ This accusation that the egalitarians are merely paying lip service to culture may be seen as a dismissal ‘de haut en bas’ of those whose views do not coincide with his own. Even Eliot’s admission that he might in some circumstances feel obliged to support some of the arguments for social justice advanced by the egalitarians does not allay the suspicion that he is intent on creating and maintaining an intellectual elite. Yet, Eliot insists, the ‘culture’ which would evolve from the social engineering which would promote equality would not satisfy the definition which he is trying to establish. Advantages of birth then, which Tawney decries as an *impediment* to a ‘common culture’, are to Eliot a necessary condition for the maintenance of culture. Furthermore, Eliot insists, his use (and his acceptance) of the phrase ‘advantages of birth’ must not be seen as a defence of aristocracy. Indeed, it must be recognised as an expression of his belief in the family as a cohesive and transmissive social and cultural institution. The family, he argues, is the primary vehicle for the transmission of culture and ... “if we agree that in a more highly civilised society there must be different levels of culture, then it follows that to ensure the transmission of culture of these different levels there must be families persisting from generation to generation in the same way of life”.ⁱⁱ For Eliot then, an aristocracy has an essential transmitting role; it has a cultural obligation to preserve the cultural tradition in which ... “the aristocracy is not subordinate to the middle class which is gradually absorbing and destroying them”.ⁱⁱⁱ Eliot, confesses that he is inclined to believe that these different cultural levels are a necessary condition for a true democracy. These levels of culture, he suggests, should also be seen as levels of power. In the Christian Society he envisages, each individual would inherit greater or less responsibility towards the commonwealth according to the position in society which he inherited - each class having somewhat different responsibilities. This social structure of class differentiation, Eliot argues, does not necessarily produce the “higher civilisation”.

ⁱ *Notes Towards The Definition Of Culture*, p.60.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.48

ⁱⁱⁱ ‘Marie Lloyd’, see *Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot, 1922, Edited by Frank Kermode, Faber & Faber, 1975, p.175.*

He warns, however, that when ... “these conditions of culture” are absent, “the higher level of civilisation is unlikely to be found”.ⁱ

The preservation of these different levels of culture serves Eliot as justification for the maintenance of class divisions. The ‘persisting groups’ will each transmit, and thereby sustain, the cultural activities ... interesting to their cultural level”. Eliot insists that these different levels of culture embrace ... all the activities and interests of a people”. His personal list of what he considers representative of the British cultural tradition is catholic; it includes such events as Derby Day, The Cup Final, the Twelfth of August, Henley Regatta as well as those peculiarly British predilections for boiled cabbage, Wensleydale cheese, nineteenth century Gothic churches and beetroot in vinegar.ⁱⁱ Indeed, Eliot argues, “what is part of our culture is also part of our ‘lived’ religion”. Our lived religion, our national culture must therefore, in Eliot’s view, be presented by a class structure in which ... “the movements of culture would proceed in a kind of cycle, each class nourishing the other” “the higher levels enriching the lower”. Eliot calls for a ... structure of society” in which there will be “from ‘top’ to ‘bottom’ a continuous graduation of cultural levels”. In a ... “vigorous society”, Eliot claims, “there will be both class divisions *and* an elite” with some overlapping and a constant interaction between them.

The common culture Eliot is anxious to preserve is that culture which he identifies as the heritage of Christian civilisation, a culture which should be recognised as a sanctified, ratified province, safeguarded by a governing elite drawn from those with superior intellectual and/or spiritual gifts and members of an established governing class. It is a notion very different from Tawney’s perception of a social justice and his understanding of Christian doctrine. “All social systems and philosophies which discriminate between men on the basis, not of individual differences, but of mere

ⁱ *Notes Towards The Definition Of Culture*, p.49
ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.31

externals, are anti-Christian", he argued. "such social systems assert that economic, social or biological differences between men are more important than the common humanity which they share as children of God".ⁱ

Eliot, however, in defence of the 'traditional values' which had obtained before the ideals of the Enlightenment and the 'machinery of modern life' had destroyed the established hierarchical order, has mustered an elite dedicated to the Christian tradition as he conceives it. A Christian society anxious to develop its national, social and cultural life, must, he insists, encourage its architects and artists, must recognise their gifts and allow them to influence taste. Similarly, such a society must provide its scientists with the facilities to extend human knowledge. Above all, Eliot urges, it must make available to its ablest minds the time and the conditions for speculative thought. For Eliot, then, the duties of the governing elite extend beyond the mechanics of legislative authority. It must also protect the Christian cultural heritage against the declining standards of the 'massenmensch' and the petty, philistine values of the middle class. Tawney also holds this somewhat patrician, view of the middle class values of "philistines and mill owners". Unlike Eliot, however, he is not prepared to leave the responsibility for the extension of knowledge to an intellectual elite. The differentiation of education according to class, he insists, "is one of those blunders which reveal coarseness of spirit even more than confusion of mind".ⁱⁱ It is, he declares "a wickedness" "to which only one answer is possible, *Ecrasez l'infame*".ⁱⁱⁱ

Eliot, however, argues that an elite of talent, artistic, scientific and intellectual must be a permanent feature of a Christian society; its accomplishments must be honoured; its judgements respected ... "generation after generation". Culture, Eliot insists, is not merely the sum of various activities; it is a way of life. A nation's culture,

ⁱ 'Christianity and the Social Order', see *The Attack*, p.183

ⁱⁱ 'An Experiment in Democratic Education', 1914, see *Radical Tradition*, p.72

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.72.

therefore, is an amalgam of those activities in which not everybody necessarily participates but which everybody recognises as peculiar to the nation. In the past, Eliot asserts, the chief repository of culture has been a elite chiefly drawn from the ... “dominant class”. Historically this class has been ... “the primary consumer of the works of thought and art”. It is, therefore, he insists, the function of the “superior members of this class” together with the ... “superior families” to preserve the nation’s culture just as it is the “function of the producers to alter it”.ⁱ In Eliot’s scheme of things it is equally the obligation of the fourteenth Mr. Pinter to develop the nation’s culture as it is for the ninth Duchess of Argyle to preserve it, while what he identifies as the ... “mass of humanity” must be content to allow a “governing elite” not only to assume the responsibility for the welfare of the commonwealth but act also as a guardian, patron and perpetuator of its cultural heritage”. He calls for a “healthy stratified society” ... in which ... “public affairs would be a responsibility not equally borne. A greater responsibility would be inherited by those who inherited special advantages and in whom self-interest and interest for the sake of their families (a stake in the country) should cohere with public spirit. A governing elite of the nation as a whole would consist of those whose responsibility was inherited with their affluence and position and whose forces were constantly increased and often led by rising individuals of exceptional talents”.ⁱⁱ

Eliot, therefore, while disclaiming political intent, has proposed a social order in which an elite ... “those with inherited affluence and position” “families with a stake in the country would assume responsibility for public affairs”. While he has not discarded the notion of ‘*carrieres ouvertes aux talents*’, he has, nevertheless, demanded a system of hierarchy and stratification incorporating an hereditary elite. Certainly, the demand is not directly endorsed by proposals for a legally constituted, legally recognised elite maintained and protected by the power of the state. Yet, where Tawney argues that inheritance must be curtailed and limited, Eliot proposes that those with ... “inherited affluence and

ⁱ *Notes Towards The Definition of Culture*, p.42.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.84.

position” be given responsible public office. While Tawney insists that the ... divisions brought about by a graduated system of social classes” will create ... “a kind of morbid obsession, colouring the whole world of social relations”,ⁱ Eliot demands that ... families with a ... “stake in the country” “those who inherit special advantages” are qualified to exercise authority. Tawney argues, however, that ... “it was fatal to Christianity to regard any men as being without capacity for responsibility and autonomy,”ⁱⁱ whereas Eliot, in the formulation of the idea of a Christian society, assigns this capacity for responsibility only to an elite. This demand for an elite is grounded in his confident assessment that ... “our period is one of decline; that the standards of culture are lower than they were fifty years ago”. This assessment, as George Orwell has remarked, “may seem true when one thinks of Hollywood films or the atomic bomb, but less true if one thinks what life was like for an unemployed labourer in the East End of London in the latter part of the nineteenth century”.ⁱⁱⁱ Furthermore, Eliot’s understanding of the declining standards of culture are compounded by his disdain for a classless society ... “even so far as it has at present adumbrated itself”. “It is mediocre”, he charges ... “It reduces human beings to the mass” ... “ready to be controlled, manipulated by a dictator or an oligarchy”.^{iv}

Yet, Eliot, the advocate of hierarchy and tradition, does not explain by what sanction this ‘governing elite’ would exercise its authority. Certainly, he had neither respect for democracy or faith in the democratic process to remedy the human condition ... “When a term has become so universally sanctified”, he complained, ... “I begin to wonder whether it means anything”.^v Insofar as Eliot committed himself to a method of social change, he suggested that just as individuals should seek self-improvement in minute particulars, so too, should society in piecemeal fashion endeavour to improve

ⁱ *Equality*, R.H. Tawney, p.58.

ⁱⁱ ‘Christianity And The Social Revolution’, R.H. Tawney, 1935, see *The Attack* p.162.

ⁱⁱⁱ ‘Review of Notes Towards The Definition of Culture’, see George Orwell, *Collected Essays*, Vol. IV, Secker & Warburg, p.457.

^{iv} ‘Interview with T.S. Eliot’, *Kenyon Review*, Winter Vol, 1965, p.15-16.

^v *The Idea Of Christian Society*, p.48.

itself. Eliot, however, provides no master plan as to the political framework in which these social improvements might be achieved. While, like Tawney, he fulminates against the ... “immorality of competition” ... “a world manipulated by big usurers” and questions ... “the morality of investing in bonds and debentures”,ⁱ Eliot proposes no practical political or economic programme by which the governing elite will correct these social iniquities to the benefit of the ‘mass of humanity’. While Tawney postulates a society of function, of mutual responsibility and equitable economic distribution, Eliot, reluctant to enlarge on the social and political consequences of his elitist notion of culture, insists that. ... “theological writers have more to say that is relevant to this subject than political philosophers”.ⁱⁱ

Christian Education

Both Tawney and Eliot believed that Christian teaching had firm implications for education. Education Eliot remarked, “is a subject on which we all feel we have something to say”.ⁱⁱⁱ Certainly, Eliot was concerned with the subject as his principle writings of social criticism indicate.^{NB} Eliot not only recognised ... “the close relationship between education theory and political theory”,^{iv} he also argued that education cannot be discussed in a void since the subject also raises questions which are social, economic, financial and political”.^v Even the word education, he insisted, has different contexts; it means something different when we are talking about education as something offered to us, or when we are talking about it as something received. Is it, he asks, something done to people or something people do for themselves? There are also, he argues, the fundamental questions to be addressed. ‘What is the purpose of education?’ ‘What are its

ⁱ *The Idea Of Christian Society*, p.105.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.44.

ⁱⁱⁱ ‘*The Aims of Education*’, T.S. Eliot, *see To Criticise the Critic*, 1950, p.61.

^{NB} *See Notes Towards a Definition of Culture*, Chap. VI. ‘*Notes on Education & Culture*’, *see The Christian Conception of Education Proceedings*, 1942 and *Various Lectures And Essays*.

^{iv} *The Idea of a Christian Society*, p.64.

^v ‘*Modern Education and The Classics*’. T.S. Eliot, *see Essays Ancient and Modern Faber and Faber*, p.161.

ultimate aims'? For Eliot, in a Christian society, the ends of education are clear - 'the permanent values' which education must nurture and encourage, the values which must influence all educational action and philosophy are ... "Wisdom and Holiness" "the values of the sage and the saint".ⁱ This somewhat idealistic and elevated notion of the purpose of education, Eliot reflects, has been frustrated by the tendency prevalent in the ... "decayed form of Christianity" which exists in the 'Christian West' to identify wisdom and holiness, education for culture and character building". In Christian Society, he suggests, culture and character might be by-products of our education as technical efficiency might be incidental to it. Education then, for Eliot, must be inspired by Christian teaching directed towards a ... "Christian philosophy of life". Yet, he complains, in the Western democracies our society is materialist, our religion is diluted, our culture, while it has not ceased to be entirely Christian, is, nevertheless, negative. While Eliot proposes that ... "a nation's system of education is much more important than its system of government",ⁱⁱ he argues, (as did Coleridge,) that ... "to the population education means instruction". The next step, Eliot insists, is that this ... "clericalism of secularism will inculcate the political principles approved by the party in power".ⁱⁱⁱ Education, he argues, must be something more than the acquisition of information, technical competence or superficial culture. Every philosophy of education, he insists, must pose the important question ... "What is the type of man which it is proudest to produce?" It is by this question that a society may identify its real ideals; it is this question which will determine the way it teaches, what it teaches and for what purpose it teaches. Eliot acknowledges that it may appear to some readers that he ... "is ready to dispense altogether, within the Christian Society, with everything they know and value by the name of education". This misapprehension, he admits, has led many to believe that his ... "goal is in effect a relapse into barbarism",^{iv} an allegation which he denies. Indeed, he counters, he is not anxious to scrap anything; he

ⁱ 'Education in a Christian Society', (1940) see *The Idea of a Christian Society and Other Essays*, p.141.

ⁱⁱ *The Idea Of Christian Society*, p.67.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.67.

^{iv} 'Education in a Christian Society', (1940) see *Idea Of Christian Society and Other Essays*, p.43.

recognises the need for laboratories and technical schools as well as institutions for the study of history and philosophy and ancient and modern languages. This apparent readiness to accept the continuation of certain recognised institutions of education is, however, tempered by a proviso ... “You cannot expect continuity unless you have a certain uniformity of culture”, Eliot insists, “expressed in education by a settled though not rigid agreement as to what everyone should know to some degree, and a positive distinction - however undemocratic it may sound - between the uneducated and the educated”.ⁱ This proviso was compounded by the suggestion that in view of the shortcomings of Harvard University’s ... “mass enrolment” policy, (which Eliot judged to be responsible for declining standards) the number of students in British higher education should be reduced to one third of the nineteen thirty-two level.^{NB} In an age of social change, Eliot also argued, our conceptions of education should be re-examined; we should ... “no longer leave education to take care of itself” but address ourselves to the question of ... who should be educated and how they should be educated and to that most neglected question of all, why they should be educated”.ⁱⁱ Eliot’s answer to this ‘most neglected question’ was made manifest in nineteen thirty-nine in the face of demands that the school leaving age be raised from fourteen years to eighteen. Eliot insisted that he held no fixed opinion in this matter although he agreed that it was ... “better that boys and girls should be at school rather than be subject to industrial exploitation”.ⁱⁱⁱ Nevertheless, he argued, this reform which might be good in certain circumstances was not always ... “a change for the better absolutely”. It is not, he asserted, necessarily a ... “good in itself”. Is this further education, he challenged ... “necessarily going to make the majority wiser or better people?”^{iv}

ⁱ *The Idea Of Christian Society*, p.67.

^{NB} This recommendation is not however included in the 1936 edition of *Eliot’s Essays - Ancient And Modern*, Faber & Faber.

ⁱⁱ *The Idea Of Christian Society*, p.166.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.144.

^{iv} *Ibid*, p.145.

It is, however, when Eliot's recognition of 'the close relationship between education theory and political theory' is applied to his own education theories that his concept of a social order is made most apparent. His 'Idea of A Christian Society', if not completely authoritarian in the manner of a totalitarian dictatorship, is, nevertheless, hierarchic and paternalistic in the manner of Petainist France. A 'governing elite' would legislate to preserve what Eliot perceives as the traditional Christian culture while an 'educated elite' would pursue the permanent values of Wisdom and Holiness. To this end Eliot urges that ... "the first educational task of the 'Christian Communities' should be the preservation of education within the cloister ... "a call for monastic orders uncontaminated by the deluge of barbarism outside"ⁱ As for the 'mass of humanity', the thrust of education in the modern age, Eliot complains, has been dominated by the idea of ... "getting on" rather than an aid to the acquisition of Wisdom. Education has become something to which everybody has a 'right' irrespective of his capacity". The result, he declares, is that ... "education is received in a diluted and adulterated form - which disappoints the many who discover that 'education' is not an infallible means of 'getting on'. This disillusioned 'mass of humanity' will inevitably forsake the 'drudgery of education', Eliot argues, and devote itself to ... "pretty simple forms of leisure" "playing cards, watching dogs, horses or other men engage in feats of speed and skill".ⁱⁱ

It is a blanket judgement entirely free from considerations of social or economic conditions, of environmental factors, of opportunity, of inheritance. It is a judgement which ignores completely Eliot's own caveat that ... "education cannot be discussed in a void since the subject raises questions which are social, economic, financial and political".ⁱⁱⁱ While Tawney acknowledges that Henry Dubb was not without faults; he was sometimes lazy, sometimes feckless; he, nevertheless, declared himself invoking 'the Magnificat' NB ... "an unrepentant Dubbite". Dubb, he argued, "may one day wake up

ⁱ 'Modern Education and The Classics', see *Essays Ancient and Modern*, p.174.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, 63.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.161.

NB "He hath put down the mighty from their seat and hath exalted the humble and meek"

and use such rights as he possesses of which he is more sensible than some of his intellectual pastors in thinking worth having”ⁱ Tawney, while admitting that Dubb could be both ... “pig-headed and exasperating”, still respects him for his ... “good sense, pertinacity, nerve and resolution”. Eliot on the other hand, oblivious of his own injunction towards “charity and humility”, brands the mass of his fellows as without ... “definite gifts or taste” capable in their leisure moments of ... propelling balls by hand, by foot or an interest in engines and various types of tools”.ⁱⁱ This disdainful evaluation of the capacities of the ‘common man’ finds expression not only in his social criticism but also in his verse ...

“And think of poor Albert,
He’s been in the army four years,
He wants a good time,
and if you don’t give it him,
There’s other will, I said”.ⁱⁱⁱ

Eliot’s views on education, as on society, are that of an elitist; even the egalitarian claims to equality of opportunity and ‘the democratisation of education’, he insists, must be scrutinised very carefully. Indeed, he argues ... “equality of opportunity can be very dangerous if we are not severe in our standards of what it is desirable to have opportunity for”.^{iv} As for the ‘democratisation of education’, he asserts that as the scope of education has expanded ... “so have social organisation broken down and been replaced by the mechanisation which increases while it manipulates the atomisation of individuals”.^v If Eliot sees the ‘democratisation of education’ as the begetter of ‘alienated’, ‘atomised’, ‘spiritual nomads’, Tawney has a more positive vision.

ⁱ ‘Christianity and the Social Revolution’, see *The Attack*, p.166.

ⁱⁱ ‘Modern Education and the Classics’, see *Essays Ancient and Modern*, p.163

ⁱⁱⁱ ‘The Waste Land’, T.S. Eliot, 1922, see *Collected Works*, Faber & Faber, 1980, p.66.

^{iv} *The Idea of a Christian Society*, p.145.

^v *Ibid*, p.144.

Education, he proposes, “although it is much else as well, is partly, at least, the process by which we transcend the barriers of our isolated personalities and become partners in a universe of interests which we share with our fellowmen, living and dead alike”.ⁱ Education, for Tawney, is not merely to impart reliable information; it has another important purpose ... “to foster the intellectual vitality, to master and use it, so that knowledge becomes not a burden to be borne or a possession to be prized but a stimulus to constructive thought and an inspiration to action”.ⁱⁱ

Eliot was suspicious of the notion of ‘equality of opportunity’; he suspected that it was inspired not by the pursuit of excellence but rather by the ‘false lights’ of achieving whatever in a ‘mass society’ was regarded as admirable. Tawney, however, believed in the ... “practical equality” which would ensure the education of every citizen in order that ... “they might be capable of freedom” ... “an education that would enable each individual to discover his own and his neighbours endowments”. For Tawney, Professor Titmuss insists, “the supreme consideration was everyman’s uniqueness without regard to the irrelevancies of class and income”.ⁱⁱⁱ Certainly, Eliot cannot have been unaware that Christianity demands of all who live by its tenets that they acknowledge the uniqueness and individuality of every human being. But Christianity was evidently “a house with many mansions” and consistent, therefore, with a wide diversity of social aspirations and ideals.

Community

Yet Eliot, like Tawney, understood the value of community ...

“What life have you if you have not life together?”

ⁱ ‘WEA and Adult Education’, see *The Radical Tradition*, p.84.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.84

ⁱⁱⁱ See *Introduction to Equality*, Richard M. Titmuss, 1964 Edition, p.15.

There is no life that is not in community and no community not lived in praise of GOD".ⁱ

But Eliot's community was one of hierarchy and discipline while Tawney saw in community the opportunity for fellowship, for all men to exercise ... "not the class differences which divide but the common humanity which unites them".ⁱⁱ Tawney believed that ordinary men and women had the capacity, in fellowship, to create a Christian Society; he saw men's strengths even as he acknowledged their weaknesses. Eliot, however, saw a human nature that was innately evil a society that was inevitably corrupt. For Tawney, whose Christian faith urges men ... "To add to Godliness, brotherly kindness ... and to brotherly kindness, charity" (PET:II.1.7), the values of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity are central to Christian teachings. For Eliot, this 'device' is only a memorial to the time of revolution: misguided, even mischievous. Certainly, as George Orwell insists, Eliot must not be disqualified from advancing social theories simply because he was an ... "Anglo-Catholic royalist who is given to quoting Latin",ⁱⁱⁱ or even because he was capable of making "reactionary statements which border on the shocking".^{NB1} Eliot's social attitudes were archaic; some of his pronouncements lay him open to charges of racism; his verse contains lines which are commonly acknowledged as anti-Semitic.^{NB2} Ultimately, his social and political theories proved to be dangerous and irresponsible. The authoritarianism to which he had looked to preserve Western Culture made no contribution to Christian civilisation, Christian thought or Christian morality. Indeed it produced a brutalised, book-burning, anti-intellectual lumpen.

ⁱ 'Choruses from *The Rock*' T.S. Eliot, 1934, see *Collected Poems and Plays*, 1969, p.152.

ⁱⁱ *Equality*, p.49.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Collected Essays*, George Orwell, Vol II, p.293.

^{NB1} See Eliot's remarks concerning "undesirable, free-thinking Jews" and "the invasion of culture by foreign races", 'After Strange Gods', *The Page Barbour Lectures*, Univ. of Virginia, 1933, Faber & Faber, 1934. The printed edition of these lectures are now out of print.

^{NB2} See references in *The Waste Land* (1922), "Burbank with a Badeker".

Tawney and Eliot, it must be recognised, were not unique in presenting social and political criticism in the light of their religious understanding. Polemicists of the right had employed a vocabulary of militant religion in defence of nationalism, paternalism, order and discipline encapsulated in Marshal Petain's 'appeal to the French nation' which, in 1940, called for ... "a new order ... an intellectual and moral regeneration". Nor was there a shortage of socialist thinkers who invoked Christian teachings against targets which, curiously, they shared with their opponents, - the individualism and materialism of industrial capitalism. Yet, Eliot and Tawney were not only concerned to present their particular interpretation of Christian teaching as translated into social organisation. They were concerned, too, in the face of a palpable decline in the power and influence of the established Churches, to warn of the social consequences of a society bereft of religious belief, motivated solely by acquisitive appetite and materialist values.^{NB}

^{NB} *Certainly, English Ethical Socialism was more influential in the nineteenth than in the twentieth century. It may be argued that the horrors of the first world war, the catalyst of revolutions, the 'shock of the new' in social behaviour, sexual relationships and artistic expression served to weaken organised religion (and that of Protestant non-conformity in particular).*

CHAPTER V

The Case Against Equality

Introduction

“The men of culture are the true apostles of equality.”

Matthew Arnold

Whilst egalitarianism may never have become an orthodoxy in Britain, the positive advocacy of inequality was muted with the development of a Keynesian consensus. This consensus, David Marquand suggests, tentatively, (for it is difficult to pinpoint precise dates), began when the wartime coalition government (in June 1944) published a White Paper committing post-war governments to full employment, until in October 1976, James Callaghan informed the Labour Party Conference that “attempts to increase employment by cutting taxes and increased public spending injected more inflation into the system and so did more harm than good”.ⁱ There was, Professor Marquand argues, no self-conscious tradition of Keynesian social democracy with which its adherents could identify. The term was used, he insists, as “short hand for a set of commitments, assumptions and expectations transcending party conflicts and shared by the great majority of the country’s political and economic leaders”.ⁱⁱ These commitments, assumptions and expectations, Professor Marquand asserts, did not evolve from “an explicit set of teachings, consciously held”.ⁱⁱⁱ Conservatives who advocated Keynesian measures still thought of themselves as Conservatives: they belonged to a long established tradition and appealed to the myths and symbols of that tradition. The Labour Party pointed with pride and guarded jealously the educational reforms, the health care legislation and the welfare provision which their periods of office had engendered.

ⁱ *The Unprincipled Society*, David Marquand, Fontana Press, 1988, p.18.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.18.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.18.

Certainly the two parties had differences of interest and belief, different aims and values as well as different constituencies. Nevertheless, Professor Marquand insists, when they were in government “their leaders approached the management of the economy and the operation of the social services in a remarkably similar fashion”.ⁱ

Though these differences in interests and beliefs were real and important, Professor Marquand observes, what stands out in retrospect is the extent to which their policies overlapped in practice. It is, he argues, “a philosophy of the mixed economy”, a philosophy of “the middle way” in which government could intervene in the market, ... and “mitigate the hardships of unregulated capitalism”ⁱⁱ while preserving consumer choice. It is a philosophy committed to repudiate “the dichotomies of market versus state; capital versus labour; private enterprise versus public ownership; personal freedom versus social justice”.ⁱⁱⁱ Essentially, such a philosophy is committed to the notion that capitalism and socialism are not inherently opposed: that it is possible to combine elements of both “in a synthesis more benign than either”.^{iv}

Certainly, in the years which followed the war, living standards improved, unemployment was comparatively low: opportunities and personal freedoms expanded. Most people enjoyed better health, their children remained at school longer, the state provided a measure of security against sickness, poverty, unemployment, old age. Britain “became a kinder and, on most definitions, a fairer society”.^v Yet the consensus did not endure: perceptions changed, opinions shifted, attitudes altered. A section of society, newly affluent, gradually distanced itself from its traditional ties to the Labour Party and socialist principles. These changes, compounded by increasing economic difficulties, led the Labour Party leadership in the 1960’s and 1970’s (and not without internal

ⁱ *The Unprincipled Society*, p.18.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.19.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.19.

^{iv} *Ibid*, p.19.

^v *Ibid*, p.40.

opposition), to adopt a less socialistic, less radical programme. Similarly, within the Conservative Party a neo-liberal faction, dedicated to a philosophy of possessive individualism, and the free-market began to exert influence. In 1974, with the fall of the Heath government and the attendant sense of frustration within the Party, this faction became increasingly dominant. By the late 1970's with the election of Margaret Thatcher, the Conservative Party leadership was firmly in neo-liberal hands.

With the election of Margaret Thatcher the already fragmenting consensus was shattered. 'New Conservatism' entered into what one contemporary supporter identifies as "its heroic phase".ⁱ The party enthusiastically embarked on a programme which included the privatisation of nationalised industries, new trade-union legislation, radical local government reforms. Economic policies were introduced which emphasised competition and dismissed as inefficient, economically costly, and socially damaging, the intervention of government in the mechanism of the market. These policies evolved out of a neo-liberal philosophy which exalted consumer choice, competition and free enterprise within a free market-place. They sought to replace the assumptions and expectations on which the post-war consensus had been predicated with a new culture of individualism. They sought confrontation rather than consensus; to create not only the economic conditions in which such a culture could flourish but also the philosophic climate in which it could thrive. Egalitarianism, which had informed so much post-war social policy was now discredited. The social and economic theories of the "new-right" were challenged. Yet for a time, in its "heroic phase", the spirit of community withered, the language of the unfettered market ruled, the philosophy was triumphant.

At this moment of triumph, in nineteen eighty three, William Letwin edited a collection of essays ... '*AGAINST EQUALITY*.'ⁱⁱ The contributions represent

ⁱ *Modern Conservatism*, David Willetts, Penguin Books, 1992, p.50.

ⁱⁱ *Against Equality, Readings on Economic and Social Politics*, edited by William Letwin, 1983, Macmillan Press in association with the Foundation for Education in Economics, London.

conservative, liberal, libertarian and 'new right' reactions against equality which Professor Letwin identified as "the leading fetish of our time". While many of the contributors attack an abstract notion of equality, some briefly distinguish between "extreme", "moderate", "judicious" and "Christian egalitarians". Their target, however, is a catch-all egalitarianism, an egalitarianism for all seasons. Tawney is occasionally mentioned, and his ethical egalitarianism must be regarded as a dimension of equality which is under attack. His particular egalitarian position, therefore, offers the opportunity to present a critical response to Letwin's contributors which addresses concrete rather than abstract anti-egalitarian arguments. This response, hopefully, allows for a more accurate appreciation of the strengths and weaknesses of Tawney's case for equality.

The "ideal of equality", its practical application, its theoretical foundations, its effects, economic, social, legal and political, is subjected to cogent and vigorous criticism. Professor Letwin, in the preface, insists that "The claims of egalitarianism in the social sphere are as baseless as in any other, and the prospects for egalitarianism, are more hopeless than elsewhere". He declares his own general opposition to 'egalitarianism', and claims that this opposition is shared by many of the contributors although they do not necessarily have his particular views on specific aspects of egalitarianism. Letwin asserts, however, that the book calls into question the philosophic arguments in favour of equality. The essays, he insists, "do not hew to any orthodoxy", they are concerned not only with specific topics but bear also on the broader issue. Yet, if not all the contributors are as implacably opposed to the ideal of equality as Professor Letwin, the collected essays constitute a concerted and concentrated attack on egalitarianism and consequently on the social, political, ethical, and philosophic theories of R.H. Tawney. Though Tawney's 'EQUALITY' is regarded, if not as the Testament, at least as the Talmud of the egalitarian case, there are fewer direct references to Tawney than to John Rawls. Rawls, in "A THEORY OF JUSTICE", advances a detailed, technical and sophisticated methodology in support of an equitable distribution of wealth. He employs a social contract mechanism in order to satisfy the moral demands of those egalitarians who insist

that all inequalities must be justified. He proposed that any departures from equality are morally acceptable provided such departures result not only to the positive benefit of the least advantaged, but that the opportunities for such departures are equally available to all. Like Tawney, Rawls's emphasis is on equitable distribution. His stated purpose, however, is ... "to generalise and carry to a higher order of abstraction the traditional theory of social contract as represented by -Locke, Rousseau and Kant".ⁱ His concern, he asserts, is to advance ... "a systematic account of justice that is superior to the dominant utilitarianism of the tradition".ⁱⁱ Yet if Tawney has not presented as elaborate or fully developed a philosophic blue-print for social justice as Rawls, his egalitarian philosophy is nevertheless subjected to judgemental criticism by Professor Letwin and his fellow contributors. NB

Letwin leads the attack with an opening statement of intent, "I have designed this book", he declares, "to challenge and rebut egalitarianism". His own essay, the first (and longest) contribution ... *'THE CASE AGAINST EQUALITY'* begins with the assertion that most people now believe in equality and most people now believe that "many aspects of social life should be reformed so as to get rid of inherited inequalities".ⁱⁱⁱ That is why, Letwin argues, "people support redistribution of wealth and income within nations, and among nations". It is, he asserts, this general acceptance of the notion of equality which provokes a sympathy with measures "to extend powers of decision to workers as well as employers, students as well as teachers, voters as well as politicians and officials".^{iv} These extensions of power Letwin insists are automatically perceived as 'democratisation', 'participation', and 'equalisation of rights'.^v Egalitarianism, Letwin

ⁱ *A Theory Of Justice, John Rawls, Oxford University Press, 1983 Edition, Page VIII (Preface)*

ⁱⁱ *Ibid, Introduction, p. VII..*

NB *John Rawls's A Theory of Justice is quite properly regarded as a seminal work. A comparison of Rawls' perception of social justice and that of Tawney offers abundant material for a research project. Such research, however, is beyond the scope of this thesis which is concerned with the theories of R.H. Tawney.*

ⁱⁱⁱ *'The Case Against Equality,' Letwin, see Against Equality, p.1.*

^{iv} *Ibid, p.1.*

^v *Ibid, p.1.*

dogmatically insists, postulating a definition of equality which contemporary egalitarians would dismiss as unsubstantiated fantasy, “seems to rest on three ideas.”ⁱ

1. “All persons should be equal.”
2. “All existing inequalities can be reduced if not utterly eradicated by action of governments or by revolutionary change in government”.
3. “All other political objectives must give way to equality” (since) “Equality is held as the paramount political end”.

These three propositions Letwin believes to be central to the egalitarian case, they are, he insists, “expounded in political tracts, official reports, philosophical essays and other considered utterances”. Letwin’s purpose is clearly stated. The book, he declares, is designed to disrupt the consensus on the egalitarian question. His intentions are fourfold:

NB

1. He will call into question the philosophical argument which have been (or may be) advanced in favour of egalitarianism;
2. Point out the ambiguities within the idea of equality;
3. Dispute the data which are supposed to reveal great and growing inequality;

ⁱ
NB *The Case Against Equality, Letwin, see Against Equality, p.3.*
Professor Albert O. Hirschman identifies three principle theses invoked by groups which oppose or criticise new policy proposals or newly enacted, policies, these are, he submits:

- (1) *The 'Perversity Thesis', ... which argues that "any purposive action to improve some feature of the political, social, or economic order only serves to exacerbate the condition one wishes to remedy",*
- (2) *The 'Futility Thesis', which holds that "attempts at social transformation will simply fail to make a dent".*
- (3) *The 'Jeopardy Thesis', which argues that "the cost of the proposed change or reform is to high as it endangers some previous, precious accomplishment", see The Rhetoric of Reaction, Perversity, Futility, Jeopardy, Albert O. Hirschman., Harvard University Press, 1991, p. 7. It may be argued that Professor Letwin's fourfold attack on egalitarian principles derives in some measure from Professor Hirschman's categories. Certainly, some of the arguments of his contributors are permeated by Hirschman's three theses.*

4. Identify the destructive consequences which have already resulted, or may result from, or may be expected, from policies aimed at equalisation.

Professor Letwin's declared understanding of the egalitarian position is, it may be argued, simplistic. He insists that "the most persuasive foundation" for the ideal of equality is the premise that "all men are essentially identical".ⁱ

It may be legitimate to create an abstract version of the case one wishes to attack. But such an attack has a disadvantage since it will almost always fail to address the arguments of any particular opponent. If Tawney is regarded as the token egalitarian, this is very much the case. Tawney specifically rejects this "persuasive foundation; equal, he holds is not tantamount to identical". Tawney acknowledges the assertion that men and (women) are, on the whole, very similar in their natural endowments of character and intelligence but argues that such an assertion of equality is untenable. Yet while he concedes that individuals may differ profoundly in capacity and character, he insists that as human beings they are equally entitled to respect and consideration. Letwin rejects "a general presumption in favour of equality"; "the ideal of equality is only rationally defensible", he argues, "when people are held to be equal, beforehand, in some predominant respect". For Tawney an evaluation of human beings as being equally "Children of God" supplies this "predominant respect". Furthermore, he argues pragmatically, the well being of a society is likely to be increased if it plans its organisation (so that) all its members may be equally enabled to make the best of such powers as they possess. Yet while Letwin is not exclusively concerned with the material consequences of egalitarianism, he pays little attention to either the moral issues which are central to such a philosophy or the ethical foundations which sustain them. Similarly, while he dismisses John Rawls's *THEORY OF JUSTICE* as economically incoherent and inconsistent, he neither acknowledges nor gives consideration to the moral dimension of

ⁱ *The Case Against Equality*, Letwin, see *Against Equality*, p. 8/9.

Rawls's egalitarian argument. ^{NB1} Certainly, he ignores Rawls' recognition of the value of self respect as a primary social good within the egalitarian philosophy. Nor does he consider Rawls' postulation of ... "the moral personality as the basis of equality". ^{NB2} Furthermore, Rawls, like Tawney does *not*, as Letwin insists, advance equality as the objective to which all other political considerations must yield. Indeed, Tawney's identification of "the supreme political good" is compounded by the uncompromising assertion that "liberty is rightly preferred to equality when the two are in conflict". For Tawney, the demand for equality is predicated upon an equal right to liberty which, equally extended, and democratically endorsed, allows each individual the equal right (within the law) to pursue those individual ends which do not impinge on the rights of others. Furthermore, Letwin's assurance for which he gives no substantial evidence, that the egalitarian creed demands that all persons should be equal is patently reductive. An unqualified claim that all persons should be equal is incoherent; no serious contemporary advocate of equality would advance such a proposition.

Tawney's position is clear; he recognises that different individuals have different strengths and weaknesses, physical and intellectual, and that just as each individual may have particular skills so may each individual be deficient in particular talents. Such a recognition cannot accommodate the over simplistic formula, all persons should be equal. Indeed, if as Letwin declares his book "calls into question the philosophical arguments in favour of egalitarianism", he must, in all fairness, present the arguments in terms which egalitarians recognise as their substantive philosophic position. Tawney would reject Letwin's simplified, all encompassing definition. In the ideal of co-operation, of mutual tolerance and mutual confidence, Tawney's definition of equality requires not an identical

^{NB1} *There are 160 page-references to moral aspects in the index of Rawls' Theory Of Justice. These include ... Moral principles, Moral psychology, Moral reasons, Moral sentiments, Moral worth of persons, Morality of authority, Moral personality, etc.*

^{NB2} *It is, Rawls argues, the moral personality which is entitled to equal justice. Moral persons, he asserts, are distinguished by two features: (1) They have a conception of their good as expressed by a rational plan of life (or they have a conception of their good as expressed by a rational plan of life (or they have the capacity for such a conception). (2) They are capable of the desire to apply the principles of justice. See, A Theory Of Justice, John Rawls, p504/5.*

level of pecuniary incomes, but equality of environment, of access to education, the means of civilisation, of security and independence, and of the social consideration which equality in these matters usually carries with it. Certainly, this definition does not coincide with Letwin's understanding of the egalitarian position. Similarly, Tawney (and all "judicious egalitarians") would reject Letwin's sweeping and unsubstantiated allegation that "judicious egalitarians" ... "have *confined* their ideal "to equality of income, wealth, esteem, political power, legal rights and education".ⁱ Rawls specifically proposes a 'Theory of Justice' which allows for differences of wealth, income, power and other resources providing such differences work to the absolute benefit of the worst-off members of society. These allowable differences, Rawls insists, must be compounded by such social organisation as will guarantee that the largest political liberty is equally extended to every individual. As for Tawney, his egalitarianism does not demand either equality of wealth or equality of income, indeed he recognises that expertise, application and responsibility, must be duly rewarded. He may insist that ... "if a man has important work and enough leisure and income to enable him to do it properly, he is in possession of as much happiness as is good for any of the children of Adam",ⁱⁱ yet this austere scale of reward for services rendered does not evolve merely from a puritan sense of ascetic frugality. It springs, rather, from the rejection of the notion of society as a congeries of competing interests rather than an enterprise of co-operative effort. Tawney acknowledges that ... "special talent is worth any price"; indeed, he agreed (in 1921) that ... "ten thousand pounds a year to the head of a business with a turnover of millions is economically a bagatelle". Tawney's egalitarianism does not then derive either from a Utopian and unattainable demand for complete equality or even a belief in equality as the supreme political value. His philosophy is a manifestation of his Christian faith; it is nurtured in the belief that in an equitable society ... "all social institutions, economic

ⁱ 'The Case Against Equality', Letwin, see *Against Equality*, p. 3.
ⁱⁱ *The Acquisitive Society*, p.220.

activity, industrial organisations cease to be either indifferent or merely a means to the satisfaction of human appetites”.ⁱ

Letwin’s observation that ... “various individuals make contributions of different kinds and consequently are entitled to different rewards” would encounter no opposition from Tawney. In both *THE ACQUISITIVE SOCIETY* and *EQUALITY*, he acknowledges that special skills, diligence and inventiveness should be appropriately compensated. If his Christian morality balks at the idea that a man should expect to be paid ... “what he is worth”, the same morality insists that what each man has a right to demand, and his fellows are obliged to ensure that he receives, ... “enough to enable him to perform his work”.ⁱⁱ That such work be executed for the benefit of society, is an integral ingredient of Tawney’s moral understanding. That remuneration be based on service to the community is a central tenet of his ethical philosophy. It is social purpose and not self-interest, he insists, which gives industry and human enterprise its meaning and ... “makes it worthwhile to carry on at all”.ⁱⁱⁱ

Some egalitarians, Professor Letwin charges, rest their case on the view that society is a common enterprise. This argument, he insists is fallacious; society is misrepresented when pictured as an enterprise. An enterprise, he argues, ... “entails entrepreneurs who launch a project in order to accomplish a goal”. Society was never launched; it is not a project, and, he asserts ... “human beings have never existed outside of it”.^{iv} Society is the inevitable condition of man, Letwin argues, and as an entity is incapable of acting; strictly speaking ... “society contributes nothing” ... “the only contributors are human beings” ... “each of whom makes contributions of different kinds”. Society is not, therefore, he insists, as egalitarians claim, a common enterprise to which “all people contribute and in whose benefits they are all entitled to share

ⁱ *The Acquisitive Society*, p.235.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.221.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.49

^{iv} *The Case Against Equality*, Letwin, see *Against Equality*, p16.

equally”.ⁱ NB Letwin, then, perceives society as an amalgam of self-interested individuals some of whom merit special rewards, since, in pursuit of their own ends, they contribute their particular talents and “cater to the various desires, tastes, motives and purposes of different beneficiaries”.ⁱⁱ Such contributions, Letwin asserts, “may be the same in kind, but they differ in degree”; “they benefit”, he argues, “not society but each other”. It is an image of society as an economic mechanism in which “individuals alone are ends and that Society is nothing but a means to those ends”.ⁱⁱⁱ It is an image grounded in an individualist and libertarian philosophy which rejects “the organic nature of society” with its emphasis on “a common consciousness, a common will and common obligations”.^{iv} Furthermore, Professor Letwin’s argument that egalitarian principles derive from a false assumption concerning the structure and initial formation of society does not invalidate Tawney’s allegation that hierarchies of wealth, status and power constitute an impediment to social cohesion, and react to the disadvantage of those without economic aptitude on marketable talents.

Tawney would have no alternative but to plead guilty to Professor Letwin’s charge concerning a perception of society as a common enterprise. He would insist that no individual, no matter how talented, enterprising or industrious ... “even if he worked overtime all his life” can provide for himself those vital amenities without which man cannot survive. It is necessary, he argues, that society ... “make collective provision for immunisation from cholera, typhus and ignorance”. Security from disease, Tawney

ⁱ *The Case Against Equality*, Letwin, see *Against Equality*, p. 6.

NB Tawney dismisses this notion of dividing “the national income into fractions and distributing it equally, as quite remote from reality” (see *Equality*, p122). Even the extremist anarchist Michael Bakunin defined equality “as a primordial condition of liberty. From each according to his faculties, to each according to his needs”. Nevertheless, George Bernard Shaw in a lecture to the Fabian Society on Dec. 10, 1910 at the Memorial Hall in Farringdon Street argued that “the simple truth about socialism was that it meant equality of income” ... “a state of society in which the entire income of the country is divided between all the people in exactly equal shares, without regard to their industry, their character, or any other consideration that they are living human beings ... that is Socialism and nothing else is Socialism”. see Bernard Shaw, Vol. 2, *The Pursuit of Power*, p265. Michael Holroyd, Chatto & Windus, 1989.

ⁱⁱ *The Case Against Equality*, Letwin, see *Against Equality*, p16.

ⁱⁱⁱ *The Crisis Of Liberalism*, J.A. Hobson, P.S. King & Co. Ltd, 1909, p74.

^{iv} *Ibid*, p. 76.

remarks, demands the observance of certain rules and the performance of certain productive tasks designed to create a particular condition which affects equally all parts of the community. Similarly, he insists, it is necessary that collective action be taken ... “to secure the positive advantages of educational opportunity and economic security”.ⁱ ... “Man, that timid, staring creature”, Tawney observes, is so compounded ... “as to require not only money, but light, air and water, not to mention, he adds ... “such uneconomic goods as tranquillity, beauty and affection”.ⁱⁱ For Tawney, these ... “uneconomic goods” which make the difference between human happiness and human misery are equally necessary and have been equally provided by God for all his children. As for Tawney the social theorist, he understands that ... “no individual can create by his isolated actions a healthy environment or provide the source of social income which is received in the form not of money but of increased well-being”. Certainly, Tawney insists, that within a civilised society it is the duty of the state to ensure the universal provision of public goods. Yet Tawney is a social democrat: he rejects as totalitarian the concept of the all-powerful state, acting without democratic consent in what it perceives as the interest of particular classes or groups to secure, on their behalf, what it considers to be socially desirable. He is concerned rather to ensure a democratic society in which not only will the institutions of the state provide the opportunity for men and women to become the best of which they are capable, but also sustain such social, political and economic arrangements as will provide these “public goods” which democratically agreed, serve the best interest of the community. To this end, he does not demand the total nationalisation of “the means of production”, but argues instead that “it is not private ownership which is corrupting the principles of industry” but private ownership divorced from work”.ⁱⁱⁱ He does not regard nationalisation as the panacea for mismanagement or the automatic provider of efficiency, equity or co-operative industrial relationships just as he rejects the claims of theorists who insist that productivity and wealth creation can only derive from

ⁱ *Equality* p.126.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.126.

ⁱⁱⁱ *The Acquisitive Society*, p 82.

the application of libertarian principles. For Tawney, industry is “nothing more mysterious than a body of men and women associated in various degrees of competition to win their livelihood by providing the community with some service that it requires”.ⁱ If he did not, in 1931, like David Miller and other contemporary egalitarians in 1993, call for “a theory of socialism”, which, in the name of “individual liberty, distributive justice, economic efficiency and consumer sovereignty”, ... “includes a full-blooded commitment to a market economy”,ⁱⁱ compounded “by a commitment to the social distribution of benefits with reference to certain ideal standards of distribution - namely criteria of desert and need”ⁱⁱⁱ he nevertheless asserts that the first duty of industry, *irrespective of ownership*, is that “it be subordinated to the community in such a way as to render the best service possible”.^{iv}

Tawney’s perception of society as a common enterprise sharing common values united in common purpose, is open to attack. Yet even between the two world wars when it might plausibly have been argued that British society was unified by a predominant if varied and sometimes uninspiring Christianity, Tawney did not insist that a common culture be predicated on Christian doctrine or motivated specifically by Christian principles. In the last decades of the twentieth century when Britain has become a nation of many cultures, many faiths (or non) a social vision which lays stress on a common culture is admittedly even more vulnerable to attack. Yet Tawney’s socialism incorporates a demand for a moral community which affirms universal humanist principles in which each individual equally recognises, and equally discharges, his or her moral obligation to mutually agreed ends. It is a theory of socialism, which recognises that “Socialism cannot be understood simply in terms of policy outcome, -the distribution of consumption goods and so forth”. It is, as David Miller stresses, fundamentally concerned with the quality of human relationships in so far as these are affected by social

ⁱ *The Acquisitive Society*, p.6.

ⁱⁱ *Market, State and Community*, David Miller, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1989, see Preface.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Social Justice*, David Miller, Clarendon Press, 1979 edition, p.336.

^{iv} *The Acquisitive Society*, p.7.

institutions".ⁱ Tawney, then, has a view of society in which common purpose and common moral values endorse a perception of society not only as "a common enterprise" but as an enterprise in common, to which all contribute and in which all may share. Contemporary society, it may be argued, multi-ethnic, multi-religious, is confronted with the problem of communally identifying substantive common purpose or mutuality of interest. Yet, ultimately, Tawney's vision of society evolves from the moral understanding that each individual and each community has, in a world of finite resources, an equal moral worth and an equal moral entitlement, since all men and all women are equally children of God. It must be conceded that the broadness of such an appeal is even less evident now than when it was advanced.

Liberty And Equality

Central to the libertarian argument is the claim that egalitarianism threatens individual liberty. While, for Tawney, measures of redistribution will extend to the economically powerless the means by which they may shape the economic circumstances of their lives, the libertarians argue that such measures not only constrain individual enterprise, they create an all-powerful state, which, by its very nature, threatens the liberty of the individual. The centralization of power, they assert, will in itself menace the democratic process. An all-powerful state, redistributing income in the name of equality, they insist, will diminish the individual's control of his or her life. Freedom, libertarians propose, consists in the right of the individual to pursue, without coercion or interference, their freely chosen ends. Freedom, they argue, secured by equal rights, is actualised in the recognition that each individual is equally free to pursue, within mutually respected parameters, those ends which they perceive as in their best interest. Individual liberty, they argue is assured where the power of the state is modified in accordance with libertarian principles. Such principles, they insist, provide the conditions in which each

ⁱ *Market, State and Community*, David Miller, p228.

individual has the equal opportunity to exercise that spirit of enterprise by which individual wealth creation reacts to the benefit of the entire society. In the notion of private property as an expression of individual liberty they argue, a free-market system will guarantee freedom of contract, exchange and production which will in turn create the conditions whereby the unfettered agent, free from restraint, may pursue his or her legitimate objectives. Such pursuit, in the absence of coercion, will, libertarians insist, facilitate progress, promote efficiency, foster initiative, extend opportunity and ratify personal freedom.

Letwin's fears of enforced equalisation, the coercive effects of income redistribution, the restrictions on individual property rights are shared by many of his contributors. Yet, while these contributors narrow their criticism to specific points, Professor Letwin attacks an abstract notion of egalitarianism which no seriously regarded egalitarian holds. The "judicious egalitarian", Professor Letwin insists, (without defining prudence or providing substantive evidence for the claim) demands the equalisation of wealth and income, esteem, political power, legal rights and education. For Tawney, certainly, equality is not an abstraction: his demands have clearly defined objectives. He seeks to extend individual liberty by the equalisation of economic power; he demands such equalisation as will allow for the effective exercise of fundamental political and civil rights. His case is grounded in a rejection of "the structure and spirit of English society", which, he asserts, "has inherited and presented a tradition of differentiation, not merely by economic function but by status and wealth".ⁱ Tawney's demands, then, are concrete. He does not press, as Letwin insists for the equalisation of wealth and income. His demands are determined pragmatically; he seeks to end "the hierarchy of class whose gradations embrace those aspects of life where discrimination is inappropriate".ⁱⁱ Above all, he demands such measures as will "make each individual capable of freedom and more capable of fulfilling their personal differences". He demands, too, through the

ⁱ *Equality*, p.72.
ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.72.

equalisation of opportunity and education an equality which will allow for “the enlargement of personal liberties through the discovery by each individual of his own and his neighbour’s endowment”.ⁱ

Letwin, like many of his contributors identifies a tension between the ideals of liberty and equality. For egalitarians, he submits, equality is the paramount end of good government. While he warns against the authoritarianism of radical egalitarians, he also insists that even liberal and democratic egalitarians frequently limited the force of this proposition by denying that equality is at all likely to conflict with the other principal ends of good government. Clearly, the tension between equality and freedom must be acknowledged. Undeniably, there is justice in the libertarian claim that the right to pursue, without coercion, and within the law, a chosen individual end is a necessary condition of freedom. Yet there is a contradiction within the libertarian argument. Libertarians proclaim the equal value of each individual; they insist that freedom derives from a moral principle which extends to each individual the equal right to pursue, without coercion or interference, his or her legitimate ends. Yet, they are prepared to defend, in the name of freedom, large disparities of wealth and income. But, it is precisely such disparities together with the inequalities of power which they engender, which not only repudiates the notion of equal liberty, but negates also the notion of the equal value of individuals.

Similarly, the libertarian notions of freedom and equality narrowly defined in terms of the mutually extended right to pursue individual ends without coercion or interference is untenable. Clearly, the equal value of individuals as pursuers of their chosen interest (within the law) is, by itself acceptable. Yet so limited a definition is necessarily inadequate; it ignores those social factors, both physical and cultural, which, for the powerless, obstruct freedom of choice and inhibit freedom of action. Indeed, it must be

ⁱ *Introduction to Equality, 1964 Edition, Richard M. Titmuss, George Allen & Unwin , p.15.*

argued that a system of competing interests, compounded by the pressures exerted by economic power and the dictates of an unregulated market renders incoherent the notion of autonomous action as expressed in the equal right of individuals to pursue freely chosen ends.

Yet, for Tawney, authentic equality and effective liberty can be secured only through an equalisation of economic power. The liberty which the anti-egalitarians commonly hold to be endangered as a result of egalitarian measures ... “to diminish or neutralise inequalities”, is, he asserts, ... “limited and specific”.ⁱ It consists, he insists, ... “in the right of individuals and groups to make and execute decisions on matters relating to their economic interests”ⁱⁱ without regard, he argues, for those directly affected by them. Tawney, does not defend *liberty in the abstract*, he defends *those liberties* which are enjoyed by particular individuals and groups in the face of an inequitable distribution of economic power. Tawney’s demands for the equalisation of economic power is predicated not on an abstract notion of liberty but rather on a pragmatic understanding. For Tawney, (in the absence of fellowship which ensures social harmony), such an equalisation will serve as an insurance against a definition of liberty which allows, in the name of freedom, the economically powerful to determine the economic lives of their fellows. ... “Freedom for the strong”, he warns, “is oppression for the weak”.ⁱⁱⁱ Again, it may be argued that Tawney’s pragmatic judgement recognises that when men are equal, fellowship is possible. Equality, for Tawney, then, is not only a defence mechanism against the powerful; it promotes social harmony and encourages co-operation.

Tawney concedes that inequality of power is not necessarily inimical to liberty. In some circumstances, he argues, it is the necessary condition for any effective action. Yet, he submits, ... “inequality of power may be a menace, for power which is sufficient to use,

ⁱ *Equality*, p.228.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.228.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.164.

is sufficient to abuse". It is necessary, he insists against the accusations of those who warn of the coercion and suppression of the egalitarian state, that ... "political power must rest ultimately on (democratic) consent, and that its exercise must be limited by rules of (democratic) law".ⁱ

As for economic liberty, Tawney insists, the mass of mankind pass their working lives under the direction of ... "a hierarchy of power". This ... "business oligarchy", he asserts, "compels by *force majeure* their reluctant obedience. Men and women in such a condition, he argues, cannot be said to be in possession of freedom, for freedom is always relative to power".ⁱⁱ Political arrangements may be such as to check the excess of political power; yet, he argues, they may not be strong enough to resist that economic oppression which constrains to civil liberty. A democratic society, Tawney insists, must be capable of controlling the conduct of those powerful in its economic affairs, which he submits is ... "the economic analogy of political freedom".ⁱⁱⁱ Liberty, he asserts, ... "when it is construed realistically ... implying not merely a minimum of civil or political rights", ensures that ... "the economically weak will not be at the mercy of the economically strong". When, he insists, the control of economic life will be amenable in the last resort to the will of all, a large measure of equality so far from being inimical to Liberty, is essential to it". Liberty, in conditions which ... "impose co-operative rather than merely individual effort" ... "is in fact equality in action".^{iv} For Tawney then, equality not only ratifies his understanding of liberty 'realistically construed', it extends fellowship. All men in such circumstances, he claims, are not only equally protected against the abuse of power, they are also equally entitled, he submits, ... "to insist that power shall be used, not for personal, but for the general advantage".^v

ⁱ *Equality*, p.165.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.167.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.167.

^{iv} *Ibid*, p.168.

^v *Ibid*, p.168.

A further criticism of equality may be defined in the distinction between negative and positive liberty. The egalitarians argue, Letwin insists, that to ... "deprive a few unwilling rich benefactors" of the liberty to spend their income as they choose because of redistributive taxation, is offset by the enhancement of liberty of the many beneficiaries. This "explaining away" Letwin argues, is to "confuse liberty to do something with the ability or power to do it".ⁱ NB

For Letwin, then, this deprivation of the unrestricted right to distribute, or not distribute wealth implies an infringement of liberty. It constitutes, in essence, a definition of freedom as simply the right of an individual to define, and act without restraint, in accordance with what he or she perceives as his or her self-interest. It is a definition of negative liberty which some have argued is predicated "on the crude concept, that freedom is the absence of external obstacles, physical or legal".ⁱⁱ It is a definition devoid even of the libertarian proviso that while freedom implies the minimal constraint on individual freedom of action, it also demands for each individual an equal freedom which allows for the exercise of individual liberty in so far as such exercise does not infringe on the equal liberty of others.

ⁱ *Against Equality*, p.4.

NB While difference "between the liberty to do something and the ability to do so" may be as Letwin insists, often confused by some egalitarians, it can often result in inequity. Sharon Dubb (aged nine) is, as her right, a pupil at her local state school. Her father, Henry, thinks she is at a disadvantage because there are thirty five children in her class. He would like to send Sharon to Roedean (where there are twenty in a class) and he is at a liberty to do so. However, since he cannot afford the fees, his liberty is curtailed by lack of economic power. Furthermore, as Raymond Plant argues, "there is a closer link between freedom and ability than the critic will admit. It is surely the case that a general ability to do X is a necessary condition of settling whether someone is free to do" If I asked, Professor Plant asserts "if people were free to fly before the invention of aeroplanes the question would be meaningless. People are only free or unfree to fly if people are able to fly. If being able to do X is a necessary condition of being free to do X" Professor Plant concludes, "there cannot be a categorical distinction between freedom and ability". see *Why Social Justice? Labour and The New Right*, Raymond Plant, Fabian Society Pamphlet 556, Feb 1993, p.6.

ⁱⁱ *Thinking About Liberty*, Fred Rosen, Inaugural Lecture. University College London, Nov. 1990, Professor Rosen, quoting Chas Taylor, p.3. of Published Lecture.

Tawney however, since he asserts that in "England, liberty and equality have usually been considered antithetic",ⁱ he is anxious to define the meaning of equality. For Tawney, equality "implies the deliberate acceptance of social restraints upon individual expansion".ⁱⁱ For the sake of the public good it demands public action to prevent "sensational extremes of wealth and power".^{NB} It means, too, that equal consideration be extended to each individual in respect of the distribution of those "goods" which allow for a life of self-respect and dignity. It serves also to endorse such social arrangements as will provide to each individual the equal opportunity to develop to the fullest extent their intellectual, spiritual, and physical capacities. As for liberty, Tawney insists, if it means "that every individual shall be free, according to his opportunities, to indulge without limiting his appetite (for either wealth or power) it is clearly incompatible, not only with economic and social, but also with civil and political equality."ⁱⁱⁱ If this meaning of liberty is accepted, Tawney suggests, "it is possible that equality is not to be contrasted with liberty, but only with this particular interpretation of it".^{iv} It is this interpretation which allows for the pursuit of individual ends without consideration of the social, economic or political consequences, which Tawney rejects. To Letwin's complaint that egalitarians "confuse the liberty to do something with the ability or power to do so", he would argue that liberty can only exist in so far as it is limited by rules which ensure that the pursuit of individual or even factional ambition does not create a society "in which freedom for some is not slavery for others". For Tawney, there is no confusion; they are both liberties although a formal liberty which grants every citizen the legal right to do something without the practical power and ability to do so, is not in effect an equal liberty since lack of economic power may constrain its effective exercise by those without economic resources. Certainly, legislation which proclaims formal liberty and the political

ⁱ *Equality*, p.164.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.164.

^{NB} *It must be noted that Tawney's understanding of equality calls for a curb on "sensational extremes of wealth and income". It does not demand the unattainable equality of wealth and income which Professor Letwin suggests is the objective of egalitarian philosophy.*

ⁱⁱⁱ *Equality*, p.164.

^{iv} *Ibid*, p.164.

rights of each individual is desirable. Yet, Tawney argues, while liberty is interpreted as exclusively providing to all an equal security against oppression by agents of the state or as a share in its government", it does not provide protection "against those with economic power who exercise a preponderant influence on the economic life of the rest of society".ⁱ Equality, for Tawney does not restrain liberty; he argues that the fundamental idea of liberty is power: the power to control one's life, which, he insists, is a necessary condition for a life of self-respect and human dignity. Equality, then, entails not only a redistribution of wealth and income, it requires also the redistribution of power, both economic and political. Without such redistribution, both liberty and equality may be enshrined in law but remain ineffectual in practice. The liberty which allows for the free exercise of legitimate rights which do not impinge on the rights of others is not constrained by equality; it is strengthened and extended by it.

To Professor Letwin's allegation that egalitarians confuse the meaning of liberty, Tawney argues that libertarians are equally confused as to its meaning. Their 'confusion', he suggests, may have alarming social consequences.

... "It is, often assumed by the privileged classes, that when the state refrains from intervening, the condition which remains as a result of its inaction is liberty. In reality, what frequently remains is not liberty but tyranny." When steps to diminish equality are denounced as infringements of freedom, the first question to be answered, he warns, is "Freedom for whom?".ⁱⁱ

Yet, for Tawney, this warning is inextricably intertwined with another question; freedom to do what? There is, he insists, "no such thing as freedom in the abstract, divorced from the realities of a particular time and place". NB Freedom, he argues,

ⁱ *Equality*, p.168.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.228.

NB This judgement is shared by Edmund Burke: "Abstract liberty", he proposes "like other mere abstractions, is not to be found". *Speech on Conciliation with America* (22 March, 1775).

involves the power to choose between alternatives which are real, attainable, not merely nominal. For Tawney, freedom demands that the political, economic and social institutions of society are so organised as to make this power effective and these chosen alternatives attainable. It must, therefore, be a freedom which, each individual, (within the structures of democratically agreed restraints) can equally and effectively exercise, to which each have an equal right. Claims to freedom then, must be tempered by an understanding of a definition of freedom which, Tawney insists, is both “practical and realistic” and which he sets out clearly ... “It is the ability to do, or refrain from doing things, at a definite moment, in definite circumstances, or it means nothing at all”.ⁱ Freedom, then, in its most positive sense is that of a man being “his own master”, which, Alan Ryan insists, quoting Isaiah Berlin, “is not a concept of liberty, *but the concept of liberty itself*”.ⁱⁱ

Professor Letwin insists that egalitarians, in the face of an accusation that equality and liberty necessarily clash in the context of an enforced distribution of resources, either resort to evasive answers, or bluntly declare equality to be the higher value. Tawney, however, is neither evasive nor dogmatic. He would endorse John Charvet’s perception that “the principles of freedom and equality are as much opposed to each other as they require each other”.ⁱⁱⁱ Yet, ultimately Tawney’s definition of liberty presents a challenge. Freedom he insists may be gauged by “whether the range of alternatives open to ordinary men,^{NB} and the capacity of the latter to follow their own preferences, in choosing between them, have or have not, been increased by measures correcting inequalities or neutralising their effects.”^{iv} Tawney concedes that an answer to all the issues cannot be

ⁱ *Equality*, p.228.

ⁱⁱ ‘*Liberty And Socialism*’, Alan Ryan, *see Fabian Essays In Socialist Thought*, edited by Ben Pimlott, 1984, p.103.

ⁱⁱⁱ *A Critique Of Freedom And Equality*, John Charvet, *see Introduction*, Cambridge University Press, 1981.

^{NB} Tawney’s use of the word, *men*, when he should use the words *men and women* is disconcerting to contemporary egalitarians. It is a point considered below in reference to Anne Phillips critical essay, ‘*Fraternity*’ (1984)’. *see concluding section of this thesis*.

^{iv} *Equality*, p.229.

given in general terms. Yet, he argues, on any particular issue, if, employing this particular definition, “an affirmative reply can be given, liberty and equality can live as friends, if a negative one, they are condemned to be foes.”ⁱ Tawney’s choice is unambiguous, “Liberty is the principle good”; it must not be sacrificed to equality, or stability, diversity, economic efficiency or any other ideal. Yet, if Tawney’s commitment to liberty is uncompromising, it is also firmly intertwined with his demand for equality. Equality, for Tawney, requires more than an equitable distribution of material “goods”: it demands, also, an equalisation of economic and political power. Since, with equal power, a realistic and practical choice becomes real and attainable, not merely nominal. Furthermore, Tawney’s definition of liberty rejects the narrow interpretation that atomistic man be allowed to pursue his own interests free from coercion or constraints. Liberty, he holds must be supported by such social, political and economic arrangements as will ensure a distribution of power which will allow each individual to participate equally in its effective exercise.

Yet Tawney’s call for effective rights to freedom extends beyond the warnings that within industrial society “a hierarchy of authority” ... “consciously or unconsciously exercises a decisive influence on countless human lives.”ⁱⁱ It extends, too, beyond the perception that such a hierarchy, may, in its own interest, act arbitrarily and autocratically. Tawney’s demands for liberty are inspired not only by an understanding of the value of freedom but also by a passionate attachment to what he perceives to be its ultimate purpose ... “A society is free in so far, and only in so far”, he asserts in the final paragraph of EQUALITY, “as, within limits set by nature, knowledge, and resources, its institutions and policies are such as to enable all its members to grow to their full stature, and do their duty as they see it”.ⁱⁱⁱ This emphasis on self development, on community duty undertaken by responsible and committed citizens, is crucial to Tawney’s entire

ⁱ *Equality*, p.229.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.230.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, *Epilogue*, (1938 - 1950), see the 1964 Edition.

philosophy. Liberty, he insists, must create the conditions for a life worthy of human beings. It must provide each individual with an equal opportunity to participate fully and responsibly in the affairs of society. This emphasis on individual development, and individual responsibility determined by individual conscience, may be seen as a manifestation of the Protestant ethic which demands of man, that, before God, he accepts responsibility for his action. Yet, for Tawney, this same ethic, while it encourages individual development and individual responsibility also seeks, in the name of Christian fellowship, "to reconcile individual self-development with communal solidarity".ⁱ Liberty, then, is not to be construed as absence of coercion or license to unconstrained acquisition but as the wellspring of that spirit of mutual obligation and social co-operation which, Tawney insists, are essential ingredients of community. "The opportunity to lead a life worthy of human beings", which, Tawney insists, is needlessly confined to a privileged minority, will, by the liberty furnished by an equalisation of economic, political and social power, be extended, so that those 'goods' which make for a life of human dignity may be more equitably distributed. "An action which causes such opportunities to be more widely shared", Tawney argues, "is therefore twice blessed, it not only subtracts from inequality, but adds to freedom".ⁱⁱ

The anti-egalitarian concern for equality under the law is made manifestly clear by Frederick Hayek. While Professor Hayek allows that "every law restricts individual freedom to someone by altering the means people may use in the pursuit of their aims",ⁱⁱⁱ he proposes nevertheless, that "in a free society" under the Rule of Law, "everybody, including the government, is bound by recognised rules". Yet, Professor Hayek argues, egalitarian measures are motivated to achieve particular ends and the pursuit of such an end is capable of interfering with the recognised and established right of the individual. In

ⁱ This phrase is taken from David Miller's *Market, State and Community*. Miller employs it, (p.233.) with reference to "William Morris and other communarians of certain religious views". It seems an appropriate expression of Tawney's view.

ⁱⁱ *Equality Epilogue*, (1938 - 1950), see the 1964 Edition.

ⁱⁱⁱ *The Road to Serfdom*, F.A. Hayek, see: Chap. IV. Routledge, Kegan, Paul, 1944.

such circumstances, Hayek asserts, formal equality before the law is incompatible “with any activity of the government deliberately aiming at material and substantive equality of different people and that any policy aiming at a substantive ideal of distributive justice may lead to the destruction of the ‘Rule of Law’”.ⁱ In sum, for Professor Hayek, any measure which in the name of equality seeks to achieve a particular social end, will “necessarily and paradoxically” require treating individuals unequally.

The problems which arise in liberal democratic societies when, in an effort to implement the principles of liberty and equality, “these values clash” are pointed out by Geoffrey Marshall. The demands of equality and one sort of liberty, (the liberty to supply and associate), he acknowledges, reinforce each other. Yet, he postulates, “the demands of equality are potentially at odds with another sort of liberty (the liberty to withhold, withdraw or disassociate).ⁱⁱ He proposes as example circumstances involving segregation of races or classes which, he asserts, can be argued both in terms of the liberty of one particular race or class to associate, or not to associate, with another race or class. There is, it is supposed, Marshall suggests, “a sphere of private relationships which ought not to be subject to official enforcement provisions”.ⁱⁱⁱ Yet, he insists, the distinction between public or state discrimination, and private or individual discrimination, has been a difficult and disputed one. He warns of the difficulties which evolve from a departure from identity of treatment arising out of a concern for equality. Departures of treatment, he argues, are sometimes undertaken out of respect for the principle of equality; such departures seek to equalise individuals who are regarded as at a disadvantage in comparison with others. There are other departures, he insists, which reflect a deliberate and justifiable rejection of the claims of equality to satisfy the claim of “some other value such as liberty or security”.^{iv} Marshall recognises, too, that in the legal and moral arguments concerning the concept and the application of liberty there are similar

ⁱ *The Road to Serfdom*, F.A. Hayek, see: Chap. IV. Routledge, Kegan, Paul, 1944.

ⁱⁱ ‘Liberty under The Law’, Geoffrey Marshall, 1971, see *Against Equality*, p.207 / 225.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.218.

^{iv} *Ibid*, p.224.

temptations. He argues that because there is a general recognition that liberty does not mean unfettered licence, there has evolved a tendency to regard all restraints on freedom of action, as “part of the concept of liberty properly so called”. In these discriminations and restraints on equality and liberty, Marshall perceives a danger. For, he argues if all, or too many *justifiable* restraints and *justifiable* discriminations are fed into the ideas of equality and liberty, then the specific roles of equality, liberty, security and justice as distinct and “potentially clashing segments of morality, are obscured”.

Marshall, it must be agreed, has quite properly identified a tendency within liberal democratic societies to feed restraints and discriminations into the ideas of equality and freedom. If, as he suggests, these restraints and discriminations create the conditions for a “clash” between these values (a notion which John Charvet cogently addresses),^{NB1} then it is essential that these values be defined. Marshall defines equality concisely; it is, he proposes, “a matter of eliminating differences of treatment between persons which are based on irrelevant differences”. As for freedom, while Marshall does not define it, he allows in respect of the claims of equality that restraints on actions may sometimes be justified in terms of protecting the liberty of others.^{NB2}

Tawney would concede Marshall’s succinct definition of equality, for although his own definition encompasses a more eclectic vision, he argues, as does Marshall, that every departure from equality demands a relevant and authentic justification. Yet the values of freedom and equality are expressed within a social structure; they are not

NB1 *A Critique of Freedom and Equality*, John Charvet, Cambridge University Press, 1981.

NB2 Tawney would certainly not dispute Marshall’s perception that restraints on individual action are sometimes justified in respect of the liberty of others. Marshall’s fear, however, that too many justifiable restraints and justifiable discriminations may be fed into the ideas of equality and liberty to the detriment of other values must be seen as a classic-libertarian postulation. Under the ‘rule Of Law’ in “a free country”, Professor Hayek proposes, “every law restricts individual freedom to some extent by altering the means which people may use in pursuit of their aims”. Yet, Professor Hayek insists in the name of individualism and libertarian principles, ... “it is essential that the discretion left to the executive organ wielding coercive power should be reduced as much as possible”. See *The Road To Serfdom*, F.A. Hayek, 1944. Routledge, Kegan Paul, see p.54, 1976 edition.

abstractions. Many of the freedoms held by anti-egalitarian libertarians to be imperilled by the restraints of equality, Tawney argues, “commonly consist, within industrial capitalist societies, of the rights of individuals and groups to make and execute decisions relating to their economic interests.”ⁱ They are rights, he insists, concerned with the acquisition and the free disposal of property anterior to, and independent of, any service which may be rendered to society. These fiercely defended rights, he argues, extended without responsibility or obligation, “have no standards for discriminating between those types of private property which are legitimate and those which are not”.ⁱⁱ They are rights grounded in a Lockean perception of property which, endorsed by libertarian theorists, acclaims the possession, acquisition and accumulation of property as the very root of freedom. For Tawney this is a freedom which is not exercisable by the majority of the population. This majority driven by the necessity of earning a living wage receives no dividends from investment or from property yields. They live within a hierarchy of power from which they are excluded; without capital, without ownership and accumulated assets, they are economically powerless. Tyranny already exists, Tawney proposes, in a society in which the majority are precluded by lack of economic power from the control and the direction of their own lives. Citing Professor Pollard, he insists, “oppression is no less oppressive when it is derived from superior wealth, than when it relies on a preponderance of physical force”.ⁱⁱⁱ

Tawney, however, is not content *simply* to constrain the economic power of the economically powerful, nor is he willing to transfer such power either to an omnipotent state, or to those who “appear to conceive the best life for men is one in which they are regimented by experts”. A social philosophy inspired by the ideals of individual self-development and a responsible and co-operating citizenry, cannot transfer the control over economic life to ‘police collectivists’, or well-intentioned ‘paternalists’. Such

ⁱ *Equality*, p.228.

ⁱⁱ *The Acquisitive Society*, p.55.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Equality*, p. 228.

transfers of economic power serve merely to replace the hegemony of Capital with another equally oppressive power. For Tawney, the answer lies in a redistribution and equalisation of that economic power which in capitalist societies “involves a concentration of ownership and the rights and authority which ownership confers”.ⁱ For Tawney, the conditions of economic freedom demand a redistribution of economic power which will end the “autocracy of the workshop” and the “dictatorship of the property owner”.ⁱⁱ They demand, too, the “intelligent co-operation of contentious human beings”, moved to co-operation “by mutual confidence alone”. It demands too, that in democratic consultation economic power be employed responsibly, “for ends that are not personal, but public”.ⁱⁱⁱ

Certainly, egalitarians must ensure that demands for equality do not compromise other values, other ‘goods’. They are obliged to defend those institutions and practices which allow them and their fellow citizens to function as self-determining human beings. They must evaluate between those constraints on individual actions which are either justified or unjustified in the name of individual freedom. To Professor Frankel’s assertion that “equality of opportunity remains a demand that we can only evaluate if we ask” ... “Equality for what?”, must be added the equally relevant questions, freedom for whom? Freedom for what? Tawney’s evaluation of freedom above all political ‘goods’ is uncompromising. Yet it is a freedom which he is prepared to define as the “power of choice between alternatives, a choice which is real not merely nominal” ... “between alternatives which exist in fact, not merely on paper”.^{iv} This definition is fundamental to an evaluation of what constitutes, in respect of the claims of equality, a justifiable restraint or discrimination. This evaluation, Tawney insists, must be accompanied by an essential question ... “it is whether the range of alternatives” open to ordinary men and women, and the capacity of the latter to follow their own preferences in choosing between them, have,

ⁱ *Equality*, p.161.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.179.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.188.

^{iv} *Ibid*, p.228.

or have not been increased by measures correcting inequalities or neutralising their effects”.ⁱ Yet, beyond the liberties, which Tawney argues, are fundamental within a free society, (liberties secured by law to all citizens, liberties which constitute the principles on which the State is founded,) are other liberties, less crucial in their content, narrower in their range. Such liberties, he insists, must be regarded as secondary. They may be extended or curtailed according to circumstances; they are desirable conveniences, but they do not constitute liberties essential to the principles of a democratic State. These are freedoms primarily invested in the right to property: they are concerned, Tawney asserts with the earning and expenditure of incomes. They are freedoms connected with the acquisition and administration of income yielding property, the employment to the best advantage of profitable assets”.ⁱⁱ There are however, and Tawney is ready to identify them, fundamental and inviolable liberties, ... “freedom of worship, of religious organisation, freedom of speech, study, teaching, and writing, of movement, choice of occupation, freedom to meet and associate for political and other purposes”.ⁱⁱⁱ

Clearly, economic power has a special significance in industrial societies; it derives from the concentration of ownership and the rights which ownership confers. It allows a small number of men to take decisions upon which the conduct of economic affairs, and therefore, the lives of their fellow men depend. While the rights to equal liberty are enshrined in law, it is only the economically powerful who can exercise many of them.^{NB} Furthermore, such rights which are proclaimed in the interest of *every* citizen, in effect allows the powerful to exercise power to the disadvantage of the powerless, to the detriment of social cohesion. For Tawney, therefore, liberty is not impaired by

ⁱ *Equality*, p.229.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.228.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.229.

^{NB} Tawney does not directly address the question of equality before the law. He acknowledges that within liberal democratic societies every citizen has an equal right, formally enshrined in law, to engage in legal action. It may be argued, however, that lack of economic resources which Tawney identifies as lack of economic power, precludes some citizens from the exercise of this formal ‘right’.

democratic actions which seek to diminish, remove or neutralise economic and social inequalities. Such actions, he insists, do not curtail liberty, rather they augment it.

Tawney's concern with the differences between what the citizen is legally *permitted* and what he is effectively *able* to do, underlines his understanding of liberty and equality. Liberty, the control over one's life, he contends, cannot be the prerogative of the economically powerful who have invested the privilege to certain freedoms with a moral status. Indeed, it may be argued that within industrial capitalism with its emphasis on acquisition, this moral status is accepted even by those who are the victims, rather than the beneficiaries of these legal, but often non-exercisable, rights. Certainly, these rights do not always, in practice, allow equal liberty. The distribution of political and economic power establishes an imbalance of those options available between those with economic resources and those who through economic necessity are forced to accept the options offered to them by the economically powerful. For Tawney, liberty is not threatened by restraints imposed on those groups and individuals whose economic power allows them a decisive and coercive influence over the lives of their fellow citizens. For Tawney, those who in the name of freedom oppose such restraints, are not upholding liberty, they are perpetuating tyranny. They are, in the name of the generally accepted abstract principle of nominal rights, endorsing particular and concrete privileges. Liberty, as Tawney perceives it, demands more than a proclamation of equal rights; it demands more than the absence of restraints. It demands an equalisation of power.

Tawney, as early as 1912, had recognised this requirement. The "fundamental idea of liberty", he wrote in his *Commonplace Book*, "is power". "Power to control the conditions of one's own life."ⁱ This power, he recognises is ambiguous ... it is identified with political power, and political power is treated in a category by itself". Certainly, Tawney agrees, "political authority is a genuine form of power", but, he argues, it is not

ⁱ *The Commonplace Book*, entry for May 4, 1912.

the only form. Power, he insists, "may be defined as the capacity of an individual or a group of individuals, to modify the conduct of other individuals or groups" Men exercise power, he submits, only when they are allowed to exercise it by other men. Its "ultimate seat", he asserts, "is in the soul" ⁱ ... "it rests on hope and fear", ... "its foundations vary from age to age" ... it has had source in religion, in military strength in a myriad of forms. It is not the case, therefore, he argues, disputing the Marxist theory of Historical Materialism, "that *all* forms of power are in the last resort economic". Nevertheless, he concedes, since economic interests are the "most generally continuous in their operation", ... "most forms of power have economic roots" and produce economic consequences. This *economic* power, Tawney insists, is a source of tyranny for through the consequent inequality of economic power, society is faced with "friction and the recurrent breakdown of the economic mechanism".ⁱⁱ

In certain respects, Tawney's proposals for a Functional Society share an affinity with the Guild Socialism as projected by S.G. Hobson, A.J. Penty or A.R. Orage. They share, too, some common ground with the co-operative theories of G.D.H. Cole and Hilaire Belloc's notion of 'distributism', although Tawney would reject the strong traditionalist and hierarchical elements of Belloc's system.^{NB} In the early 1920's, Tawney declared a broad sympathy for such schemes "... though possibly an unorthodox Gild (sic) Socialist", he stated, and certainly disagreeing with some of its opponents ... "I welcome it because it has drawn English Socialism into the mainstream of the socialist tradition

ⁱ *Equality*, p.159.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.159.

^{NB} See *Restoration Of The Guild System*. A.J. Penty, 1906. see also S.G. Hobson *National Guilds and other works*, *The Servile State*, Hilaire Belloc (1912), G.D.H. Cole, *Guild Socialism Restated and other works*. see also the writings of R.A. Orage, editor of the literary and political journal *New Times*, who also wrote for G.K. Chesterton's 'Distributor League'. See Rodney Barker, *Political Ideas In Modern Britain*. Methuen & Co, 1978. p98-104 passim.
 Curiously, Orage, an early Fabian and member of the Independent Labour Party "became an ardent Theosophist, a disciple of Gurdjieff." Holbrook Jackson, the literary historian and critic (1874-1948) wrote in *The Windmill*, Vol III, No. 11, 1948, that Orage wanted "to create a Nietzsche circle in which Plato and Blatavsky, Fabianism and Hinduism, Shaw, Wells and Edward Carpenter should be blended, with Nietzsche as the catalytic". see Madame Blavatsky's *Baboon*. Peter Washington, Secker and Warburg, 1993, p202.

which has as its object not merely the alleviation of poverty but an attack on the theory of the functionless society.”ⁱ

How, then, in a democratic society, to protect the citizen from the inequalities of power which restrain individual freedom? How to ensure the preservation of that liberty which allows for individual initiative and autonomous decision? How to abolish an economic system of reward without contribution, in which the power of property perpetuates a hegemony of capital, a hierarchy of class? For Tawney, a redistribution of economic power secured by democratic process will end this hegemony, destroy this hierarchy, prevent the illegitimate use of economic power, and, in the name of equality, extend individual liberty. Such democratic process requires democratically agreed laws which can be neither immaculate nor written in stone. They must respond to changes in power relationships, to changes in the political, social and economic structures; they must be subject to new interpretations, responsive to new technologies; to each of the constantly changing conditions of mankind. No society can resolve these problems to the full and permanent satisfaction of all parties. Yet in a community dedicated to the extension of liberty and equality, an attempt to implement such legislation, to enforce it, to improve it, is a democratic and moral duty. Legislation so created, must give grounds for the exercise of individual enterprise, must increase the options and the opportunities open to every citizen just as it must protect society from the excessive or predatory exercise of power. It must be legislation which will uphold the right of each individual to pursue his own legitimate ends: a right which John Charvet insists, “is necessarily, an equal right”.ⁱⁱ Yet such legislation must not be content to define freedom only in terms of an absence of external obstacles, physical or legal. It must be legislation which is balanced by the understanding “that all that makes existence worthwhile to anyone, depends on the restraint on the actions of other people” but it must be guided also by “the principle that the sole end for which mankind is warranted individually or collectively in

ⁱ *The Commonplace Book, entry for Aug 9, 1914.*

ⁱⁱ *Critique of Equality and Freedom. John Charvet, p.166/167.*

interfering with any of their number is self protection".ⁱ It must be legislation imbued with the perception that the individuals rights are rights to which he or she is entitled as a member of a community, and only as such. It must be legislation aware that in its duty to safeguard liberty, it may be necessary to impose obstacles which react not only against the illegitimate interest of the powerful, but also against individuals or groups who infringe upon the rights of others or threaten the social peace. It demands such legislation as will provide to all those facilities which he ironically reminds Burke, "are necessary to all of nature's children", ... "light, fresh air warmth, rest and food".ⁱⁱ

But what if, as Tawney fears freedom is pursued paternalistically, granted from above by an intellectual elite? For Robert Nisbet the notion of individual liberty is menaced by "egalitarian intellectuals", who not only assume to instruct the individual as to "where his own good lies", but seek also to persuade a population against its conscious will, that it is in fact, living in immorality and injustice". Such a mission, Nisbet suggests, is "messianic", "it requires not only the politicisation" "of the question of income inequality, "but also an alteration in people's basic assumptions about the extent they are responsible to their neighbours and their neighbours, for them". This problem, Nisbet asserts, confronted "St Paul, and a long line of Christian missionaries after him, down to the Berrigans".ⁱⁱⁱ It is, Nisbet insists, "a formidable problem" which finds expression in what contemporary zealots preach as "the only true good", the gospel of equality. Certainly, for Tawney, it is a moral problem: it is bound up not only with the rights of the individual, the boundaries of government, the obligations of citizenship; it encompasses also a vision of an ethical community. It is concerned not only with the rights of the individual and the obligations of the collective, but ultimately with the moral direction of society.

ⁱ Professor Fred Rosen, quoting Charles Taylor and indirectly John Stuart Mill. see Professor Rosen's Inaugural Lecture, *Thinking about Liberty*. U.C.L. 1990.

ⁱⁱ *Equality*, p.136.

ⁱⁱⁱ *The Pursuit of Equality*, Robert Nisbet, 1974, see *Against Equality*, p.127.

Tawney is confronted with three problems. First, how to avoid the gross inequality which might result when a people is coerced into, or paternalistically provided with, equality? Second, is power genuinely equalised within a society in which ultimate power is concentrated in the hands of a state no matter how democratic that state may be? Third, if as Tawney argues a moral social order is a necessary condition of equality, will not its creation invade the freedom of dissidents? The first question is answered by Tawney's universally acknowledged social democratic credentials which reject both state coercion and Fabian paternalism. For Tawney, the answer to the second question resides in the notion of a functional and decentralised economic, political and social order which would, through democratic measures, achieve an equalisation of power. Finally, in reference to the invasion of the freedom of the dissenting, Tawney's answer is unequivocal. Socialism and a moral order, he insists, must only be achieved by democratic process; it must never sacrifice "the supreme goods of civil and political liberty in whose absence no Socialism worthy of the name can breathe".ⁱ

There are, Tawney argues, some laws and traditions which serve not to unite men in co-operative purpose, but to divide them in competitive striving. Such circumstances, Tawney insists, demand a re-examination of the ethical assumptions of society as well as its accepted doctrines, values, codes and practices. All these must submit to a judgement, Tawney declares, which assesses a civilisation by ... "the institutions which it creates, the relations between human beings which these institutions establish, and the type of character, individual and social which is fostered by those relations".ⁱⁱ A society in which men and women, confront each other in a competitive struggle of self interest, cannot, in Tawney's view, create institutions, or human relationships in accordance with moral principles. Such a society does not foster those relations which are essential to social cohesion, individual development, and fellowship. It is, indeed, these beliefs, which give moral content to Tawney's egalitarian philosophy so that Nisbet's allegation that the ideal

ⁱ 'Christianity and the Social Revolution', 1935, see *The Attack*, pp.165.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.169.

of equality “has all the requisites of becoming a religious idea” is, in Tawney’s case, justified. In a society concerned with “the manipulation of forces and interests”, Tawney’s commitment to a political philosophy which insists that society should be not “an economic mechanism” but a community of wills” ... “capable of being inspired by devotion to common ends” is indeed, “a religious one”.ⁱ

Tawney, then, contends that the causes of what Nisbet recognises as the “present disaffection”, “the spreading alienation”, the social unrest are “not simply economic, nor party-political, but moral”.ⁱⁱ They evolve out of a deeply held conviction that the external arrangements of society appear to contradict what men feel to be morally right. Men feel too, that these arrangements, since they result from human action, are capable of alteration. Where Nisbet quotes De Tocqueville to support his claim that in those societies which have eradicated the most blatant inequalities, “the slightest inequalities are marked enough to be noticed”,ⁱⁱⁱ Tawney, concerned with what Nisbet designates disapprovingly as “the politics of virtue”, calls into question “the moral attitude produced in society by the present system.”^{iv} It is this rejection of the prevailing moral attitudes which actuates Tawney’s perception of liberty, just as it causes the greatest problem in his defence of it.

Equality, Despotism And Coercion

Now, in the last decade of the twentieth century, political philosophers of both left and right are confronted with the irrefutable evidence of the barbaric despotism of totalitarianism. They are, then, properly concerned in the name of justice and freedom, to contain the authority of government and are, with reason, fearful of despotic power. Equality, libertarian theorists insist, threatens freedom, its creation demands coercion.

ⁱ *The Acquisitive Society*, p.227.

ⁱⁱ *The Commonplace Book*. entry for Oct. 6, 1912.

ⁱⁱⁱ *The Pursuit of Equality*, Robert Nisbet, see *Against Equality*, p.126.

^{iv} *The Commonplace Book*, entry for Oct. 6, 1912.

They see freedom as something belonging to the individual which must be defended against the intrusion of the state. Coercive action by the state, they argue, is illegitimate when applied to inhibit the conduct of the individual in what they identify as the “private sphere”. By contrast, they contend, egalitarians see the state as the central instrument of social justice and individual development. The egalitarians, libertarians submit, will, through this all-powerful agency, curtail the freedom of the individual in the interest of equality. For libertarians, freedom consists “in that condition of society in which the coercion of some by others is reduced as much as possible”.ⁱ The task of a policy of freedom, they argue, is to minimise coercion and its harmful effects even if, it cannot be completely eliminated. In a free society, libertarians submit, the state will limit its powers of coercion. It will act, within the rule of law, to uphold those rights which guarantee equally, to each individual the freedom to engage in the pursuit of legitimate ends. It will act, by the same rule of law, to frustrate those, who, in self-interest impinge on the rights of others.

Freedom to acquire and accumulate private property (within the rule of law) libertarians insist, must be recognised as an extension of the private sphere. In a free society, they argue, commercial competition in a free market, monitored by mutually agreed laws of contract and exchange, will protect the individual from the power of a coercive state. Freedom, they assert, demands resistance to coercion which they identify as the imposition of the arbitrary will of another (or others) by which the individual is “forced to act, not in accordance with a coherent plan of his or her own, but to serve the ends of another”. They reject, as dangerous, the egalitarian notion that liberty must be identified with the economic power. Once this identification is accepted, they assert, there is no limit to “the sophisms by which the attraction of the word liberty can be used to support measures which destroy individual liberty”.ⁱⁱ Where the state is all powerful, libertarians warn, the individual is obliged to forsake a chosen plan of action in what is

ⁱ *The Constitution Of Liberty*, F.A. Hayek, Routledge, 1960, p.12.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.16.

perceived as the interest of the collective. Such power, they insist, constrains individual freedom, reacts against individual initiative and impedes self-development. Such paternalism, even despotism, weakens that sense of personal responsibility which is a necessary condition of freedom.

In the tradition of von Humboldt, Lord Acton, Sir Henry Maine, Herbert Spencer, Frederick Hayek and other libertarian thinkers, Professor Letwin fears “the tyranny of the state”. It is not a fear exclusive to libertarians, indeed it is shared by Tawney and all democrats.^{NB} Nevertheless, Professor Flew warns “even the milder engineers of the soul” will establish a power elite which must by itself, in its total control over society, constitute “the greatest possible offence to any genuine ideal either of personal equality, or even of equality of outcome”.ⁱ J.R. Lucas is even more frightened of the consequences of egalitarianism, which he suggests, leads easily to totalitarianism, and a state apparatus of absolute power. If we abhor totalitarianism, he argues, “we must be prepared on occasion to rebut the presumptions of the egalitarians, and concede that not everything in our society can be justified”.ⁱⁱ Furthermore, Lucas insists, that within egalitarianism there is ... “a trend which is dangerous because it makes the state answerable for every social arrangement”, and, he warns, not everything is possible to the state, nor, he adds, “should it be”.ⁱⁱⁱ In the effort to create equality, Lucas argues (conceding the deficiencies of inequality) there is the danger of imposing a totalitarianism which represents a far greater evil than the evils which the egalitarians seek to eliminate”. John Charvet, too, in his concern to elaborate a coherent system of ethical thought in connection with the ideals of freedom and equality, warns that the notion of equality requires either the abolition of classes or, “the destruction of the necessary conditions for the free development of the

^{NB} George Orwell, who did not share Professor Letwin's anti-egalitarian views argued, “collectivism is not inherently democratic, but on the contrary, gives to a tyrannical minority such powers as the Spanish Inquisition never dreamed of”. Review of F.A. Hayek's *The Road to Freedom*. George Orwell, *Observer*. April 9, 1944. See *The Collected Essays Vol. III*, Secker Warburg, 1968, p. 118.

ⁱ ‘The Procrustean Ideal’, Antony Flew, 1978, see *Against Equality*, p 148/166.

ⁱⁱ ‘Against Equality Again’, J. R. Lucas, see *Against Equality*, p.78.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.78.

personality, ... the family”.ⁱ This judgement is echoed by Charles Frankel who also insists “if we want everyone to begin at the same place, we must, as Plato asserted, abolish the family”.ⁱⁱ Robert Nisbet is even more alarmist. Indeed, Nisbet has argued that the new Deal, in which governmental intervention sought to bring the United States out of the 1930’s Depression, was “the West’s first taste of Fascism”.ⁱⁱⁱ Nisbet warns, that “using the rhetoric of equality as window-dressing, power might pass to tyrants” ... “as it did to Augustus, Napoleon, Torquemada, or even Hitler”.

Whilst Tawney and the social democratic tradition have always been fiercely anti-totalitarian, attention must be paid to warnings against the all-powerful state. A state, answerable to no one, may in the interest of equality or any other proclaimed end, impose a set of values and promote a culture of obedience, which will not tolerate dissent. Such a state may proscribe the right of the individual or of particular groups to pursue chosen ends which the state judges, in the name of equality, to be against its interest. Certainly, history endorses Lucas’s submission that egalitarians, to satisfy egalitarian principles, have sometimes unwittingly created a totalitarianism which exceeded in evil, the evil they sought to end. Lucas, then, argues that to struggle for egalitarian principles is to expose society to the dangers of totalitarianism. Yet such an argument carried to its logical conclusion would not only have opposed the abolition of slavery on the grounds that it might lead to perpetual civil disobedience, but also have rejected adult suffrage because an electorate might ultimately endorse fascism, anarchy or totalitarian communism. This philosophy of leave ill-alone, appears to owe something to the Burkean understanding that those natural laws and entrenched customs which evolve out of historical process, may be imperilled by well-meaning yet unrealistic social theorists, who, in the name of progress, or social justice, seek to change the social order to the detriment of social stability. Moreover, such an understanding of ‘natural law’ can, in the name of stability,

ⁱ *A Critique of Freedom and Equality*, John Charvet. Cambridge University Press, 1969, p.186.

ⁱⁱ ‘Equality of Opportunity’, Charles Frankel, *see Against Equality*, p.186.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Conservatism*, Ted Honderich, Hamish Hamilton, 1990, p.112, quoting *Fascism*, Noel O’Sullivan, 1983, Dent, p.149.

discipline, and the preservation of the established order be used as a spurious justification to *impose* totalitarianism.

As for Lucas's warning that egalitarians may involuntarily sow the seeds of totalitarianism, Tawney, "the social democratic par excellence", like Henry Dubb will not lightly surrender those fundamental, constitutional, civil and political democratic rights so long and strenuously fought for. Furthermore, in Tawney's vision of an egalitarian, social democratic society, men and women will not be penalised for pursuing their own, legitimate, self-chosen ends. Such choice will be encouraged, individual talent will be fostered acknowledged and respected.

Tyranny and economic injustice, Tawney proclaims, are *both* abominations". Christians, he insists, are not compelled to choose between them; they can, and should, repudiate them both"ⁱ It is the essence of Christianity, he declares, that "when conscience and authority collide, it is to God, not to man that obedience is due".ⁱⁱ Totalitarianism, he asserts, regards loyalty to the State as the cardinal virtue and loyalty to principles which are repugnant to the State are liable to entail severe penalties, "which only the most heroic will venture to incur". The resulting subordination to official dictates, he argues, "is ruinous to the integrity of the soul". Capitalism, with its exploitive nature and its totalitarian rivals, he insists, are both in contradiction to Christian ethics, both he argues, "emphasise the supreme importance of material riches" ... "both have the characteristics of a counter-religion".ⁱⁱⁱ

Tawney abhors totalitarianism. He saw in the Soviet Union 'a dictatorship of the proletariat' that was indeed a dictatorship, tyrannous and repressive. He saw there an all-powerful state which ... "advertised police collectivism as not only a convenient device for

ⁱ 'Christianity and The Social Order', see *The Attack*, p. 172.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p. 171.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p. 165.

keeping the toilers on their toes, but also the last word in proletarian freedom”.ⁱ Tawney cannot accept a conception of ‘socialism’ which is ready to control and nationalise the means of production yet unwilling to cede the political power on which all else depends. Such a conception not only negates the purpose of Socialism which seeks to extend political power, equalise economic power and foster the spirit of co-operative participation in the industrial, social and economic life of the community. It replaces the old exploiting class with a new power-elite equally irremovable by action from below. It is a ‘Socialism’ which in the name of social justice imposes a hierarchy of authority, which suspends the liberties of the individual in what it claims is the interest of the collective. It is a ‘Socialism’ which will “put Dubb on a chain” and deprive him of “those fragments of liberty and equality” for which he has so fiercely fought. This rejection of such a ‘Socialism’ is an expression of Tawney’s belief that a democratic Socialism, (“the only socialism worth aspiring too”) depends “not on the impersonal forces beloved by doctrinaires, but on human minds and wills” ... “on the good sense pertinacity, nerve and resolution of the loveable, pig-headed, exasperating Dubb.”ⁱⁱ

As for German totalitarianism, Tawney castigates it as “political primitivism born in the mist of pre-history”.ⁱⁱⁱ It endorses a cult of force, fostered “a belief in violence; substantiated the ideal of “a community of culture for the mere physical relationship of the human herd”. It embraces “a half-tribal conception of national unity” and “repudiated as a gigantic aberration two thousand years of European history”. It denies the common humanity of man and replaced it with a savage dogma of race and intolerance. It has, Tawney accuses, attempted to eradicate Christianity, for in Christianity, he argues, “it recognises a creed which holds that one must obey God rather than man”.^{iv} Tawney’s rejection of the all-powerful German State rests, then, not only in its suppression of the values of liberty and equality. It rests, too, on a moral repugnance for any political system

ⁱ ‘Christianity and The Social Order’, see *The Attack*, p. 165.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.166.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Equality*, p.192.

^{iv} ‘Christianity and The Social Revolution’, see *The Attack*, p.174.

which “idealises the chief who represents the blood bond and persecutes the alien who is unprotected by blood brotherhood”.ⁱ Such a system must see in Christianity an irreconcilable enemy and it is Christianity which permeates Tawney’s philosophy. It is Christianity, too, which enjoins men to fellowship and commands them to “Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby, some have entertained angels unawares. (The Epistle of St Paul to the Hebrews 13:1).

Professor Letwin concedes that most egalitarians recognise that perfect equality is, or may be, unobtainable. They have, settled for a more confined and therefore defensible position. They argue, he insists, that equality is man-made, a product of human vice, of unsatisfactory and inequitable social arrangements. For egalitarians, he asserts, these badly fashioned social arrangements can be refashioned in the interest of equality. It is not, therefore, “the moral reform of individuals on which egalitarians rely to bring about equality. They pin their hopes”, Letwin insists, “on enforced equalisation by government”. Certainly Tawney commends those actions by which badly fashioned social arrangements have been refashioned in the interest of equality. He welcomes each step towards equality. It is his understanding of the purposes of equalisation and the goals of egalitarianism which distinguish his views from Professor Letwin’s.

In response to Letwin’s allegation that egalitarians will enforce equalisation by government legislation it may be argued that all government legislation is in a sense enforced. Even those laws which have the support of the majority are, if ignored by those who oppose them, enforced by government. Letwin’s terse assessment of the egalitarian position as “enforced equalisation by government” has ominous, even sinister implications and is in part simply rhetoric. Does he contend that a government inspired by such

ⁱ *Equality*, p. 192.

egalitarians as R.H. Tawney and Richard Titmuss would *enforce* equalisation?^{NB1} With what repressive measures does Letwin believe such a government would “compel or impose” equalisation? Indeed, to lump together all egalitarians as advocates of enforced equality fails to differentiate between The British Fabian Society and the Khmer Rouge, between George Lansbury and Pol Pot.

Nevertheless, as if to endorse Letwin’s argument, Professor Hayek has chosen as his target, not the economics of socialism “but the political and cultural nemesis which, he is convinced it entails”. Yet, Tawney argues, in Great Britain (in the third year of a Labour government) there is no need to fear for civil and political liberty. The sole security for the preservation of such liberties, Tawney argues, “is a public opinion which is determined to preserve them”.ⁱ There is no reason, he insists, placing his faith in the democratic institutions of Britain and Henry Dubb’s determination to defend them, to regard that security to be weakened merely because steps are being taken to extend to the whole population those privileges, economic and social, which have previously been enjoyed by a minority.^{NB2} As for civil liberty which Letwin regards as threatened by “egalitarian coercion”, Tawney argues that it, “depends on freedom of worship; freedom of speech and writing; freedom of meeting; freedom in the choice of occupations; and freedom to combine”.ⁱⁱ Political liberty, he proposes, depends on civil liberty, partly on the existence of constitutional arrangements for the maintenance of representative and

^{NB1} *It should be remembered that the Labour Government (1945-1951) introduced what were regarded as radical measures of redistribution and equalisation. Lord Beaverbrook saw St. George in chains, Sir Winston Churchill warned of a Gestapo. In the event there was no repression. Certainly no public resistance which compared to the Poll-Tax riots (1989-1990). Furthermore, to compound the riots the resistance to payment was unprecedented in contemporary British history. "In Scotland, during the collection year (1989-1990), 1,420,825 summary warrants for non, payment were taken out against the approximately 3 million people registered for the community charge" (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. COSLA, Edinburgh 1991). "By January 1992, an estimate of 7 million was given for the number of similar orders issued in England and Wales". (Independent, 23 January 1992). See 'Legitimacy in the United Kingdom: Scotland and the Poll Tax'. Rodney Barker, p.522. British Journal of Political Science, 1992.*

ⁱ 'Social Democracy in Britain', Tawney, 1949, see *The Radical Tradition*, p.165/166.

^{NB2} See *Social Democracy In Britain* R.H. Tawney, 1949. In this essay Tawney briefly addresses arguments advanced by Professor Hayek in *The Road To Serfdom*. Routledge, 1944.

ⁱⁱ *Social Democracy in Britain*, Tawney, 1949, see *The Radical Tradition*, p.165/166.

responsible Government. While Tawney confesses that he regards “confident predictions from history, as mostly sciolism”, he nevertheless, insists that while it is not certain, “it is probable, that Socialism in England can be achieved by methods proper to democracy”. It is certain, however, he concludes, that “it cannot be achieved by another”, nor even if it could”, he warns, should *the supreme goods of civil and political liberty*, be part of the price”ⁱ

The State, Tawney concedes, addressing the fears of Professor Hayek, is a powerful and important instrument: “but it is an instrument, and nothing more. Fools will use it, when they can, for foolish ends, and criminals for criminal ends. Sensible men will use it for the ends which are sensible and decent. We, in England, have repeatedly remade the State”. ... “Why assume despotism?” ... “Why should we be afraid of it?”ⁱⁱ Yet Tawney argues “history is a stage where forces which are within human control can contend and co-operate with forces which are not”.ⁱⁱⁱ His prediction from history, therefore, are tempered by his experience of what he defines as the “historian’s task”. Idealism and the highest aspirations of mankind, history teaches, have sometimes degenerated into tyranny.

Equality And The Right To Property

The right to acquire, accumulate, inherit and bequeath property within a free market system is, for the critics of equality, a necessary condition of freedom. Indeed, if “the roots of libertarianism are defined as a categorical opposition between the Individual and the State”,^{iv} then, for libertarians, an attack on property is an attack on liberty. The equal right to property, secured by law, they argue, resides in that “private sphere”,

ⁱ ‘Social Democracy in Britain’, Tawney, 1949, see *The Radical Tradition*, p165/166.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p. 164.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, p,274.

^{iv} *A Review Of The Rise And Decline Of Western Liberalism*, Anthony Arblaster, Basil Blackwell, 1984, see Raymond Williams, *The Guardian*, Sept 21, 1984.

which, in the interest of individual liberty, must remain free from state interference. Ownership, they argue, is a means of self authentication; private property, they insist, is a concrete expression of enterprise and the just deserts of personal application. The desire to bequeath property, they argue, derives from a natural instinct to transmit the economic benefits of a life's work to one's children.^{NB} The instinct, they contend, is both socially and economically beneficial; it encourages prudence and diligence to the economic advantage of the entire society. The right of inheritance, it is submitted, allows for "the preservation of the heritage of civilization". The family function of "passing on standards of education and traditional values", it is proposed, "is closely tied up with the possibility of transmitting material goods".ⁱ Individuals, it is conceded, differ in capacities; some, it is acknowledged, will acquire more property than others. Coercive laws, exercised in the interest of equality, will destroy initiative, discourage invention, react against productive efficiency and endanger democratic process.

Indeed, Professor Harry G. Johnson warns that while "Democracy is necessary for the preservation of personal freedom", "government has been increasingly extending itself into the economic sphere", counterpoising the rights of property and specifically the right of the owner of property to the enjoyment of income from such property. There has evolved, Johnson alleges, a system which allows the right to vote about the disposition of other people's property based on the single fact that the voter is a "human being, qualified by law to the rights of franchise". The justification for democratic government Johnson argues, is that "people must have equal political rights as *persons*"; the dilemma, he

^{NB} Michael Quinn identifies a contradiction in the libertarian argument. "If the fruits of an individual's efforts, good or bad, are automatically secured to their children, initially in a form of a favourable developmental environment and then by the direct transfer of entitlement to property", he argues, "it is difficult to discern how a model of justice which seeks to reward free individuals on the basis of their individual deserts can be maintained". Since the generation of desert-bearing talents and capacities is not an autonomous process "immune from determination by differential contextual conditions", Quinn proposes, "it seems highly unrealistic to suppose that the eventual rewards will be congruent with individual deserts". See *Justice And Egalitarianism Formal and Substantive Equality in Some Recent Theories of Justice*, Michael Quinn, Garland Publishing Co. N.Y.

ⁱ *The Constitution Of Liberty*, F.A. Hayek, p.90/91.

insists, is that “these political rights are used to demand equal rights over property, though as property owners (as distinct from human beings) they are by no stretch of the imagination equal”.ⁱ

Tawney attacks the libertarian arguments concerning the rights of property. There are those, he insists, “who will endeavour to preserve all private property even in its most degenerated form”. There are also, he argues, those who while they recognise the perverse power of property within industrial capitalism have no desire to establish “a visionary communism”. They realise, he insists, that “the free disposal of a sufficiency of personal possessions”, (and enough for subsistence to enable men to do their work), is “the condition of a healthy and self-respecting life”.ⁱⁱ It is, he asserts, “a naive philosophy which would treat all proprietary rights as equal in sanctity”. There is, he suggests, a difference between property which is used by its owner in the conduct of his household or in pursuit of his profession, and “property which is merely a claim on wealth produced by another’s labour”.ⁱⁱⁱ Tawney demands that ownership involve the discharge of definite personal obligations. It is a demand submitted in the conviction that ‘functionless’ property undermines creative energy, and, “sustains a system of rights without service”. Indeed, he argues, the laws of inheritance, in spite of death duties, still serve to maintain a hereditary economic status between different classes.

Tawney recognises the value of property ownership as an instrument of personal authenticity, as a means of validating the individual’s own and particular chosen life. He understood, too, the relationship between property and security,^{NB} to the majority of

ⁱ ‘Equality and Economic Theory’, Harry. G. Johnson, 1975, see *Against Equality*, p.276/276.

ⁱⁱ *The Acquisitive Society*, p.94/95.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.94/95.

^{NB} *The emphasis on security creates problems for some anti-egalitarians. Robert Nisbet proposes that the majority would intuitively come up with security or protection as “the single sovereign virtue” ... “it would not be justice, he asserts, however defined”. Nevertheless, in the same essay, while he insists that “the desire for equality is insatiable among a substantial number of intellectuals”, he proposes that the notion of “hitting it big” and “the risk taking sensibility” appeals to the majority of the people at large”. See ‘The Pursuit of Equality’, Robert Nisbet, 1974, *Against Equality*, p. 124/147.*

property owners, he suggests, ... “its meaning is simple, it is not wealth, or power or even leisure from work. It is safety.”ⁱ If by property he asserts, “is meant the personal possession, which the word means to nine tenths of the population, the object of socialists is not to undermine property, but to protect and increase it”.ⁱⁱ It is not, then, private property which Tawney opposes; it is rather an economic system which not only accords the acquisition of property an undue respect but also provides it with an economic power which negates democratic principle. As for the provision of capital, Tawney recognises the need of capital within any system which seeks to supply men efficiently with “things that are necessary, useful and beautiful and thus bring life to body or spirit”.ⁱⁱⁱ Capital, he submits, must be paid for, yet, he argues, “it must be employed on the cheapest terms possible”.^{iv} Further, he insists, those who own it and advance it can have “no authority over production for which merely as an owner of capital, he is not qualified”.^v

The character of ownership under such circumstances, Tawney argues, would change in three advantageous ways. It would abolish the government of industry by property. It would end the payment of profit to functionless shareholders; it would “lay the foundation for industrial peace ... since industry would be carried on for the service of the public, not for the gain of those who own capital”.^{vi} It would facilitate “the Liberation of Industry”. It would give that dignity which comes from the sense of common purpose. It would endorse Tawney’s understanding of property as a trust over the notion of property as a right.

ⁱ *The Acquisitive Society*, p.82/3.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.70/87 *passim*.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.9.

^{iv} *Ibid*, p.117.

^v *Ibid*, p.114.

^{vi} *Ibid*, p.9.

Equality And Equality Of Opportunity

Equality of opportunity “the minimal egalitarian goal”,ⁱ is dismissed by its critics as an unattainable. Even if the notion is accepted as a principle of justice, it is argued, it remains incoherent, incapable of realization within human society. In a liberal democratic society, it is proposed, each individual has, secured by equal rights and the rule of law, the opportunity to develop his or her natural abilities. The resulting benefits, in a free society, will inevitably reflect the differences of individual talents, capacities and application. Further, any attempt to implement this unrealisable principle demands unlimited and economically crippling resources. The redistribution of such resources, from the advantaged to the less advantaged, it is contended, entails coercive intervention on the part of an authoritarian state which will stifle individual enterprise, impede progress and efficiency and react to the detriment of freedom.

Indeed, Professor Letwin insists the egalitarian term, equality, is a “misnomer”.ⁱⁱ The principle, he insists, because it demands that certain rights be enjoyed universally, is mistakenly assumed to mean that “everyone should possess and exercise these rights in equal degree”. It may be argued, Letwin insists, that equality of opportunity implies the equal right of any individual to freely compete for any post for which he or she has the necessary qualifications. Yet “properly understood”, he deduces without reference to any egalitarian source which endorses this deduction, “everyone should have the right to enter any occupation for which he or she is qualified by skill and that nobody should be denied access to an occupation arbitrarily or capriciously: that is, on grounds of personal characteristics, other than his (or her) ability to do the job.”ⁱⁱⁱ Nobody, therefore, according to Professor Letwin’s understanding of egalitarian principles, can be excluded

ⁱ *Anarchy, State, And Utopia*, Robert Nozick, Basil Blackwell, 1974, p.235

ⁱⁱ ‘The Case Against Equality’, Letwin, *see Against Equality*, p.46.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.46.

from work for which he or she is qualified. “Confusion reigns”, Professor Letwin insists, “when such a right is held universally”.

Plainly the tension that exists between the values of equality and freedom impinges on the notion of equality of opportunity. Clearly, “confusion reigns” where, as in Letwin’s interpretation of the principle, a universal right always takes precedence over a democratically agreed common good. Tawney’s notion of equality of opportunity is not centred, as Letwin deduces, on the right of each individual to any post to which they are qualified by skill. Patently, it demands such social organisation as will extend to all the equal opportunity to acquire such skills and develop to the full their human capacities. Yet the sentiment of justice is satisfied ... “not by offering to every man and woman identical treatment, but by treating different individuals, in so far as being human, they have requirements which are the same, and, in different ways, in so far as being concerned with different services, they have requirements which differ. Tawney’s demand for equality of opportunity does not, then, entail identical treatment; indeed, he insists that “different kinds of energy need different conditions to evoke them”. Ultimately, for Tawney these “different conditions” are “grounded in differences in the power to contribute to, and share in the common good”.ⁱ

Letwin’s conclusions concerning the notion of equality of opportunity are invalidated by the moral context of Tawney’s understanding of the principle. Equality of opportunity is authenticated not within a society of competitive individuals and competing interests but within a society in which each is concerned to contribute to the agreed and socially beneficial common ends. For Tawney, equality of opportunity “rightly interpreted”, means more than an equal opportunity for the qualified to apply for a desirable post or even that the best qualified should get “the prizes of life”. It means, in addition, that equal provision must be made of those environmental conditions which

ⁱ Tawney, quoting Professor Ginsburg, *The Problem of Colour in Relation to the Idea of Equality*, *Supplement to the Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 1926, p.14.

shape individual lives so that none may be disadvantaged by poor housing conditions, lack of health care, inadequate educational facilities. It means, the establishment of those conditions in which men and women shall, in community, ... “be able to live a life of dignity” and “be free to make the most of their common humanity”.ⁱ Equality of opportunity, Tawney insists, does not consist of “the equal power to scramble ashore undeterred by the thought of drowning companions”.ⁱⁱ The Christian injunction to brotherhood is without meaning within a society in which men are impervious to the plight of their fellows, a society which honours and rewards only those individuals with exceptional capabilities.

Professor Letwin reasonably argues that it is impossible to know to what extent the excellencies and deficiencies of normal adults have resulted from capacities which they have inherited genetically, and to what extent from the subsequent development of their potential capacities. *Radical* egalitarians, he insists, as he surprisingly acknowledges the diversity of arguments for equality, have aimed at equalising people’s skills - as distinct from raising everybody’s skills however unequal the end result. Peter Bauer in support of Professor Letwin even identifies “moderate Fabian egalitarians, notably Tawney” who, he insists, happily acknowledge that “equality of opportunity would result in substantial equality of income”. Any differences, he submits, would be seen to “reflect merit and therefore be widely respected and readily accepted.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Tawney, in 1931, had identified ‘The Tadpole Philosophy’, a vision of society which he vigorously rejected as immoral. “It is possible”, Tawney wrote, “that intelligent tadpoles reconcile themselves to the inconvenience of their positions by reflecting that, though most of them will live and die as tadpoles and nothing more, the most fortunate of them will one day shed their tails, distend their stomachs, hop nimbly on to dry land, and

ⁱ *Equality*, p.104.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.106.

ⁱⁱⁱ ‘*The Grail of Equality*’, Peter Bauer, 1983, see *Against Equality*, p. 370.

croak addresses to their former friends on the virtues by which tadpoles of character can rise to be frogs”.ⁱ Professor Frankel, however, dismisses Tawney’s “tadpole theory” as an expression of the notion of equality of opportunity as proposed by “idealists, socialists, and apostles of the welfare state”.

Sympathy for unsuccessful tadpoles, Frankel argues, must have limits. There are particular occupations, he observes, in which the capacity to perform at an extraordinary level of ability is quite properly recognised as the sole qualifying factor. Yet, Frankel insists, there are circumstances (family pressures, wrong environment, etc.,) which may militate against the opportunity to develop a potential talent, and, in consequence, a potential ability is unrealised. Is not the possessor of such undeveloped talent, Frankel demands, entitled to complain that circumstances have deprived him of the opportunity to develop his talent? We use the term ability, Frankel observes, in two different contexts ... “the here and now” context, and the potentiality context in which the primary desideratum is developmental and educational. In this context, Frankel proposes, we distinguish between an individual’s ‘natural ability’ and his existing performance. We concede, Frankel suggests, that natural ability is not, except within narrow limits, ‘modifiable’, just as we recognise that in the latter context, ability may develop and potential realised in response to training and education.

From these different contexts of the term ability, Frankel insists, there arises different conceptions of the notion of equality of opportunity which depend on whether it is performance or potential which is being stressed. The first conception which he designates the meritocratic, allows competition, regardless of physical hindrance or economic stature and the equal opportunity to demonstrate the quality of performance. Such an interpretation of equality of opportunity, he proposes, is compatible with sharp hierarchical differences as long as there is social mobility. It will ensure too, that the level

ⁱ *Equality*, p.105.

of individual ability will ultimately determine that the individuals social and economic position results from meritorious performance within his or her particular field. Yet, Frankel argues, this meritocratic concept of equality of opportunity can be seen as unfair, since, while it rewards merit, it does nothing to stimulate it other than eliminate these glaring disadvantages which prevent a man or woman from competing. And, Frankel asks, if it is regarded as unfair that an individual cannot compete because he or she cannot afford to travel to the test place, why is it not equally unfair that they are denied the education, which is available to others, which would enable them to prepare for such a test? Furthermore, is it not equally an example of inequality of opportunity to “leave them in an environment which deprives them of even the desire to seek such an education”?ⁱ So, Frankel asserts, there evolves a second concept of equality ‘the educational conception’. The advocates of this interpretation argue that if opportunities should be limited only by ability, then, unless “we successfully modify those aspects of an individuals situation which prevent them from performing up to the level of their *natural* abilities”ⁱⁱ we cannot make a valid claim to equality of opportunity.

Frankel sees no way of adjudicating between these two conceptions. There is, he concludes, no fixed formula which can be applied universally: each case must be judged separately. It must be recognised that each context has a different primary objective and that both contexts represent a potentially legitimate claim which must be considered in the formulation of public policies. There are circumstances with which we cannot compromise, Frankel quite properly insists, “we cannot put up with inferior brain surgeons or airline pilots”.ⁱⁱⁱ In such instances, ability must be the essential deciding factor. There are other circumstances, Frankel suggests, in which the encouragement, training and development of talent is the primary requirement and in between “there are all sorts of circumstances in which a concern for both efficiency and education are

ⁱ ‘Equality of Opportunity’, Charles Frankel, see *Against Equality*, p.183.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.183.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.184.

possible". "In such circumstances we must decide what weight to give to each".ⁱ The factors, not only of economic cost, but psychic cost, energy expended, and the probabilities of disappointment must all be considered. As for modifying environmental factors, Frankel argues that not only are these difficult to change, but "such modification probably lies beyond our existing resources in people, funds, general patience and goodwill".ⁱⁱ Under these circumstances Frankel suggests, "certain limits will have to be placed on the broad 'educational' version of equality of opportunity".ⁱⁱⁱ It is he insists, necessary to strike a balance to consider, for instance, how much a society should expend to change the environment of poor people so that they may contribute (say as mathematicians) when, without expenditure, the more favoured classes of the population can supply mathematicians adequate to the needs of society. We must weigh the social costs, on the one side we must evaluate the cost of maintaining an opportunity structure that limits horizons, on the other we must consider the social cost of "a socially isolated elite". Clearly, as Frankel sees it, both concepts of equality of opportunity, the 'meritocratic' and the 'educational', demand from those responsible for public policy a constant adjudication between social needs and social costs. He is not however, without an understanding that the claims of both concepts are 'potentially legitimate'. Ultimately, he proposes, equality of opportunity "remains a demands we can evaluate only if we ask: Equality of opportunity for what?"^{iv} It is, in this evaluation that the fundamental differences between those who "are mainly sceptical of equality as an ideal" and the ethical socialist egalitarians are most apparent.

Tawney does not specifically identify Frankel's two contexts of equality. Nevertheless, he recognises that the concept must always accommodate the essential, never to be compromised requirements of society. Clearly, the educational and developmental aspects of equality of opportunity are central to his egalitarian argument.

ⁱ 'Equality of Opportunity', Charles Frankel, see *Against Equality*, p.184.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.185.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.185.

^{iv} *Ibid*, p.188.

Yet, even if as contemporary critics claim, (see Chapter VI below) that Tawney neglected to address the inequalities of race, or gender, or geography, he would judge Frankel's question "equality of opportunity for what?" to be superfluous, valid only within "the acquisitive society". For Tawney, the dynamics of industrial capitalism inexorably create and deliberately sustain gross and avoidable inequalities. His Christian Socialism demands that the system give way to a social order in which economic power is equitably distributed and equality is equally extended. Such a social order, he contends, will encourage individual spiritual and intellectual development: Industrial capitalism which promotes "self-egotism" and "the exercise of unfettered strength" thwarts it. Frankel, in defence of inequality, presents an "ideal of equality" which "lies beyond our existing resources in people, in funds, in general patience and goodwill". Tawney, notwithstanding that his egalitarian argument is motivated by moral principles, pragmatically proclaims, "it is not that equality should be completely attained, but that it should be sincerely sought".ⁱ

Equality And Equality Of Educational Opportunity

Those who desire in the interest of justice that all should be made to start with the same chances, Professor Hayek declares, are pursuing an ideal that is "literally impossible to realize". The ideal of equality of educational opportunity, it is asserted, is "confused". It involves two conflicting objectives. It attempts not only to equalize opportunity, it seeks to adjust opportunity to capacity, which, it is argued, "has little to do with merit in any moral sense".ⁱⁱ Professor Letwin is also concerned to demonstrate the inconsistency and the impracticability of the ideal, which he insists is "unachievable and approachable only at the cost of adopting gross repressive policies".ⁱⁱⁱ Letwin asserts the incontestable fact that different children emerge from the same school with very unequal skills, not to

ⁱ *Equality*, p. 56.

ⁱⁱ *The Constitution Of Liberty*, F.A. Hayek, p.384.

ⁱⁱⁱ 'The Case Against Equality', Letwin, see *Against Equality*, . p.54.

mention the differences of average skills in different neighbourhoods between children educated within the same comprehensive school system which is ostensibly aimed at the equal education of all children. Letwin suggests that radical egalitarians would argue that this is because children come to school from different home environments. John Charvet, a contributor to 'Against Equality' endorses this view. Charvet, argues in 'A Critique of Freedom and Equality' a work more concerned with the moral interrelation between the two values than the economic implications, that "the major factor producing this inequality of opportunity will be in the first instance, the home environment background". Convinced that a degree of inequality of opportunity will depend primarily on the degree of inequality of conditions that exists between the classes in the first place, Charvet argues that the home background "will ensure that a public education system not *designed* to favour children from the higher classes will nevertheless be used to the greater advantage of the latter".ⁱ

Professor Letwin agrees that most people concede that every child should be taught to read, write and do arithmetic and receive enough schooling "to actualise the potential for reasoning which every normal person enjoys". But he argues, it is beyond these usually agreed minima, that a serious debate ensues, as to whether further education should be available to those whose performance is deficient or to those whose performance is superior. He properly judges that there are differences in mental capabilities (as indeed there are in other capacities, physical, moral and spiritual). In these circumstances, he asks "Bluntly is success or failure the better guide as to who should get more education"? ⁱⁱ This question demands definition; by what standard, and by which criteria are success or failure to be measured? Further, it prompts another important question; concerning the purpose of education.

ⁱ *A Critique of Freedom and Equality*, John Charvet, Cambridge University Press, 1981, p.184/5.
ⁱⁱ 'The Case Against Equality', Letwin, see *Against Equality*, p.53.

Professor Letwin's agreement that a provision of rudimentary education should be available to even the deficient is universally accepted. Certainly it is a move towards Tawney's demand for an educational system which provides "for *all* the nation's sons and daughters an education, generous, inspiring and humane".ⁱ Tawney insists that civilisation is not the business of an elite alone. A life of dignity and culture is the entitlement of all men and women and it must be provided "in a common affection for the qualities which belong not to any class ... but to man himself". While he would readily acknowledge that not every individual has the capacity, or even the inclination for success, no matter how it is defined, his concept of equality of opportunity demands an educational system which equally encourages, and equally offers, the opportunity for self development to all. Indeed, Tawney, in 1922, had sought in the face of anti-egalitarian opposition to secure "Secondary Education for All".ⁱⁱ Such an educational reform he insisted, would provide "a common set of standards and hence of expenditure" to "a variety of types of school" which would make provision for children with creative and practical abilities as well as the academic child. For Tawney this provision of universal secondary education serves a social purpose beyond a commitment to the academically gifted. It was "one of Tawney's major themes", Rodney Barker insists, "that education should provide a meeting place for diverse social origins and hence a common basis for an integrated social life".

These attacks on the notion of equality of educational opportunity do not properly address themselves to Tawney's egalitarian position. He does not demand, as Professor Letwin asserts, "that all children should get an identical schooling whereby all would acquire more nearly equal skills". Tawney's argument for equality of educational opportunity derives from his understanding that egalitarian measures will ensure a moral order which will provide each child with the social conditions which allow for equal advantage. Indeed Tawney, like Letwin, believes that "there are diversities of gifts, which require for their development, diversities of treatment." Equality of opportunity, he

ⁱ 'A National College Of All Souls', R.H. Tawney, 1917, see *The Attack*, p.28/34.
ⁱⁱ *Secondary Education For All*, R. H. Tawney, Labour Party Pamphlet, 1922.

suggest, will seek to do justice to all, by providing facilities which are at once various in type and equal in quality. Certainly, Tawney is not concerned to endorse an educational system so undifferentiated that it will, by its uniformity, frustrate the development of special gifts and exceptional talents. His objective is not to create homogeneity but to ensure that “the common school of the whole population should be so excellent and so generally esteemed, that all parents desire their children to attend it”. Tawney’s demand is neither for uniformity, nor even, for the abolition of private schools “providing they are equally accessible to all children qualified to profit by them, irrespective of the income and social position of their parents”.ⁱ That there should exist in England “a special system of schools, reserved for children whose parents have larger bank accounts than their neighbours”, seems to Tawney, not only an “education monstrosity” and “educationally vicious” but “socially disastrous”, for “it perpetuates the division of the nation into classes of which one is almost unintelligible to another”.ⁱⁱ Tawney deems this perpetuation of class division, this educational arrangement which interacts on the culture of the entire society to be unworthy of a civilised society. It sustains an educational structure “which is determined not by the requirements of the young, but by the facts of the class system”.ⁱⁱⁱ It serves, too, as Rodney Barker asserts, “as an instrument of social and political hierarchy”.^{iv} Such an education system is not only inequitable, it acts against the nation’s interest. No nation, Tawney cautions, has at its command such a plethora of ability that it can afford “to leave uncultivated and under cultivated the talents and potentialities of four fifths of its children”. But beyond the waste of human potential, beyond the economic interests of the nation, such an education system with its class division and its class bias, constitutes “a hereditary curse” on English education.

Tawney’s egalitarian demands, advanced in the name of morality for the recognition of man’s common humanity, does not constitute a claim that men are

ⁱ *Equality*, p.145.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.145.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.145.

^{iv} *Education and Politics, 1900-1951*, Rodney Barker, p.101.

essentially identical.^{NB} Nor is it to concede that men are identical in talent, capacities or aspirations. Certainly, Tawney recognises that between men there are differences, yet in spite of them, he argues it is imperative that men and women of varying characters and capacities be given the equal opportunity to develop those qualities which “in their common humanity are worth cultivating”.ⁱ To place emphasis, or grant privilege on account of wealth or birth or social position is for Tawney morally indefensible. He cites both Mill and Arnold who had “commended equality to their fellow countrymen as one source of peace and happiness”.ⁱⁱ Tawney’s demand for equality of education opportunity, then, is motivated not only by his sense of equity but also by his revulsion of an educational system which was “created in the image of our plutocratic class-conscious selves, and still faithfully reflects them”.ⁱⁱⁱ The demand, therefore, is permeated by an understanding that the inequalities of the class system not only perpetuate privilege, they deny to the majority the facilities of a civilized life. These inequalities deny also the equal opportunity of education which, as it fosters individual developments, serves to benefit the community. “The tragedy of English education”, he ruefully insists, “is the tragedy of English social life; it is the organisation of society upon the lines of class”.^{iv}

NB “It cannot be repeated often enough that a relation of equality and a relation of identify are not the same thing. As D. Thomson argues ... “to say that men are equal is not to say that they are identical. Even in its most basic mathematical meaning equality does not really mean identity. No mathematician ponders for long the equation $X = X$, but it is important for him to know whether $X = 8$. Such an equation is, in fact, a statement about the value of X ”. Michael Quinn, quoting D. Thomson. *Equality*, 1941. see *Justice and Egalitarianism. Formal and Substantive Equality in Some Recent Theories of Justice*. Michael Quinn, Garland Publishing Co. N.Y. 1991, p.33/34.

i *Equality* p.56.

ii *Ibid*, p.56.

iii ‘A National College Of All Souls’, Tawney, 1917, see *The Attack*, p.34.

iv ‘The Public Schools And The Older Universities’, R.H. Tawney, see *The English Public School* (J.H. Whitehouse, Editor) London, 1919, p.72.

Equality, Class Distinction And Envy

There will always be, Professor Hayek proposes, “the most profound differences about the issue of class”.ⁱ Indeed, amongst the critics of equality there are some who deny its significance while others praise its usefulness. Professor Letwin argues that within a democratic society in which the autonomous agent has, without coercion, the equal opportunity to pursue his or her freely and rationally chosen ends, the traditional notions of class, it is argued, are eroding. In a free market system under the rule of law where equal rights extend equality of opportunity to each individual, the issue of class, it is submitted, is becoming increasingly irrelevant. Indeed, ‘Professor Letwin asserts, the importance of class is only sustained by the erroneous and “arbitrary theoretical assumptions of historians who lean toward egalitarianism”. Such historians, Letwin insists, contend that “every community consists fundamentally of ‘classes’; that every class defines the interest of its members; that the several classes are at war with each other”,ⁱⁱ a theoretical assumption which Professor Letwin strongly rejects. Nevertheless, in spite of what is clearly regarded by some anti-egalitarians as the diminishing importance of class, there are social theorists who not only acknowledge class distinctions, they are prepared to defend them.

Egalitarians, J.R. Lucas argues, find class distinctions offensive since they fail to recognise that such distinctions are manifestations of “deep social needs”. Such distinctions, he proposes, are expressions of the “human need to classify people in order that we may know what to expect from them, and, how far it is safe to relax our guard against them”. Egalitarian principles, he argues, remove the signs by which we may identify friendliness and trustworthiness, so that within an egalitarian society, “each man is treated as every other man’s enemy”.ⁱⁱⁱ Class distinctions he therefore concludes, allow

ⁱ *The Road To Serfdom*, F.A Hayek, p. 87.

ⁱⁱ *The Case Against Equality*, Letwin, see *Against Equality*, p. 5.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Against Equality Again*, J. R. Lucas, see *Against Equality*, p.101.

every man “to know where he stands”. The weak man, he adds comfortingly, “need not necessarily fear that the strong are ready to trample on him and use him discourteously”.ⁱ Clearly then, for Lucas, class distinctions act as an emollient and necessary feature of social life. Indeed, he remarks, ethnologists have found that in some cultures, men reserve their enmity for their equals, and are remarkably forbearing on those evidently weaker than themselves.

Lucas’s depiction of an egalitarian society in which “each man is treated as every other man’s enemy” is, although submitted without evidence, chilling. Yet although he claims that class-distinctions are morally justified, his desire for social cohesion and solidarity shares a remarkable affinity with Tawney’s desire for fraternity. “We are not all brothers”, Lucas insists, “but fraternal feelings is nevertheless a good thing”.ⁱⁱ “We are not all brothers,” Lucas insists. Yet, he submits, “fraternal feeling is nonetheless a good thing”.ⁱⁱⁱ The preservation of class-distinctions will serve as a means by which “we may identify the signs of friendliness and trustworthiness”. For Tawney, on the other hand, the class distinctions which Lucas insists are an expression of a “deep human need” are “immoral”, “un-Christian”, indeed “anti-Christian”,^{iv} “an erection of divisions within the human family” ... based on “income and economic circumstances”, which, he insists, “are more ruinous to the soul than most of the conventional forms of immorality”.^v While Lucas urges a hierarchical society on the grounds that “the principle of Universal Humanity requires us to pay attention to the differences between men as well as the resemblances”, Tawney rejects class divisions as “noxious to the human soul”, “the parent of insolence and of servility”.^{vi}

ⁱ ‘Against Equality Again’, J. R. Lucas, see *Against Equality*, p.101.

ⁱⁱ *The Acquisitive Society*, p.166.

ⁱⁱⁱ ‘Against Equality Again’, J. R. Lucas, see *Against Equality*, p.87.

^{iv} ‘Christianity and The Social Order’, see *The Attack*, p.170.

^v *Ibid*, p.170.

^{vi} *Ibid*, p.181.

Lucas is especially critical of those “rich egalitarians”, who retain their riches, even as they argue that “the whole system ought to be changed”. It is their moral duty, he asserts, to recognise that there are indeed, “significant inequalities in our society” and accept that since they are the principal beneficiaries, they are formally bound to discharge the responsibilities which such benefits engender. Moral reasoning, he argues “is best based on facts as they are”, and rich egalitarians should “operate within a scheme of thought which enables them to come to terms with things as they are”.ⁱ This argument presents itself as a further expression of Lucas’s resolve to preserve the established social order, for fear that out of social change there may come social instability, even anarchic chaos. It must be conceded that there are few egalitarians possessed of that degree of saintliness which inspires men to “forsake all worldly goods” and heed Christ’s injunction to “Follow ME and be a fisher of men” (MATH 4:19). Even “the quality of Tawney’s goodness” (which) “was such that it never embarrassed you”ⁱⁱ can only be used as evidence of his own unique character. Sadly, humanity as a whole has neither his principles nor his moral commitment.

Equality And Envy

Critics complain that envy is both the cause and justification of egalitarianism. Professor Letwin subjects to examination the notion that envy the third deadly sin, ... “the most depraved of vices”, corrodes the social fabric and creates disruption and social confrontation. This egalitarian notion, Letwin argues, maintains that equality is the necessary price of social stability. It is, he asserts, ... “an argument which founds the ideal of equality on convenience, rather than on right”.ⁱⁱⁱ Letwin challenges the egalitarian assertion that inequality leads to envy; there is no historical evidence for this claim, he

ⁱ ‘Against Equality Again’, J. R. Lucas, see *Against Equality*, p.101.

ⁱⁱ *An Appreciation*, Hugh Gaitskell, Address at a Memorial Service for RH Tawney, St Martins-in-the-Fields, February 8, 1962.

ⁱⁱⁱ ‘The Case Against Equality’, Letwin, see *Against Equality*, p.18.

argues. In fact, he insists, ... “the evidence seems to point in the opposite direction”.ⁱ Envy, he suggests, “is not the principle cause of social instability; it results more from such groups as dissidents in the Soviet bloc, Black African Nationalists, Irish or Arab terrorist groups than from the ‘relatively deprived’ in the Liberal Democracies.”^{NB} Furthermore, he argues, psychology also fails to establish that inequality must inevitably result in envy. Talent and achievement, he suggests, may inspire admiration and respect as readily as it arouses envy or resentment. To argue that equality is a cure for envy, Letwin declares, is to assume that inequality is an evil and that envy is therefore natural. If, however,... “*inequality* is natural” (a notion which he assiduously pursues) ... “and if envy is corrupt, then the entire argument for equality as a cure for envy collapses”.ⁱⁱ

Letwin is not alone in identifying envy as a prime motivator of the egalitarian case. Egalitarianism, Professor Bauer argues, has given envy ... “a spurious legitimacy”,ⁱⁱⁱ based on a wide-spread guilt feelings of the economically successful who are made to feel that not only are economic differences abnormal, they are also reprehensible, the result of exploitation. Similarly, George Polanyi and John B. Wood insist that the general condemnation of differences of wealth and income which evolve from the egalitarian thesis ... “makes it easier for politicians and commentators to invoke the latent feelings of envy and resentment which is present in most societies at most times”.^{iv}

Anti-egalitarians, then, claim that egalitarians use envy and the threat of the social disruption which envy generates as a weapon in their egalitarian argument. But, anti-egalitarians contend, envy has socially beneficial consequences. It not only acts as a spur to ambition, it fosters the spirit of healthy competition which benefits the entire society. Yet Tawney’s egalitarianism is so firmly grounded in moral principles that even as he

ⁱ *The Case Against Equality*, Letwin, see *Against Equality*, p.19.

^{NB} The expression ‘relative deprivation’, Letwin asserts, “combines both melodrama and technicality”. He dismisses it, therefore, as ... “an emotional device employed by egalitarians in the more affluent societies in which inequalities cause no real hardship”.

ⁱⁱ *The Case Against Equality*, Letwin, see *Against Equality*, p.19.

ⁱⁱⁱ *The Grail of Equality*, Peter Bauer, 1983, see *Against Equality*, p.382.

^{iv} ‘How Unevenly is Wealth Spread Today?’, Polanyi and Wood, see *Against Equality*, p.259.

supports his moral argument with pragmatic reason he can never be accused of presenting a case for equality which is founded merely on a narrow appeal to convenience. As to the assertion with regard to the benefits inequality, it cannot be satisfactorily substantiated. To recognise or dismiss the benefits of competition and ambition are ultimately matters of moral choice. It is impossible to deduce conclusively from historical evidence the validity of this anti-egalitarian claim.

Equality And Industrial Efficiency

It is an article of libertarian faith that inequality is a necessary condition of industrial efficiency. Indeed, Professor Honderich identifies a "Conservative Incentive Proposition," which, he proposes, holds that "a certain unequal distribution of income and wealth is necessary, in our societies where people are not forced to work or enslaved, if we are to achieve a certain economic level".ⁱ It is this principle which anti-egalitarians promote against what they perceive as the dangerous effects of egalitarian measures on industrial efficiency. Professor Johnson, therefore, is concerned that "the transfer of popular economic attention from efficiency and growth to equality and grace" will react to the detriment of economic expansion. Professor Keyfitz argues that for the sake of productivity, and in order to encourage enterprise, society must not only financially reward the economically proficient ... "but find some way to give power to those of its members who are innovative or otherwise competent".ⁱⁱ Professor Bauer insists economic efficiency depends on the performance of people, and it is best served by "such arrangements which guarantee "that those who produce more should enjoy higher incomes".ⁱⁱⁱ For the anti-egalitarian, then, with economic expansion as the overriding priority, individualist competition and the pursuit of self-interest engendered by industrial capitalism are necessary conditions of economic efficiency. In the name of economic

ⁱ *Conservatism*, Ted Honderich, p.29.

ⁱⁱ 'Can Inequality Be Cured?', Nathan Keyfitz, 1973, see *Against Equality*, p.321.

ⁱⁱⁱ 'The Grail of Equality', Peter Bauer, see *Against Equality*, p.372.

expediency, they argue, social divisions, sustained by the individualist ambition to outdo one's fellows, promote both economic efficiency and economic growth.

Professor Letwin develops this argument on what he perceives as egalitarian economic policy. Inequality, Letwin argues, aids productivity. Rather than raising the income of some, by lowering the income of others, economic efficiency, he insists, will raise the income of all, discourage the indolent, and inspire the indigent to effort. Certainly, economic efficiency and a concomitant rise in everybody's living standards, will not meet with opposition. Indeed, as Tawney remarks, "The object of industry is to produce goods, and to produce them at the lowest cost in human effort".ⁱ But, as he further insists, confidence is necessary to the effective performance of labour by men whose sole livelihood depends on it. It is necessary, he argues, to organise industry in order to secure the efficient service, and promote the confidence of those engaged in it. Class confrontations and industrial disputes, do not inspire confidence and while the threat of unemployment may spur a reluctant workforce to productivity, it also incites resentment and disruption. Efficiency, he argues, rests ultimately on psychological foundations ... "It depends, not merely on mechanical adjustments; but on the intelligent co-operation of contentious human beings whom hunger may *make* work, but mutual confidence alone can enable to co-operate".ⁱⁱ

Tawney recognises the benefits of industrial efficiency. Indeed, he acknowledges "the splendid achievements of practical energy and technical skill" released by the industrial revolution". Nevertheless, he argues, "if economic ambitions are good servants, they are bad masters". Ultimately, he insists, industrial capitalism with its "naive and uncritical worship of economic power"ⁱⁱⁱ is destroying efficiency itself. It is being strangled by "an old fashioned industrial establishment, whose obsolete machinery and

ⁱ *The Acquisitive Society*, p.79.

ⁱⁱ *Equality*, p.189.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Religion And The Rise Of Capitalism*, P.276/277.

ineffective organisation depresses the standard of output and working conditions”.ⁱ The solution, he asserts, lies in the notion of service and co-operative participation in the productive process. “If power divorced from responsibility is the poison of states”, he submits, it is improbable that it is the tonic of economic effort”.ⁱⁱ

For Tawney, there is an argument stronger than the utilitarian one against equality. Economic activity, he insists, should be an act of social purpose; it must be performed, as a responsibility to society: it is to be judged *efficient* in respect of its service to community purpose or common benefit. Social well being (which is not the same as Professor Letwin’s ‘rise in income’) depends on social cohesion and social solidarity. This understanding is compounded by the perception that “standards of well-being are relative”. It may well be, Tawney postulates, that a ... “lower average wage with more equality may make a happier society than one with a higher average income, with less well being”.ⁱⁱⁱ As for the argument that equality will create low output and inefficiency, Tawney asserts that industrial capitalism, while its champions may laud it as efficient and while, pro-tem, ... “it still works” ... “it works unevenly, amid constant friction and jolts and stoppages”. He quotes Professor Wedgwood’s postulation that ... “the hostility and suspicion, envy and resentment resulting from *inequality* are themselves one cause of low industrial productivity”. Furthermore, he argues that ... “the complex of hopes and fears and ignorance and patient credulity and passive acquiescence” which had, in the past, secured industrial efficiency, could no longer be relied upon to secure it. It is, he insists, an elementary economic truism to say that active and constructive co-operation on the part of the rank and file of workers would do more to contribute to industrial efficiency ... “than the discovery of a new coal field or a generation of scientific discovery”.^{iv}

ⁱ *Equality*, p.173

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.188.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.113.

^{iv} *Ibid*, p.184.

Professor Letwin seeks to illustrate the contradictions which would arise if the government set out to equalise pay by assuring every worker the same wage. He argues that this 'ideal' (which no contemporary egalitarian proposes), is strictly unattainable. He insists that a policy which ensured that all workers were paid equally would be untenable because of the different number of hours each worker worked, as well as from the failure of some to work, either from sickness, disinclination, or even the inability to find employment. No one can disagree; the ideal is not only unattainable, it is incoherent and most important it is chimerical, since no contemporary egalitarian seriously proposes it.^{NB1} Letwin further insists, extending the false assumption that egalitarians demand that all workers be paid equally, that ultimately, through their different propensities to save, there would evolve an inequality of wealth. If, he argues, validly, inheritance was also permitted, these inequalities in wealth would be further enlarged. Inequality would be further accentuated if people were permitted to invest their savings or their inheritance. It is, therefore, clear, Letwin concludes, that to prevent unequal accumulation of wealth "continuous and all pervasive repression" would be required.^{NB2} Furthermore, he accurately observes, "if all workers were paid equally this would entail unequal 'sacrifice' by different workers" since, he correctly insists "some jobs are more burdensome, more dangerous than others". Similarly, his argument that to pay the same increment to highly skilled, highly trained specialists, or those engaged in unpleasant or dangerous work as those performing pleasanter, safer, more easy to qualify for jobs, is "to contradict the notion of equality of effort",ⁱ would not be disputed by Tawney who concedes that special talents are in some instances, "worth a great deal more than even the exorbitant salaries" which they now command. For Tawney, however, remuneration is beside the point. No

^{NB1} *There have been, John Charvet properly remarks, some extremist, even idiotically romantic concepts of equality. Babeuf in Conspiracy of Equals (1796) advances ideas of equality which would be rejected as meaningless and totally impractical by contemporary egalitarians.*

^{NB2} *Again, Letwin lumps together every strain of egalitarian thought. Certainly Trotsky, Moa Tse Tung, Pol Pot et al might apply continuous and all pervasive repression. It is difficult, however, to imagine the Fabian Society exercising such measures. The notion of Tawney as Beria is an absurdity.*

ⁱ *'The Case Against Equality', Letwin, see Against Equality, p.35.*

one, he insists, “has any business to be paid what he is worth, for what he is worth is a matter between his own soul and God”.ⁱ

Equality And Welfare Provision

Anti-egalitarians oppose Welfare provision with seven main arguments. It does not achieve its purpose; it damages industrial efficiency; it fosters dependency; it is unnecessary; it infringes on the liberty of the individual to dispose of their resources; it strengthens the power of the state; it fuels inflation. Professor Letwin’s contributors draw on all these arguments. Some essays are highly technical, Polanyi and Wood, for instance, break down into age groups various types of “capital holdings”. They analyse the differences between *personal* wealth and the assets of corporations; they evaluate the effects of both inheritance and investment. Professor Boulding illustrates income graduations and trends of wealth distribution over four decades.^{NB} Professor Wagner seeks to demonstrate by means of statistical tables and data which incorporates classifications according to class, occupations and factors of probability, that the tax structure (in the United States) designed to extend equality, in fact, not only “penalises earned income, but also reacts against enterprise”.ⁱⁱ

In spite of the expertise with which the economists present their evidence, there are clearly differences of opinion between them on the extent of economic inequality within industrial capitalist societies. Some contributors even question whether any meaningful inequality, in fact, exists, indeed Professor Letwin declares “the evidence normally presented (to prove inequality) is illusory, much less than most believe”. Nevertheless, if the economist differ as to the extent of equality, they all share certain

ⁱ *The Acquisitive Society*, p.222.

^{NB} ‘*The Stability of Inequality*’, K.E. Boulding, 1975, see *Against Equality*, p.261-275.

ⁱⁱ ‘*The Egalitarian Imperative*’, Richard E. Wagner, 1977, see *Against Equality*, p.297.

views; they all resist measures of redistribution designed to extend economic equality. They all oppose “Welfarism”.

Professor Bauer, for instance, concerned by the “increasing role of the state”, insists that provision for old age, ill health, housing, unemployment and the responsibility of bringing up children have been taken over by state agencies, which, through taxation, finance such provision. This tax system, he asserts, “treats people as if they were children”,ⁱ since he argues it is the duty of adults to manage their own incomes and assume responsibility for the contingencies of life. Furthermore, he insists, prudent people, even if poor, can normally provide for such contingencies by saving and insurance but only, he warns, if the value of money is protected from the excess of welfare expenditure. For Bauer, then, Welfarism promotes inflation (through heavy state expenditure), encourages dependency, penalises the economically productive and extends the power of the State. Professor Flew is even more critical of the notion of welfare which is dependent on taxation which he identifies as “compulsory exaction”.ⁱⁱ These exactions, he argues, in defence of what he perceives as individual freedom, “must involve some possible restrictions on liberty”. Furthermore, Flew claims, those egalitarians who are opposed to more choice on selectivity in welfare service, demonstrates their attachment to the value of equality over liberty, or even welfare. Professor Frankel, too, is suspicious of Welfarism. He perceives the egalitarian argument “that all men should be insured of the minimum conditions of a decent life” as in reality, a demand for equality “in a highly attenuated state”, which, he insists, “is simply an argument for a more adequate welfare state”.ⁱⁱⁱ Professor Tullock argues that welfare redistributory measures do not necessarily benefit the poor.^{iv} Such measures, within industrial capitalist societies, he insists, are essentially transfers of funds between the middle classes who are the greatest beneficiaries both as individuals, and as a class. Professor Keyfitz admits that egalitarian

ⁱ *The Grail of Equality*, Peter Bauer, 1983, see *Against Equality*, p.368/369.

ⁱⁱ *The Procrustean Ideal*, Antony Flew, 1978, see *Against Equality*, p.160/161.

ⁱⁱⁱ *'Equality of Opportunity'*, Charles Frankel, see *Against Equality*, p.176.

^{iv} *The Charity of the Uncharitable*, Gordon Tullock, 1971, see *Against Equality*, p. 328/345.

demands for redistribution through graduated taxation are well intentioned, but, he argues, such tax arrangements inevitably extend the control of government over economic affairs, since the authorities believe that “they can spend our money for us better than we can ourselves”.ⁱ In the interest of production, industrial efficiency and individual enterprise, Keyfitz, insists a tax system must allow its citizens to retain the profits of their enterprise and this method of “natural selection” can act as a means by which those “competent in production are self-selected to exercise power”.ⁱⁱ

Collectively, these objections constitute more than an attack on ‘Welfarism’. They serve also as a defence of a society of competitive individualism. they endorse a free-market economy which rewards in terms of income and approbation, those with economic aptitude or marketable talents. Some of the objections seek, in the name of freedom, to protect the individual’s right to pursue his or her self-interest from the interfering state. Some objections to welfare provision are grounded in the notion that public provision is socially debilitating, it encourages indolence, saps individual initiative, reacts against industrial efficiency.

These arguments that welfarism is not so much undesirable as ineffective cannot be resolved by a recourse to moral principles. Neither can unsubstantiated claims concerning impediments to industrial efficiency, the benefits or disadvantages of various tax arrangements, or speculations which entertain the notion of “natural selection” as a method of determining economic competence. Such arguments do not address the concerns of an egalitarian such as Tawney whose demand for welfare provision is motivated by ethical rather than economic considerations. Conversely, arguments advanced in the exclusive interest of productive efficiency find little common ground with social philosophies which are motivated by moral principles. Nevertheless, the perception that welfare measures do not necessarily achieve their objective, or that some benefits

ⁱ ‘Can Inequality Be Cured?’, Nathan Keyfitz, *see Against Equality*, p.326.
ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p. 321.

accrue to the advantage of the middle-classes rather than to the most needy, has provoked a response from egalitarian defenders of welfare provision. They have in the last quarter of the present century developed theories of redistribution which, while they recognise the efficiency of a market economy, are committed to the distribution of social benefits in accordance “with the criteria of desert and need” NB

Yet the most important questions concerning Tawney’s commitment to public provision are posed by a sympathetic critic, Anthony Wright. “Why”, Wright asks, “should welfare necessarily strengthen a culture of independence and self-confidence rather than one of dependency and subordination? Why should welfare act as a stimulant to equality rather than a substitute for it? Perhaps Wright proposes, Tawney’s “socialism of ‘minds and wills’ required that it should”.ⁱ Tawney’s Christian Socialism is not predicated solely on welfare provision. Its first requirement is moral regeneration; its objective is a co-operative community of participating and responsible citizens sustained by the recognition of mutual responsibility. Public provision extended as a right, accepted as a duty, will endorse that recognition. For Tawney, public provision is an instrument of enablement. It will, he argues, “dissolve the servile complex” which “is a capital obstacle to effective action”. It will present the opportunity for self-direction, “create a population with the nerve and self-confidence to face the immense task of socialist reconstruction”.ⁱⁱ

NB *Market, State and Community*, David Miller, see Introduction to this thesis. Furthermore, Julian Le Grand concludes after an examination into “four areas of social policy: health care, education, housing and transport that public expenditure as a whole favours the better off rather than the poor”. As a result, Le Grand asserts, “equality however defined has not been achieved”. *The Strategy of Equality*, Julian Le Grand, 1982, Unwin Hyman, p.4. There are other defenders of the Welfare State, including Richard Titmuss, Albert O. Hirschman, who have examined this thesis. Whilst Hirschman agrees that other social groups “with more clout” may benefit from ‘transfer payments’, he insists that “it requires a special gift of sophistry to argue at one and the same time that welfare payments have those highly advertised perverse effects on the behaviour patterns of the poor and they do not reach the same poor”. See *The Rhetoric of Reaction*, Albert O. Hirschman, Harvard University Press, 1991, p.62. Julian Le Grand in spite of his finding that ‘back-door’ methods of redistribution are now powerful enough to overcome the social and economic forces maintaining equality does not call for an end to redistribution. He urges instead that “These forces have to be tackled another way”.

ⁱ R.H. Tawney, Anthony Wright, p.110.

ⁱⁱ *Equality*, p.120.

Equality, Desirability, Achievability

Egalitarians “of all shades”, Professor Letwin insists, “are deluded by loose thinking and utopian fantasies”.ⁱ For J.R. Lucas, “equality as a general goal of political endeavour is impossible to achieve”,ⁱⁱ while John Charvet argues that the principle of equality of opportunity imposes conditions for individual development which are absurd fantasies”.ⁱⁱⁱ Professor Letwin and his contributors, then, not only dismiss egalitarianism as theoretically weak, intellectually incoherent and economically inefficient, they challenge its goals as unattainable, its vision as utopian.

Egalitarians, then, are confronted not only by those who question the desirability of equality but also by those who dismiss the notion as unachievable. Ultimately, however, this confrontation may be seen as a disagreement between opposing sets of unbelievers, those who like Professor Letwin describe egalitarians as victims of utopian fantasies, “grotesquely optimistic in supposing that equality will bring in its train” ... “liberty, wealth, justice and general virtue”^{iv} and those who like J.R. Lucas, “discern positive merits in some forms of inequality”.^v Tawney is not “grotesquely optimistic”: yet he argues that to dismiss the pursuit of equality as an unachievable goal stands on a par with “using the impossibility of absolute cleanliness as a pretext for rolling in a manure heap”.^{vi}

Yet, if Tawney has little faith in the ability of “egotistic, greedy, quarrelsome man” to create a Utopia, he insists, nevertheless, that “a change of system or machinery can create an environment in which the causes of social malaise are not encouraged”.^{vii}

ⁱ *The Case Against Equality*, Letwin, see *Against Equality*, p.69.

ⁱⁱ *'Against Equality Again'*, J.R. Lucas, see *Against Equality*, p.105.

ⁱⁱⁱ *The Idea of Equality as a Substantive Principle of Justice*, John Charvet, 1969, see *Against Equality*, p.110/111.

^{iv} *The Case Against Equality*, Letwin, see *Against Equality*, p.70.

^v *'Against Equality Again'*, J. R. Lucas, see *Against Equality*, p.74.

^{vi} *Equality*, p.56.

^{vii} *The Acquisitive Society*, p .222.

Equality, he concedes, may be outside the ability of man to achieve but since all men and women are members one of the other, we are bound in common humanity to *strive* towards it. To ignore this obligation, Tawney asserts, “is like denying the importance of honesty because no one can be wholly honest”.ⁱ

This assertion is not an expression of a belief in mankind’s ultimate capacity for perfectibility. It is, rather, a manifestation of a conviction that economic, social and political institutions, informed by moral standards can create a more equitable society. It is, an expression, however, of Tawney’s belief that although few ordinary men and women can aspire to the spiritual grace of Mother Theresa or Mahatma Ghandi, they may, nevertheless, in concert, strive to create a society in which all may equally aspire to a life of dignity and self respect. Certainly, Tawney’s life bears witness to his understanding that “the day is short and the work is great” (yet) “it is not thy duty to complete the work, neither art thou free to desist from it”.ⁱⁱ Tawney “did not desist from the work”; his commitment to equality is tempered by the pragmatic understanding that a perfect application of every egalitarian principle is unattainable. Nevertheless, as Ross Terrill insists, “Tawney did bring equality nearer in England”.ⁱⁱⁱ Furthermore, his moral commitment to a philosophy which respects the rights of all men and considers each man worthy of equal consideration must encompass within it the resolve to improve, if not bring to perfection, the conditions of the disadvantaged. Certainly, Tawney has no quarrel with Professor Letwin and his contributors who demonstrate that the ‘ideal’ of absolute equality is chimerical. But, as Michael Quinn judiciously argues, “to admit that something is not ultimately attainable, even logically, is not equivalent to an admission that the pursuit of that thing is irrational at least as long as that thing admits of relative degrees of achievement”.^{iv} In a moral society, Tawney submits, “social institutions, economic

ⁱ *The Acquisitive Society*, p.56.

ⁱⁱ *The Funeral Service*, see *The Authoritative Daily Prayer Book of The Hebrew Congregation of the British Empire*, Eyre and Spottiswood, 1968 edition, p.422.

ⁱⁱⁱ *R.H. Tawney and His Times*, Ross Terrill, p.193.

^{iv} *Justice and Egalitarianism*, Michael Quinn, p.180, Garland Publishing Inc. 1989.

activity, industrial organisation" ... "are judged by standards of right and wrong". Such "institutions, activities, organisations, derive a certain sacramental significance from the spiritual end to which ... they are ultimately related". "They become", he asserts, "stages in the progress of mankind to perfection".ⁱ NB

Equality And 'The High Moral Ground'

J.R. Lucas resents "the high moral line" taken by many egalitarians who tell him not to set his heart on mere monetary values".ⁱⁱ He recognises that "there are greater things in life than money", but, he argues, "if in spite of this evaluation I greedily pursue riches and I am successful in acquiring them", egalitarians "ought not to bellyache at my having done better than they". If "I ought not to be greedy", he argues, "they ought not to be envious": "high mindedness about money", he asserts, with indignation, "falls into a category which counsels perfection", which, he insists, is the private concern of each individual". It is not, he asserts, in defence of what he perceives as the freedom of the individual, "the right of one person to dictate to another the conduct of his life, or to propose which goals and ambitions it is morally proper for him to pursue".ⁱⁱⁱ The wrongness of riches, he insists, has not been established; not all gains are ill gotten, and since "the institution of money is defined by rules," its legitimate acquisition breaks no moral or legal code. For Lucas, therefore, the egalitarian moral argument appears to be valid only because of the "confusion" in modes of moral discourse. Lucas concludes his judgement with the declaration that "wealth is a 'good' which men often seek, and at least sometimes legitimately and sometimes to the general benefit of society.

ⁱ *The Acquisitive Society*, p.235.

NB This submission is endorsed by Ernst Cassirer ... "It follows from the nature of ethical thought". Cassirer proposes, "that it can never condescend to the 'given' ... the ethical world is never 'given', it is forever in the making". Quoted by Irving Howe, *The Spirit of the Times*, *Dissent*, Spring 1993, p.133.

ⁱⁱ 'Against Equality Again', J.R. Lucas, see *Against Equality*, p.104.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.103/4.

“Millionaires are like marquises”, he claims (ignoring all republican sentiment or egalitarian qualification), “one wants them to exist, although not be one oneself”.ⁱ

Lucas perceives a “confusion in the modes of moral discourse”. Yet critics who oppose equality on the grounds that it constrains individual liberty can hardly complain when under the rule of law and within a democratic society, egalitarians present what they regard as the moral case for equality. Nevertheless, Tawney must confront the charge that he is “engaged in the politics of moral exhortation” nor can he deny his belief “that socialism is morally superior to capitalism”. Tawney, the economic historian, acknowledged that in the name of equality men and women had defended repressive dictatorship and excused the suppression of liberty. Can he, then, escape Lucas’s allegation that “high minded egalitarians” threaten the individual’s liberty to freely pursue a legitimately chosen end or that they “assume to dictate to another the conduct of his life”? Tawney is a Christian Socialist; his political philosophy is predicated on the persuasive content of his ethical argument. Equality, he insists, can only be sanctioned by consensual agreement. Legislation, democratically approved, must legitimise every egalitarian measure. He offered, as Anthony Wright proposes, “the prospect of a moral consensus as the basis of a socialist society of common ends”.ⁱⁱ Ultimately, Tawney must “appeal to principles”. He is concerned to establish a moral community in which industrial organisation, social institutions and economic activity are judged by moral standards. Such a Socialism insists that its objectives must only be achieved “by the methods proper to democracy”.ⁱⁱⁱ Such a Socialism cannot countenance the enforced imposition of equality, or any other perceived social good.

ⁱ *Against Equality Again*, p.104.

ⁱⁱ *R.H. Tawney, Anthony Wright*, p.147.

ⁱⁱⁱ ‘*Christianity and the Social Order*’, 1935, see *The Attack*, p.165.

Tawney, Equality And Christianity

Tawney's egalitarianism is ultimately grounded in the tenet of Christian faith which proclaims that "since all men are the children of God all men are equal". For Tawney, this tenet, while it concedes inequalities of personal capacities, will not tolerate unjustifiable inequalities which evolve out of the social and economic environment and serve to "emphasise the differences which divide men, rather than strengthen the common humanity which unites them".ⁱ Professor Letwin admits that "Christianity may have been a powerful influence in propagating the beliefs that underlie contemporary egalitarianism".ⁱⁱ Nevertheless, he points to a theological variation in the egalitarian argument, the doctrine of election within Calvinism, he insists, opposes the ideal of equality. Indeed, there are interpretations of Christianity which endorse a rigid, hierarchical social order.^{NB1} Yet, Professor Letwin argues, even if the present vogue for egalitarianism owes much to Christian teaching, this historical truth cannot now be mustered as a rationally compelling argument in favour of equality. He dismisses, as "a perplexing manifestation of unreasoned faith" "the declaration that all men are equal in the sight of God". Powerful as faith is", he concludes, "it cannot perform the office of reason".ⁱⁱⁱ NB2

Yet every sincerely held political view involves a dimension of faith and conviction just as it involves a dimension of reason. Moral values do not derive from pragmatic investigation, and practicalities and possibilities are not generated by moral principles.

ⁱ *Equality*, p.49.

ⁱⁱ 'The Case Against Equality', Letwin, see *Against Equality*, p.54.

NB1 See Chapter III *An Examination of the Writings of T.S. Eliot*.

ⁱⁱⁱ 'The Case Against Equality', Letwin, see *Against Equality*, p.54.

NB2 There are, however, political theorists who would challenge the basis of Professor Letwin's proposition. T. D Weldon, for instance, denies "the usefulness or even the possibility of providing a foundation of a political viewpoint". Weldon argues that reason always rests, ultimately on non rational premises ..."either they are logically empty and thus have no consequences, or they are mistaken and harmful empirical generalisations open to refutation". Weldon, in what Phillip Cummings describes as the first full-scale analytic treatment of the problems of political philosophy argued that "a great deal needs to be done about the language in which discussions of political philosophy are conducted". *The Vocabulary of Politics*. T.D. Weldon, Harmondsworth Press, 1953, p.172. See *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, Vol. VI, Macmillan Publishing Co, 1972 edition, p.385.

Tawney's constant appeal to moral values is clearly underpinned by his Christian faith, but the appeal is not addressed solely to Christian values nor does it demand unquestioning faith. Tawney, as has been noted, did not "generally frame his writings in Christian terms or present them as exemplifications of Christian doctrine".ⁱ The appeal, then, is addressed to the humanist spirit which cherishes fellowship, respects the common humanity of all mankind and is dedicated "to cultivate in all men the powers which make for energy and refinement".ⁱⁱ

While various of Professor Letwin's contributors briefly acknowledge a religious dimension in the egalitarian case, it is Professor Johnson who notes "how thoroughly the current discussion of the inequality of the competitive system and the inequality of income distribution is penetrated by Christian precepts". Since, Johnson suggests, so many advocates of redistribution pride themselves on their liberation from religious beliefs "it is strange that these liberals uphold social views which are based on the supreme commandment of the New Testament" - "Love Thy Neighbour as thyself". As for the Marxists and "the more radical egalitarians", their views are derived, Johnson insists, from the Old Testament, which he claims, "is also preferred by bigoted and violent fundamentalists", who endorse its emphasis on the superiority of 'the chosen people' "its callousness towards murder, plague and the pestilential persecution of the unwashed".ⁱⁱⁱ Religion, Johnson asserts, is a consumption, "not a productive activity"; it contributes only prayers for the success of the productive effort against the hazards of nature and the benign negligence of God Himself'. Yet, he argues, "it claims its material title from the harvest", and Johnson insists society may be badly advised to take its advice on economic morality from "parasites on the social surplus whatever the claims for moral entitlement to that position may be". Indeed, while Tawney notes with regret that the very conception of religion as an inspiration and standards of social life and corporate effort has been

ⁱ R.H. Tawney, *Anthony Wright*, p.19.

ⁱⁱ *Equality*, p.85.

ⁱⁱⁱ '*Equality and Economic Theory*', Harry G Johnson, 1975, see *Against Equality*, p.283.

forgotten, Johnson questions, why, in a secular society, any popular social policy discussion should remain a religious activity?

It is a question which Tawney addresses. Since, he insists, “social institutions are the visible expression of the moral values which rules the minds of individuals” ... “it is impossible to alter social institutions without altering that valuation”.ⁱ For Tawney it is ultimately moral values which determine the nature of society, for, he asserts, no discussion on social policy *can* be separated from ethical consideration. While Professor Johnson, decries the ultimate dominance of religious concepts which permeate egalitarian arguments, Tawney insists that it is not mere poverty which produces the dissensions which divide society. They result, he declares, from “the consciousness of a moral wrong”, “from the feeling of abhorrence against an outrage against what is sacred in man”.ⁱⁱ

Tawney’s social philosophy is predicated upon this understanding of “what is sacred in man”. He would accept with pride the allegation that his social views are penetrated by Christian concepts, determined by Christian values, directed by moral consciousness. He, would not deny that his philosophy endorses “the supreme commandment of the New Testament”. He would, however, compound the commandment to “Love Thy Neighbour”, with the injunction of St Paul to “Bear ye one another’s burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Gal: 6:2).^{NB} Tawney regards obedience to this injunction as a fundamental Christian duty. It is an injunction which demands of Christians a contribution beyond prayers for the productive effort, for it imposes on them the obligation “to try the institutions and procedure of society by the standards of [Christian] faith”.ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ *The Commonplace Book, entry for 10 June 1912.*

ⁱⁱ ‘Christianity and The Social Order’, see *The Attack*, p.167.

^{NB} Tawney in defence of communal medical provision quotes the first part of this verse. It is not he suggests “merely the voice of piety” ... “but also of economic prudence”, *Equality* p.139.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Equality*, p.170.

Tawney sees in Christianity “at its best” ... “as a dynamic and revolutionary force”. The Capitalist system which Professor Johnson insists provides “the politically free and affluent society we are accustomed to”, he regards as “not so much unchristian but anti-Christian”.ⁱ Capitalism, he insists, has created a society in which the violation of the spirit of community is compounded by ruthless economic exploitation. Certainly, the competitive system as Tawney perceives it, with its emphasis on the supreme importance of material wealth, the intensity of its appeal to the acquisitive appetites does not equate with the supreme commandment of the New Testament”. Nor, for Tawney, can men within a society of privilege, exploitation, and self interest, fulfil those “laws of Christ” which enjoins them to brotherhood. Tawney, in ‘The Attack’ invokes the “unbreakable spirit of comradeship” expressed by William Morris ... “fellowship is life, and lack of fellowship is death”. Tawney, too, committed of “the law of Christ”, understands that one cannot regard men as brothers unless in some measure one shares their lives.

Tawney, then, fortified by Christian faith exercises “the moral entitlement” to advise on economic morality. It is this faith which provides him with the moral authority to demand “a right order of society, in which “the disease of inequality” would not longer support “an economic liability of alarming dimensions”. But it is a demand advanced not only in the name of Christian fellowship, but also in the pragmatic understanding that “common sense and a respect for realities are not less Graces of the spirit than moral zeal”.ⁱⁱ It is a demand animated by a scale of moral values which not only rejects the notion of gain without service, but “assigns to economic activity its proper place as the servant, not the master of society”.ⁱⁱⁱ Indeed, Tawney proposes, the burden of our civilisation is not merely the inequitable distribution of wealth, the tyranny of privilege or even class dissension. The burden, he insists, derives from the exclusive predominance of materialistic values the obsession with economic issues, which, to the detriment of “the

ⁱ *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, p.276.

ⁱⁱ *The Acquisitive Society*, p.241.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.114.

dignity and refinement “of the human beings who compose it thwart the spiritual ends and distort the moral values which are the mark of a civilized society”. He is instead, rejecting its ‘moral’ principles which insists that “the free exercise of rights is the main interest of society and the discharge of obligations a secondary, incidental consequence which may be left to take care of itself”.ⁱ He is, too, challenging Professor Johnson’s assertion that democratic society requires a “convention which draws a clear line (if this is possible) between political activity as concerned with people and economic life as concerned with capital”.ⁱⁱ It is, curiously, a distinction which Tawney has already identified, “Capital”, he argues, “consists of things and labour consists of persons”, “the only use for things, he insists is to be applied to the service of persons”.ⁱⁱⁱ He does not demand, therefore, that “economic life”, be divorced from “political activity”, and be allocated a separate sphere. Indeed, Tawney’s appeal for a recourse to moral principles, leads him to conclude that “a society must so organise its industry that the instrumental character of economic activity is emphasised by its subordination to the social purpose for which it is carried on”.

For Tawney, these “ends” of economic activity must necessarily be agreed within a society in which “each has the power to contribute and in which each may share in the common good”. These same “ends” demand also a standard of moral values which determines not only the purpose to which such endeavour should be applied, but also “the criteria by which its success may be judged”. It is this standard of moral values which prompts Tawney’s attempt to reawaken the historic determination of the Christian Church ... “its effort so often corrupt and pettifogging in practice”, to assert, once again, “the superiority of moral principles over economic appetites”. Ethical thought, Isaiah Berlin proposes, “consists of a systematic examination of the relations of human beings to each other”. “These conceptions of how life should be lived are objects of enquiry”. “They are called, (when applied to mankind) political philosophy, which is but ethics applied to

ⁱ ‘Equality and Economic Theory’, Harry G Johnson, see *Against Equality*, p. 285.

ⁱⁱ *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, p. 279.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.279.

society”.ⁱ It is a proposition which Tawney would not dispute. Into his own “conception of how life should be lived”, he sought to revive Christian values, and “work, once more, the Christian virtues into the spotted texture of individual character and social conduct”.ⁱⁱ

Professor Johnson’s complaint, therefore, that questions of inequality and redistribution within a competitive system are penetrated by the Christian precepts of those who seek to apply religious principles to a secular society, are not, as far as they go, unreasonable. Certainly Tawney’s social philosophy derives from his own religious convictions. His appeal to principles, however, is not addressed solely to those who share his Christian faith. It is directed to the universal humanist spirit which, he insists, “is not the exclusive possession of either those who reject some particular body of religious doctrine or of those who accept it”. It is a spirit, directed towards an end, and that end, Tawney proclaims, ... “is the growth towards perfection of individual human beings”.ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ *Isaiah Berlin, New York Review of Books, June 1989.*

ⁱⁱ *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism, p.279.*

ⁱⁱⁱ *Equality, p. 85.*

CHAPTER VI

The Contemporary Relevance Of The Social

And Political Theories Of R.H.Tawney

I have in this section of the thesis sought to defend the contemporary relevance of Tawney's thought in the light of the social, economic and political changes which have occurred since he first formulated his social theories and political philosophy. I have sought to demonstrate, drawing on Tawney's writings, the necessity of co-operative and collective effort within a world of finite resources and economic and ecological interdependence. Again, utilising Tawney's writings to support my thesis, I have sought to assess Tawney's egalitarianism in the light of libertarian arguments of contemporary conservative thinkers who argue that the economics of the free-market, and the recognition of equal political rights have invalidated the egalitarian case. I have employed this same method with the views like those like Alisdair McIntyre who accuse him of lack of "political intelligence and imagination", and "high mindedness". I have argued, by reference to Tawney's writings, the necessity of such social organisation as will ensure a society of co-operation and mutual obligation in the face of new technology and new methods of production which are transforming the established relationship between capital and labour. I have examined Tawney's egalitarian views in relation to the legitimate concerns of those, who like Anne Phillips, seek to extend the notion of equality beyond the narrow and traditionally male-orientated understanding of 'fraternity'. I have examined the analyses of those, who like David Marquand and Anthony Wright have sympathetically, but not uncritically, analysed and assessed the contemporary relevance of Tawney's thought. I have sought to demonstrate that while Tawney's philosophy is derived from his Christian faith and sustained by the attendant moral values, he is also, based on his understanding of the English character, a pragmatic thinker in the English philosophic tradition. In conclusion I hope to reach some judgement concerning the

enduring value of Tawney's philosophy, and to indicate the tensions, the weaknesses and the strengths of his thought.

Consensus Reached, Consensus Broken

In the eighty years since Tawney, in his *COMMONPLACE BOOK*, set out the foundations of his social philosophy, the world has been witness to revolutions, the overthrow of dynasties, the end of empires. The ... "world made by and for the liberal middle classes in the name of progress and civilisation"ⁱ has seen the barbarities of death camps, the horrors of Auschwitz, of Kolyma, of Hiroshima ... "Christ walks again", the poet cried,

... "He walks on the Sea of Blood,
He comes in the terrible Rain".ⁱⁱ

Out of the class confrontation, the fear, the envy and the resentment, which Tawney identifies in *THE ACQUISITIVE SOCIETY*, came ruthless totalitarianism dedicated to the destruction of the ... class enemy ... the racially impure ... the counter-revolutionary ... the left wing ... the right wing deviationary.

Then, after 'the age of anxiety' which bridged the two world wars, after the hardship and the hunger of mass unemployment, after the victory over fascism, there emerged a new demand for social justice and a new resolve to achieve it. The British people who had endured the unavoidable terrors of war were no longer willing to endure the avoidable miseries of peace. and then ...

"the lost travellers,

ⁱ *The Age Of Empire, Introduction, Eric Hobsbawm, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987.*
ⁱⁱ *The Shadow of Cain, Edith Sitwell, circa 1942.*

with sun bleached hair dazed
 upon the gangway,
 came home again with all the applauding windows open”.ⁱ

and a newly elected government, in accordance with its mandate, committed itself to provide what it perceived as ... “those requirements which make the essentials of a civilised life a common possession”.ⁱⁱ The nation which had been united in common purpose endorsed, although not without some opposition, the provision of communal health care, of improved environmental conditions, of an extension of educational opportunity and such social organisation as would create that sense of security which makes possible a life of dignity and self-respect. Slowly, through democratic process, the concept of collective provision was generally accepted, its purposes acclaimed, its methods established. There was, T.H. Marshall argues, ... “an urge in the wide currency of the term welfare state, to find in the concept of ‘welfare’, a single axial principle for the new social order.”ⁱⁱⁱ The majority of the electorate, it was widely acknowledged by all political parties, approved of state provided social benefits and would guard their rights to them jealously.

In the aftermath of war, Tawney’s vision of moral regeneration, of a society without privilege of a society of obligation and function, was not realised. While (in 1950) he welcomed the post-war expansion of public provision, he insisted, quoting Professor Richard Titmuss, “that the conversion of a cheap makeshift provided for the lowest class in a society based on competitive individualism into a vast co-ordinated plan for the betterment of an entire community is still at an early stage”.^{iv} Certainly, Tawney’s ideal of a society in which men and women might share an equality of responsibility in the

ⁱ ‘Armistice’, see *The Terrible Rain*, John Lehmann, 1945, *The War Poets*, Methuen, 1966, p.188.

ⁱⁱ *Equality*, p.134.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Citizenship and Social Class, and Other Essays*, T.H. Marshall, Cambridge University Press, 1950, p.56.

^{iv} *Equality*, 1952, Chapter VII, Epilogue 1938-1950.

economic direction of their lives and an equality of individual liberty which evolves from an equality of economic power did not materialise. The continuing inequalities of environmental conditions and educational facilities had not engendered an equality of opportunity or facilitated the establishment of an authentic common culture. Clearly, Tawney declared “the time of congratulations has not yet come”, but, he asserted, “the significant fact is that it is on the way”.ⁱ Nevertheless, over the concept of welfare, where, for so long there had been sharp division, there was now broad agreement. Where there had been opposition, there was now consensus. This consensus, David Marquand suggests, ... “prevailed for about thirty years”. In the face of changing social and economic conditions, of rising living standards and the blurring of the traditional class divisions, the consensus was gradually eroded. It has now plainly broken down, ... “but no new consensus has replaced it”.ⁱⁱ The consensual commitment to the welfare state and the co-existence of large public and private sectors in the economy has been challenged by a libertarian philosophy which rebuts post-war Keynesian economic practices and advocates, instead, a free market economy with limited government intervention. It is a philosophy which, in its dedication to individualist values, seeks to create the conditions for a property-owning, share owning society. It is a philosophy with no enthusiasm for collective provision; certainly it is not concerned to extend it. It is a philosophy which rejects Tawney’s social and political theories. It is a philosophy which raises a question: what in a society which has replaced the priority of common purpose with the pursuit of private ends, is the contemporary relevance of the philosophy of R.H. Tawney?

Tawney, in a critical review of M.H. Dobson’s *STUDIES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF HISTORY*, recommended, in the interest of scholarship and impartial judgement, that “respect for a thinker is shown not by respecting what two generations ago he said, but by considering what, in the light of knowledge acquired since

ⁱ *Equality, 1952, Chapter VII, Epilogue 1938-1950.*

ⁱⁱ *The Unprincipled Society, David Marquand, Fontana Press, 1988, p.18.*

he wrote, he might now be disposed to say”.ⁱ Certainly, in the light of the changes, social, political and economic of the last decades, with the application of ‘New Right’ economic and social theories, in the face of the apparent acceptance of a new libertarian spirit of individualism, it is proper to consider what Tawney “might now be disposed to say”. It is appropriate, also, to re-examine Tawney’s social philosophy in a world in which the ‘globalisation’ of the market place, the emergence of new centres of industrial production and revolutionary technological advances have presented a challenge to the hegemony of the established industrial powers. Yet a world which has seen the collapse of the erstwhile Soviet Union, the failure of Marx-Leninism and the end of the ‘cold war’, is still confronted with disease, poverty, unemployment, hunger and inflation. It faces, too, the unprecedented dangers of ecological disaster in the wake of unregulated and irresponsible economic expansion. In such a world, threatened, insecure, it is indeed proper to “pay respect” to the thought of R.H. Tawney and consider, what, “in the light of knowledge since acquired he might now be disposed to say”.

Tawney’s philosophy was first formulated in what, in retrospect, was a more stable age. Yet, if the peace proved to be fragile and the stability insecure, the principles, rooted in Christian faith which inspired the philosophy, remained unchanged and the resolve to realise them undiminished. From this philosophy there emanated the conviction that the first requirement for ... “ a reconstruction of society” is a recourse to moral principles. From this philosophy there evolves, too, a vision of a society of ‘function’, a community of mutual obligation, of common purpose, of a common culture, of fellowship and co-operation. From these same principles came Tawney’s uncompromising commitment to equality. Yet, even as he acknowledged in 1950, that without the ... “alarms and excursions” forecast by the anti-egalitarians there had been achieved through democratic process a progress towards a more egalitarian society, and conceded that ... “it was legitimate to feel a modest pride that a course in the right direction had been

ⁱ *The History of Capitalism’, R.H. Tawney, History & Society, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1950, p.211.*

held", he regretfully complained that ... "the devils of insolence and servility" which ... "the poison of inequality engenders, had not yet been eliminated".ⁱ There still existed a society which did not extend equally to each individual the freedom to responsibly participate in decisions which directly affected their lives. There still existed inequalities of opportunity, of education, of environment. NB

Most disappointingly for Tawney, there still existed a misunderstanding of a cardinal egalitarian argument ... "the disparities of life which cut deepest", he insisted, "are a matter not merely of income, but of life".ⁱⁱ It is currently claimed by egalitarians that these complaints are still valid. However, some anti-egalitarians dispute this claim. There is, they argue, and there always will be, a hard core of social misfits unable or unwilling to cope with normal social conditions. There remains, too, it is submitted, an underclass, deprived, uneducated, perhaps uneducable, which resist every attempt to absorb them into the mainstream of conventional life. Yet, it is proposed, that with the exception of these minority groups, a gradual yet relentless process of equalisation has made obsolete the traditional notions of an exploited and subservient working class. We have witnessed, it is postulated, a social and economic revolution. In the face of the inexorable equalisation it is asserted, the bastions of privilege and the hierarchies of power are visibly crumbling. Thus, it is argued, the egalitarian case, at least in democratic industrial societies, is irrelevant and anachronistic. Certainly, Tawney recognised that there had been progress towards a more equal social order. He acknowledged the improvements in social conditions which resulted from the post-war welfare legislation. He was quick to point out that against the warnings of the anti-egalitarians, this legislation had been effected without repression. Yet, it may be argued, to assess Tawney's social theories merely in reference to whether or not there exists a persistent tendency towards

ⁱ *Equality*, p.222.

NB Tawney's concern for education is still relevant when in 1994, in England, one hundred and seventy-seven of the top two hundred schools ranked by A level results are private. See *The Seven Cultures Of Capitalism*, Charles Hampden Turner and Alfons Trompenaais, Piatkus Books, 1994.

ⁱⁱ *Equality*, p.222.

equalisation and whether or not this tendency is irreversible, is to underestimate the range of Tawney's thought. As Anthony Crosland argued, (in 1974) in spite of the great social and economic changes which followed the war "even after six years of Labour rule Britain is conspicuous for its persistent and glaring class inequalities" ... "extreme class inequalities remain".ⁱ NB There were still gross inequalities of wealth and income and the consequent inequalities of power.

Some Critical Views: An Attack From The Left

Tawney's political philosophy is not only subject to the criticism of libertarian ideologists and advocates of laissez-faire economics. When Alisdair McIntyre insists that Tawney's social theories are irrelevant,ⁱⁱ he attacks from the left. While McIntyre grants that Tawney was "full of high moral purpose", he declares Tawney's ... "cliché ridden high mindedness" to be suspect. McIntyre argues that the 'socialist' policies implemented after 1945 were not, as Tawney had suggested, ... "the deliberate choice of the Labour Party" but were coincidental to Tawney's recommendations. Indeed, he claims that in spite of ... "the frustrations and disillusionment of its working class supporters, the Labour Party had provided ... "the necessary and inevitable solution to the problem of laying a new basis for British capitalism". Tawney, McIntyre argues, not only underrated ... "the resources of an intelligent conservative defence of capitalism", he also overlooked the capitalism of the big corporations which may, for its own purposes, accept trade unionism, the welfare state and even measures of state intervention and public control. Furthermore, McIntyre insists, the orthodox Labour Party on which Tawney pinned his hopes for social change was increasingly the political expression of technocrats and managers rather than of the workers. It was, McIntyre suggests, ... "merely an alternative

ⁱ *Socialism Now*, Anthony Crosland, Jonathan Cape, 1974, p.23.

NB Contemporary statistics are not encouraging. "An analysis of Department of Employment statistics showed the gap between the lowest and average earners is widening". "Nearly ten million British workers earn less than the 'European Decency Threshold'. See *Report of the Low Pay Unit*, Sept., 1992.

ⁱⁱ 'The Socialism of R.H. Tawney', Alisdair McIntyre, *New York Review of Books*, Sept., 1964.

Conservative Party”, a fact ... “ which Tawney succeeded in concealing from himself and others”. This attack not only charges Tawney with complacency, it compounds the charge with an alleged ... “lack of *political* imagination and intelligence”.NB1

Curiously, as if in response to Tawney’s recommendation concerning the “respect due to a thinker” for ... “ what he might be now disposed to say”, McIntyre questions whether it may ... “perhaps be absurd to criticise Tawney for being limited by the horizons of this period”. Yet, having quite properly posed the question, he proceeds with the criticism on the grounds of Tawney’s ... “profound misunderstanding of the role and achievements of the post-war Labour government”. Plainly, an assessment of the role and the achievements of the post-war Labour government is beyond the scope of this thesis; yet, it may reasonably be argued that McIntyre’s perception of a working class ... “frustrated and disillusioned” because they had been denied a more radical socialism by the political ineptitude of high minded moralists is open to question.NB2 Similarly, McIntyre’s criticism of Tawney’s failure to press for the complete public ownership of industry evolves from a profound misunderstanding of Tawney’s position on nationalisation. Certainly, Tawney demands the nationalisation of the key industries, ... “the mines, the railways, the canals, etc.”ⁱ Yet, nationalisation, Tawney argues ... “ is not by itself an end, it is a means to an end”, (and) ... “when the question of ownership has

NB1 *The assessment was advanced in 1964. It is possible ... “in the light of knowledge since acquired”, that after the disintegration of the Soviet system and the reappraisal and more general acceptance of social democratic policies, McIntyre’s condemnation of Tawney’s position might be less severe.*

NB2 *Indeed, it may be argued that McIntyre’s perception derives from ... “a profound misunderstanding” of what, (in 1945), was the political temper of the British working-class. True, the five post-war priorities and expectancies of the British people were “Less class distinctions, Education reforms, Levelling of income, More state control, Increased social services”. See ‘Mass Observation’ report 1943.*

Nevertheless, in the 1945 election the Communist Party of Great Britain committed to achieve precisely these priorities, presented a “radical socialist programme” which included the public ownership of industry, the banks, etc. The party polled 102,780 votes a minuscule 0.04% of the national total. They gained one parliamentary seat, bringing their total to two. In 1950, with 100 candidates, the party vote fell to 91,746, (0.03% of the national total) They lost both seats. See Parliamentary Elections Aspects of Britain. See HMSO Publication, 1991, p.41/42.

ⁱ *The Acquisitive Society, p.149.*

been settled the question of administration still remains”.ⁱ Unequivocally, Tawney asserts, public accountability is essential to ensure that the purpose of industry is efficiently realised. Nevertheless, he insists, it is the understanding that the overriding purpose of industry is the provision of public service, rather than private gain, which must determine the ownership structure of any particular enterprise. Tawney, in spite of McIntyre’s complaint concerning his attitude to ... “the big corporations”, perceives the dangers of an over centralised public sector and of an all-powerful state of excessive bureaucratic control. The administrative body which succeeds private ownership, he insists, must not be a department dependent on the government but rather ... “an authority which represents those who supply the service and those who use it”.ⁱⁱ Tawney is committed to the decentralisation of power and the extension of local government, he proposes that the control of certain industries be invested not in Whitehall but in ... “the little republics of Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds”.ⁱⁱⁱ Furthermore, he suggests, the Co-operative Movement can also provide an efficient distribution of goods and service without a commitment to the maximisation of profit. His concern, then, is to divert industry from the acquisition of private gain to the performance of public function. To this end he proposes worker and consumer participation in the processes of production and distribution, the “professionalisation” of industry in an effort to ensure standards of excellence, efficiency and dedication. The essential condition is ultimately public control, he argues, but there are ways of replacing private ownership other than by nationalisation. There are, he observes, “more ways of killing a cat than drowning it in cream”.^{iv}

... “The heart of the matter for Tawney”, McIntyre judges, “is the moral deficiency of capitalism”. It is a perceptive judgement. Tawney was an Ethical Socialist, a Christian. He argued that a ... “moral regeneration was the necessary condition of a reorganisation of society”. He had, Professor Halsey and Norman Dennis insist, ... “a

ⁱ *The Acquisitive Society*, p.155.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.149.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.155.

^{iv} *Ibid*, p.155.

vision of society embodying a set of ideals”; these ideals illuminated his social philosophy. Yet, if Tawney’s demands for moral regeneration coincided with the declining authority and weakening influence of the Christian Church, he had, born of experience, an understanding of ... “the good sense, pertinacity, nerve and resolution of the loveable, pigheaded, exasperating, Henry Dubb”.ⁱ He had, too, a pragmatic understanding of the British Labour Movement, its strengths and its weakness. ^{NB} Indeed, his research into the American Labour Movement had deepened his understanding of its British counterpart. He recognised how the working class movement in Britain had developed, in the face of industrialisation, its own peculiar traditions, values and loyalties.

It is not, then, as Alisdair McIntyre alleges “a lack of political intelligence and imagination” which undermines Tawney’s political convictions. Dubb, Tawney asserts, will not lightly surrender such hard-won rights as he possesses: he will guard them jealously; for Tawney insists, ... “He is more sensible than some of his intellectual pastors in thinking them worth having”.ⁱⁱ Furthermore, as David Reisman insists, Tawney is committed to a socialism which is democratic. His belief in democracy, Reisman argues, ... “extends not only to its conception but also to its mode of operation”.ⁱⁱⁱ For Tawney, Reisman asserts, democratic socialism pre-supposes ... “not a revolution led by a vanguard of activists ∴ but rather a peaceful and democratic revolution radiating out from polity to economy”.^{iv} Such a revolution finds its inspiration ... “not in inexorable evolutionary laws of historical and political economy” but in the evaluation and rejection of the values of the acquisitive society.

Tawney’s social vision, then, rests on this understanding of social democracy: the democratic rights which sustain it and the need to defend them. It rests, too, on the

ⁱ ‘Christianity and The Social Revolution’, 1935, see *The Attack*, p.166.

^{NB} ‘The American Labour Movement’, R.H. Tawney, 1942, see *The American Labour Movement and Other Essays*, Ed. J.M. Winter, Harvester Press, 1979.

ⁱⁱ ‘Christianity and The Social Revolution’, 1935, see *The Attack*, p.166.

ⁱⁱⁱ *State and Welfare: Tawney, Galbraith and Adam Smith*, David Reisman, Macmillan, 1982, p.29.

^{iv} *Ibid*, p.29.

perception that an all-powerful state threatens that concept of liberty which is an essential condition for the exercise of individually chosen ends. It rests on the rejection of a 'socialism' which places the sovereignty of the all-powerful state above the legitimate freedom of the individual. Such a rejection endorses what William Temple held as an essential 'Christian Social Principle' which insists that ... "the person is primary, not the society: The State exists for the citizen, not the citizen for the State".ⁱ

Yet, ultimately Tawney's social vision rests on a notion of democratic government, which, Anthony Arblaster suggests, is expressed "in the idea of popular power, of a situation in which power and perhaps authority rests with the people". Such authority, Arblaster argues, "while it may look to the people as the ultimate political authority need not be exclusively political. It often takes the form "of the idea of popular sovereignty",ⁱⁱ which, Tawney argues, "extends to the majority the democratic right to make or unmake governments".ⁱⁱⁱ It rests, too, on the proposition that a social philosophy concerned with the "muddled soul of Henry Dubb", permeated by a morality which emphasises fellowship, community, and mutual obligation, cannot, in an increasingly materialist world, be irrelevant.

Nevertheless, the possibility of achieving broad acceptance of such a philosophy within a society in which Henry Dubb is no longer the archetypal citizen is perhaps the most vulnerable part of Tawney's social vision, and the one most open to McIntyre's charge of "cliché-ridden high-mindedness". The proposal for a common culture and a common ethical basis for social and political life clearly faces complex problems in a pluralistic, multi-cultural, post modern society. On the other hand, it is a feature of such societies that in the interest of social harmony, principled proposals for political and public life proliferate.

ⁱ *Christianity and The Social Order*, William Temple, 1942, Shephard-Walwyn, 1976 edition, p.67.

ⁱⁱ *Democracy*, Anthony Arblaster, Open University Press, 1987, p.8.

ⁱⁱⁱ 'Social Democracy in Britain', 1949, see *Radical Tradition*, 1964, p.158.

A Feminist Critique: Anne Phillips

A contemporary reader sympathetic to Tawney's philosophy cannot fail to respond to the somewhat qualified respect he pays to ... "the loveable, pig-headed, Henry Dubb". Yet the same reader, confronted each day with the urgent claims for equality and equity engendered by the concerns of race, religion, ethnicity, sexual preference and gender, will note that Tawney does not address these issues. While he confesses that he ... "has not yet despaired of Henry", he appears to have forgotten Henrietta. Anthony Wright draws attention to 'this sin of omission' and quite properly comments that while ... "no doubt Tawney was entirely typical of his generation, there is a conspicuous absence of women in his socialist argument." The social focus, Wright proposes ... "was on class ... this focus is too narrow for a contemporary socialism, which, nourished by feminism, has learned to extend its range of vision from class to gender".ⁱ Wright's proposition is given emphasis by Anne Phillips in her perceptive critique of the notion of fraternity. In an increasingly individualist world, Professor Phillips insists, socialists ... "cast around ... for some surviving signs of collective feeling".ⁱⁱ There is, she argues, a sense of regret at the loosening of the traditional socialist bonds of solidarity, co-operation and community. Phillips, after an examination of the historical background, argues that the notion of fraternity which evolved out of the medieval guilds and the peripatetic lives of the journeymen was essentially predicated ... "upon a community of single males bound together ... by their shared experience as *men*". From this root, she suggests, there grew the traditional definition of the working class as a male, and therefore, ... "solidarity became almost inextricably linked with masculinity". Class unity, she asserts, ... "became the prerogative of male workers". Now she proposes, as the traditional centres of male employment decline, the new industrial sectors increasingly require the skills and services of women. The changed circumstances in which women now compose over 40% of the work force, Phillips insists, demand a more realistic concept of solidarity, which she

ⁱ R.H. Tawney, Anthony Wright, p.147.

ⁱⁱ 'Fraternity', Anne Phillips, see *Fabian Essays in Socialist Thought*, edited by Ben Pimlott, Fabian Society, 1984, p.230-241.

sagaciously recommends, must accommodate itself to the new social, economic and industrial environment.^{NB1}

There exists, too, Professor Phillips recognises, in spite of the understanding that women share a common identity as women, a division which separates working class women from middle class women, women with children from those without children and the myriad differences arising from race, religion, sexuality, etc. The notion of sisterhood, she suggests, even as it creates a bond, conceals these divisions. But if these differences exist, Professor Phillips argues, the problem of solidarity still remains, and the solution must reject a politics based on the self-interest which derives from gender or background, or special groupings. Certainly, a notion of solidarity based on an ideal of brotherhood which is concerned with the exclusive and particular interests of men is inadequate. It must give way, as Phillips suggests, to ... “a more complex unity that stems from recognising and facing those conflicts which can divide us”. Professor Phillips is concerned with contemporary issues; she is concerned to confront contemporary problems. While she does not directly reprimand Tawney for his failure to address the question of gender, in her demand for a reinterpretation of the notions of fraternity, of unity and solidarity she properly observes “how conspicuous is the absence of women in Tawney’s socialist argument”.^{NB2}

Tawney, it must be conceded singularly failed to address the issue of gender. In his classic attacks on the inequalities and exploitation within industrial capitalism he neglected to evaluate how radically the system had effected the lives of working women. The changes were fundamental: “over the last fifty or sixty years as Anne Witz

^{NB1} *This account of Anne Phillips’ critique is necessarily brief, her case is cogently argued, her complaint is justified. It is however, because of the relevance of her arguments in reference to Tawney’s ‘sin of omission’ that I have gratefully enlisted her assistance.*

^{NB2} *Tawney, however, was not insensitive to the bitter struggle for women’s rights ... “Women, who fifty years ago would have been regarded as dependent almost as completely as if femininity were an incurable disease with which they had been born ... now receive an education, support themselves in the professions”, *The Acquisitive Society*, p.85.*

demonstrates, women, in most industrial capitalist societies, have made up an increasing proportion of the total labour force".ⁱ Certainly, the twentieth century has irreversibly transformed the role of women in society, yet, as Gisela Kaplan proposes, in spite of the dramatic increase in women's participation in paid employment, "the domestic field has generally remained women's work".ⁱⁱ In western industrial economies, Professor Kaplan agrees, "household technology has eased the burden of domestic chores. Yet, she argues, "such technology has not only turned the household into a consumer entity", it has supposedly "freed" women to seek employment outside the home and supplement the family income".ⁱⁱⁱ

Yet, as Professor Phillips recognises, solidarity is not exclusively work-based. A solidarity grounded in the notion of equality demands not only equal rights and equal opportunities, it demands equal respect. This respect must be extended to those women whose labour, child bearing, child caring, the creation of a stable domestic environment, is unpaid. Inevitably, the traditional work-based unity is, in the face of changing economic and productive processes, beginning to lose its power. Under these circumstances, Professor Phillips argues, "we have to look to alternative sources of strength and solidarity. "Whatever solidarity we build on for the future", she insists, "must rest on new foundations".^{iv} Certainly, Tawney's vision of community equality, co-operation and mutual respect cannot be realised where "class unity is the prerogative of the male worker".^v Indeed, the contemporary feminist argument which rejects the male assumptions of competitive individualism in favour of an ethic of care and solidarity endorses the social values which Tawney proposes. Ironically, traditional semantic restriction encourages the use of the inadequate, but generally employed adjective

ⁱ 'Women at Work', Anne Witz, see *Women's Studies*, edited by Diane Richardson and Victoria Robinson. Macmillan, 1993, p.274.

ⁱⁱ *Contemporary European Feminism: Gisela Kaplan*, U.C.L. Press 1992, p.37-40 *passim*.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.37-40 *passim*.

^{iv} 'Fraternity', Anne Phillips, see *Fabian Essays in Socialist Thought*, edited by Ben Pimlott, *Fabian Society*, 1984, p.230-241.

^v *Ibid*, p.236.

fraternal, to define a moral concept which extends the ethic of care and co-operation beyond the boundaries of sorority.

It may be argued that Tawney's work was concluded before the women's movement of the 1960's aroused a wide public awareness of the issues of women's rights. Yet, Tawney had witnessed the struggle for women's franchise; witnessed the exploitation of female labour in East End sweat-shops. He had seen, too, the changes brought about in employment patterns by the introduction of the typewriter and the influx into the workforce of female labour which were features of both the first and second world wars. Under these circumstances it is difficult to understand his failure, if not to stress, at least to acknowledge the importance and urgency of women's claims to effective equality. Curiously, in an analysis of 'Inequality and Social Structure', Tawney stated (in 1931) that whilst class remained a salient division in Britain, gender did not, ... "for men and women are treated as political equals".ⁱ It is a statement which sadly fails to acknowledge that the status of women as "political equals" did not protect them from the discriminatory practices and prejudices of some employers and even some trade unions in matters of wages, promotion and equality of opportunity. Certainly, it is curious that while Tawney attacks those arrangements, social, economic and political which sustain class division, perpetuate class privilege and militate against the notion of a common culture he makes no explicit and direct demand for women's rights. Yet, if there is no specific commitment to such rights, there is commitment to a social order ... "in which, as, within the limits set by nature, knowledge and resources, its institutions and policies are such as to enable *all* its members to grow to their full stature,"ⁱⁱ to realise their full capacities. It may be argued, in defence of the theory of community set out by Tawney, that such a social order, such institutions and policies, cannot exclude women. It must be argued, too, that such a commitment is necessarily extended, by the tenets of Tawney's Christian faith, to ... "all the children of God". Perhaps, this failure should be considered

ⁱ *Equality*, p.57.
ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.235.

in accordance with Tawney's own advice, ... respect for a thinker", he proposed, "is shown not by respecting what two generations ago he said, but by considering what in the light of knowledge acquired since he wrote, he might now be disposed to say".ⁱ

Some Sympathetic Criticisms

While Alisdair McIntyre finds little of contemporary relevance in Tawney's thought there are thinkers who, not without criticism, are prepared to defend him. Inevitably, they recognise the profound changes, social, economic and political of the last decades. They perceive that new problems require new solutions; demand new insights, ethical, cultural, even psychological. If they approve the accolades directed at Tawney's thought,^{NB1} they must consider the brickbats.^{NB2} They must, too, after four decades, remember Tawney's advice, ... "from generation to generation", he insisted, "the system of valuations, preferences and ideals - the social environment within which individual character functions - is in process of continuous change".ⁱⁱ

Nevertheless, Anthony Wright, while he considers Tawney "capable of saying some of the most important things that need to be said in constructing a case for democratic socialism"ⁱⁱⁱ presents a cogent, though sympathetic critique. Tawney's aim, Wright argues, was to mobilise for socialism "a moral community, rooted in traditional

ⁱ *The History of Capitalism*, R.H. Tawney, 1950, see *History and Society*, p.211.

^{NB1} "Tawney is the one twentieth century British socialist thinker who can be saluted from every quarter, Bevanite left, Gaitskell right, guild socialist, Marxist, Fabian, Christian Socialist ... he fertilised them all" ... (he was) "the philosopher who most nearly provided an overall socialism in British conditions and according to British temper". See 'R.H. Tawney and His Times', Ross Terrill. *Andre Deutsch*, 1974, p.277.

^{NB2} Martin J. Weiner, in *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850-1980*, quotes G.R. Elton's letter to the *Times Literary Supplement* (11/2/77) in which Elton insists that Tawney's *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* ... "has some claims to being one of the most harmful books written in the years between the wars. At least one generation, and that a crucial one, was given grounds for believing that everything that contributed to the greatness and success of their country derived from sinful selfishness and money grabbing wickedness". Pelican edition, 1985, p.196.

ⁱⁱ *Religion and The Rise of Capitalism*, p.272.

ⁱⁱⁱ *R.H. Tawney*, Anthony Wright, p.150.

values, expressed in its code of morality, its religious institutions and its structures of private life".ⁱ How, Wright asks, can one reconcile the ideal of a community around common ends in combination with democratic pluralism and functional freedom? Is such a moral unity around common ends practicable, or even desirable? Can a moral consensus be maintained as Tawney's notion of democratic socialism demands, within a pluralistic society of individual functional freedom? Tawney's socialism, Wright asserts, "depends on his belief in God: he is a Christian". How, then, in an increasingly secular society in which moral diversity and religious plurality flourish, can a coherent moral community be sustained? Is it possible that "an appeal from the established values of private life to a recognition of their implications for public life",ⁱⁱ can survive in a society in which the structure and the values are constantly contested and "the vitality of the established order" is steadily eroded? Further, as if in answer to Tawney's demands, the Church and other moral authorities within our multi-cultural society are increasingly vocal and progressive in their social policies. Yet, the crisis of liberal humanism is accentuated by their failure to exercise their moral authority on behalf of Tawney's basic message, both Christian and Humanist, that men and women by virtue of their common humanity have claims each upon the other.

Certainly Wright exposes an inconsistency in Tawney's thought. Inevitably Tawney's desire for a morally rooted social unity encounters problems of ethical diversity, social pluralism and political freedom. To avoid these problems, Wright submits, "a philosophy of common ends comes perilously close to being a philosophy of loose ends".ⁱⁱⁱ Indeed, Wright has anticipated the concerns of John Rawls who asks how, within liberal democratic societies, can a stable system of co-operation be maintained "between free and equal citizens who are deeply divided by the reasonable and comprehensive religious, philosophic and moral doctrines which they affirm"?^{iv}

ⁱ R.H. Tawney, *Anthony Wright*, p.147-150.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.147-150.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.88.

^{iv} *Political Liberalism*, John Rawls, Columbia University Press, 1993, p.44.

Plainly it must be conceded that democratic socialism cannot necessarily secure a moral unity or guarantee a moral consensus around common ends. Nor, it must be argued, can any ... “religion be relied upon to lead the believer in the direction of a socialism of common purpose of common humanity”.ⁱ Even Tawney’s socialism, which is ... “so explicitly legitimised by his High Church Christianity”ⁱⁱ cannot, David Reisman insists, in an increasingly secularised society which is both religiously and ethnically pluralistic, be relied upon “to lead the believer in the direction of a socialism of common humanity”. How, then, to achieve enduring social unity within a society which allows for the free expression of views which are unorthodox, dissident or even eccentric? How, then, to avoid confrontations when sectional interests react against the notion of a community of common purpose?

Certainly, libertarians will reject Tawney’s concept of a society which seeks a moral consensus around common ends for they see morality realised in the pursuit of freely chosen *individual* ends. Furthermore, the simplistic conservative perception ... “of a common culture evolving from a shared history, shared values and unspoken assumptions”,ⁱⁱⁱ is unacceptable to Tawney. For Tawney, the foundations of a common culture, as Raymond Williams submits, are essentially economic. ... “Their condition is a large measure of equality”.^{iv} Nevertheless, the most sympathetic critic must recognise the unresolved tension between Tawney’s vision of morality realised within a community of common purpose and a morality expressed in the free exercise of individual rights. Further, when the notion of a common culture predicated on ... “a large measure of equality” confronts the new-right claim that ... “in liberal democratic societies for moral and constitutional purposes we are all egalitarians now”,^v the tension is accentuated.

ⁱ *State and Welfare*, Tawney, Galbraith and Adam Smith, David Reisman, Macmillan, 1982, p.33.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.33.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Modern Conservatism*, David Willetts, Penguin Books, 1992, p.110.

^{iv} *Culture and Society*, Raymond Williams, Hogarth Press, 1958, see 1987 Edition p.220.

^v *Modern Conservatism*, David Willetts, Penguin Books, 1992 p.110 / 111.

Tawney is not unaware of the potential clash between fundamental values. He recognises that within liberal democracies “liberty, the supreme political value”, may be constrained by lack of economic power. Certainly, he would not abandon the notion of democratic pluralism. He sees it as the agency by which the democratically agreed ends of a responsible citizenry may be fulfilled. He sees it, too, as a necessary condition of individual freedom; a bulwark against the economic and political power of particular interest groups.

Furthermore, in spite of David Reisman’s anxiety concerning Tawney’s ‘High Church Christianity’, Tawney is not locked into a narrow Christian sectarianism. Although his social philosophy is grounded in Christian values, he recognises the spiritual strength and the social contribution of Humanism, which he asserts, “is neither the anti-thesis of Christianity nor of theism”.ⁱ The “humanist essence,” as Tawney identifies it, is close to his own Christian understanding. It is expressed, he proposes, “in the belief that the machinery of existence ... the whole fabric and mechanism of social institutions is to be regarded as a means to an end ... the growth towards the perfection of individual human beings”.ⁱⁱ Such a humanism for Tawney can only evolve out of a democratically approved consensus, which, in the name of equity, “judges the externals of life by their effect in assisting or hindering the life of the spirit”.ⁱⁱⁱ

Tawney recognised in China an example of a common culture which did not depend on any one religion or sectarian basis. He saw there a spiritual unity which, he proposed, had existed during the greater part of her history. Such a unity, he submitted, “is the unity of a civilisation rather than a political system”.^{iv} It is a unity unsustained by individual political rights or a formal legal structure: a unity cemented by shared practices and traditional values. It creates, it may be argued, a social cohesion which, in England,

ⁱ *Equality*, p.82-88 *passim*.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.82-88 *passim*.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.85.

^{iv} ‘China’, 1930-1931, R.H. Tawney, see *The Attack* p.36-37 *passim*.

preceded the “growth of individualism” and “the triumph of the economic virtues”. Such a unity, Tawney insists, does not derive from a common language or “a community of economic conditions”. Further, he asserts, it does not rest on religion, for, he remarks, “in China the gods are not jealous and there is no national creed”. Ultimately, he argues, it rests on a philosophy which makes personal relations, not rules of law, the centre of its scheme”.ⁱ

Tawney, then, the Christian moralist, finds common ground with the Humanist principle which encourages the growth towards individual perfection. The “man of deep Christian faith”,ⁱⁱ recognises in a non-Christian society, an affinity with his own philosophy of co-operation, fellowship and personal relations. Tawney’s social philosophy is motivated by demands for equality, for co-operation, for individual development. These demands, he insists, can only be realised within a socialist and democratic society. Yet, Britain today, as Anthony Wright reminds us, is religiously pluralistic, multi-ethnic and increasingly secularist. It is, too, a society which must, in the name of equity, acknowledge the legitimate claims of feminism which Tawney, unhappily failed to address. Yet a co-operating and responsible citizenry, may, in a democratic society, reach a consensus. A responsible and co-operative citizenry sharing an ethic in which every citizen, broadly, enjoys an equal opportunity for legitimate self expression may, in a democratic society, reach a consensus. Such a consensus does not necessarily demand that a society be united in basic religious, philosophic belief although, as Tawney insists, reciprocity, tolerance and mutual respect are necessary conditions of social cohesion. Yet, as John Rawls argues, consensus may evolve where “the political conception of justice is a focus of an overlapping consensus of reasonable comprehensive doctrines endorsed by the main religious, political and moral doctrines that endure over time in a well ordered society”.ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ ‘China’, 1930-1931, R.H. Tawney, see *The Attack*, p.36-37 *passim*.

ⁱⁱ *Introduction to Tawney’s Commonplace Book*, J.M. Winter and D.M. Joslin, Cambridge University Press, 1970, p.XIII.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Political Liberalism*, John Rawls, Columbia University Press, 1993, p.192.

Tawney Today

"I believe that man will not merely endure; he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance".

Wm. Faulkner; Address upon receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature; Stockholm; Dec. 10, 1950.

Over the last two centuries of wars and revolutions, through technical and scientific advance, through concessions gained and privileges yielded, there has evolved in Western industrial societies a marked and general improvement in the material conditions of life. There has been an extension of franchise, and an extension of education. There now exists, though often grudgingly extended and stringently monitored, a wide, if not universal, acceptance of the notion of welfare provision. Nevertheless, in spite of the improvements within these developed economies, they are subject to recurring recessionary economic crises which result, inevitably, in unemployment and social tension. This problem is compounded by the drive towards more efficient and competitive production which necessarily demands the introduction of new technological methods which make old skills redundant. Such methods, while they require the expertise of a small highly-trained technical class, perpetuate class division, create unemployment with its attendant miseries of rejection, insecurity and social distress. These methods accentuate the division between the skilled and the unskilled. They create an underclass, with all that implies for social unrest, for envy, for resentment, for a narrow and twisted 'patriotism'.

There exists, too, the problems of the 'underdeveloped' world. With modern communication technology, burgeoning international investment, an expanding world market, the nations of the world and the economies of the world are increasingly

interdependent. Now, with the demise of the 'Soviet Bloc', hopefully free of global confrontation, we are confronted by global problems which demand global solutions. Vast areas of an interdependent world face the miseries of starvation; we face the dangers of over-population, of mass migrations, of disease. We face the perils of ecological disaster brought on by ecological mismanagement. We waste precious, diminishing resources. We live in a world in which a welding fracture at Sosnovy Bor threatens the health, the life expectancy, indeed the lives of millions. Threatened by tyrannies and revolutions, by the arbitrary caprices of natural disasters, the population of the 'third world' (now over seventy percent of the global population) place in jeopardy, by their numbers, by their desperation and their despair, the fragile security of the entire world.

The solution to these problems, it is generally recognised, demand international co-operation. They demand the intervention of internationally funded agencies, empowered to act, not in the narrow interest of individual or corporative gain, but in the wider interest of global stability, perhaps even global survival.^{NB} A world so threatened cannot entrust its future to the mechanics of an unrestricted market economy. Such mechanics are designed to identify a market, to invest capital in that market on such terms as will, commensurate with prudent investment practice, secure the highest financial return. Its first priority is to maximise profit; its dynamic is expansionist. Its objective is not to safeguard finite resources but rather to market those resources in the best interest of capital accumulation. Such a dynamic is not concerned with the control of population explosion or with the social and cultural consequences of mass migrations; it cannot subordinate its objectives and its interests to the solution of global problems. It has neither mechanism nor brief to correct those imbalances of power and wealth which exist between the developed and underdeveloped countries, between the affluent and the

^{NB} Tawney, in 1924, had recognised the need for international co-operation. *"Internationalism has, I am well aware, a Utopian sound. But policies must be based on the realities of human intercourse (and since) economic civilisation is supernational, the real romantics are those who continue to brandish the political formulas of a vanished order. the line which separates national from international interests requires to be redrawn". International Affairs, 1924, see The British Labour Movement And Other Essays, R.H. Tawney, Yale University Press, 1925.*

poverty stricken. Certainly, a dynamic motivated by the spirit of competition and acquisition is not, by its very nature, disposed towards co-operative endeavour nor are its first concerns for community or common purpose. Men may, indeed, be as Doctor Johnson suggests ... “never more innocently employed than in getting money”, but in so doing, they are rarely concerned, in the interest of mankind, to solve those problems which threaten the planet.

The world, Tawney argues, ... “continues in scarcity” because it is too grasping and too short sighted to seek that ... “which maketh men to be of one mind in a house”. The well intentioned schemes for social reorganisation ... “are abortive”, he suggests, ... “because they endeavour to combine incompatibles”.ⁱ They seek to diminish poverty and its attendant social evils by pursuing more vigorously the very policies which have created both the poverty and the social disorder. They fail to understand that ... “poverty is a symptom of social disorder”, while the disorder itself is something at once ... “more fundamental and more incorrigible”,ⁱⁱ the inevitable result of the false values of a social economic organisation which encourages possessive individualism rather than the spirit of community. The conditions for a right order of industry, Tawney argues, ... “are the same in all essentials, for a society which is poor as for a society which is rich”. The differences of economic endowment may determine what an industry may yield; they do not alter the ends at which industry should aim, or, he insists, ... “the moral standards by which its organisation should be tried”.ⁱⁱⁱ Tawney in 1921 had warned that ... “the period of increasing returns has ended and the period of diminishing returns has begun”.^{iv} He recognised that in a world of finite resources, the industrialised nations, in order to secure ... “the foodstuffs and raw materials” essential to economic survival, must organise an economic order not only with regard to economic expediency but on ... “such moral

ⁱ *The Acquisitive Society*, p.5.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.7.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.7.

^{iv} *Ibid*, p.7.

principles as would justify themselves to the consciences of decent men”.ⁱ Such moral principles for Tawney are necessarily grounded in the notion of community and common purpose. They evolve from a perception that ... “a poor society cannot be too poor to find a right order of life, nor a rich society too rich to have need to seek it”.ⁱⁱ In an increasingly interdependent world in which there is not yet an international agency which effectively addresses the global problems of environmental damage, diminishing resources and endemic poverty, Tawney’s injunction “to seek a right order of life” is relevant.

Yet to embrace “a right order of life” demands of men and women that they make an existential choice. Certainly Tawney, as Anthony Wright argues, always believed and always assured others that “the labour movement represents a moral revolt against capitalism, a demand by human beings to be treated as ends not as means”.ⁱⁱⁱ Yet Tawney’s insistence that any reform of the prevailing system must incorporate “an adequate conception of human nature and human aspirations”, may be expressions of his own sense of outrage at the moral deficiencies of capitalism. Perhaps, Wright proposes, Tawney ... “in claiming to know what people felt and cared about was claiming too much”? Certainly, it is possible that Tawney’s assessment of what moved men and women to political action was mistaken. Perhaps his judgement of what men and women ... “felt and cared about” was erroneous, predicated not on ... “human nature and aspirations”, as they are, but on his own highly developed sense of justice? Perhaps his Christian faith, his sense of morality, his commitment to a politics of moral exhortation, had blinded him to the ... “instrumental” attitude of working men and women? It is certainly possible that Tawney’s plea for moral regeneration derived from the false assumption that ordinary men and women have the moral capacity for such a regeneration. It is conceivable that his appeal for moral regeneration is a futile exercise, an appeal addressed to men and women concerned not with morality, but only to approve

ⁱ *The Acquisitive Society*, p.7.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid.*, p.7.

ⁱⁱⁱ *R.H. Tawney, Anthony Wright*, p.142.

such social changes which they perceive to coincide with their own interests. Perhaps Tawney's 'understanding' of ... "the muddled soul of Henry Dubb" had led him to ascribe to that ... "exasperating, loveable creature", a capacity for unselfish action which he did not, and never will, possess? Tawney's philosophy is grounded in the belief that narrow personal or sectional interests must be set aside in the name of fellowship, for the sake of community. Yet, within a society of competitive and isolated individualism, is not such a vision utopian? How, it may be legitimately asked, can such a philosophy be relevant within a society in which men and women strive to authenticate their lives by economic achievement in an impersonal market-place?

Tawney's social vision resides in the notion of a society in which a collective ethic sustains a democratically defined perception of the common good. In such a society a redistribution of economic power will preclude the exploitation of the economically powerless by the economically powerful. Yet, it must be argued that while a newly-empowered majority may accept the services and the advantages which derive from redistribution, they may not necessarily embrace the ethic which motivates it. Clearly, men and women may lack the capacity for moral regeneration which Tawney insists is a necessary condition of social reconstruction. Equally, he may have overestimated the sense of social solidarity which evolves from shared disadvantage. Clearly, while every individual desires the power to control his or her life, not every individual is prepared to accept the mutual responsibility and co-operative spirit of the collective ethic. Plainly, Henry and Henrietta Dubb, even without the guarantee of economic security, may reject a social ethic which seeks to promote intellectual and spiritual development in favour of an ethos of materialist acquisition and individualist competition.

Tawney, in 1921, reflected on the outcome of the war in which, for four years, millions had endured the extremes of misery, ... "for ends which they believed to be little

tainted with self interest”.ⁱ In spite of the sacrifices and suffering, he argued, the values of Macht-Politik and the ‘acquisitive society’ still persisted ... “as the victors continue the process of ruining themselves in order to more completely ruin the vanquished”. It was an illusion, he insisted prophetically, to suppose that such terms, imposed in the name of such values would preserve a lasting peace. Unless ... “mankind succeeded in basing its social organisation upon some moral principle which commands general acceptance”, he asserted, the same values will permanently ensure ... “an embittered struggle of classes, interests and groups”.ⁱⁱ It may be argued that the contemporary relevance of Tawney’s thought emanates precisely from this demand for ... “social organisation based on a moral principle which commands general acceptance”. The demand, however, is not merely a manifestation of dangers perceived by a prescient social theorist in the aftermath of war. Certainly, the demand endorses the judgement of an economic historian who argues that mankind, because it supposes prosperity is to be achieved by the destruction of an economic rival, ... “has torn itself to pieces every century, or oftener, since 1648”. Yet, the demand for a ... “moral principle” is more than a warning of perceived danger, more than historical judgement. Certainly, it is an expression of his own moral understanding, the assessment of a philosopher who, invoking the tenets of his own Christianity, is committed not just to solve a contemporary problem but to persuade men and women to live by those moral values which he perceives as both universal and fundamental to religious faith. There is, he insists, already ... “a principle we recognise in part and which we ought to recognise *everywhere*, and *always*”.ⁱⁱⁱ There exists, he proposes, in a short critical examination of utilitarian principles, ... “a law higher than the well-being of the majority, and that law is the supreme value of every human being as such”.^{iv} We are moved to condemn or approve the actions of men and women by a principle which is ... “transcendent, religious or mystical”. We are moved, he declares, by an understanding that ... “the most divine thing we know is the personality of man” ... and ... “to encroach

ⁱ *The Acquisitive Society*, p.224.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.225.

ⁱⁱⁱ *The Commonplace Book*, R.H. Tawney, entry for July 29, 1913.

^{iv} *Ibid*, entry for July 29, 1913.

on it is to efface the very title deeds of humanity".ⁱ This declaration is for Tawney an article of faith. It is to an expression of a transcendental humanism. He supports it with a verse from the Gospels which encapsulates a fundamental precept of Christian belief. (Math. 18:6, Mark 9:42, Luke 17:2) "Whosoever shall offend one of these little ones who believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea." This verse (not exactly verbatim) is repeated three times in the New Testament.

For Tawney, the principle is transcendental because it rejects the repulsive and immoral notion that one man, for his own ends, may use the one God-given life of his neighbour. The principle is religious because it is at the heart of an ethic which proclaims that all men and women are equally the children of God. The principle is mystical because it has the power to inspire that "spirit of compassion and sacrifice and endurance" which, without regard to self-interest, evokes that *universal* human feeling which is mysteriously capable of binding together men and women in an understanding of their common humanity. Yet, Alisdair McIntyre proposes, in the age of such tiny and impotent figures as McDonald, Bonar Law, Baldwin and Chamberlain, Tawney, "the essentially English idealist" assumed "the appearance of great moral stature". However, McIntyre insists, "the Socratic question of whether one would rather have ones shoes mended by a good cobbler or a good man has relevance in politics, too".ⁱⁱ Tawney, McIntyre concedes, lived up to his own high-minded ideals, but, he assertively concludes, "Goodness is not enough".

Indeed. But it is not 'Goodness' on which Tawney relies. Certainly his political philosophy, sustained by his Christian faith, demands a social order which recognises that "certain types of society and certain types of life are fit for human beings and others are

ⁱ *The Commonplace Book, R.H. Tawney, entry for July 29, 1913.*

ⁱⁱ *'The Socialism of R.H. Tawney', Alisdair McIntyre, New York Review of Books, 1964, p.38-42.*

not”ⁱ, but, if this is “high-minded idealism” it must not be mistaken for naiveté. Tawney’s perception of a social order in which “the ultimate tribunal by which all forms of organisation and policy are to be tried is not economic expediency but the conscience of individuals”,ⁱⁱ finds no favour with the powerful interest groups who defend the values of the ‘acquisitive society’. Similarly, he understood that a socialism, “obstinately and unashamedly ethical”, which placed individual liberty before what the ruling faction proclaimed as the overriding interest of the state, would be derided, as “bourgeois Philistinism” by his “enlightened friends with philosophies of history”.ⁱⁱⁱ Indeed, Alisdair McIntyre who complains of Tawney’s failure to deal adequately with Marxist theory, declares that *The Radical Tradition*, “a book designed to celebrate the Social Democrat par excellence”, is in fact, “a monument to the failure of ideas”. However, in spite of attacks from both the Left and the Right, Tawney’s commitment to a society of responsible men and women working without fear in comradeship remains undiminished. Tawney offers no vision of Utopia, instead “this essentially English idealist” pragmatically insists that the important thing is not that equality should be completely attained, but that it should be sincerely sought.^{iv} As Leszek Kolakowski proposes, “goals now unobtainable will never be realised unless they are articulated when they are still unobtainable” ... The existence of Utopia as a utopia” he insists, is the necessary prerequisite for its eventually ceasing to be a utopia”.^v

The world today, Tawney declared “will not last” ... “the forces undermining it, forces which are moral and intellectual even more than economic are too strong”.^{vi} While capitalism, in its present form is a brief episode in the history of man, the “validity of the Christian doctrine of man, his dependence on God, and the relations which, as a consequence are to be desired between different members of the human family is universal

ⁱ *‘British Socialism Today’*, R.H. Tawney, *Radical Tradition*, p.168.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.169.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.170.

^{iv} *Equality*, p.56.

^v *Concepts of the Left*, Leszek Kolakowski, New Haven Press, 1976, p.686.

^{vi} *‘Christianity & The Social Order’*, see *The Attack*, p.189.

and permanent”.ⁱ This declaration is more than an expression of religious faith. For can it be that “man, who climbed out of the slime on all forms and stood upright”ⁱⁱ will, in the face of global problems which threaten his very existence, find no solution beyond the uncertainties of free-market capitalism? Can a system “which takes as its premise that every group and every individual shall be free to grab what they can get and hold what they can grab “survive the waste, the ill will, the anarchy ... “which threatens to overwhelm us”.ⁱⁱⁱ What faith can man place in a social and economic order “which even now, in the hour of its triumph, has not yet learned to master itself”?^{iv} Tawney, in a world threatened perhaps by terminal crisis, sought to remind mankind that “because men are men they are bound to acknowledge that man has claims on man”.^v In a world of “grab and hold”, of “hoard and snatch”, Tawney, “the best man I ever knew”,^{vi} devoted his life and employed his scholarship, in the service of a socialism whose foundations, he insisted, were ultimately ethical. He was committed to promote those “activities of the spirit” and ignite that “energy of the soul” which units mankind in fellowship, just as he was resolved to reduce those “insignificant differences” which divide it. Of Richard Henry Tawney, it must be truly said,

“He fought the good fight,

He finished his course,

He kept the faith” (Timothy II, 4:7)

Tawney: The Language Of Community

The Left, David Marquand argues, has ...

ⁱ *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, p.280.

ⁱⁱ *Notes for an Address to the Nobel Prize Committee, William Faulkner, Stockholm, 1950.*

ⁱⁱⁱ *Equality, R.H. Tawney, p.210.*

^{iv} *Ibid, p.280.*

^v *The Commonplace Book, entry for March 6, 1913.*

^{vi} ‘Postscript’, Hugh Gaitskell, *see The Radical Tradition, 1962, p.214.*

“in the past been in many respects as individualist in assumption and behaviour as The Right. It has advocated public intervention but as a means of satisfying private interests; it promised entitlement but said little about responsibilities. Its trade union allies represented the narrow sectional interests of their clienteles and rarely acknowledged a wider social interest”.ⁱ

In sum, the Left, according to Marquand’s assessment, has behaved exactly as Tawney regretfully expected. ... “Is it any wonder”, he declares, ... “that the creed which affirms the absolute rights or property should sometimes be met with a counter-affirmation of the absolute rights of labour”.ⁱⁱ When, he argues, a section of the working class use their strategic position to extort extravagant terms for themselves at the expense of their fellow workers, ... “might not such action” be described ... “as exploiting the community?” Tawney answers his own question without equivocation. At present, he argued, (in 1921) the statement is meaningless because ... “*before the community can be exploited, the community must exist, and its existence in the sphere of economic relations is today not a fact but only an aspiration*”.ⁱⁱⁱ This unequivocal assertion is of contemporary importance especially in view of Professor Marquand’s perception of “a shift in the public mood to ... a language of community”. While, Marquand proposes, ... “in the realm of policy, private interest still holds sway”, there is a growing sense of regret at the erosion of the community spirit”. After a decade in which neo-liberal doctrine seemed to be unassailable, *all* political factions now proclaim a concern for such values as ... “citizenship, responsibility and stewardship”.

Such widely acclaimed values, however, do not necessarily mean the same thing to all parties. The meanings are determined by such factors as a view concerning the role of government, a definition of liberty, an understanding of what constitutes equal rights and the emphasis placed on collective, rather than private interests. The moral quality and

ⁱ ‘A Language of Community’, David Marquand, see *The Alternative*, edited by Ben Pimlott, Anthony Wright and Tony Flower, W.H.Allen, 1990, p.3-13.

ⁱⁱ *The Acquisitive Society*, p.31.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.31.

social impact of this “neo-collectivism” has yet to be determined, and, Marquand proposes ... “it can be authoritarian or participative, repressive or tolerant, High Tory or social democratic”. Indeed, he insists there is no reason to assume that the Left is by definition “better fitted to work the grain of a neo-collectivist era”, in a society in which ... “private interest still held sway”.

Tawney would not dispute Professor Marquand’s assessment. His contemporary relevance does not rest on a defence of sectional interest nor in explanations of why, in ‘an acquisitive society’, the behaviour of particular groups is self-seeking and without regard for the common good. His relevance rests now, as it did in the past, on the convictions from which his social philosophy derives. The industrial problem, he argues, “is a moral problem” and “the cause of the present unrest is not simply economic, nor is it party political: it is moral”.ⁱ Certainly, within a materialist culture which neglects common ends in favour of private gain, an understanding that an ethical foundation is a necessary condition for an equitable society, is relevant. When, too, as Professor Marquand warns, the *moral* quality of this neo-collectivism is yet to be determined, Tawney’s injunction that “the conception of right and wrong must apply to all relations of life” (and that) “all social behaviour must be judged by strict moral standards”ⁱⁱ is relevant.

The hollowness of the ideology of neo-liberalism, Professor Marquand insists, has become increasingly apparent. Certainly, he argues, it has not ended the century-long relative decline of the British economy, and meanwhile, he proposes, its social costs have become more obvious and less tolerable.^{NB} Yet, as Tawney argues, ... “the smiling illusion which has erected into a philosophy the conception that industry is a mechanism,

ⁱ *The Commonplace Book*, entry for May 6, 1912.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, entry for May 6, 1912.

^{NB} “There were in the five poorest wards of Manchester 1,446 more deaths per year than the national average ... 14% of babies were born underweight as opposed to 3% in the affluent areas. Tameside Metropolitan Borough Policy Research Unit. 1988, Tameside.

moving by quasi-mechanical laws and adjusted by non-moral forces",ⁱ is lodged deep within the public consciousness. If there is, as Marquand suggests, a new demand for 'a language of community'; the ideology of consumerism, and the acclaimed triumph of the free-market, has not been seriously challenged, and as the poet observes,

"... In the supermarkets, things are still buying people".ⁱⁱ

Sadly, it must be acknowledged, that in Britain what Tawney identified as "the disease of inequality" has not been eradicated, nor has the acquisitive society given way to society of social obligation and co-operative purpose. Certainly, the new liberal enthusiasm which Professor Marquand detects for 'citizenship', 'responsibility' and 'stewardship' is welcome. Yet citizenship involves more than responsibility and stewardship, more than "the worthy endeavours" of individuals provoked into social action by "the new climate of voluntarism". It assumes a sense of mutual obligation; it requires, as Tony Wright insists, the understanding "that social life is more than a maelstrom of atomic individualism. It demands not only the acknowledgement that "public affairs (are) everyone's concern".ⁱⁱⁱ It calls for a redistribution of economic power, an alteration in economic relationships. Indeed, as David Willetts concedes, "in a modern market economy it is difficult to see how someone can participate properly without command over resources".^{iv} Precisely. Welfare provision, as Desmond S. King and Jeremy Waldron note "is now seen in western societies as a core element in citizenship", (it is regarded) "as integral to the contemporary sense of citizenship".^v

ⁱ *The Conditions of Economic Liberty*, see *The Radical Tradition*, p.101.

ⁱⁱ *Contra Viento y Marea*, Eduardo Galleano, Minerva, 1989, translated by Cedric Belfrage, p.207.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Citizens And Subjects*, Tony Wright, Routledge, 1994, p.127.

^{iv} *Modern Conservatism*, David Willetts, Penguin Books, 1992, p.118.

^v 'Citizenship, Social Citizenship and The Defence of Welfare Provision'. Desmond S. King and Jeremy Waldron, see *British Journal of Political Science*. 18, 1988 p.415/443 "An analysis of the normative stakes of claims to the social rights of citizenship in the light of New-Right criticism".

Indeed, as David Marquand submits, one cannot practice citizenship or participate in a common culture if you are trapped in a despairing and alienated underclass".ⁱ

For Tawney, therefore, 'the practice of citizenship' demands "a large measure of equality". Welfare provision, as a social right, equally extended, will redress the inequalities of economic power inherent in industrial capitalism. Such an entitlement will react against the grave inequalities, in health care, in education, in environment. Such an entitlement, Tawney insists, together with civil and political rights, "is the essence of citizenship".ⁱⁱ Certainly, welfare provision if minimally and begrudgingly extended cannot rescue an alienated underclass. Yet, Tawney insists, social provision "makes a contribution to equality", "it changes social psychology".ⁱⁱⁱ It creates, too, a climate of mutual responsibility and stewardship. It endorses "the notion of reciprocity of rights against, and duties towards the community", which, David Held argues, is the meaning of citizenship".^{iv}

Yet, now in an era in which, Raymond Plant insists, "the idea of empowerment is at the centre of the political debate", neo-liberals argue that individual empowerment is best pursued through the market mechanism. The social provision which Tawney demands as "a necessary condition for a life worthy of human beings" is increasingly attacked "as an illegitimate extension of rights".^v While Tawney defines empowerment as the capacity of the individual to control the economic circumstances of his or her economic life, a contemporary libertarian declares "the market mechanism to be quite an

ⁱ David Marquand in a review of 'Citizenship and Community' by Adrian Oldfield and other books concerned with citizenship, public co-operation, etc. see *New York Review of Books*, December, 1991.

ⁱⁱ *Equality*, Chapter XII, in which Tawney pays tribute to the perceptions of T.H. Marshall.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.219.

^{iv} 'Citizenship', David Held, see *Between State and Civil Society*, edited by Geoff Andrews, Lawrence and Wishart, 1991, p.21.

^v *Citizenship and Rights in Thatcher's Britain, Two Views*, Raymond Plant, Norman Barrie. I.E.A. Publication 1990, see Raymond Plant, p.4.

egalitarian device.”ⁱ While Tawney is fearful for “the traditional liberties of Englishman” in an industrial environment solely determined “by the decisions of a Committee of half-a-dozen Directors”,ⁱⁱ Professor Norman Barrie, a spokesman for the ‘new-right’ claims, “that the market process, *if left undisturbed*, shows a tendency to the equalisation of income”.ⁱⁱⁱ

Tawney’s assertion that ... “plenty is good and scarcity is evil”^{iv} can be regarded as a maxim for all seasons. That, ... “the neglect or perversion of these rights and duties” ... constitutes ... “oppression”, are judgements of contemporary relevance, as is the demand for a reappraisal of the purposes of industry. But Tawney’s concern extends beyond the perimeters of economic life. ... “Englishmen”, he proposes, ... “must repudiate an inhuman philosophy of politics”.^v Where social relationships and methods of organisation are determined by considerations of economic efficiency and economic convenience, that sense of fellowship, and that common culture, which, for Tawney, are necessary conditions for a civilised society cannot survive. The contemporary dedication to the creation and fulfilment of consumer’s ‘wants’ stimulated by an increasingly aggressive and ‘sophisticated’ advertising industry creates a culture of possessive individualism. Such a culture, Tawney warns, ... “erects an artificial barrier between the economic life of society and its culture, ... “its religion and its art”, its sense of community. The moral traditions, he warns, are degraded; the spirit of fellowship and ... “the kindly feelings of human beings are sterilised”.^{vi} The emphasis on consumerism and “considerations of economic convenience” has increased, not abated, in the decades since Tawney delivered these warnings, yet, ... “In the light of knowledge acquired since he wrote”, the warning is still relevant.

ⁱ *Citizenship and Rights in Thatcher’s Britain, Two Views, Raymond Plant, Norman Barrie. I.E.A. Publication 1990, see Raymond Plant, p.58.*

ⁱⁱ *The Acquisitive Society, p.163.*

ⁱⁱⁱ *Citizenship and Rights in Thatcher’s Britain, Two Views, Norman Barrie, p.59.*

^{iv} *The Acquisitive Society, p.5.*

^v *Ibid, p.101.*

^{vi} *The Conditions for Economic Liberty’, see Radical Tradition, p.101.*

Conclusions

"I suspect that we will not discover the way out of the present impasse until we find an economics that projects a moral vision along with a technological diagnosis".
Robert Heilbronner; New York Review of Books; 3 March, 1994.

The current international commitment to a new era of peaceful co-operation, it is claimed, will engender a new social, political and economic order. It is also claimed (although not without dissent) that with scientific and technological advances, the growth of the service industries and new methods of industrial production the traditional notions of class are redundant. The confrontations of the past, it is asserted, are obsolete relics of a less politically sophisticated age. In the aftermath of the collapse of the centralised command economies, a world no longer divided by opposing ideological differences, it is held, will inevitably turn, in the interest of prosperity and abundant provision, to a free-market economy. The superiority of the free market mechanism, it is declared, is self evident. A neutral free-market mechanism identifies and satisfies consumer needs and demands, and through economic efficiency creates a rise in the general living standards. The system, it is conceded, is not perfect. There may be periodical recessionary troughs just as there will be periods of above average prosperity. Certainly, there are divisions of opinion as to how freely such a free market should operate. There are political and economic theorists who insist that there must be absolutely no governmental interference with the free market process. There are others who argue that a degree of governmental intervention in the national interest is imperative, although there are factional differences concerning the extent of this intervention. The system, its libertarian champions insist, will, with the minimum of interference, offer not only the maximum opportunity for individual enterprise, it will also allow for the free exercise of the competitive spirit. Indeed, its advocates insist, a free market system is a necessary condition of freedom, a democratic right, and to interfere unduly with its mechanism is to constrain the rights of

the individual or the group to pursue their freely chosen ends.^{NB} Furthermore, it is proposed that since the market system is ... "open ended" ... "and because it is open, everyone can thrive without injuring others".ⁱ Yet, whatever the political and economic differences, in the light of the failure of the state controlled centralised economies, it is argued that a market economy is (with, some insist, a degree of control) the most efficient economic mechanism for the effective satisfaction of consumer demands. Now, when respected egalitarian scholars, in the interest of consumer and community, seek to formulate "a theory of socialism that includes a full-blooded, unapologetic commitment to a market economy",ⁱⁱ what, it may be asked, is the contemporary relevance of Tawney's philosophy?

Tawney's thought, it has been argued, is "derivative" ... "he was not an abstract thinker of high quality"ⁱⁱⁱ ... (he was) "a wholly impractical and inexperienced visionary". Certainly, he did not "carry to a higher order of abstraction the traditional theory of social contract" nor did he present "a systematic theory of justice". Tawney it is proposed, "was obviously not, in any but the vulgar sense, a philosopher".^{iv} Tawney's "case for socialism" is curiously insular. It is, as Anthony Wright proposes, "located entirely within the framework of a single national economy".^v Clearly, it fails to take into account the technological, economic and social development which has followed the internationalisation of the capitalist structure. Furthermore, Wright submits, while Tawney rejected a socialism based upon "a theory of class formation", he did assume the existence of a traditional proletariat as an indispensable social agency, which, Wright properly

^{NB} "It is interesting to note", George Orwell observes, that Mr (Joseph) Kennedy, USA ambassador to London remarked on his return to New York in October 1940 that as a result of the war, "democracy is finished". By "democracy", Orwell insists, he meant "private capitalism", see *The Lion and The Unicorn*, George Orwell, 1941, Vol. II Secker & Warburg.

ⁱ *Modern Conservatism*, David Willetts, p.82.

ⁱⁱ *Market, State and Community*, David Miller, see Introduction.

ⁱⁱⁱ *R.H. Tawney and His Times, Socialism As Fellowship*, Ross Terrill, Cambridge University Press, 1973, p.10.

^{iv} *The British Political Tradition, Vol. II, The Ideological Heritage*, W.H. Greenleaf, Routledge, 1983, p.440.

^v *R.H. Tawney*, Anthony Wright, p.146.

insists, "is scarcely adequate for a modern socialism preoccupied with the analysis of the decomposition of a traditional class structure". Certainly, the "decomposition of the traditional class structure" has accelerated with the triumph of the free-market philosophy. Patently, the retreat from public ownership, the emphasis on deregulation, the removal of trade barriers and capital investment controls, the growing competition from capital intensive technology at home and low labour costs abroad have all combined to erode the traditional class structure. Where, and Who, as Wright properly asks, is Henry Dubb now? ⁱ Indeed, it is not only the traditional class structure which is altered by the changing order. New methods of production are transforming the processes of production, making old skills redundant, demanding new habits of labour, changing the make up of the work force.

Clearly, technology has created a new work ethic, a new relationship between management and labour. In manufacturing industries there is an increasing dependency on specialised sub-contractors and the casualised services of the self-employed. Contemporaneously, in the expanding service sector, there is an increasing tendency (at the unskilled and semi-skilled level) to rely on the part-time labour of a low-paid, predominantly female work-force. Simultaneously, at the highest level, efficiency in both sectors demands the expertise of the professionally qualified technician. In the face of these factors the power of organised labour diminishes and the traditional working class solidarity which derives from shared work experience is weakened. There is, too, a decline in support of collectivist measures from the beneficiaries of the changing order. Restrictions on industry have little appeal to those who, with the spread of equity share ownership, perceive their interest in the maximisation of profit. Similarly, the ethic of individualism has fuelled a reluctance to support measure of taxation necessary to welfare provision.

ⁱ *R.H. Tawney, Anthony Wright, p.146.*

Such changes inevitably have social implications which challenge the conventional standards of social behaviour, dispute the authority of the established institutions, question the traditional values of family and community. The structural changes create social as well as economic disruption. A capitalism competitively engaged in a global market which seeks productive capacity in the labour force which will provide the greatest return on capital employed necessarily affects individual working lives, loosens local loyalties, alters the established relationships of the work place. Plainly, “a socialism located in a single national economy” predicted on the existence of a traditional (mainly male) working-class, is ill equipped to confront a capitalism which, with which minimum restraint, pursues maximum economic profit with the minimum of social obligation. Tawney, as economic historian had, perhaps uniquely, examined the impact of the political and social changes of the reformation on traditional doctrine and values. Yet, curiously, Tawney the social philosopher in proposing “a socialism of moral choice” neglected “to trace the significant connections” and examine the economic and social consequences which evolve from the rapidly changing structure of industrial capitalism. Plainly, such an examination is crucial to a contemporary theory of political thought. Certainly, as Anthony Wright insists, “a modern socialism ought to be properly concerned with both”.ⁱ

Furthermore, “a large measure of equality” is central to Tawney’s social thought; it is, he insists, a pre-condition of a common culture, the foundation of social equity. He perceives the democratic process as the only instrument by which “a large measure of equality” may be morally and peacefully attained. Yet, plainly, while democratic process has in the interest of equity extended equality, it has not produced a common culture; rather it has served to fragment it. Indeed, in liberal democratic societies an increasingly marginalised underclass is excluded by social and economic factors from the democratic process. Yet, while democratic process has provided improved access to education, to health care and housing, a significant section of the traditional socialist constituency has

ⁱ *R.H Tawney, Anthony Wright, p.146.*

been won over to an ideology which fosters competitive individualism rather than co-operative effort. Ironically, Tawney's chosen instrument has served to sustain, by democratic process, the values and aspirations of industrial capitalism.

Tawney's experience was of a largely homogenous culture which validated itself by respect for what it defined as liberty. Tawney rejected this narrow libertarian definition. The liberties of the powerful, he insists, cannot simply be construed as liberty. Liberty, he argues, extends beyond the freedom to buy and sell in the market place. For Tawney, liberty is not an abstract, value-free concept. His social philosophy evolves from an understanding of morality as a collective ethic motivated by a vision of the common good. The extension of liberty within such an ethic demands as a moral imperative, the equal distribution of the concrete and external conditions for personal growth and self development. Clearly, such a distribution and such empowerment will gain the support of the relatively powerless. Yet, while the disadvantaged may accept the advantages of public provision and enjoy the benefits of health care, educational access and social housing, they may not share Tawney's vision of the common good or of morality as a collective ethic. Indeed, they may perceive their interest served in the pursuit of private rather than communal ends. Tawney, "scholar, saint and social reformer"ⁱ is in danger of overestimating the spirit of social solidarity created by shared disadvantage. Similarly, he may have overestimated the desire or the ability of Henry and Henrietta Dubb to withstand the rampant privatisation of every aspect of social life within a society in thrall to libertarian ideology.

Yet ultimately, Tawney's vision of the common good may be realised or rejected by the accuracy of these estimates. Clearly, where a conception of industry as a mechanism adjusted by the play of non-moral laws is elevated into a philosophy in which "organisation and social relationships are determined solely by considerations of economic

ⁱ *The Diary Of Beatrice Webb, Vol.IV, 1924-1943, edited by N. J. Mackenzie, entry for Dec. 8, 1935, Virago Press, 1985.*

convenience and productive efficiency”,ⁱ there is little scope for the notion that each individual has a claim on his or her fellows by virtue of a common humanity. Ultimately, Tawney’s moral exhortation may require the support of an individualist argument. Pragmatically, an appeal to self-interest may prove more effective than “an appeal to principles”. Plainly, Henry and Henrietta’s interests are jeopardised by the spirit and values of competitive individualism. Patently, their economic security is undermined and social cohesion is threatened by the dynamics of an impersonal market mechanism.

Yet, a market mechanism does not operate in a vacuum. Its mechanics are determined by the economic system in which it functions. Its methods and its objectives are organised, sustained or amended by legislation or regulation coincidental to the interests of the prevailing social, political or economic order. The free-market mechanism of modern industrial capitalism, Tawney insists, creates “an economic life which is in a perpetual state of morbid irritation”ⁱⁱ. It creates, he asserts, “a climate of fear in which ... “workers and employers” ... in ... “two compactly organised armies” ... “are only restrained from collision by the fear of its possible consequences”.ⁱⁱⁱ It creates a culture which fosters individual competition, a culture in which the percentage of return on capital invested is perceived as the only yardstick by which economic efficiency must be measured. It perpetuates those rifts between classes, which, Tawney asserts, ... “are obvious and unmistakable” and derive ... “from the inequality of economic power by which certain groups exercise authority over others”.^{iv} It cannot provide the conditions for a society of fellowship and social cohesion. It creates instead, a culture “in which wealth becomes the foundation of public esteem and the mass of men who labour, but who do not acquire wealth, are thought to be vulgar and meaningless and insignificant”.^v There evolves a market psychology, a set of assumptions and values which permeate the

ⁱ *The Acquisitive Society*, p.225.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.225.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.225.

^{iv} *Equality*, p.112.

^v *The Acquisitive Society*, p.38.

public consciousness. Individual and competitive struggle come to be regarded as essential components of the all-important market system. To succeed within the system comes to be recognised as an endorsement of personal validity, of self authentication.

Yet, where some have a greater appetite for competitive economic enterprise, there are, inevitably, winners and losers: unequal abilities create an unequal distribution of wealth. There is poverty and there is affluence; there is, too, an unequal distribution of power so that even within liberal democratic societies, equal rights do not translate into equal power or the equal capacity to exercise them. Certainly, welfare provision remains; it is, after all, not only preserved by a sense of moral obligation and social responsibility, it has been ceded after generations of political pressure. Yet its extent is dictated, and its application determined, by the social and economic philosophy of the ruling faction. Such provision, while it alleviates the harsher aspects of social deprivation does not, in a society of drastic economic disparities, create the conditions for ... “moral regeneration” and a society of common ends. Instead, the ‘acquisitive society’ is made legitimate, its values and its practices approved. There still remains a hierarchy of wealth and a hierarchy of power. Class divisions persist; there remain inequalities of education facilities, of medical provision, of environmental conditions. Undeniably, the decades between the publication of Tawney’s major works have brought about dramatic social and economic changes, but, as Richard Hoggart argues, ... “society is not destroying but reforming and relabelling the ridges between classes”.ⁱ If we are ... “now less divided by the traditional indicators of birth, property and inherited wealth, we are still divided by status differences, consumer group differences, differences in standards of living”.ⁱⁱ

Tawney sought to end these differences. His output of essays and articles, lectures and pamphlets are testimony to his commitment to social justice. His major works of political theory, *THE ACQUISITIVE SOCIETY* and *EQUALITY*, informed by a sense

ⁱ *An Imagined Life, Richard Hoggart, Chatto & Windus, 1992, p.6.*
ⁱⁱ *Ibid, p.6.*

of moral conscience continue to influence democratic socialist thought. His perception that “the only adequate history is l’histoire integrale”ⁱ is reflected in his dedication to trace “the significant connections” between religious doctrine and social, political and economic development. His understanding of the power of moral ideas to bring about social change is an expression of the Christian faith which permeates his writings both as economic historian and social philosopher. Clearly, some of his assessments and assumptions have been overtaken by changing social, economic and political circumstances. Regrettably, he neglected to address the issues of race and gender just as he apparently failed to recognise the rapidly changing structure of capitalism and the gradual transformation of the traditional, mainly male, working class. Some of his concerns, the English public schools, the Church of England, the peculiarities of the English class system, indeed, “his case for socialism”, are curiously parochial. While his chosen instrument of social change, the democratic process, has brought about some social benefit, it has not created a commitment to “the common good”. Similarly, his “politics of moral exhortation” have not demonstrably extended the spirit of fraternity nor have they fostered a sense of community or engendered a common culture. Nevertheless, as I have sought to demonstrate, Tawney’s moral authority, his rebuttal of the anti-egalitarian case, his passion, his pragmatism and above all the moral dimension of his thought continue to contribute to the contemporary egalitarian argument.

There are, today, within liberal, democratic, societies, political theorists dedicated to a more equitable social order. There are thinkers who insist that in an age in which the prosperity of the nation is dependent on human capacities the public good of consensual and social peace becomes ever more valuable. In an age “in which the successful economies are the ones that most closely approximate to the model of economic co-operation, possessive individualism is self-stultifying”.ⁱⁱ They demand, in the name of

ⁱ *The Study of Economic History*, R.H. Tawney, 1933, see *History And Society*, p.64.

ⁱⁱ *Review of Citizenship and Community, Civic Republicanism and the Modern World*, Adrian Oldfield, Routledge 1991, David Marquand, *New York Review of Books*, Dec.1991.

democracy, constitutional reforms which will allow every citizen through a redistribution of legislative power to participate more fully in the democratic process. In the name of equity, they insist it is necessary to monitor the anti-social tendencies of the market mechanism. Such thinkers, while they vigorously confine utopian visions to the wilder shores of political thought, seek, nevertheless to promote and extend egalitarian principles. To these thinkers, motivated by the spirit of social justice and committed to the democratic process, the philosophy of R.H. Tawney is not only relevant, it is inspirational. NB

NB 1) *"Is Tawney's Equality now out of date?" ... "Have we in Britain reached such an egalitarian position that further substantial measures of collective redistribution are not called for, economically and morally?"* Richard M. Titmuss. Introduction to 1964 edition of R.H. Tawney's *Equality*. "Richard Henry Tawney has been the crowning figure of ethical socialism in the twentieth century" ... "he enjoyed pre-eminence as the source of exemplary wisdom for the British Labour Party for forty years from the First World War". *English Ethical Socialism*. Norman Dennis and A.H. Halsey, Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 149.

2) *"He is capable of saying some of the most important things that need to be said in constructing a case for democratic socialism ... "his treatment of the relationship between equality and liberty has provided a reference point for all subsequent discussion".* R.H. Tawney, Anthony Wright, Manchester University Press, 1987, p.150/151.

3) *"The last important voice in that tradition which sought to humanise the modern system of society on its own terms".* *Culture and Society (1780-1950)*. Raymond Williams, Penguin Books 1961, p.223.

4) *"The last great re-statement of the intrinsically moral dimension of social democracy was developed by R.H. Tawney",* Andrew Vincent, *Philosophy, Politics and Citizenship*. Andrew Vincent and Raymond Plant, Basil Blackwell, 1984, p.180.

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