The Moral State in 1919:
A study of John Watson's idealism and communitarian liberalism as expressed in *The State in Peace and War*

by

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A thesis submitted to the Department of History in conformity
with the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Queen's University

Kingston, Ontario, Canada

May, 1998

Abstract

This thesis explores through an analysis of *The State in Peace and War* (1919) how John Watson, Chair of Moral Philosophy at Queen's University, defended an idealist and communitarian liberal political economy. The idealist social and political philosophy to which Watson subscribed has been identified by historians as an important influence in the changing political culture of the late nineteenth century. Idealism, which began to flourish in Britain in the 1860s, is seen to have provided a persuasive case for community and a more positive outlook on state power. Idealism has consequently been linked to the development at the turn of the century of "new liberalism" and increased government activity in economic management and social welfare. Although *The State in Peace and War* was published well after the main lines of idealist political philosophy had been established, it possesses historical importance as Watson's response to the backlash during the First World War against idealism and, more broadly, communitarian liberal political economy. Watson needed to contend with the perceived connection between idealism and German statism and with charges that idealism more generally led to unwarranted acceptance of established power. *The State in Peace and War* was less a bold new initiative for idealism than Watson's attempt to preserve it as a viable perspective for social and political thought. It was also his attempt to direct the course of history -- which was uncertain and very contentious in the immediate post-war period -- according to a communitarian liberalism as opposed to a laissez-faire liberalism or a radical adjustment of social, economic and political power. Attention in this thesis is given primarily to Watson's attempt at rescuing idealism from charges of statism, his reconciliation of poverty and industrial instability with new liberal forms of citizenship and government policy, and the popularity of his political project among reviewers in newspapers and academic journals.

Acknowledgements

In writing this thesis, I have drawn upon the resources of many people. I appreciate the support from Queen's University and the tax payers of Ontario; without teaching assistant positions and graduate awards, this project would not likely have occurred. My other financial backers, my parents, deserve my gratitude for their many contributions to post-secondary education, including those most welcome additions to my wardrobe and freezer as well as providing a place to stay while completing the thesis.

My classmates: Jenn, Kate, Heidi, Robin, Amanda, Cam, Jamie, James, Lee, Dan, John, Ross, Stephanie, Megan, Ken, Ann, Mike, Bob, Chris and Dieter all deserve recognition for their companionship and various points of view, which, I would like to think, ultimately helped shape my understanding of Watson. I would also like to recognize George Henderson for his generous assistance in the archives and for the occasional meal.

This thesis has taken shape largely out of the instruction and thoughtful commentary of Dr. Sandra den Otter and Dr. Ian McKay. Apart from bringing their particular expertise to bear on Watson, they provided two models of historical scholarship that I found congenial and enriching to reflect upon. To them, I owe a great deal of thanks.

Finally, I need to thank Ann for her patience and not complaining once about Watson even though I seemed to bring him everywhere we went: Freiburg, Montreal, Kingston, Toronto and Boston.

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An Introduction to John Watson and *The State in Peace and War*

John Watson (1847 - 1939) was an idealist philosopher at Queen's University in Kingston.[1] In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, he held international prominence as an expert on Kant, religion and ethics and he was probably the best-known and most influential philosopher in English Canada. Late in his life, he redirected his interests somewhat towards political philosophy and, in 1919, when he was 72 years old, published his views in *The State in Peace and War*. Primarily a statement of the idealist political philosophy of T.H. Green and Bernard Bosanquet, this book was not Watson's most original or rigorous contribution to western thought. In comparison, his two-volume *The Interpretation of Religious Experience* (1912) -- which was published only seven years earlier and written from the material he presented for the prestigious Gifford Lectures at Glasgow University -- could be seen as the most fitting culmination of a lifetime of serious scholarship.[2] When one surveys the immense bibliography of Watson's work, *The State in Peace and War* presents itself as an isolated deviation into political philosophy from his main interests in religion and ethics. Although *The State in Peace and War* may not be the most representative or important example of Watson's philosophical outlook, it will be the focus

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[1] It will be noticed that Watson and his contemporaries often capitalized idealism and important words like the state, which reflected a German form of scholarship. This thesis will not adopt these trappings and will keep these words in lower case.

[2] John Watson, *The Interpretation of Religious Experience* (Glasgow: James Maclehose and Sons, 1912).

of study for this thesis because it represents how Watson addressed the cultural revulsion brought on by the Great War.

The First World War was a moment of rupture for western society. The cataclysmic rate of casualties in mechanized, trench warfare and the often extreme military policies pursued by governments raised questions about not only the meaning of the war but also the meaning of underlying beliefs in evolution, reason, progress and state power. This re-evaluation had many consequences, but one of the most significant was a new political order. The Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, the success of the Labour Party in Britain and the breakthrough of farm- and labour-based politics in Canada irrevocably shook up established power. They gave new importance to the socialist and third-party contestation of the economic and political order of western nation-states. These events were not coincidental but in fact inherently linked to how political thought, in both its vulgar and refined modes, responded to the war. In this context of contestation, Watson's political philosophy gains a new significance as a reflection on war and the state. As was common for his contemporaries, Watson explained the war as a battle between two state ideals: German autocracy and militarism versus British democracy and peace. Watson's views were more distinct and controversial in their idealist framework. Although Watson thought that idealism provided an appropriate basis for social understanding, many thought that idealism, especially the thought of Kant and Hegel, uncritically glorified the state as an ethical entity. These critics held idealism partly responsible for not only German militarism but also for masking unjust political and economic relations. In *The State in Peace War*, Watson responded to these criticisms and outlined how he thought that idealism provided the proper outlook to address the war and the political and economic order of liberal-democratic societies.

The seeds for Watson's opinions in 1919 lay in the mid-nineteenth century. A brief outline of his education and career will help provide context for the significance of his post-war political statement. Watson was born in 1847 to the family of a block printer in Glasgow, Scotland. He received his early education at a Free Church Presbyterian school and then, lacking sufficient funds to attend university, worked as a clerk. He was eventually able to attend university after winning a small bursary from a United Presbyterian Church and after his mother, and evidently his sister, volunteered their wages for his expenses.[3] He studied briefly at Edinburgh's Theological School and then transferred to the University of Glasgow to study with the renowned idealist philosopher Edward Caird. This transfer was not without controversy as apparently Watson's father disliked Caird for being part of the "Established Church of Scotland." According to Watson's daughter, Harriet Sweezey, what attracted Watson to Glasgow was how Caird bridged religion and western thought. It seems Watson had been brought up to think that religion was a "thing apart" and Caird was able to show him the continuities between, for instance, St. Paul and Socrates.[4] At Glasgow and under the direction of Caird, Watson flourished and won numerous awards.[5] He graduated in 1872 with a MA and first-class honours in English and Philosophy. Watson then enrolled at the Theological School of Glasgow to study with Edward's brother, the respected theologian John Caird. Watson's education in divinity was interrupted, however, by his

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[3] S.M. Mohan, ed., "John Watson," *Douglas Library Notes* 16.4 (Summer 1968) 4. This pamphlet provides a brief biography of Watson and an excellent bibliography of his publications. According to Watson's obituary in *The Times* of London, his sister,"who was still in her teens, volunteered that she would go to work if her father would get her a place in the print works in which he was employed." *The Times* (January 28, 1939) 7.

[4] Harriet Watson Sweezey, "John Watson of Queen's -- As Teacher and Philosopher," t.s., Box 1, file 4, [un-numbered] Harriet Sweezey Papers, Queen's University Archives.

[5] Watson won first prizes in Logic and Rhetoric, Moral Philosophy, English Literature and Junior Divinity. "John Watson," *Canadian Illustrated News* 22.20 (November 13, 1880) 307.

acceptance of a position at McGill University in Montreal, Canada.[6]

When he arrived at Montreal, his plans changed. John Clark Murray of Queen's University had recently filled the position that Watson had apparently accepted.[7] Instead of returning to Britain, Watson travelled to Kingston to seek employment at Queen's. His appointment as professor of philosophy was, the historian John Irving asserts, "the most important event in Canadian philosophy in the nineteenth century."[8] At the time, Watson's career prospects looked far from auspicious. In 1873, Watson's place of employment was a struggling provincial theological college of the Presbyterian Church. It had one building, six faculty and, after the disappearance of its funds in the recent collapse of the Commercial Bank, a very uncertain future.[9] Although Watson fondly recounted these beginnings in his recollections to students, his daughter wrote that he was initially depressed and homesick, especially after he saw the one building at Queen's, the Old Medical Building, which compared rather unfavourably with the "dignified" buildings at Glasgow.[10] Watson nevertheless committed himself to stay in Kingston. His decision was perhaps influenced by a lack of academic positions in Britain but also by a strong sense of community.[11] Not only did Kingston have a high proportion of Scottish immigrants but

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[6] Mohan,"John Watson," 4.

[7] Ibid.

[8] John A. Irving, "The Development of Philosophy in Central Canada from 1850 to 1900," *Canadian Historical Review* 31.3 (1950) 268.

[9] John Watson, "Some Random Recollections of University," *Queen's University Journal* 51.26 (January 27, 1925) 3.

[10] Sweezey, Box 1, file 4, 64-5.

[11] In 1923, O.D. Skelton, who was Dean of Arts and the Dean of the Department of Political and Economic Science, suggested to Principal Taylor that the days were gone when Queen's could hope to hire talented professors, like Dr. Watson, from overseas. "Conditions have changed in Great Britain," he wrote, "where the rise of the new universities and the development of journalism and the Civil Service and other outlets attract the best of men who would earlier have looked to the Colonies." O.D. Skelton, letter to R. Bruce Taylor, 30 April 1923, Oscar Douglas Skelton Papers, National Archives of Canada.

also a number of faculty, including Principal Snodgrass and later Principal Grant, who had

attended Glasgow University.[12]

From this humble start, Watson began teaching and writing philosophy. Within a decade

of hard work, his reputation as a serious scholar was becoming known. Herbert Spencer, for

instance, identified him as one of the Neo-Kantians whose writings were challenging evolutionary

empiricism.[13] Watson's growing stature was also indicated by the fact of being considered among

the top candidates for the Chair of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow University, which Edward Caird

had vacated in 1893 to become Master of Balliol, Oxford. Watson was unsuccessful in his

candidacy and, according to his daughter, resolved to remain at Queen's despite offers from other

universities.[14] With Kingston as his home, Watson continued to write. Through prodigious work,

he published 15 books, over 60 articles, and numerous book reviews. Many of his books,

especially *The Philosophy of Kant as Contained in Extracts from his own writings* (1888) and *An*

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[12] Watson, "Some Random Recollections . . .," 3.

[13] In a letter to Richard Hodgson, Spencer wrote: "I wish you would look at some of the writings of the Neo-Kantians, who are becoming dominant, and who, for example, Watson, think they have made unanswerable attacks upon Evolutionary Empiricism." In another letter to G. Croon Robertson, Spencer wrote: "Probably you have already looked at an article in the current number of the *Edinburgh* on the 'Kantian Revival.' Joined with some other incentives which have arisen of late, as, for instance, the criticisms contained in the work of Professor Watson, I feel prompted to say a few words about the matter in so far as it concerns myself." Herbert Spencer, "Spencer to Richard Hodgson," 16 January 1883; "Spencer to G. Croon Robertson," 22 January 1883, T*he Life and Letters of Herbert Spencer*, ed. David Duncan (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1911) 228-9.

[14] Henry Jones, who succeeded Caird, thought that Watson was Caird's first choice for the position. This election was the subject of some gossip in Britain and in Canada. According to D.G. Ritchie, Watson was actually Caird's second choice after Jones and that the contest was primarily between Jones and John MacCunn. See, David Boucher and Andrew Vincent, *A Radical Hegelian: The Political and Social Philosophy of Henry Jones* (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1993) 7, 190. In her account of Watson's life, Harriet Sweezey recalled that Watson had thought he had the position when he left for Glasgow. She suggests that he lost the position when, succumbing to nervous exhaustion from overwork, he vented his frustrations on a university governor after learning that the position was not his and that he would have to canvass the governors. See, Harriet Sweezey, Box 1, file 11, 43, 68-70. Sweezey's account seems inaccurate however. James Bonar, who considered the contest to be decided between two "formidable rivals," Watson and Jones, wrote James Mavor and indicated that Watson, prior to announcing his candidacy, knew Caird would support Jones. James Bonar, letter to James Mavor, 11 January 1894, 28 February 1894, James Mavor Papers, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library.

Outline of Philosophy (1898), were standard university textbooks well into the twentieth

century.[15] When he gave the prestigious Gifford Lectures at Glasgow University in 1912 -- the

only Canadian ever to do so -- and subsequently published his popular *The Interpretation of*

Religious Experience, Watson perhaps reached the pinnacle of his career. In 1924, E.L. Schaub

of Northwestern University deemed Watson the "leading interpreter of Kant in this continent."[16]

Watson's links to Glasgow and his international reputation meant that he was more than

just a Canadian scholar. He was a North Atlantic scholar. With his roots in Glasgow and through

letters, travels, conferences and academic journals, he maintained contact with scholars in Britain

and the United States. This arrangement allowed Watson (and his contemporaries who similarly

received education outside of Canada) to engage with intellectual trends in culturally dominant

countries while being one step removed as a colonial citizen. During the First World War, he was

in a position to observe the difficulties Britain faced in fulfilling its war-time obligations and to

observe the forces of isolationism in America.[17] His intellectual environment and the audience for

which he wrote, consequently, was much broader and diverse than English Canada. In the case of

The State in Peace and War, he wrote not only for Canadians, but also with an eye to how

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[15] Apparently, Canadian historian Ramsay Cook used *An Outline of Philosophy* as an undergraduate at the University of Manitoba in the 1950s. See. A.B. McKillop, *A Disciplined Intelligence: Critical Inquiry and Canadian Thought in the Victorian Era* (Montreal: McGill - Queen's University Press, 1979) 268 ft. 76. Watson's translation and anthology of Kant, *The Philosophy of Kant as Contained in Extracts from his own writings* (Glasgow: James Maclehose and Sons, 1888), was perhaps his best selling publication. According to Mohan's *Douglas Library Notes*, it had at least seven reprints. Added to this, another batch of 1550 were printed in 1935. See: Maclehose, Jackson and Company, letter to John Watson, 29 March 1923, 31 January 1935, Box 1, John Watson Papers A, Queen's University Archives.

[16] E.L. Schaub, letter to John Watson, 13 November 1924, Box 1, John Watson Papers A, Queen's University Archives.

[17] Prior to writing *The State in Peace and War*, for instance, Watson was a guest summer lecturer at Grove City College in Pennsylvania, USA. A.T. Ormond, letter to John Watson, 29 December 1914, Box 1, John Watson Papers A, Queen's University Archives. See also "Grove City College," Box 2, file 6, John Watson Papers B, Queen's University Archives.

philosophers in Britain and the United States challenged idealism.

With his international stature, Watson was not only a conduit through which philosophical ideas entered Canadian culture but also a prominent professor at Queen's. His course on mental and moral philosophy was required and he was also reputed to have the most honours students.[18] In his obituary of Watson for the Royal Society of Canada, W.E. McNeill wrote that Watson was a devout and topical professor. McNeill wrote:

> Throughout his time at Queen's he opened his first class of the day with the lines of the collect: 'Prevent us, O Lord, in all our doings with thy most gracious favour, and further us with they continual help.' But student tradition, rejoicing in his vigorous attacks on materialism, liked to report that John Watson really said: 'God bless me and Immanuel Kant; damn Comte, Mill, and Spencer, and all the Hedonists.[19]

Although Watson was well regarded by students (apparently he was affectionately called "Wattie"), he maintained a strict discipline over them.[20] McNeill wrote that "no one went lightly to his classes," because Watson was "deadly in his detection of sham or intellectual indolence." "But no serious student," McNeill added, "missed these classes; the whole university knew that minds were transformed there."[21]

Over the forty-six years that he lectured, Watson taught a number of students who would later become prominent members of the Protestant Church, academia, public education and the civil service. For instance, in *Idealism Transformed* (1985), B. Anne Wood portrays Watson as a seminal influence on the thought and action of John Harold Putnam, a school inspector and

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[18] *Canadian Illustrated News*, 307.

[19] W.E. McNeill, "John Watson," *Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, vol. XXXIII, 3rd series (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1939) 159-161.

[20] J.M. MacEachran, "John Watson," *Some Great Men of Queen's*, ed. Robert Charles Wallace (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1941) 23.

[21] McNeill, "John Watson," 159-61.

leading progressive educator.[22] Also, in *The Search for An Ideal* (1976), S.E.D. Shortt identifies

Watson as a key influence on Adam Shortt, who pioneered the study of political economy at

Queen's University.[23] Watson's influence and philosophical world view were not just expressed in

the classroom. He was an active participant in the Queen's Alumni Conferences, particularly in

the conferences held in the 1890s, to which Canadian historians have traced the beginning of the

social gospel in Canada.[24] From 1912 until 1924, he was vice-principal of Queen's. He also

contributed to the federal Civil Service Commission by creating and marking the section on

General Philosophy for the civil service exams.[25] Far from living a cloistered life, Watson adopted

the role of a socially engaged and active moral philosopher.

Part of Watson's success was due to his own hard work but it also stemmed from the

international prestige of idealism. Idealism, in general, refers to a philosophical perspective that

understands reality to be a collection of experiences formed, ordered or held together by mind.[26]

When he studied at Glasgow, idealism was just beginning to assert itself in Britain. The trajectory

of Watson's career paralleled the ascendency of idealism. The contours of this philosophical

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[22] B. Anne Wood, *Idealism Transformed: The Making of a Progressive Educator* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1985).

[23] S.E.D. Shortt, *The Search for An Ideal* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976) 96-7, 99.

[24] McKillop, *A Disciplined Intelligence*, 208-9; Brian Fraser, *The Social Uplifters: Presbyterian Progressives and the Social Gospel in Canada, 1875 - 1915* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1988) 1.

[25] William Foran, letters to John Watson, 18 September 1913, Box 1, John Watson Papers A; and, 20 May 1915, Box 1, file 1, John Watson Papers B, Queen's University Archives.

[26] According to the *Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, idealism is the "philosophical doctrine that reality is somehow mind-correlative or mind-coordinated -- that the real objects constituting the "external world" are not independent of cognizing minds, but exist only as in some way correlative to mental operations. The doctrine centres on the conception that reality as we understand it reflects the workings of mind." The Dictionary further notes these distinctions: "A dispute has long raged within the idealist camp over whether "the mind" at issue in such idealistic formulas was a mind emplaced outside of or behind nature (*absolute* idealism), or a nature-pervasive power of rationality of some sort (*cosmic* idealism), or the collective impersonal social mind of people in general (*social* idealism), or simply the distributive collection of individual minds (*personal* idealism)." *Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 355-7.

perspective were first mapped out by T.H. Green as well as Edward Caird and F.H. Bradley at Oxford University in the 1860s. Drawing on Platonic, British and continental philosophical traditions, they positioned idealism as a critique of English empiricist and Scottish Common Sense traditions of philosophy. Watson is usually identified as a member of a prominent, "second generation" of idealists, which also included Henry Jones, William Wallace, J.S. Mackenzie, D.G. Ritchie and Bernard Bosanquet.[27] These idealists expanded upon the initial foundations of Green, Caird and Bradley and established idealism as a major intellectual perspective in the late nineteenth century. Before it was eclipsed by realism and pragmatism in the twentieth century, idealism enjoyed a prestige that rivalled Mill's utilitarianism.[28]

What defined these British idealists was not a common set of philosophical arguments -- though Peter Nicholson suggests that there was some truth to the jibe that all idealists were merely parrots of Green[29] -- but a common approach to philosophical investigation. In *British Idealism and Social Explanation* (1996), Sandra den Otter notes some shared characteristics of thought among them. All followed Kantian principles of epistemology and ethics and consequently rejected empiricist notions of sensationalism in perception and hedonism in morality. They believed in a rational and moral order underlying the seemingly disparate and independent aspects of day-to-day experience.[30] The idealists also stressed the importance of community for

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[27] Incidentally, Watson was the only one of this group to have spent most of his career outside of Britain.

[28] Sandra den Otter, *British Idealism and Social Explanation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) 1-7.

[29] Peter Nicholson, *The Political Philosophy of the British Idealists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 1-2.

[30] Watson expressed the essentials of his world view as follows: "The philosophical creed which commends itself to my mind," he wrote, "is what in the text I have called Speculative Idealism, by which I mean the doctrine that we are capable of knowing Reality as it actually is, and that Reality when so known is absolutely rational. [. . .] The general proof of Idealism must consist in showing that, while the determination of Reality by such categories as coexistence, succession, and causality, is capable of vindication so long as it is not regarded as ultimate, it becomes false

individual identity and for a moral understanding of the state.[31] In terms of intellectual influences,

Watson and the idealists have often been described as primarily Hegelian in character.[32] While

Hegel spoke strongly to many British idealists, their intellectual outlook was shaped by a broad

and diverse range of ideas. Many, including Watson, came from non-conformist religious

backgrounds. Much of their university education focused on Plato and Aristotle, and classical

thought in general, as well as the liberal empiricist thought of J.S. Mill and the other English

utilitarians.[33] Many idealists identified with the British tradition of political activism and the

examples of Thomas Carlyle, John Bright, Richard Cobden and Jeremy Bentham.[34] Finally, in

regards to aesthetic influences, idealism drew upon the expressive Romantic literature of

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false when affirmed to be final, and that we are compelled at last to characterize existence as purposive and rational. There are various ways of enforcing this view. The method which I have followed here is to attempt to show that the ideas which lie at the basis of Mathematics, Physics, Biology, Psychology and Ethics, Religion and Art, are related to each other as developing forms or phases of one idea -- the idea of self-conscious Reason." John Watson, *An Outline of Philosophy with Notes Historical and Critical*, 4th ed., (Glasgow: James Maclehose and Sons, 1908) vi-vii.

[31] den Otter, *British Idealism and Social Explanation*, 7.

[32] In Canadian historical literature, A.B. McKillop, Ramsay Cook and Doug Owram primarily associate Watson's idealism with Hegelianism. See: McKillop, *A Disciplined Intelligence* 171, 181; Ramsay Cook, *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada* (1985; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991) 24; and Doug Owram, *The Government Generation: Canadian Intellectuals and the State 1900 - 1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986) 93.

[33] In *The Platonic Tradition of Anglo-Saxon Philosophy: Studies in the History of Idealism in England and America* (1931), the idealist John Henry Muirhead argued that an identification of British idealism with German philosophy was "if not wholly mistaken . . . a very one-sided picture." He suggested that British idealism was a flowering of a pre-existing Platonic tradition in Britain, which was revived by Benjamin Jowett, Green's tutor at Oxford, in the mid-nineteenth century. This Platonic tradition, not Hegelianism, provided the intellectual outlook and resources for Green's critique of empiricism, argued Muirhead. In a review of Watson's philosophy, J.M. MacEachran, a philosophy professor at the University of Saskatchewan and a former student of Watson, found Muirhead's argument "impressive" but also recognized strong Hegelian influences in Watson's world view. MacEachran was unwilling to decide which influence was predominant and in his review settled on drawing out how Watson's work incorporated the continuities between these two traditions. MacEachran, *Some Great Men of Queen's*, 27, 35-40.

[34] Nicholson, *The Political Philosophy of the British Idealists* 193-4. Nicholson argues that the pragmatism of T.H. Green's conception of liberty displayed a strong affinity with utilitarianism. Melvin Richter, *The Politics of Conscience: T.H. Green and His Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1964) 268-273.

Coleridge, Wordsworth, Schiller and Goethe.[35]

In political philosophy, Watson was for the most part not making any new bold claims for idealism in 1919. *The State in Peace and War* was essentially an update of the communitarian liberal position first outlined by T.H. Green in his *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation* (1895) and later developed by Bernard Bosanquet, D.G. Ritchie and other idealists over twenty years earlier.[36] Watson, of course, expressed idealist political philosophy in his own way. Instead of rehashing the arguments made by Green, Bosanquet and Ritchie, he chose to illustrate idealist principles through an evaluation of political theories from Ancient Greece until modern times. For Watson, past philosophical systems were not hermetically sealed statements that were disconnected from present realities. They embodied historical epochs of understanding about the underlying "intelligence" of the universe and formed "stepping stones" to the clear apprehension of the true principles of the state. Historical examination allowed Watson to delve into the past, determine historical progress and distinguish what was universal and true from what was temporary and false.[37]

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[35] Watson's idealism had a strong aesthetic component. In Harriet Sweezey's unpublished biography of Watson, the meaning of idealism is often associated with the Romantic poets. For instance, of Watson's colleague and former Caird student James Cappon, she wrote: "Cappon was a great Wordsworthian and Caird's idealism was in essence the same as the Wordsworthian poetic existence." J.M. MacEachran described Watson's perspective with references to the spiritual principles in the poetry of Wordsworth, Burns, Carlyle, Coleridge, Goethe, Tennyson and, even Milton. See: Sweezey, Box 1, file 11, 63. J.M. MacEachran, "John Watson," 35-40.

[36] In the published Preface to *The State in Peace and War*, Watson indicates his indebtedness to a number of works on political theory including T.H. Green's *Lectures on the Principles of Obligation*, Bernard Bosanquet's *The Philosophical Theory of the State* "and other writings," Edward Caird's *Evolution of Theology in the Greek Philosophers* and his *Critical Philosophy of Kant* as well as D.G. Ritchie's *Natural Rights*. In a draft Preface to *The State in Peace and War*, Watson was more exclusive identifying his intellectual debt to primarily Green and Bosanquet. John Watson, "Preface," Notebook 4, Box 5, t.s., John Watson Papers B, Queen's University Archives.

[37] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, viii. For a discussion of Watson's historical method see: Armour and Trott, *The Faces of Reason* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1981) 236. For a discussion of T.H. Green's historical method see: Andrew Vincent, "Introduction," and W.H. Walsh, "Green's Criticism of Hume," in *The Philosophy of T.H. Green*, ed. Andrew Vincent (Aldershot, England: Gower Publishing Company Ltd., 1986) 10-13, 22.

At this point, a review of Watson's main arguments is in order. He began *The State in Peace and War* with an outline of the ideals of Athenian democracy as they were expressed by Pericles in his funeral oration. Athens succeeded as a political community according to Pericles, Watson noted, because it possessed two main excellences. It was "pervaded by a single mind, and it [allowed] free play to the capacities of the individuals." Theses virtues allowed Athenians to reconcile individual freedom with public authority.[38] They had solved what Bosanquet had called the paradox of self-government, by which he meant the paradox of obeying oneself and the rules of society.[39] By beginning his account of political philosophy with Pericles's funeral oration, Watson accomplished two things. First, he implicitly compared the First World War to the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta, which was the event that gave occasion for the funeral oration. This analogy established the paradigm that the Great War was fought for Athenian principles of democracy against the Spartan spirit of militarism. Secondly, Watson demonstrated his awareness of a common nineteenth-century practice of centring political philosophy within the experience and thought of Ancient Greece.[40] The democratic ethic of Pericles's funeral oration had impressed J.S. Mill, for instance, and had similarly formed the central theme for his work on *Representative Government*.[41] That Watson began his work with

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[38] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 1-3.

[39] Bosanquet, *The Philosophical Theory of the State*, 50.

[40] Richard Jenkyns and Frank Turner both explore the wide penetration and uses of Ancient Greek culture in Victorian and Edwardian Britain. See especially Turner's essays on "Late-Victorian and Edwardian Reflections on Athens" and "Benjamin Jowett: Plato as the Father of Idealism." Richard Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980); Frank M. Turner, *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981) 244-64, 414-47.

[41] Eugenio F. Biagini, "Liberalism and direct democracy: John Stuart Mill and the model of ancient Athens," *Citizenship and community: Liberals, radicals, and collective identities in the British Isles, 1865 - 1931*, Eugenio F. Biagini, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 36.

the model of Ancient Greece suggested his outlook was not primarily an expression of German

philosophy but a development of more accepted British approaches to political theory.

Moreover, it was the Athenian political experience from which Plato and Aristotle had

formulated their social and political thought. Watson devoted a disproportionate amount of *The*

State in Peace and War, two chapters, to investigating the ideas of these monumental figures of

western civilization. Their thought, Watson claimed, was important because they illustrated how

individuals could only achieve self-realization and moral freedom in political society. Political

obligation did not therefore intrinsically involve a diminution of individual freedom but was

instead the condition for it. "It is in and through the organism of the State," Watson wrote, "that

man can be taught to distinguish between the real and the apparent will," between moral

knowledge and unreflective opinion. This process occurred not just "in" but "through" the state,

which implied an intrinsic involvement of the state with moral knowledge. As Watson noted,

according to Plato, the question "what is a good man?" immediately inferred the prior question,

"what is the good State?" Because the state was essential in revealing the best life, the study of

power, politics and government was inherently linked with moral philosophy.[42]

Watson contrasted this political perspective with the theories of the Cynics and Sophists.

Instead of seeing the political community as the means for moral development, these philosophers

adopted a more utilitarian understanding of public authority as merely a social contract to ensure

peace among egoistic individuals. In Watson's words, this theory of the state held that people

surrendered "their purely selfish interests in order the better to secure them." This political theory

Watson attributed to materialist metaphysical views. Unlike Plato and Aristotle who retained a

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[42] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 48, 12, 17.

supernatural element in their philosophy, Watson suggested that the Cynics and Sophists adopted

a more secular outlook. Protagoras, for instance, "transferred his gaze from external nature to

man, and declared that 'man is the measure of all things,' while Gorgias claimed that as a

knowledge of nature is impossible, we ought to concentrate our attention on human affairs."

Moreover, a skepticism about knowing the "real nature" of things, Watson suggested, led the

Cynics and Sophists to argue that social phenomena were not divinely ordained but merely

conventional. Consequently, Watson claimed that the skeptics' version of the social contract

meant that laws did not have a special meaning for human nature but were merely the expression

of the strongest will in society.[43]

In contrasting the political thought of Plato and Aristotle with the Cynics and Sophists,

Watson established a central paradigm of *The State in Peace and War*. He aligned an organic and

communitarian view of political society with the moral philosophy and metaphysics of idealism

and set this perspective against a social contract view of political society which he associated with

egoism, individualism and materialist metaphysics. Watson saw the major figures of the English

political tradition -- Hobbes, Locke, Bentham, Austin, the Mills and Spencer -- as essentially a

continuance of the Sophists' social contract understanding of public space, though he would

recognize the democratic aspects of Locke's philosophy, the reformist spirit of Bentham and

James Mill, and the organicism of J.S. Mill. Conversely, Watson situated his own idealism as a

later and historically enriched expression of Athenian democracy and the principles of political

obligation outlined by Plato and Aristotle. "With whatever modifications the ideas of Plato and

Aristotle must be accepted," Watson insisted, "there can be no doubt that Greece set the example

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[43] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 3, 4, 47-8.

to the world of a polity in which the freedom of the individual was shown to be compatible with the authority of society."[44]

Although Ancient Athens provided a fruitful model of political obligation, it was a parochial society based upon slavery. Because of these flaws, Watson argued that this political experience was destined to falter. In his third chapter, he analyzed the thought of "The World-State, The Roman Empire and The Middle Ages." This period saw two major advances in social and political thought. First, and perhaps most importantly, there arose originally in Stoicism and then with Christianity a belief that, unlike in Athens, all people possessed the potential for reason and moral self-determination, that all people were the "children of God." "The subsequent history of mankind," Watson further wrote, "may be said to consist in the endeavour to realize this ideal, not merely in the lives of individuals, but in a form of society modelled after the 'pattern in the mount.'" The second major development of this period was the government institutions of checks and balances and the mixed constitution of assembly, executive and monarch, which Montesquieu would later make popular in the eighteenth century. Despite these advances, this period of political experience was destined to falter as well. Because the Roman Empire and later the Holy Roman Empire were so large and encompassed many diverse peoples these political organisations were incapable of creating institutions that could help create and reflect the general will of their citizens.[45]

With the demise of the Holy Roman Empire and the beginning of nation-states, Watson's survey of political theory embarked on a new stage. To the Renaissance and Reformation and to

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[44] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 48

[45] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 188, 57.

the thought of Machiavelli, Luther, Bodin and Grotius, Watson devoted a full chapter.

Expectedly, Watson criticized Machiavelli's politics as materialistic and conversely praised the

ethical emphasis of Luther, Bodin and Grotius. Notwithstanding these contrasting valuations and

emphases, Watson found that all such figures spoke of an epoch in which the form of the nation-

state, characterized by a sovereign power and international relations, emerged.[46] The subject of

the nation-state would occupy the next four chapters. Here he explored the thought of Hobbes,

Locke, Bentham, Austin, the Mills, and Spencer. Although he recognized differences between

these theorists, he assessed the ultimate worth of their political theories according to his

materialist/ idealist dichotomy. He asserted that these philosophers could not consistently,

because of their materialism, understand political society as anything more than a utilitarian

contract preserved by the force of government. Among these materialists, Watson thought that

Spencer illustrated this characteristic most coherently. For Spencer, as with the Sophists, the

state was no more than a referee for egoism, no more than a "joint-stock company."[47]

Still, Watson expressed admiration for this great English political tradition. Locke had

made a significant advance in political theory, Watson noted, by allowing citizens to remove

legally the sovereign power. Watson also praised Bentham and James Mill for their reformist

activity. Because Locke, Bentham and the Mills were important icons in the English Whig

tradition, Watson needed to put forth his criticisms carefully without completely repudiating this

tradition. His solution lay in praising these philosophers (excluding Hobbes and Spencer) for

possessing a morally correct perspective but a flawed speculative or metaphysical perspective.

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[46] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 86-9.

[47] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 158-9, 193.

Watson's commentary on J.S. Mill illustrated this strategy well. Watson praised Mill's defence of

individual liberty and acknowledged his attempts at balancing liberty with an organicism and

discrimination between lower and higher, unsocial and social passions. The fact that Mill was

moved to make these modifications illustrated for Watson the limitations of political perspectives

based upon hedonism. Consequently, Watson thought that Mill's brand of utilitarianism was still

"infected" with materialism. Justice could not be reduced, Watson argued contra Mill, "to a mere

calculus of pleasures." Also, the social-contract theory of Mill still promoted the view that

political obligation entailed some loss of individual freedom. "It is not true," Watson urged

against Mill,

> that in a civilized State there is less interference with the individual; what is true is that
> the ordered life of civilisation provides the conditions under which much greater
> diversity of individual life is possible.

In Watson's view, Mill's inability to account for this fact pointed to the flaws of materialism and

provided a strong rationale for idealism.[48]

This philosophical perspective was the terrain of Spinoza, Rousseau, Kant and Hegel.

These philosophers, Watson argued, revived the spirit of Plato and Aristotle in understanding

political society as more than a mere contract, as something necessary to the development of

rational and moral freedom of individuals. It was Rousseau, Watson noted, who specifically

revived the ancient Greek idea that the "civil state is an embodiment of moral liberty." Although

Rousseau's *Social Contract* began with "man is born free and everywhere is in chains," Watson

quickly pointed out that this statement was not an indictment of the true nature of political

society. Rousseau, Watson proudly wrote, saw that civil liberty, as distinct from the natural

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[48] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 103, 149-50, 152-9.

liberty of unregulated impulse, was possible only under state laws. The problem of political

obligation for Rousseau lay in finding an association in which man will obey himself and remain

free. Here Watson examined Rousseau's notion of the general will, which was the values of the

common good underlying laws and other political decisions. Rousseau claimed that the general

will could only be arrived at in open assembly, where individuals were capable of voicing their

opinion and affecting the decision. Watson criticized this definition for being not only impractical

for a large modern state but also dangerous for providing no checks against the tyranny of the

majority. The general will was not the sum of individual wills, Watson claimed *pace* Rousseau,

"but the will of all in so far as the common good is the object; and law is its expression, but only

in so far as it ought to be." Watson further wrote:

> Laws can only be made by the general will, and are the register of the real will of the
> individual. Still, while the general will is always right, it does not follow that the
> resolutions of the people are always right; for, though men always desire their own good,
> they do not always discern wherein their good consists.

For Watson, the general will represented action in accordance with principles of the underlying

intelligence of the universe and not simply decisions arrived at by consensus as he suggested

Rousseau led one to believe. Indeed, although Watson found Rousseau's notions about civil

liberty and the general will perspicacious, he found Rousseau's understanding inadequate in

expressing their real nature. Watson wrote: Rousseau "never entirely clears his mind of the

fallacy that man is free apart from society, whereas the real gist of his argument is that it is only in

society that man is free at all."[49]

The flavour of Watson's understanding of the state was also revealed in his discussion of

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[49] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 104-7.

Kant. Watson admired much of Kant's ethical philosophy and emphasized Kant's claim that

individual freedom involved the recognition of the freedom of others. Despite this admiration,

Watson still criticized him for inadequately realizing the social nature of individuals and

continuing the social-contract myth. "In truth," Watson asserted,

> the State is not the result of any self-surrender of an original opposition, but the
> recognition that such an opposition is one-sided and abstract. The State is neither a
> despotism, forcing individuals to submit to its commands, nor is it an arbitrary agreement
> of individuals to protect their personal rights by making concessions to others; it is the
> recognition and realization of the essentially indivisible nature of the consciousness of
> self and the consciousness of other selves. The general will of which it is an expression
> is the essential nature of the wills of individuals.

In this criticism of Kant, Hegel's emphasis on reconciliation is evident. Although Rousseau and

Kant still couched their views of the state in terms of the social contract, Watson thought that

Hegel, by discarding the social contract and developing the concept of *Sittlichkeit*, had clearly

expressed the true nature of the state, profoundly illustrated by Plato and Aristotle, as based upon

the general will. Hegel, Watson wrote, "removes the last vestige of the false theory that the State

is based upon contract, making its foundation to rest upon the true principle of the common will,

as distinguished from the mere sum of individual wills."[50]

This reference to Hegel was a somewhat controversial aspect of Watson's political

philosophy. Not only was Hegel considered by many to be partly responsible for the Prussian

worship of state power, but also Hegelianism in general had been viewed with suspicion by T.H.

Green. In his *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation*, Green had primarily looked to

Rousseau, not Hegel, to express how political society could provide the conditions for individual

moral freedom. This focus was a consequence of Green's suspicion of Hegel's views on the state.

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[50] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 124, 192, 129.

In a passage that became much quoted, Green asked how Hegel's conception of state as the basis

for self-realization could be reconciled with the experience of an "under-fed and untaught denizen

of a London yard with gin-shops on the right and left." Green concluded that "Hegel's account of

freedom as realized in the state does not seem to correspond to the facts of society as it is, or

even as, under the alterable conditions of human nature, it could be." Green, in short, eschewed

what he perceived was a misplaced sense of optimism in Hegel's account of the state.[51]

Watson's decision to break with Green on the importance of Hegel reflected his support of

Bosanquet's greater emphasis on Hegel and, in turn, on the unity of the state. These

characteristics Watson illustrated in his chapter on "Modern Society." Watson, like Bosanquet,

defined the state as the "totality of institutions by which the common weal is secured," and

sovereignty as ultimately the expression of the general will.[52] This meant that the state was more

than just government and sovereign power was more than just executive or legislative power.

Again, for Watson as well as Bosanquet, the state was not a utilitarian contract which individuals

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[51] T.H. Green, *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1895) 104, 123-4, 127-8.

[52] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 195-204. When Bosanquet wrote *The Philosophical Theory of the State* (1899), he sought to continue Green's spirit of political philosophy but with two modifications. Bosanquet attempted, firstly, to incorporate modern theories of psychology into his account of the general will and, secondly, to overcome Green's "scrupulous caution" towards the state. Bosanquet certainly recognized the plight of the "denizen" and as a member of the Charity Organization Society was an active social reformer. Too strong a focus on these instances, however, led to a cynical view of the state and, he emphasized, inadequately represented the many profound ways by which the state provided the conditions for individual moral freedom. In outlining how the state provided the conditions for self-realization, Bosanquet adopted a more positive outlook towards Hegel. Whereas Green had reflected primarily on Rousseau's conception of the general will, Bosanquet explored more fully the notion of a general will in relation to Hegel's concept of *Sittlickheit*. It was Bosanquet's contention that modern theories of psychology illuminated *Sittlickheit* by describing how individual consciousness was formed out of the larger mind of society. Bosanquet argued that the state should be seen properly as more than just the government. The state was: "the entire hierarchy of institutions by which life is determined, from the family to the trade union, and from the trade union to the Church and University. It includes all of them, not as the mere collection of the growths of the country, but as the structure which gives life and meaning to the political whole, while receiving from it mutual adjustment, and therefore expansion and a more liberal air." Bosanquet, *The Philosophical Theory of the State*, 4th ed., (London, MacMillan and Co., 1920) 139-40, 246, 267-9.

formed to pursue their separate interests peacefully. It was the society and legitimate power by which individuals developed and realized together their general will. This conception of the state, Peter Nicholson claims, closely parallelled Hegel's definition in that the state represented society as a whole, that political society or the government was charged with coordinating social life within the state and that the purpose of the state was to enable its citizens to live well.[53] Although in the First World War many held Hegelianism responsible for statism, Watson's choice to align his viewpoint with Hegel and Bosanquet illustrated his belief that a focus on community and unity of purpose in political society was not opposed to the integrity of the individual. Indeed, when *The Philosophical Theory of State* appeared in 1899, Watson saw no major disagreement between Bosanquet's innovations and Green's apparently more liberal political philosophy. In a presentation to the Saturday Club at Queen's University, Watson praised *The Philosophical Theory of the State* as "the most recent, and in some respects the best, exposition of the conception of the state put forward by such writers as Hegel, T.H. Green, E. Caird and Wallace."[54]

Watson's adherence to Hegelian forms of political philosophy some twenty years later suggests that he did not significantly change his appraisal. A strong focus on the communitarian aspects of the state did not, he argued, thwart the foundations for individual freedom. In his chapter, "System of Rights," Watson elaborated upon his understanding of individual rights. They

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[53] Nicholson, *The Political Philosophy of the British Idealists*, 212-3.

[54] John Watson, "Bosanquet's *Philosophical Theory of the State*," t.s. [undated] Box 5, Notebook 22, John Watson Papers B, Queen's University. In his review of *The Philosophical Theory of the State* in *Queen's Quarterly*, Watson, reiterating his praise, wrote that it was the "most recent, and on the whole the best, exposition of the idealistic conception of the State." John Watson, rev. of *The Philosophical Theory of the State*, by Bernard Bosanquet, *Queen's Quarterly* 7 (1900) 320.

were not, he argued, given to individuals in absolute terms or in isolation from society. Rights,

for Watson, were not primarily to protect individuals in an alienating society. Rather, rights were

a thoroughly social phenomenon, existing only through the recognition of others in society.

Because Watson saw rights conferring responsibility on individuals, he argued that "the exercise

of political rights has an incalculable educational value and is essential to the realisation of the

common good." For this reason, Watson supported movements towards female suffrage.

Women deserved the vote, Watson argued, on the principle that it provided the conditions for

citizenship and better political discussion. Indeed, Watson wrote that the "special knowledge of

the conditions under which their sex lives must form an important element in determining many

social questions."[55] For Watson, the problem with utilitarian accounts of individual rights, even

the developmental outlook of J.S. Mill, was that they compromised the moral nature of individual

rights with their focus on rights as the guarantee for egoism. This, Watson maintained, was an

inadequate basis for political obligation. In materialist social-contract theories of government,

Watson wrote:

> There is nothing to compel individuals to enter into the contract, and therefore nothing to
> explain why it should be made. To reduce the contract to a mere expedient for attaining
> a larger amount of happiness, does not explain why any man should be under obligation
> to assent to the contract, if he thinks he would obtain more satisfaction by purely
> individual initiative.

Watson's understanding of the state privileged, therefore, the ethical importance of the common

good.[56]

Watson contrasted this ethical conception of the state with contemporary German

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[55] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 233.

[56] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 222, 230, 195.

philosophy. In a chapter on the thought of Nietzsche, Haeckel and Treitschke, Watson attacked

what he saw as their distortion of Hegel's legacy and the true purpose of the state. These

philosophers, he argued, mistakenly argued that the state's ethical nature involved force and

domination over other states. This practice substituted material egoism for a spiritual relationship

between peoples and contravened the fundamental rules of morality. In the last chapter of *The*

State in Peace and War, Watson applied this belief about the moral purpose of the state to a

discussion of international relations and the proposed League of Nations. The state, he reiterated,

was an "organ of humanity." He expressed his belief that states, when properly organised and

when pervaded by Christian principles of morality, would naturally exist in peaceful cooperation

with each other. To this end, Watson placed hope in the League of Nations as the beginning of a

new ethical spirit of international relations.[57] In summary, Watson's belief in the ethical potential

of states reflected an optimism about coercive power and political society. The state was the

means, he believed, by which a general will and individual liberty were developed and secured.

The state was not a utilitarian construction to preserve hedonism but rather the means for

individuals to realize their moral nature. In the words of Green, "will, not force, is the basis of the

state."[58]

Because idealists were the prominent philosophers of their time, historians have asked

what was the legacy, or legacies, of their philosophy. Before considering the significance of

Watson's idealism for post-war social and political thought, an examination of some prominent

interpretations of idealism's impact on political culture is in order to provide a broader

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[57] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 164-8, 172, 247, 285-7.

[58] T.H. Green, *Lectures on the Principles Political Obligation*, 121.

understanding of how Watson's viewpoint corresponded to the tenor of his time. Historians have in the past tended to measure the legacy of idealism in terms of its contribution to "new liberalism." This term refers to the ascendence in liberalism of beliefs about social responsiblity, organicism and a willingness for experimentation in government policy and the gradual diminution of classical liberal beliefs about limited government, individual self-reliance and the near inviolability of private property. For many liberal strategists of the early twentieth century, Bentham's utilitarian, "night-watchman," conception of the state was replaced with a new conception of the state as a positive and integral institution for social, political and economic reform. This change in political values supported new government activity in taxation, employment and welfare policies between the 1890s and 1920s. Although idealists were liberals who, for the most part, believed in self-reliance, private property and capitalism, they sought to leaven these principles with a critique of materialism and an emphasis on historically developing and communitarian aspects of political society. This convergence between idealism and a shift in political culture has led historians to ask about the relationship between these phenomena.

Much of the historical literature has focused on T.H. Green, the most prominent and influential idealist political philosopher. In his seminal work, *The Politics of Conscience* (1964), Melvin Richter focuses on how Green transformed non-conformist religious concerns for morality into a conception of citizenship characterized by commitment and good works to one's own community. By associating religion and citizenship with a social reform ethos, Green and his followers, Richter asserts, provided a strong rationale for private philanthropy and volunteer activity. It was from this impulse, Richter claims, that Green criticized utilitarian accounts of the state and sought to create a more positive outlook on political society as a means for social

change and individual betterment. Richter warns, however, about seeing a clear line of

development from Green's positive conception of the state to the twentieth-century welfare state.

Green shared many classical liberal beliefs about limited government and the need to protect self-

reliance and private property. Besides, private philanthropy and volunteer organizations, not

central government, were the primary instruments for social reform in Green's time. For Richter,

Green was very much a nineteenth-century liberal who sought, by appealing to pre-existing,

broader notions of moral duty, civic virtue, and citizenship in Victorian culture, to build consensus

among all classes in society for social reform and activism. Green's relationship to new liberalism

was therefore indirect. Although he was not at the forefront of new liberal thought, he helped

create an ethos of citizenship that would support experimentation in reform activity.[59]

This conception of citizenship challenged individualistic interpretations of society and

human behaviour. In *New Liberalism* (1978), Michael Freeden argues that the core values of new

liberalism were characterized by an increasing concern for the claims of community in relation to

individual independence. Because idealism was an important source for communitarian notions of

individual identity, it tended to support this transition in liberalism. But Freeden limits the degree

of influence that idealism had over this transformation in liberal thought. Idealism was only one

source of collectivism, Freeden argues. He asserts that developments towards collectivism in

utilitarianism, evolutionary empiricism, economics and even practical politics all contributed to the

complex process by which liberal thinkers attempted to rework traditional liberal ideas in

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[59] Melvin Richter, *The Politics of Conscience: T.H. Green and His Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1964) 13, 27-9, 172, 225, 267, 271, 281, 295-6.,344, 348, 354-5. Richter draws attention to Green's profile as religious social reformer in the immensely popular moral didactic work *Robert Elsemere* (1888) by Mrs. Humphrey Ward. Portraying Green as the renowned Professor Grey, Ward illustrated how Green awakened religious enthusiasm by exhorting his listeners to practice good works in society.

addressing industrial social problems.[60]

In comparison to Freeden, Raymond Plant and Andrew Vincent, in *Philosophy, Politics and Citizenship* (1984), give idealism a greater privilege in shaping new liberal thought. It was Green and the idealists, they argue, who first outlined how "law or restraint could be a positive and constructive element in liberty." This change in political theory opened new space for the use of the state's coercive power in social reform activity. Plant and Vincent also echo Richter's emphasis on how religion informed the idealists' conception of citizenship and civic virtue. Plant and Vincent further emphasize how many of the students of idealists would later become important social reformers and new liberals. Among others, these students included Arnold Toynbee, R.H. Tawney, L.T. Hobhouse, R.B. Haldane, H.H. Asquith and David Lloyd George. The salient feature of idealism, Plant and Vincent contend, was that it provided a predisposition and strong rationale for accepting greater government intervention as the mark of enlightened and socially responsible citizenship.[61]

Apart from looking at how idealism informed a kind of moral collectivism in political thought, James Kloppenberg, in *Uncertain Victory* (1986), sees a link between Green's epistemology and progressive reform movements. For Kloppenberg, Green's idealism developed, along with a number of other philosophical perspectives such as pragmatism, a "radical theory of knowledge," which he calls the Via Media. He credits these philosophies for changing conceptions of knowledge from something that is given or found to something that is created.

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[60] Michael Freeden, *The New Liberalism: An Ideology of Social Reform* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978) 2, 17.

[61] Andrew Vincent and Raymond Plant, *Philosophy, Politics and Citizenship* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984) 40, 76, 41, 53, 51, 188.

This change in late nineteenth-century thought gave a theoretical impetus for experimentation in attempts at social reform. In the course of a work that is rather grand and abstract, Kloppenberg maintains that Green and the philosophers of the Via Media "worked to establish a bridgehead from the mid-century world of liberalism and socialism to the territory of the welfare state to be occupied by social democrats and progressives."[62]

Historians also have linked John Watson to changing patterns of social and political thought in Canada. In *A Disciplined Intelligence* (1979) and "The Idealist Legacy" (1987), A.B. McKillop, who has written most of the recent scholarly works on Watson, claims that his idealism had a profound affect on Protestant thought and the development of the social gospel in Canada. As the pre-eminent idealist in Canada, Watson helped idealism to become widely accepted, McKillop contends, because it provided a justification for religious faith amid the late nineteenth-century challenges raised by evolutionary and historical critiques of the Bible. Instead of preserving a traditional religious concern for individual salvation, however, Watson redirected religious impulses towards a "moral imperative" in social reform. The "idealist preached what was fundamentally a social ethic," McKillop claims, and, furthermore, this ethic resonated with the concerns of Canadians as they began to experience the problems of industrialism in the 1890s.[63] Watson's influence on Protestant thought was integral to his importance for intellectual and popular thought in Canada. The churches were major centres for social thought because

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[62] James Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought*, 1870 - 1920 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 2, 4, 146. The members of Kloppenberg's Via Media were: the Britons T.H. Green and Henry Sidgwick; the Americans William James and John Dewey; the German Wilhelm Dilthey; and the Frenchman Alfred Fouillée.

[63] McKillop, *A Disciplined Intelligence*, 208-9, 199, 225. A.B. McKillop, "The Idealist Legacy," *Contours of Canadian Thought* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987) 99.

most universities, including Queen's, were religious colleges until the early twentieth century and

church-based magazines, such as the Presbyterian *Christian Guardian*, were popular publications

and significant avenues for public opinion.

Other historians of Protestant thought in Canada assign Watson much less influence than

does McKillop. In *Social Uplifters* (1988), Brian Fraser argues that Presbyterian thought was not

shaped primarily by Watson's idealism but by a more traditional Free Church Evangelicalism.[64]

Similarly, in *The Evangelical Century* (1991), Michael Gauvreau outlines the continuing strength

of Baconian intellectual resources in evangelical thought and disputes McKillop's claim that

Protestant churches eagerly adopted idealism as a new philosophical justification for religious

faith. By extension, in *A Full-Orbed Christianity* (1996), Gauvreau and Nancy Christie privilege

traditional evangelical values in the social reform activities of Protestant churches.[65] This debate

raises the question about how far idealist religious and social thought extended beyond Watson's

classroom before it joined more popular and traditional forms of Evangelicalism and civic virtue.

Historians have also linked Watson's idealism to broader emerging political and economic

thought in Canada. In *The Government Generation* (1986), Doug Owram, who mirrors

McKillop's contention about the widespread popularity of idealism, considers Watson's political

philosophy to have represented intellectual thought about the state in Canada during the first part

of the twentieth century. Key characteristics of this thought were an emphasis on individual

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[64] Brian Fraser, *Social Uplifters: Presbyterian Progressives and the Social Gospel in Canada, 1875 - 1915* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1988) 1, 23, 37.

[65] Michael Gauvreau, *The Evangelical Century: College and Creed in English Canada from the Great Revival to the Great Depression* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991) 121-2, 154, 184, 186. Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity: The Protestant Churches and Social Welfare in Canada 1900 - 1940* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill - Queen's University Press, 1996) 85.

"spiritual renewal," an organic conception of society and a rejection of an "older individualism." Idealism was accepted by many political economists, Owram maintains, because it provided a more positive view of the state in terms of religious-inspired social reform than did the traditional utilitarian approach that was held by Prime Minister Laurier and most, if not all, Members of Parliament. Watson's idealist understanding of the state began to decline, Owram argues, when new secular social science became dominant in Canadian universities following the First World War.[66] In *Remaking Liberalism* (1993), Barry Ferguson investigates the thought of Queen's political economists of whom the most significant, Adam Shortt and O.D. Skelton, had studied under Watson. Although Ferguson primarily does not focus on Watson's influence directly, he echoes Kloppenberg's arguments and claims that Watson's idealism created "a sense of human direction as well as intellectual mastery over the social order," which transformed the purely religious nature of scholarship at Queen's University and created an intellectual atmosphere conducive to new political and economic investigations.[67]

Watson's political philosophy has also been the subject of investigation by Leslie Armour and Elizabeth Trott. In a chapter in *The Faces of Reason* (1981) these philosophers examine how Watson's understanding of reason influenced his understanding of the state in *The State in Peace and War*. Because Watson understood knowledge to be both an act of discovery as well as creation, he viewed the structures of the state as flexible and historically developing. This understanding of reason, Armour and Trott further suggest -- they provide little comparative evidence to substantiate their claims -- led Watson towards a stronger emphasis on individuality

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[66] Owram, *The Government Generation*, 34, 103, 116.

[67] Barry Ferguson, *Remaking Liberalism: The Intellectual Legacy of Adam Shortt, O.D. Skelton, W.C. Clark, and W.A. Mackintosh 1890-1925* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill - Queen's Press, 1993) 10.

and history than such idealists as Green, Bosanquet and Bradley. Armour and Trott's emphasis on

reason as an act of creation also echoes Kloppenberg's arguments. In fact, Armour and Trott

suggest that Watson saw knowledge as more an act of creation than did Green. Unlike

Kloppenberg's investigation of Green's epistemology, however, Armour and Trott's assessment of

Watson's philosophy is primarily ahistorical and does not address how Watson used his political

philosophy as a response to his time.[68]

The State in Peace and War was very much Watson's response to the currents of social

and political thought during the First World War. Whereas much of the Canadian historical

scholarship on idealism considers its importance broadly in terms of emerging patterns of thought,

this thesis will address Watson's idealism more specifically in terms of its importance for post-war

political culture. That is, how Watson applied an idealist understanding of state power to justify

a communitarian liberal political economy will be examined. In this examination, this thesis will

suggest that historians need to reassess their interpretations of Watson's political philosophy.

Rather than broadly considering idealism as a general cultural attitude, this thesis considers

idealism as a formal set of arguments used to support more generally held political, social and

economic viewpoints. This focus provides an opportunity to investigate Watson's thought in

relation to intellectual developments outside of Canada and to incorporate some of the recent and

innovative British historical literature on idealism.[69]   This thesis will also argue that Watson's

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[68] Leslie Armour and Elizabeth Trott, *The Faces of Reason*, 224, 225, 235.

[69] Since McKillop published *Contours of Canadian Thought* in 1987, there has been among British scholars a renewed interest in idealism as not only an important historical influence but also an under-appreciated contribution to western thought. Important recent publications include Nicholson's *The Political Philosophy of the British Idealists* (1990) and den Otter's *British Idealism and Social Explanation.* Also see: David Boucher and Andrew Vincent, *A Radical Hegelian: The Political and Social Philosophy of Henry Jones* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1993).

political philosophy was more rigorous and popular than either Owram or Ferguson suggest. Although both of these historians consider Watson's idealism to have been important for the development of social science in Canada, they describe this emerging form of social study to be not only distinct from idealism but also opposed to idealism. Moreover, Owram argues that the amount of destruction during the First World War undermined the prestige of idealism and its principles of an "intelligence" manifest in reality. The challenges to idealism by war time experiences and new forms of knowledge lead Owram and Ferguson to assign idealism an increasingly marginal place in the intellectual contours of post-war Canada.[70] While British idealism in the 1920s certainly was in the twilight of its existence, this thesis argues that Watson's idealism may very well have survived the war and new forms of knowledge better than previously thought.

Watson's political philosophy, as noted, did not mark any new bold initiative for idealism. He primarily re-asserted core idealist beliefs from the late nineteenth century in an effort, he noted in his Preface, "to guard" the "true principles" of the state from "misconception."[71] Watson reiterated these principles in an attempt to come to terms with not only the war-time suspicion of German philosophy but also the forces of polarization and fragmentation that were encouraged by the war. Watson *had* to put forth his understanding of political philosophy. Not only did he need to distinguish his understanding of Kant and Hegel from contemporary German thought but also to defend a communitarian focus for liberal economy. As historians in Britain and Canada have shown, Watson's idealism was an important factor in the shift between an individualistic classical

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[70] Ferguson, *Remaking Liberalism*, xiii, xv, 48; Owram, *The Government Generation*, 13, 96-7, 100, 104, 117, 120.

[71] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, vii.

liberalism and a more communitarian new liberalism. By 1919, the events and opinions

occasioned by the war conspired to challenge the viability of idealism and communitarian liberal

political economy as philosophical and political perspectives. Indeed, in many ways, the idealist

understanding of the state was an embattled political project.[72]

The war raised questions about not only the presence of an underlying rational order in the

universe but also the meaning of state power. At vulgar and refined intellectual levels, German

idealist political philosophy received considerable criticism for containing the seeds of militarism

and statism. *The Metaphysical Theory of the State* (1918), by the prominent British liberal and

sociologist, L.T. Hobhouse, was among scholars perhaps the most trenchant and famous attack

on idealism.[73] As he would later recall, while sitting at home reading Hegel and then hearing

gunfire and planes in the distance, Hobhouse realized that the war was but the manifestation of

that theory of the "god-like state" put forth by Hegel "and his most modern and most faithful

exponent, Dr. Bosanquet." For Hobhouse, the "central fallacy" of idealism was that it confused

"the state with society and political with moral obligation."[74] Because Watson had followed

Bosanquet's political theory and had promoted the thought of Kant and Hegel, he was caught in

the position of having to distinguish and defend the idealism of good German philosophers from

the statism of more recent German philosophy.

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[72] Walter Kaufmann, "Coming to terms with Hegel," rev. of *Hegel*, by Charles Taylor, *Times Literary Supplement* 2 January 1976: 12; den Otter, *British Idealism and Social Explanation* 209-213; H.D. Lewis, "The British Idealists," *Nineteenth Century Religious Thought in the West*, eds. Ninian Smart et al., vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) 272; Stefan Collini, "Hobhouse, Bosanquet and the State: Philosophical Idealism and Political Argument in England 1880 - 1918," *Past and Present*, vol. 88, no. 72, (1976) 86.

[73] Collini, "Hobhouse, Bosanquet and the State," 90; Peter Nicholson, *The Political Philosophy of the British Idealists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 199, 207.

[74] L.T. Hobhouse, *The Metaphysical Theory of the State* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1918) 16-9, 23-5, 77.

Watson also could not ignore the industrial conflict and political polarization that

accompanied the First World War. The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, the unprecedented number

of strikes occasioned by the war and the increasing popularity of socialist critiques of capitalism

called into question the viability of liberal market society. From this questioning, the British

political order underwent a significant transformation. The Liberal Party, which had introduced

significant progressive legislation prior to the war under H.H. Asquith and David Lloyd George,

ceased to be a major political party following the war with the ascendence of the Labour Party. In

his study *Liberalism Divided* (1986), Michael Freeden notes how, in the post-war period, the pre-

war new liberal consensus on progressive reform fractured into left and right perspectives. He

notes that the war-time demise in the prestige of idealism, and an impatience with idealist rhetoric

that carefully balanced the needs of both individual and community, was a significant factor in this

breakdown of consensus.[75] In Canada too, there was polarization. In the federal election of

1921, the country not only witnessed the defeat of Sir Robert Borden's Union government but

also the rise of the farm- and rural-based Progressive Party and even the Independent Labour

Party.[76] This electoral success grew, in part, out of an increasingly radical literature on social and

political thought. For instance, William Irvine's *The Farmers in Politics* (1920) and Salem

Bland's *The New Christianity* (1920) championed the interests of farm and labour with structural

critiques of how capitalism masked the inequities of established power.[77] Incidentally, Bland had

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[75] Michael Freeden, *Liberalism Divided: A Study in British Political Thought 1914 - 1939* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986) 11, 31-3.

[76] Craig Brown, ed., *The Illustrated History of Canada*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Lester Publishing, 1991) 428-9. The Progressive Party captured the second most number of seats, 64, and the Independent Labour Party captured two seats.

[77] William Irvine, *The Farmers in Politics* (1920; McClelland and Stewart, 1976); Salem Bland, *New Christianity or The Religion of the New Age* (McClelland and Stewart, 1920).

been a student of Watson in the 1890s.[78] These comparatively radical critiques as well as the

polarization of politics based on class interests implicitly opposed Watson's belief in the ultimate

harmony of the state based on principles of liberal market economy.

In 1919, Canada and western society in general were in a state of confusion and flux.

Attempts to bring order and discipline to this confusion placed the political philosophy of idealism

on trial. In the constellation of social and political thought following the war, Watson defended

idealism, which for him not only consistently explained the differences between contemporary

German statism and the philosophy of Kant, Fichte and Hegel but also provided the proper

principles for social reform. Only through responsible private enterprise and progressive liberal

market reforms, he argued, could political society achieve its full potential as the means for

individual self-realization and liberty. The importance of Watson's idealist message at the end of

the war, it should be stressed, was not simply about the relative prestige of philosophical systems.

At the heart of Watson's political philosophy was a particular conception of state power and

market society that was increasingly targeted by critics of established power. At stake in the

popular reception of Watson's social and political thought was whether reform of society should

proceed along idealist communitarian liberal lines or classical liberal lines -- or through a more

radical adjustment of social, economic and political relations in the state.

The State in Peace and War, written at a moment of intense contestation of the social,

economic and political order, is an artifact of idealist political philosophy. Study of it will reveal

some of the ways in which Watson, a prominent, early twentieth-century philosopher, understood

this contestation. Consideration of *The State in Peace and War* will proceed over the next three

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[78] A.B. McKillop, "The Idealist Legacy," 105.

chapters. Chapter two will look at Watson's definitions of the state and sovereignty, his defense

of idealist principles from war-time criticism and his thoughts on the League of Nations. In

chapter three, attention will be focused on his views about market society, socialism and the

proper way for governments to reconcile domestic conflict. Finally, chapter four will trace the

success of Watson's arguments through book reviews in newspapers and academic journals.

2/
The Great War and the Limits of Community

Although it seems hard to justify the First World War with late twentieth-century hindsight, many well educated and thoughtful individuals at the time saw the war as just. At stake was the world's response to what appeared to be a belligerent and statist German ideal of political society. Despite legitimate reservations about armed conflict, many liberal philosophers including John Watson, L.T. Hobhouse and even John Dewey, supported their respective countries' war efforts. Watson's justification of the war was controversial, however. Hobhouse, Dewey and many others criticized idealist philosophy for creating philosophical conditions for the very statism allegedly manifested by the Germanic ideal. The prominent German idealists, Kant, Fichte and Hegel, were seen to have provided notions of individual freedom and identity that powerfully and dangerously supported the nation-state building regimes of Bismark and the Kaiser. By implication, the British idealists, who had imported much of this philosophy into Anglo-American circles, received criticism for diluting and undervaluing the liberal tradition of individual freedom and responsible government. Watson certainly did not agree with these criticisms. When he provided philosophical direction for understanding the state in peace and war, he was confident that idealism could account consistently and fruitfully for both the ethical importance of the state and the liberal tradition of individual rights.

The war represented for Watson a battle between the Athenian spirit of democracy and the

Spartan spirit of militarism. In "German Philosophy and the War" (1916), Watson wrote:

> It is, I am convinced, only apparently paradoxical to say, that the fierce conflict which
> even now convulses the world is at bottom the clash of opposing ideals of life rather than
> the shock of armed hosts. Ideas, as Luther said, are living things with hands and feet.

Watson went on to examine how contemporary German philosophers were responsible for

glorifying the German state and Prussian militarism.[1] In this categorization, Watson joined

countless voices in condemning Germany for the conflict and, in turn, defending the liberal

democratic principles of the British Empire. And yet, as Doug Owram argues in *The Government*

Generation (1986), this dichotomy presented problems for apologists of the war and especially

for Watson's idealism. The battle for democracy may have started primarily as a voluntary effort

on behalf of citizens in Allied countries but, as the war dragged on, it became increasingly fought

under a heavily regimented state. For Watson and other idealists, who had justified the war in

terms of the general will, the question or dilemma arose as to what were the acceptable limits of

state action. If citizens were obligated to fight militarism then how far could the state command

their loyalty and how much could the state tolerate dissension?[2]

These were serious questions. Once Canada entered the war as a British colony, it found

that it needed to coordinate the war effort with increasing intervention in society and the

economy. Efficient war production required tremendous government investment in industries

and the organization of labour resources. This activity caused other problems, however, that

necessitated further government intervention. War-profiteering, shortages of staple goods,

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[1] John Watson, "German Philosophy and the War," *Queen's Quarterly* 23.4 (April, May, June, 1916) 365.

[2] Doug Owram, *The Government Generation: Canadian Intellectuals and the State 1900 - 1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986) 92, 95.

inflation and the real cost of living were significant issues commanding government attention by the end of the war. To bring some stability to supply and demand, the government applied coercion as well as campaigns of public information to discipline the free market. Business profits and income taxes, for instance, were introduced to pay for the war and, in part, to skim off excess wealth from war-production. Labour too was marshalled by the government. In 1918, the Union government of Sir Robert Borden outlawed strikes and granted itself the power to dictate wages and hours of employment. In that year, it also enacted the Anti-loafing Law. This law rendered criminal any man between the ages of 18 and 60 who was without gainful occupation.[3] These coercive measures represented a huge step in the expansion of the federal government, especially for a comparatively young and recently industrialized country.

Another axis of tension was conscription. For most of the war, Canada had found a sufficient number of troops through voluntary efforts and had avoided Britain's troubles with conscription and conscientious objectors. This situation was not to last. Early in the spring of 1917, Prime Minister Robert Borden introduced plans for conscription, which he thought was necessary after he had visited England and been apprised of the considerable rate of casualties. Although Borden thought conscription was necessary for Canada to live up to its international obligations, conscription nonetheless deeply divided the country along rural/urban, capital/labour and especially French/ English lines. To appreciate the conditions for conflict, enlistment figures are revealing. In 1916, 37.5% of male British-born Canadians had volunteered, which, according to J.L. Granatstein and J.M. Hitsman in *Broken Promises* (1977), was the largest rate of

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[3] Robert Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook, *Canada 1896 - 1921: A Nation Transformed* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974) 239, 234-40.

enlistment of any group in the British Empire. This enthusiasm for the war was not matched by other Canadians. Only 1.4% of French Canadians, 6.1% of Canadians of British extraction and 6.1% of Canadians of foreign birth had enlisted. These different rates suggest that support for the war varied considerably. Clearly, French Canadians manifested the least sense of obligation to participate in the war. Though the linguistic divide was important, it was only one aspect of the different levels and kinds of support. Radical labour groups opposed conscription as another example of exploitation by the federal government.[4] Farmers too opposed conscription. Their need for a large amount of seasonal labour particularly was threatened by conscription. Plurality in economic interest and national identity would deeply fracture Canadian society.[5]

In order to implement conscription, Borden united in the summer of 1917 elements of the Conservative and Liberal Parties into the Union government. This coalition split the House of Commons between a primarily English-speaking, pro-conscription government and a French-Canadian, anti-conscription opposition. This polarization between the interests of government and opposition led to some manipulation of the 1917 federal election. Through the War Time Elections Bill (1917) and Military Voters Act (1917), the federal government extended the franchise for the first time to women, but only to women who were mothers, wives, sisters and daughters of soldiers. Naturalized immigrants from enemy countries who had arrived in Canada after 1902 had their franchise taken away. Conscientious objectors too, such as Doukhobors and

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[4] Bryan D. Palmer, *Working Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800- 1991*, 2nd edition (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1992) 199-200.

[5] J.L. Granatstein and J.M. Hitsman, *Broken Promises: A History of Conscription in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1977) 62-3, 66. The different rates of enlistment became an even greater issue when Canada's contributions were compared to other countries. In 1917, Canada's overseas contingent was 284, 000 soldiers. New Zealand, South Africa and Australia, the other important semi-autonomous colonies of Britain, had sent, respectively, 450, 000, 400, 000 and 500, 000 soldiers to the front. Furthermore, France and Britain had, respectively, committed four and three times the number of soldiers relative to their population than Canada.

Mennonites, lost their vote. Conversely, any soldier, regardless of length of residence in Canada, received the franchise. And, if the soldier did not assign his ballot to a specific constituency, then his vote was assigned for him. Granatstein and Hitsman speculate that the possibilities for "gerrymandering" this election were great. They also conclude that these measures reflected the Borden government's deliberate attempt "to create an English-Canadian nationalism, separate from and opposed to French Canadians and naturalized Canadians."[6]

With the election of 1917 won, Borden's government continued with implementation of conscription via the War Service Act. Under this Act, individuals were conscripted first and then given the right to apply for exemption. Perhaps not surprisingly, 94% of those conscripted applied for exemption. Moreover, the local tribunals which existed to hear individual claims were not always the most objective courts of appeal. Mr. Justice Lyman Duff, who was in charge of the courts of appeal, recalled that the tribunals in Quebec had exempted virtually all French Canadians. "But," he noted, "they applied conscription against the English-speaking minority in Quebec with a rigor unparalleled." Unfortunately, the tribunal records do not exist to verify Duff's claims. He destroyed them because he had been afraid of their potential affect on national unity. The tribunals, he said, were "full of hatred and bitterness."[7]

Opposition to conscription did not come only from this linguistic divide. Farmers who opposed conscription would remain suspicious of the Tory party throughout the 1920s. Labour

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[6] Granatstein and Histmen, *Broken Promises*, 78.

[7] Granatstein and Histmen, *Broken Promises*, 98.

too was wary of the government's conduct.[8] Indeed, when identities of exploited labourer and

French Canadian combined, opposition to conscription was fierce. For example, after the

legislation for conscription, the Military Service Act, was passed in August 1917, French

Canadians and particularly those with ties to the labour movement rioted in Montreal. Between

28 March and 1 April 1918, French Canadians again protested against conscription. This time the

riot occurred in Quebec City. Four civilians were killed and numerous were injured in clashes

with police and the army. To maintain order, the government used its powers under the War

Measures Act and passed an order-in-council which suspended *habeas corpus*, drafted any man

who had participated in the riot and gave the military summary court martial powers in any area in

Canada designated by the Governor-in-Council.[9]

Conscription illustrated how the government of Canada, driven by the need to uphold its

international obligations, resorted to unprecedented levels of control and extreme measures to

ensure compliance to its laws. The riots of French Canadians and the harsh response of the federal

government pointed quite dramatically to the level of polarization. Did these experiences suggest

that the war represented the general will of Canadians? Unfortunately, it is unclear what Watson

specifically thought of all this. He did not, it seems, offer a public commentary on the justice of

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[8] In British Columbia, Ginger Goodwin, who among other things was a member of the Socialist Party of Canada, union organizer, vice-president of the radical B.C. Federation of Labour, and draft dodger, was shot by police for participating in an anti-conscription demonstration. This incident led to a one-day general strike in Vancouver. Palmer, *Working Class Experience*, 199-200.

[9] Granatstein and Hitsman, *Broken Promises*, 78, 89 95, 98. Under the summary court martial powers given under this order in council, the military did in fact hold conscripts illegally. In Alberta, R.B. Bennett, the future prime minister, represented a conscript named Lewis. The Supreme Court of Albert found in favour of Lewis and the order in council illegal. The federal government quickly appealed this decision. It also passed a new order in council declaring that the government would abide by its original order in council "notwithstanding the said judgement and notwithstanding any judgement or any Order that may be made by any Court . . .". Granatstein and Hitsman describe this government conduct as "simply astonishing" (95).

conscription or the many orders-in-council which the federal government executed in enforcing its will on Canadians.

Even if Watson opposed conscription, his polemic about the war being a battle for individual liberty contributed to the popular support in English Canada for the war. The contrast between his rhetoric about liberty and the ways in which individual liberty was actually compromised in Canada were brought out in a Queen's Alumni Conference in 1915. At this conference, there was much discussion about Rev. G.L. Robinson, who recently had been given an honourary Doctor of Divinity from Queen's University. Robinson made the mistake of commenting publicly that Britain was partly to blame for the war because of its naval expansion programme in the years leading up to hostilities. According to the *Canadian Annual Review*, Robinson received quick denunciation. His planned address at Knox Church was cancelled and other churches called on Queen's to rescind the honourary degree, though it seems this did not happen. There were also rumours, apparently, that Robinson was pro-German. Although Watson did not comment directly on the Robinson issue at the Alumni Conference, he did address the subject of the war. "It is lamentable," he said,

> that a nation of thinkers should be misled by the sophistry which opines that, because each State has power to enforce its decrees on its own citizens, therefore it may coerce all other nations in its own interests. No state may justly enforce a single law, or make or break a single treaty, in defiance of universal principles of reason.[10]

Watson's address confirmed the justness of the war and even reified its purpose as the affirmation of "universal principles of reason." Did this rhetoric also absolve public sentiment from concern about silencing Robinson, imposing taxes, banning strikes and enforcing conscription?

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[10] J. Castell Hopkins, *Canadian Annual Review War Series 1915* (Toronto: Canadian Annual Review Ltd., 1918) 311-312.

Doug Owram suggests that during the war idealism became impotent to check the rise of government power. According to Owram, "state power was growing tremendously by 1917, and the problem of the unleashed power of the state that the combination of idealism and war allowed began to raise troublesome questions." Arthur Darby, for instance, asked in the *University Magazine*: if Canada had undermined the basic foundations of democracy in the war with Germany, was Canada becoming infected with the German spirit of militarism? This concern pointed directly to the question regarding the nature and limits of state power.[11] In this context, the necessity for Watson to comment about idealism and the meaning of state power becomes apparent. After all, in the name of the general will, Watson defended a war that led to profoundly coercive state practices.

As Watson set out to explain the "true principles" of the state, he faced a growing suspicion of German idealism. Whereas before the war German culture and scholarship had illustrated the heights of spiritual and intellectual virtue, during the war it gained an odious association with statism and contemporary Prussianism. In Britain, the press lampooned Watson's friend and idealist Lord Chancellor R.B. Haldane, for instance, for allegedly having pro-German sympathies.[12] In Canada too, the press turned on individuals they suspected of being pro-German. A prime example occurred in 1914 at the University of Toronto. Under public pressure, the university was forced to dismiss three "German professors" because it was thought that they

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[11] Owram, *The Government Generation*, 95, 99.

[12] R.B. Haldane, *Richard Burton Haldane: An Autobiography* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1929) 301, 305. Following the war, Haldane commended Watson for upholding the "true" view of Hegel in *The State in Peace and War*. See: R.B. Haldane, letter to John Watson, 9 June 1919, Box 1, John Watson Papers A, Queen's University Archives.

would inculcate Prussian ideals in their students.[13] Watson certainly had the credentials to be implicated in this feverish, anti-German sentiment. He was a leading Kantian scholar and a chief proponent of Hegelianism in Canada. Rev. S.W. Dyde, who was a former student of Watson and would become Principal of Queen's Theological School in 1918, had translated *Hegel's Philosophy of Right* in 1896, which was dedicated to Watson.[14]

This war-time revolt against German culture was not just expressed in popular patriotic sentiment. As noted, L.T. Hobhouse, in *The Metaphysical Theory of the State* (1918) delivered perhaps the most famous assault on idealism for what he perceived to be an intrinsic political conservatism.[15] Unfortunately, Watson did not comment on Hobhouse's views, likely because their books appeared at roughly the same time. There were many other critics of idealism, nonetheless, to whom Watson could respond. When Watson was teaching Kantian philosophy at Grove City College, Pennsylvania, John Dewey, the American pragmatist, published *German Philosophy and Politics* (1915) in which he attacked Kantian moral philosophy for exhibiting the illiberal tendencies of statist Germany. The historian John Morrow describes this work as "the most elaborate critical statement of nineteenth-century German intellectual developments."[16] What Dewey targeted in Kant's philosophy was the distinction between noumenal and phenomenal. This separation had allowed Kant to reconcile the material causality that was

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[13] J. Castell Hopkins, *Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs 1914* (Toronto: Canadian Annual Review Ltd., 1918) 265-269.

[14] George Rawlyk and Kevin Quinn, *A History of Queen's Theological College 1912 - 1972* (Kingston: Queen's Theological College, 1980) 11, 30; G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, trans. S.W. Dyde (London: G. Bell, 1896). Dyde's translation has recently been republished by Prometheus Books of Amherst, New York in 1996.

[15] L.T. Hobhouse, *The Metaphysical Theory of the State* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1918) 77.

[16] John Morrow, "British Idealism, 'German Philosophy,' and the First World War," *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 28.3 (1982) 380-1.

seemingly evident in the external, physical world with the individual free will that was a pre-requisite for moral conduct. Although Watson found this perspective extremely fruitful, Dewey saw in Kant's "two worlds" the very conditions for statist German social and political thought.

For Kant, individuals were free when they did what they ought to have done rather than what their immediate passions prompted them to do. For Dewey, this formulation represented an overly internal conception of freedom. When translated into practice, this formulation allowed Germans to combine technical sophistication and regimentation in their day-to-day life with a sustaining inner sense of freedom. Kant's moral philosophy epitomized for Dewey how Germans could live an external existence committed to duty and necessity and still see their activity as being self-determined. Yet, Dewey recognized that Kant was not entirely specific in what constituted moral duty. This problem was what Fichte and Hegel addressed in their identification of one's national culture and state as the basis for individual self-realization and freedom. Because of this importance, the state deserved loyalty. Dewey argued that Kant's thought, further shaped by Fichte and Hegel, formed popular German beliefs about their nation's historical mission and the presence of an indwelling law guiding the state's historical development. Dewey also argued that Fichte and Hegel created the conditions that allowed Darwin's "survival of the fittest" and Nietzsche's "will to power" creeds to be applied to the state. The example of German statism in the First World War, Dewey maintained, was not primarily the result of Nietzsche or Bismark but of the philosophical legacy begun by Kant.[17]

Dewey asserted, furthermore, that the *a priori* element in idealism shielded people from

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[17] John Dewey, *German Philosophy and Politics* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1915) 24, 28-30, 45, 70-1, 116, 121.

coming to terms with evidence contrary to their preconceptions. Given that Dewey's pragmatism

emphasized an experimental approach to philosophical questions, it was not surprising that he

criticized idealism for its *a priori* emphases and especially its belief in the Absolute. Dewey wrote

that:

> one can at least say with considerable assurance that a hierarchically ordered and
> subordered state will feel an affinity for a philosophy of fixed categories, while a flexible
> democratic society will, in its crude empiricism, exhibit loose ends.

Liberal political society and thought had always been associated, Dewey noted, with philosophical

empiricism. German society, on the other hand, was animated by the logic of *a priori* ideas.

Although Germany had shown an ability to produce great works of culture that elevated the inner

spirit and the customs of the *Volk*, it had failed to secure liberal rights and responsible government

for them. Dewey thought that this state of affairs not only contradicted the liberal perspective but

also constituted a dangerous priority of values. Too easily, he suggested, did German political

culture accept the commands of the "drill sergeant." Although the English emphasis on self-

interest, hedonism and "trafficking ethics" was not the "noblest kind of morals," Dewey argued

that it was at least "socially responsible as far as it goes."[18]

Watson responded to these criticisms, and popular criticism generally of German idealism,

in two articles in *Queen's Quarterly*: "German Philosophy and Politics," (1915) and "German

Philosophy and the War" (1916).[19] He would later express the essence of these articles in *The

State in Peace and War*. Dewey recognized that "strict Kantians" would probably disagree with

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[18] Dewey, *German Philosophy and Politics*, 42, 44, 54, 57, 65.

[19] John Watson, "German Philosophy and Politics," *Queen's Quarterly* 22.4 (April, May, June, 1915). John
Watson, "German Philosophy and the War," *Queen's Quarterly* 23.4 (April, May, June, 1916).

him; Watson, one of the foremost authorities on Kant, certainly did disagree.[20] Watson asserted

that arguments linking Kant with Germany's spirit of militarism compromised or ignored a central

imperative of his moral philosophy. Appealing to Kant's emphasis on autonomy and self-

determination, Watson wrote that the "freedom of a people, like the freedom of the individual,

cannot be secured by any form of external compulsion."[21] This principle underpinned Kant's belief

in republicanism and set his philosophy apart, Watson argued, from the militaristic and statist

ambitions of Frederick the Great. Watson quoted Kant as saying that as long as nations commit

their energy and resources in "vain" attempts at "aggrandizement, and thus hinder the slow toil of

the education of the inner life of the citizens, the ideal of humanity can never be realized."

Similarly, Watson argued that it was hard to see how Fichte and Hegel could be linked to the

Prussian spirit of militarism because both writers had witnessed the destruction caused by

Napoleon and the French Revolution. This experience, Watson asserted, left them with a

profound belief in the inviolability of the state and a strong antipathy towards the dominance of

one nation over the other, especially in the name of abstract ideals as had occurred during the

French Revolution.[22]

The real difference, though, between Kant, Fichte and Hegel and later German

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[20] Dewey, *Germany Philosophy and Politics*, 55.

[21] As an aside, William Galston suggests that Kant's "startling comeback" in the late twentieth century as a prominent philosopher is partly due to how, historically, Kantians have resisted the subversion of individual rights. According to Galston, "To begin with, totalitarianism raised the prestige of philosophical positions that enable individuals to recognize and resist collective evil. In Germany it did not escape notice that Kant's followers were far less open to Nazi appeals than either existentialists or legal positivists. And the recognition of the actual character of the former Soviet regime compelled most European thinkers to discard the illusion that the realization of Enlightenment hopes is somehow immanent in the historical process. As Bernard Crick has summed up the lesson of this experience, 'Theories of socialism without a critical moral philosophy are as undesirable as they are impossible.'" William A. Galston, "What Is Living and What Is Dead in Kant's Practical Philosophy?" *Kant & Political Philosophy: The Contemporary Legacy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) 287.

[22] Watson, "German Philosophy and the War," 333-335; Watson, "German Philosophy and Politics," 337, 342-4. See also: Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 165-70, 171.

philosophers of statism was not simply a moral regard for autonomy. Watson argued that the difference was more fundamentally between idealist and materialist metaphysics. Hegel, Watson argued, had always seen the state as a part of a Kingdom of God. This larger identity imposed moral laws on the conduct of states and therefore provided a check against egoism. Conversely, the late nineteenth-century German philosophers had, in Watson's view, eschewed the concept of a moral universe beyond the state and the traditional Christian values of duty and service to divine principles. Instead, they had emphasized the morality of "egoism" and succumbed to the survival-of-the-fittest logic. These values were evident in von Bernhardi's rhetoric that war was necessary to purge the inferior races from the vital races. These values were also evident in Treitschke's glorification of the state as power. If one wanted to find the origin of this materialism, one should not look to Hegel but to Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. These philosophers, Watson asserted, had declared God dead and provided the "false theology" that allowed people to disregard universal principles of morality. In "German Philosophy and the War," Watson quoted Hegel: "It is a melancholy thing when a people has no longer a political philosophy, and not less melancholy when it has lost its metaphysic and no longer seeks to comprehend its own inner nature." Thus, for Watson, the underlying metaphysical views of German philosophers were integral in differentiating the German idealists from contemporary German materialists.[23]

Watson's understanding of the relationship between philosophy and politics revealed another way in which he disassociated idealism from the charges of Dewey and others. Dewey argued that idealism should be blamed because Kantian moral principles existed in popular consciousness. People all too easily forget, he claimed, how general ideas "originated as parts of

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[23] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 168-172; Watson, "German Philosophy and the War," 368-8.

a remote and technical theoretical system, which by multitudes of non-reflective channels have

infiltrated into their habits of imagination and behaviour." The correspondence between

philosophical systems and popular thought, especially within government bureaucracies, was

particularly strong in Germany, Dewey argued, because that society not only had a tradition of

training its bureaucrats in its universities but also did not have a strong tradition of an independent

liberal press. Consequently, the universities provided the "ready-made channels," the "chief

organs" by which ideas -- such as defining freedom as one's duty to the state's historical mission --

became real in government affairs and public opinion.[24]

Watson challenged this easy, causal connection of philosophy to public opinion and official

policy. "Much of the popular writings called out by the present war," he wrote:

> seem to attach an exaggerated importance to the supposed influence of German thinkers
> and historians. No doubt anyone like Treitschke, who has the opportunity of educating
> successive relays of students, must in course of time exert a considerable influence upon
> the national mind; but it cannot be said that his influence has directly shaped and guided
> the political administration of the country.

Watson maintained a distinction between the knowledge of philosophy and the guiding principles

of the particular administration in Germany. Philosophy could only have an indirect influence on

popular thought, he claimed, because by its very nature it considers the "meaning what had been

and is" rather than "what is to be." Quoting Hegel, Watson wrote: "the owl of Minerva never

begins its flight till the shades of evening have begun to fall." In contrast to Dewey, Watson

circumscribed the capacity of philosophy to establish the "particular general ideas" of society.

Watson considered philosophy a system of ideas distinct from the various ways in which public

opinion might interpret and distort its meaning. The relationship between philosophy and public

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[24] Dewey, *German Philosophy and Politics*, 9-10, 16.

opinion was consequently more ambiguous and contested than the relationship that Dewey

mapped out.[25] In this way, Watson excused Kant from late nineteenth-century materialist

conceptions of duty and blamed contemporary German philosophers for distorting Kant's

principles.

Like Dewey, Watson still held philosophers politically responsible because, even if

indirectly, their philosophy could criticize or condone the principles of practical politics. For

Watson, contemporary German philosophy had failed to check the rise of Prussianism. This

materialistic nationalism Watson attributed to the fact that the German "democratic and national

movements towards unity and liberty were stifled at their birth" under the regime of Frederick

Wilhelm the Third. This meant that when Bismark finally awakened popular national sentiments,

Germany lagged far behind Britain and France in democratic institutions and values as well as

economic wealth and empire. These conditions, and an unfaithfulness to the spirit of Kant, Fichte

and Hegel, were at fault for the German sense of national grievance and concern for commercial

and military aggrandizement. Statism and militarism were not the results of German idealism,

Watson argued, but of an arrested democracy and materialist philosophy.[26]

Other philosophers, however, disagreed. One such critic was Harold Laski. In 1917,

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[25] A case in point was Watson's interpretation of Fichte's *Addresses to the German People*. "It is true," he noted, that these Addresses "chanced, from a fortunate concomitance of circumstances, to attract the attention of a Prussian statesman, and proved suggestive to him; but in truth this very case shows how very loose is the connection between philosophy and the politics of the day; for these Addresses are the impassioned utterances of a patriot, not the political philosophy of a speculative thinker." Later, Watson wrote that Fichte was "always careful to add, that philosophy must not be identified with prophecy, or even with practical statesmanship." Thus, rather than seeing an easy transition between philosophy and what a Prussian statesman might think, Watson saw a clear division between these two forms of knowledge and opinion. Watson, "German Philosophy and Politics," 330-1, 341.

[26] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 169. Watson wrote: "The tragedy of German philosophy seems to me to be this: that, for reasons hard to disentangle and impossible to set forth at present in detail, the idealists have lost ground, while the positivists have captured the popular ear." See: Watson, "German Philosophy and the War," 369, 373.

Laski wrote *Studies in the Problem of Sovereignty*, in which he drew upon pragmatism to

confront what he described as "monistic" theories of state and sovereignty. Laski's criticisms are

worth mentioning because Watson and, incidentally, later twentieth-century political theorists

have considered them important.[27] "Hegelianwise," as Laski began his first chapter, "we can not

avoid the temptation that bids us to make our State a unity." This unity assimilated state power

with the entire society and created the "all-embracing one, the State." This attention to unity,

however, had dangerous consequences. In "monist" political society, Laski wrote:

> what the state ordains begins to possess for you a special moral sanction superior in
> authority to the claim of group or individual. You must surrender your personality to
> its demands. You must fuse your will into its own. It is, may we not without paradox
> say, right whether it be right or wrong. It is lack of patriotism in a great war to
> venture criticism of it. It has the right, as in this sovereign view it has the power, to
> bind your will into its own.

This theory of society provided the foundations, Laski noted, for the Prussian spirit and the

success of Bismark's state-building project. Given the reference to patriotism and the inability to

criticize the war, Laski had also pointed to the spirit of monism in Britain.

A more suitable conception of sovereignty, Laski argued, would respect plurality and not

be so eager to find unity among all particulars. "Man is solitary no less than a social being," Laski

wrote, "and his ideal world is at bottom interstitial." The state could not be seen as one unified

political organism without compromising or reducing the significance of other organisations to

which the individual belonged. The presence of conscientious objectors illustrated the potential

for conflict between different identities as did the striking miners in South Wales, Unionists in

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[27] F.H. Hinsley, *Sovereignty*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) 216. In his classic work on sovereignty, F.H. Hinsley refers to Laski as an example of how some modern theorists have revolted against the concept of sovereignty because, they argue, it has been used to wage war and subvert the interests of individuals.

Ulster and militant suffragists. The meaning of this plurality, Laski contended, was the necessity of devaluing the status of the sovereign power, the state. Laski agreed that the state had an important role in society, as the provider of rights for instance. He disagreed that the state was *sui generis*, as the idealists claimed, and argued that the state was merely another kind of organization in society, different in degree but not in kind. From this point of view, political obligation was not *a priori* but contingent upon how well the state satisfied the interests of individuals. For Laski, sovereignty was not the expression of the general will but merely referred to the assent given by citizens for government measures. Rather than basing their decisions on some mysterious general will, governments, Laski contended, had to be much more sensitive and active in securing the assent of the individuals and groups in society.[28]

As Laski raised questions about how idealist conceptions of sovereignty compromised the plurality of identities in society, other critics viewed idealist political philosophy from the perspective of international relations. In *The State in Peace and War*, Watson referred to the criticisms of Delisle Burns, Bertrand Russell and G.D.H. Cole. In the symposium, "The Nature of the State in View of Its External Relations" (1915-1916), these political activists charged idealism, particularly the philosophy of Bosanquet which had so integrally influenced Watson's political philosophy, with defining the state as a self-contained, complete and self-determined political entity.[29] This definition incorrectly portrayed the real, disparate qualities of political society and provided the conditions for international conflict.

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[28] Harold Laski, *Studies in the Problem of Sovereignty* (1917; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1929) 1, 8, 12, 14, 260-4.

[29] Delisle Burns, Bertrand Russell and G.D.H. Cole, "Symposium: The Nature of the State in View of Its External Relations" *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, new series - vol. XVI, 36th Session, 1915 - 1916 (1916).

For Burns, Bosanquet was led astray by a flawed methodology. In his consideration of political society, Bosanquet focused on the teleological principles of "the state." This approach, Burns claimed, inadequately described the characteristics of "a state." In other words, Burns portrayed Bosanquet as fixated with defining some true form of political society and overlooking the history of actual states. For instance, Bosanquet claimed that "the state," as the truer form of the actual state, would have no ends but public ends and always would act morally. In response, Burns suggested that Bosanquet was speaking of a hypothetical state, of which there is no evidence, or that he really argued that the state had no moral responsibility. This approach led Hegel and Bosanquet to describe the state as the supreme ethical community. This kind of thinking, Burns wrote, promoted a "primitive group morality," in which the state pursued its external actions in disregard of whether it was morally right or wrong. Moreover, this kind of thinking obscured the profoundly international aspects of society. It was through amicable contact between states, he noted, that "the more valuable elements in the civilised State have come about." In short, by privileging the category of "the state," Hegel and Bosanquet obscured the actual realities of interstate cooperation and goodwill that would have led to more peaceful international relations.[30]

Russell's contribution addressed how idealist doctrines of the state masked the inequalities of power within political society, which he saw as the true cause of the Great War. Whereas idealists put faith in individuals to act in accordance with the common good, Russell adopted a much more sceptical attitude towards human motivation. Russell did not disagree that people were often motivated by what they understood to be their common good. He simply argued that

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[30] Burns, "Symposium. . .," 290, 293-4, 299, 300.

this common good was in fact the reflection of people's particular passions and positions in society. A true common good, furthermore, was prevented by the inequalities of power in society. Because state laws were created by the governing elite, he argued, they tended to support the particular good of the elite and were not the expression of some real common good or some *Sittlichkeit*. Russell also argued that the Great War was a product of this inequality of power because the governing class had built armies to protect the state and, in turn, their social position. As a nation armed, however, he claimed that it threatened the security of other nations who then also built armies. National armies provided, therefore, only greater insecurity. The way to international peace, Russell suggested, lay in ending the elites' struggle and ambition for power. "It will be a regrettable thing," he lamented in reference to Bosanquet, "if philosophers help them in the struggle by that glorification of the nation State to which they have been too prone in recent decades."[31]

Cole echoed these concerns. He did not disagree that the state could have an organic quality or even a "personality." There was no denying a national sentiment "or that which the *homo economicus* may feel to the guardian of property and security." He was concerned, however, that the legacy of Kant and Hegel had reified the state into a position such that it was absolute and commensurate with society. For Cole, this was dangerous fiction. He even suggested that Hegel and Bosanquet suffered from solipsism -- the trap of "Cartesian introspection," he contended -- in their application of metaphysical postulates to political reality.

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[31] Russell, "Symposium. . . ," 306, 307, 310. Russell displayed his fine lucid style of writing when he wrote of the governing elites: "In most ages and most countries they are composed of very common clay. If they have imaginative vision and breadth of purpose it is a rare stroke of luck; it is not a common occurrence or one which we have any right to expect."

The consequence of this thinking was a lack of appreciation for the full amount of plurality and diversity in society. In Cole's view, the political authority of the state was unable, without compromising the complexity of society, to embody all of this diversity into a harmonious whole. This view did not mean that Cole rejected the possibility of a common will. He just thought that it represented majority opinion and not any mysterious general will. As a corollary to the relationship between state and society, Cole argued that in international affairs it was misleading to treat the state as one, unified actor. States did not conduct their affairs with each other *qua* states. They interacted with people and organisations in domestic and international legal jurisdictions. In foreign relations, state power was not exercised between two sovereign wills but relative to a wide variety of disparate groups. And, as a further argument against idealism, Cole noted that the very presence of checks and balances imposed by society on the state indicated that it was not an absolute but a restricted power.[32]

These comments spoke to a central critique of idealist political philosophy. In the idealists' attempts to describe the communitarian nature of the state in terms of the general will, they inadequately provided, the argument went, for legitimate disagreement and plurality in society and the fact that the state's coercive power was the focus of significant contestation. This was the main fault with idealism that Hobhouse articulated in *The Metaphysical Theory of the State*.[33] In *British Idealism and Social Explanation* (1996), Sandra den Otter notes how other contemporaries criticized idealists for privileging social harmony over conflict. den Otter also points to how some, such as R.M. MacIver, linked this characteristic to the influence of classical

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[32] Cole, "Symposium...," 311,312, 315, 317, 319.

[33] Hobhouse, *The Metaphysical Theory of the State*, 77.

Greek thought which "led the idealists to envision society as an intricate network of functions and duties characterized by unity and harmony."[34] Watson recognized contemporary claims about plurality and the supposed incompatibility of society and state. He nonetheless dismissed criticisms that idealism compromised social plurality. "Of course," he wrote, "a distinction may be made between the Community and the State, such as is made by Professor MacIver in his interesting work *The Community*, but this seems to me largely a matter of terminology."[35] Although Watson wrote little else specifically about MacIver's claims, his brevity reflected perhaps more a rhetorical strategy of quickly dismissing potential criticism than a casual attitude towards the charges of undermining legitimate opposition to state authority. Throughout *The State in Peace and War*, Watson attempted to balance the claims of diversity and autonomy in society with the unified purpose of the state.

This concern began with his discussion of Greek thought. Although Pericles, Plato and Aristotle illustrated the virtues of a common will in the city-state, their political philosophy contained many parochial aspects in comparison to the modern nation-state. The death of Socrates was a case in point. One of Watson's main criticisms of Plato and Aristotle was that they, in fact, had associated society with the state. This characteristic was reflected in Plato's prescription for the communal ownership of property. It was also reflected by Plato's and Aristotle's understanding of justice, which emphasized the rights of individuals to serve the state in the function according to their basic nature. Watson's difficulty with these social arrangements was twofold. First, although the Greeks had perspicaciously outlined the importance of reason

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[34] Sandra den Otter, *British Idealism and Social Explanation: A Study in Late Victorian Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) 199-200.

[35] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 131.

for moral knowledge and conduct, they held a hierarchical and exclusive view of who possessed reason. They believed that only Greek citizens sufficiently possessed the capacity of reason. This belief consequently legitimated a system of slavery, which was at odds with Watson's Christian belief in principles of reason existing universally in all people. Secondly, by too closely tying the interests and activity of people to the government of the city-state, these Greek philosophers undermined that source of social and political renewal which resided in the individual's freedom to pursue his or her interests independently in civil society.[36]

These criticisms were not inconsistent with Watson's profound admiration for Athenian democracy and the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle. History illustrated, for Watson, progress from the "simple and undifferentiated" city-state to the "more diversified and much better organised" nation-state. Watson tried to avoid the criticism that his understanding of the state compromised or opposed social diversity. In fact, he suggested that the "very complexity of modern society makes it hard to find a formula which expresses its nature with accuracy and completeness." And yet, Watson thought that this diversity could be reconciled with political obligation. The state still remained the central category of political analysis, Watson maintained, because its authority extended to all citizens and because it was the supreme authority for the settlement of disputes between organisations and individuals.[37] This defence of the state mirrored the response of Bosanquet and other idealists to those pluralists, such as G.D. H. Cole, who sought to displace the state's importance in modern society.[38]

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[36] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 28- 32, 51, 54, 63, 185-6, 188.

[37] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 184, 194, 201.

[38] Bernard Bosanquet, "The Function of the State in Promoting the Unity of Mankind," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, N.S. XVII, 38th session, 1916 - 1917 (London, Williams and Northgate, 1917) 28-9; Morrow,

Whereas critics of idealism attacked the partiality of state institutions towards established

patterns of power, Watson maintained his belief in the possibility of the state reflecting the general

will. As noted, the general will represented an understanding of the real nature of the universe

and not simply the will of all or majority opinion. Moreover, the general will, in keeping with

Hegel's notion of *Sittlichkeit*, was realized through the historical evolution of institutions of

society. Although history was the "expression of a rational process," this observation did not

mean

> that institutions in all cases are the deliberate result of any abstract process in which they
> are placed before the mind and the means for their fulfilment sought for. Political
> institutions exist before there is an explicit and reflective consciousness of their nature.
> Now, if it is true that the whole life of man is a comprehension of the real world and of
> himself, he cannot get rid of the unseen guidance of reason without ceasing to be a man.
> How otherwise than by supposing that reason is something more than direct ratiocination
> does it come about that the institutions of society do realize human purposes and display
> a rational system? How otherwise can we account for the progress which has been made
> in the forms of association by which human life is raised to an even higher potency?[39]

On the basis of this metaphysical understanding, political institutions were neither arbitrary nor the

expression of the strongest. They contained the essence of reason which could be discovered as

people laboured to transform opinion into knowledge. With this belief in the teleological nature

of human institutions, Watson privileged the possibility of social harmony and eventual agreement

over the conflict and diversity that other social thinkers emphasized.

Watson thought that individual freedom was essential to realizing this general will, though

he did not consider this value in isolation from the development of the general will. Mill was so

desirous of protecting the individual, Watson claimed, that he seemed to value eccentricity for its

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[38](...continued)
"British Idealism, 'German Philosophy' and the First World War," 383-4.

[39] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 227.

own sake. Originality consisted, Watson argued, in thinking for oneself and not unlike others.[40]

Although Watson believed in the importance of diversity of occupation, his belief in the general

will disallowed relativism. For Watson, individuals were not free when they pursued selfish and

unsocial acts, and, he added, Mill realized this. Watson thought that the need to tie individual

freedom to the general will would not compromise legitimate freedoms, though it might (and

should) limit inappropriate individual excesses. Part of Watson's belief in the viability of the

general will was its historical character. Watson did not think that individual freedom should be

evaluated from abstract notions of good or majority opinion but from the traditions and customs

revealed in history -- and the history of Britain revealed, of course, progress in parliamentary rule

and the expansion of liberal rights.

Watson's belief in the compatibility of individual freedom with the general will was

reflected in his understanding of Hegel and sovereignty. Though he admitted that Hegel assigned

more initiative to the state government than an Englishman or American would assign, Watson

argued that this did not vitiate the spirit of Hegel's philosophy. In Watson's view, Hegel allotted

power to state officials not so that society could be regulated from above but simply because state

officials usually knew more about politics than the average person. Watson argued that the true

state was not absolute, in which all initiative came from the government. The true state

envisioned by idealists, he maintained, respected the need for individual autonomy and social

diversity while providing for the unique importance of the state for individual development. The

state was unlike any other organization, Watson reminded his readers, because its powers

extended to all its citizens and because it was the ultimate power to protect individual rights and

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[40] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 158-9.

to reconcile conflict. Since the state was unique in this regard, Watson rejected Laski's claim that the state was just another organization and that it warranted loyalty in the same way as other organisations -- on the pragmatic basis of their ability to secure assent. This view obscured for Watson the important difference in nature or kind between the state and other organisations such as a trade union.

To clarify his understanding of how sovereignty could reflect the general will and not compromise legitimate freedom and plurality, Watson distinguished between "absolute" and "relative" sovereignty. Under conditions of absolute sovereignty, Watson stated, individuals and subordinate organisations did not have independence from the government, which was the condition that Laski was concerned about. In relative sovereignty, on the other hand, the state's sovereignty was relative to that of other corporate bodies in civil society. The state, acting through government, was still the supreme authority and organization of society but its power was limited to its own purview, which was protecting individual rights and mediating conflicts between individuals and other organisations. As long as individuals and subordinate organisations did not contravene state laws and individual rights, these individuals and organisations were able to conduct their affairs freely. Hence, trade unions, churches, fraternal societies, corporations etc. were able to act in their own way as long as they did not contravene the laws of the state. When they did the state had a right to act. For Watson, Laski's concern that idealism bred monism confused idealist conceptions of sovereignty with absolutism. The concept of relative sovereignty provided for Watson a way to retain the unique primacy of the state and to allow independence

for a plurality of organisations in the state.[41]

In his response to Cole, Watson similarly spoke about the possibility of balancing plurality with sovereign power. Watson understood Cole's argument as reducing the state to the government, which Watson thought was incorrect. This reduction mistook a partial element of the state for the whole state. Through this misunderstanding, Cole incorrectly placed the interests of government and non-government organisations in antagonism. This outlook compromised, Watson asserted, the importance and ultimate impartiality of the state. For Watson, the government was more properly understood as the organ of force in a large unity of the state, which included all the institutions. He quoted Bosanquet who argued that the state contained the whole hierarchy of institutions that provide "the structure which gives life and meaning to the political whole." In this way, these institutions affected the power of the government. Hence, it is not a case of government in opposition to the institutions but a case of how the institutions provide life to the government. Watson wanted to preserve the importance of plurality in organization to ensure that the state did not quietly lapse into archaic and rigid forms. Whatever the extent of conflict and plurality in the state, Watson did not share Cole's suspicion of state power and maintained a belief in the ultimate possibility of harmony and agreement about the purposes of the national community.[42]

In emphasizing the compatibility of civil liberty and the general will, Watson wrote that he was defending the spirit of Bosanquet's philosophy. He had "no intention," Watson declared, "of undervaluing the importance of subordinate institutions," which were essential for renewal,

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[41] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 198-200, 207.

[42] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 205-8.

innovation and creativity in the body politic. Watson suggested that Bosanquet received this unwarranted criticism because his critics had failed to distinguish the state from the government. In other words, Watson allowed for governments to be in error while still retaining a belief in the form of the nation to generate and reflect the general will.

Despite Watson's defence of Bosanquet, however, *The State in Peace and War* reflected a different tone towards individuality and plurality than did Bosanquet's *The Philosophical Theory of the State*. In response to Green's political philosophy, Bosanquet had sought to investigate the moral nature of the state with modern theories of psychology. These theories provide an illustration, Bosanquet argued, of how "the Idea of a real or general will" could exist in individual minds and throughout society. He tended to express this relationship in absolute terms. For instance, "the common self or moral person of society is more real than the apparent individual." Also, individual "minds and society are really the same fabric regarded from different points of view."[43] After Bosanquet published his work he received some criticism from idealists about his psychological representation of individual consciousness. Henry Jones, one of Bosanquet's most vocal critics within idealism since the early twentieth century, thought Bosanquet's philosophy had gone too far in defining the social nature of individuality and undermined individual autonomy and integrity.[44] In comparison, Watson expressed his understanding of the general will without Bosanquet's language of absolutes. Watson certainly subscribed to Bosanquet's argument that a general unity pervaded the nation-state. This unity was one of the main excellences of the ancient Greek city-state that Watson had admired. Yet, Watson insisted that the Greek city-state

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[43] Bosanquet, *The Philosophical Theory of the State*, 144.

[44] den Otter, *British Idealism and Social Explanation*, 159.

inadequately protected individual liberty and that the history of political theory illustrated progress

in realizing the importance of individual autonomy and social diversity. Moreover, he had

maintained throughout this work that the common good of the state rested upon a balance

between the full development of individual capacities and a recognition of the social nature of

individuality. Other idealists had recognized this divergence from Bosanquet in Watson's

philosophy. For instance, James Seth, an idealist at Edinburgh University, commended Watson

for incorporating the criticisms of Jones and others about Bosanquet's and other neo-Hegelian

theories of state.[45]

In *The Faces of Reason* (1981), Armour and Trott comment that in Watson's political

philosophy there was not "any sense of Bernard Bosanquet's view that there is a final primacy to

the community" in relation to the individual. They also claim that Watson's view of the individual

was "utterly antithetical" to Bosanquet's position. On the level of philosophical language, this

point seems to account appropriately for the difference between Watson and Bosanquet. There

are, however, other ways to consider this relation between Watson and Bosanquet. Firstly,

Armour and Trott premise their understanding of Bosanquet on the basis that he presented a

major development of idealism away from Green. They seem to say that, whereas Green was

more concerned with the social condition of the individual, Bosanquet adopted a more

conservative political position and stressed the importance of community over individual needs.[46]

Peter Nicholson, as mentioned, counters this view that Bosanquet represented a major departure

from Green. Although there were differences between them, Nicholson asserts that the

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[45] James Seth, letter to John Watson, 20 May 1919, Box 1, John Watson Papers A, Queen's University Archives.

[46] Armour and Trott, *The Faces of Reason* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1981) 221-224.

differences were mainly due to emphasis about the moral qualities of the state. Moreover, to suggest that Bosanquet privileged the community's needs as final over the individual's needs obscures Bosanquet's great concern to preserve individual integrity and autonomy. As Nicholson asserts, Bosanquet did not reject welfare provisions, such as old-age pensions, from a complacent acceptance of the status quo. Through the Charity Organization Society, Bosanquet had been very active in attempting to reform society by developing and maintaining individual integrity.[47] In light of Nicholson's perspective, the difference between Watson and Bosanquet in terms of individuality was less a substantive question of degree and more a difference of expression.

Secondly, Watson's response to the First World War suggests that perhaps he had a more communitarian view of political culture than did Bosanquet. In Bosanquet's view, the state in its proper form could only have public ends. If agents of the state, such as its executive, acted in an immoral way then their conduct reflected their moral failings. Their immorality, Bosanquet argued, "can hardly be laid at the door of the public will."[48] Bosanquet had made this argument because he wanted to distinguish the public morality of the state from the private morality of individuals. He argued that the state did not commit acts of private morality as did citizens because its will was properly devoted to the common good. When individuals acted on behalf of the state in an immoral fashion, their activity reflected their own private failings. Watson took issue with Bosanquet. "By a curious process," Watson suggested, Bosanquet's view "seems to take all the responsibility from the state and to impose it upon its agents." Watson thought that the state and the public will could not escape responsibility that easily. Granted, he argued, when

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[47] Peter Nicholson, *The Political Philosophy of The British Idealists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 220-1.

[48] Bosanquet, *The Philosophical Theory of the State*, 300.

the agents of the state acted immorally they acted against the true will of the state. Nevertheless, Watson insisted that the state must be judged by its actual will. Since the government was the organ of the state and expressed the actual will of its people, then the citizens of a nation should be held responsible for the moral failings of its government. If immoral acts, Watson wrote, were committed by the "government, which is an accredited agent of the people and expresses its actual will, it must be held that the really responsible agents are the people and not the immediate agents." Here Watson did not hedge his understanding of the communitarian relationship between the individual and state but rather used it to assign moral responsibility to all citizens.[49]

Watson was moved to make this criticism of Bosanquet by the experiences of the First World War. Even though he rejected the criticisms of idealism by Burns, Russell, Cole and Laski, he shared their outrage about the immorality of states. Immediately following his discussion of Bosanquet's understanding of state morality, Watson attacked the practices of the First World War. Civilized countries, he suggested, followed international standards of conduct in military engagements. Countries that tortured prisoners, used poison and killed civilians were not only breaking these international standards. They were also lowering the standard of "human conduct which the human race has worked out by a long and slow process." Although Watson did not mention the names of any countries guilty for these acts, he may very well have had in mind the conduct of not just Germany but the allied countries as well. However, Watson squarely pointed his finger at Germany in his public addresses (the quick public denunciation of Robinson after his criticisms of Britain may have warned Watson about the political dangers of shifting his critical eye away from Germany). And yet, even as Watson had justified the war as a battle over the

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[49] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 218-21.

degenerate German state ideal, he did not support plans for exacting heavy reparations from

Germany after the war ended.[50] In this regard, Watson's perspective was diametrically opposed to

the official policies of Canada, Britain and France.[51]

The rationale for Watson's position on reparation reflected his belief in the teleological

nature of human reason and the general will. He was afraid that if heavy reparations were

imposed then Germany would be confirmed in its belief that England was ultimately guided by

commercial interests and was intent on thwarting Germany's national development. This belief

would merely encourage the "racial pride" of Germany. It would then spurn the League of

Nations with which it would have no sympathy. Germany further would rebuild its armaments

and "prepare for the next war." Unfortunately, Watson did not develop more fully the

relationship between Britain's policies of imperialism and the First World War. If he had, he might

have given a more balanced assessment of the causes of the war. Nonetheless, Watson associated

future international peace with recognizing Germany's national and commercial interests.

"Neither revenge," Watson wrote:

> for the barbarous manner in which Germany has conducted the war, nor an eye to the
> commercial interests of England, even if that could be admitted, will justify us in
> proposing a League of Peace on the one hand, and seeking to destroy the legitimate trade
> and commerce of Germany on the other.[52]

As much as Germans were guilty for the Great War, they had to be respected as a nation with

legitimate commercial needs. For Watson, German statism would not be overcome through

diminution of the state but only through recognition of the political integrity of the German

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[50] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 220, 270.

[51] He was also opposed to popular opinion among some Canadian newspaper editors. See: "Are Peace Terms Too Harsh? Canadian Newspapers Unanimously Answer: 'No!'" *Maclean's* 32.6 (June, 1919) 34b.

[52] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 270.

national community.

Again, Watson illustrated a belief in the potential of human reason to reconcile conflict and achieve harmony. To this end, Watson believed in the possibility of a League of Nations provided that all nations realized their moral responsibilities in joining such a league. And yet, Watson did not think that Germany could simply be left on its own. For Germany to fulfil its moral responsibilities, Watson argued that the "better elements" of that society needed to shape political behaviour and expressed hope that "Socialists, Radicals and the Catholic 'centre'" would support a political regime disposed to international peace. The "military caste," in turn, had to be removed from power -- but only by the German people, he maintained. Watson placed faith in the democratic will of Germany and, in this way, confirmed that the essence, the real will, of political society would logically realize that the common good entailed peaceful international conduct.[53]

This optimism reflected Watson's metaphysical belief about an underlying spiritual order in the universe. Yet, Watson did not think that the general will would be found easily or comprehensively. There was after all a difference between the ideal and actual will, which imposed the demand of continuous striving to realize the ideal. The history of thought was the process by which individuals realized the general will or the proper spiritual principles of existence. History had shown, Watson argued, that this process occurred best in a "well-organised" state. For Watson, a well organized state included institutions that promoted the virtues of individual rights and parliamentary government. As Doug Owram notes, institutions were important means in Watson's political philosophy for a society to realize its general will. He

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[53] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 267-8, 274, 276.

notes, moreover, that Watson thought that when individuals were equipped with the right "religious scruples and educational background, people would understand naturally the moral course of action." They would then possess the right democratic opinions and the state would be the agent of the general will.[54] While the proper institutions and correct religious and educational principles were important in generating moral conduct, they were not sufficient elements in Watson's democratic understanding.

The process by which the general will was discovered, or by which a better conception of the general will emerged, was not a straightforward activity. Although some critics of idealism suggested that this philosophy encouraged an uncritical acceptance of established practices, Watson argued that idealism encouraged no such complacency. Citizens in Watson's view should not sit back and wait for historical progress to occur; it was not the "deliberate result of any abstract process." Rather, the general will was realized through "a slow process of trial and error." As he maintained throughout *The State in Peace and War*, the real will of individuals and society was never completely known, but its advancement depended on reflection upon new insights gained from new experience. In this way political discussion and "legislation becomes a process of self-criticism and self-correction." Central to this process was public discussion about the principles of the common good. Plato, according to Watson, had understood this fact and had assigned to the statesman the important role of discerning and teaching the moral principles of the state. For Watson, not just statesmen, but all citizens should participate in this process. He signalled this importance of public discussion early in *The State in Peace and War* in his quotation of Pericles's funeral oration:

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[54] Owram, *The Government Generation*, 93.

> We alone regard a man who takes no interest in public affairs, not as a harmless, but as a useless character; and if few of us are originators, we are all sound judges of a policy. The great impediment to action is, in our opinion, not discussion, but the want of that knowledge which is gained by discussion preparatory to action.[55]

In other words, Pericles was not interested in discussion for its own sake but in a discussion that developed and explored the principles of good conduct. Similarly, Watson was not interested in discussion that merely produced majority opinion but in that which produced a better knowledge of the general will. To this end, he argued, particularly in his discussions of Kant and Hegel, that a rational and moral society depended upon recognizing the dignity and freedom of other people and the presence of reason (*Sittlichkeit*) in the customs and culture of one's nation. Far from being an automatic process, the general will evolved in a democracy committed to these principles.[56]

Although the government possessed coercive power, Watson encouraged his readers to see beyond this force and recognize the general will and moral importance of the state. In this way, Watson distinguished the idealist position from materialist philosophies such as utilitarianism and evolutionary naturalism. Watson was not recommending that individuals displace their critical capacities in judging government conduct. He was instead encouraging a spirit of social concern towards the conditions of society and the role of the state in establishing these conditions. The only way that conditions could improve in the state or that militarism could be removed from international affairs was through a change in spirit in the activities of the government and the interests of citizens. "This spirit," Watson wrote in reference to G.D.H. Cole was "not to be generated by any vague and misleading talk about the Community as wider than the State, or any

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[55] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 2.
[56] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 111, 210, 227-9.

belittling of the State's supremacy."[57]   Instead, it was by recognizing the full importance and ultimate reality of the nation-state.

Watson confidently put forth his idealist political philosophy in the belief that it consistently and fruitfully accounted for the nature of political society. The critics of idealism, such as Hobhouse, Dewey, Laski, Burns, Russell, and Cole, illustrated how contentious some of these claims were. At the heart of their arguments was a concern that idealism compromised plurality and the right to dissent. Indeed, the experiences of highly coercive labour laws and conscription clearly pointed to the dangerous level of state power during the First World War. Watson nonetheless steadfastly believed that the concept of the general will did not necessarily compromise diversity and civil liberties. For Watson, the problems of political society were not a case of protecting the individual from the unified purpose of the state but of transforming the unified purpose of the state into the service of individuals. Because he provided hope for political harmony and the "universal principles of reason," Watson, in a sense, offered a salve for a political society wrought by the vicissitudes of war.

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[57] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 266.

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The Moral State and the Crisis of Capitalism

If the state should have provided the conditions for the best life, then what was it to do in 1919? The economy, quite simply, grossly under-served the interests of Canadians, who responded with unprecedented support for labour protest and third-party politics. How was the state to reconcile these grievances with competing claims for industrial and political order? As a moral philosopher, Watson employed his expertise to provide some direction in coming to terms with these problems. As he had argued since arriving at Queen's in 1873, social harmony would not be achieved as long as citizens were indifferent to the needs of others in the state. His political philosophy did more, however, than simply encourage a sense of social concern and responsibility; it outlined certain principles to allow individuals to flourish in the state. Despite the vicissitudes of massive economic dislocation, Watson affirmed that private property, inequality of wealth and competition were in accordance with the common good. Accordingly, Watson warned his readers about the misleading claims of socialists and argued that only liberal market society provided the true foundation for a prosperous moral state. Although Watson rejected socialism, he did believe in government intervention. He asserted that the socially responsible state balanced individual liberty in economic activity with appropriate government measures to correct some of the inefficiencies and inequalities of the market. This understanding of

government was not something that Watson brought with him from Scotland in the 1870s but reflected the recent trends of new liberal thought. In *The State in Peace and War*, Watson accommodated these trends in his idealist approach to state power and used idealism to justify greater state activity in dealing with the very real problems of liberal political economy.

The First World War was an event in which the emancipatory rhetoric of the "war being for democracy" clashed violently with the experience of many Canadians. In 1913, Canada's economy slid into a severe depression. It is generally held by historians that the high rates of enlistment at the beginning of the war were directly the result of high unemployment. Although the needs of war diminished the surplus of labour, the economy remained under stress. Particularly troubling was the cost of living. With the influx of money from war production and government debt issues, and with shortages of labour, fuel and food staples, inflation wreaked havoc on the economy and necessitated further government intervention. Added to this strain was war-profiteering, which for some merely constituted another example of economic injustice.[1] When demobilization began in 1918, unemployment soared again. In 1921, for instance, the average annual unemployment rate peaked at 8.9% but in the winter months the rate rose to 12% of the labour force. A significant deflation in wheat prices, which was caused by the expansion of production during the war, further undermined the economy. Canada would not escape crippling levels of unemployment until 1925, and then it would be only a few years until the onset of the Great Depression.[2]

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[1] Robert Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook, *Canada 1896 - 1921: A Nation Transformed* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974) 239, 234-40.

[2] James Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State 1914 - 1941* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983) 25, 32, 215.

Something needed to be done. Greg Kealey and other historians contend that this era was

"the greatest period of industrial unrest in Canadian history." As Bryan Palmer asserts, this unrest

built upon the impressive gains of labour during the war. For instance, in 1917, there were more

"working class" victories through labour protest than in the entire period from 1890 until 1950.

As well, union membership broadened to include federal employees, the Association of Letter

Carriers. By 1919, the strength of labour combined with intolerable economic conditions led to

over 460 strikes across Canada including the poignant Winnipeg General Strike.[3] This discontent

was clearly not just a fringe movement on the radical left. In Watson's province of Ontario, for

instance, the United Farmers of Ontario, together with the Independent Labour Party, formed the

provincial government in 1919.[4]

The success of radical politics drew upon a widespread belief that the political and

economic order needed reform. These calls for reform were no longer just motivated by a sense

of social injustice. Because the Canadian state called upon its citizens to place their lives on the

line for democracy, it had a new and profound obligation to provide its citizens with employment.

This argument, Doug Owram notes, was illustrated by Stephen Leacock who argued in 1921 that

society "owed to every citizen the opportunity of a livelihood," and that "'Unemployment' in the

case of the willing and the able becomes henceforth a social crime."[5]

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[3] Gregory S. Kealey, "1919: The Canadian Labour Revolt," *Labour/ Le Travail* 13 (Spring 1984): 11-44; Gregory S. Kealey, "State Repression of Labour and the Left in Canada, 1914 - 20: The Impact of the First World War," *Canadian Historical Review* 73.3 (September 1992): 281- 314; Allen Seager, "Nineteen Nineteen: Year of Revolt," *Journal of the West* 23. 4 (1984): 40-7; Bryan Palmer, *Working Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800 - 1991*, 2nd edition (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1992) 196-208.

[4] Craig Brown, ed., *The Illustrated History of Canada*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Lester Publishing 1991) 428.

[5] Doug Owram, *The Government Generation: Canadian Intellectuals and the State 1900 - 1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986) 89.

Watson added his own voice to the rhetoric calling for social reform. In 1918, he told students of Queen's University that:

> After the war the best powers we can bring to the task will be required to readjust the economic, social and political relations of the Empire and the world, and it is important that we should be well equipped to throw our weight and energy in the right direction.

And social reform was not just a question of social justice, Watson claimed, but also of patriotism and manhood. Queen's students should "quit [sic][themselves] like men," he said. He noted further that "there is no proper place for a man who is not heart and soul for his country."[6] These remarks were echoed in *The State in Peace and War*. The "manlier virtues" were not cultivated only in war but also in the battle against the "evils of society."[7] Awakening social concern in his students was, nonetheless, only part of being a good citizen. The question remained, what was "the right direction" for citizens to follow in readjusting the relations of social, economic and political power in the world?

Watson argued that social reform must observe the importance of a civil society based on private property. "Legislation," he wrote, "should be conducted with a view to providing for the possible acquirement of property by everyone; for without property, as Hegel says, a man cannot be a complete man."[8] Readers of *The State in Peace and War* would not have had to read far to understand the importance that private property held for Watson. In his discussion of Ancient Greek political thought, Watson criticized Plato for placing property and the means of production under the direct control of the Republic. The problems with this scheme were not of intent.

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[6] John Watson, "Address by Vice-Principal Watson," *Queen's Journal*, 18 October 1918, 1, 5.

[7] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 182.

[8] Watson, *The State in Peace War*, 234.

Watson admired Plato's efforts to promote the public interest by removing the tendencies to develop private and "selfish" interests. Communism was nonetheless not the answer. It would not work because, first of all, Plato misunderstood how much morality was a condition of mind. Merely changing external conditions, Watson argued, was insufficient to curb selfish behaviour. Secondly, rights to property were essential for the development of individual capacities and moral responsibility. They allowed individuals the independence to pursue private ambitions apart from the control of government and thereby facilitated experimentation and diversity in the range of individual occupations and skills in society, which Watson thought furthered social awareness of the Absolute and characterized historical progress. Although this freedom provided the conditions for greater selfishness, it also imposed obligations on individuals to pursue their affairs responsibly. Thirdly, Watson faulted Plato's communism for too rigidly dividing the functions of society. By clearly separating the activities of guardian, producer and ruler, Plato undermined a common interest by encouraging separate fields of experience. Watson thought that an economy based on private property would promote interaction between people of different abilities and functions.[9]

Plato's communism failed to serve the general will, Watson argued, because it prevented the differentiation of society from state. Watson similarly criticized Aristotle for too closely relating the activities of citizens and slaves to the state. But Watson thought that Aristotle had made a significant advance over Plato on the issue of private property. Instead of placing economic activity under the purview of the state, as Plato had done, Aristotle associated this activity with the family. Although this change did not establish property as an individual

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[9] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 29-31.

possession, it still anticipated, in Watson's view, civil society as a sphere of activity distinct from family and government. The way to differentiate civil society from the state, therefore, was to implement a social order based on private property. Such an order gave individuals the burden of self-reliance that positively affected the development of self-government. It also allowed individuals to pursue their own interests and, as Watson noted of Aristotle, individuals tended to pursue with zeal and ambition projects that were their own. In short, private property was essential for the "true form of community" which was characterized by "dissimilarity in its members, and a reciprocity of services and function." Because Aristotle had removed property from the sphere of government Watson concluded that he had "vindicated property as the basis of a moral life."[10]

Watson returned to the issue of private property in his discussion of Hegel for whom private property and economic activity were important in society. Whereas individuals were directed towards common ends in their activities concerning family and government, Hegel argued that they could pursue their own private interests in the civic community. The protection of private property gave individuals the means and freedom to pursue these interests "and to develop their special abilities in competition and cooperation with one another." Economic activity was not simply a way to develop technical skill. Hegel saw private property as the "first form in which the subject realised himself outwardly." It was the material embodiment of personality and, consequently, commercial activities were not alienating but served to bring individuals into contact with each other. The "reciprocal relations of men were multiplied" in the economic activity of individuals. This reciprocity contributed to Hegel's understanding of the

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[10] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 41, 51.

state as "an organism in which life is continually streaming from the centre to the extremities, and back from the extremities to the centre." Unlike Plato's Republic, in which communism led to hermetically sealed categories of function, Hegel's state, in Watson's view, provided for diverse and open social interaction by protecting private property as a common attribute of all citizens.[11]

As Watson defended the institution of private property, he distinguished his position from materialist political theories. These perspectives, he argued, saw private property and economic activity as primarily benefitting the individual. The Sophists, for instance, understood political society as a way for individuals "to surrender their purely selfish interests in order the better to secure them." Likewise, in Watson's view, Herbert Spencer saw the state as little more than "a joint stock company." In other words, because the materialists inadequately realized the moral nature of the state, they reduced the state to being merely a utilitarian framework for individuals to pursue private, economic concerns. Watson thought Hegel's privileging of private property as the basis for civil society avoided this problem because he placed the interests of civil society in the context of larger interests of the state. The citizens and government of the state were not, ideally, just concerned with protecting their private rights but in making the state's ethical ideal "explicitly realized." The common good of the state, Watson believed, was more than protecting the private rights of its citizens. "It is only when the State [as political organization] is identified with the Civic Community," Watson wrote, "that its sole function is held to consist in providing for the security and protection of property and of personal freedom." In short, by keeping the state as an ethical entity with a common good beyond that of civil society, Watson believed that

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[11] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 130-6, 166-7.

the individualistic tendencies of private property could be reconciled with a higher unity.[12]

The ability to balance individual pursuits with a concern for the common good was the spirit of Ancient Greece. For Watson, the funeral oration of Pericles illustrated this quality admirably. The two main excellences of Athens, Pericles wrote, were that it was "pervaded by a single mind" and that it gave "free play to the capacities of the individual." Through respect for the laws of the city-state, these Greek citizens lived harmoniously with one another. More than respect for laws, however, explained the success of Athenian democracy. Athenians held the public good in such high regard that public service was a mark of honour. Private business affairs did not cause these citizens to neglect politics. Those who took no interest in politics, Pericles described as useless. Moreover, wealth had a functional purpose in regards to the good of the community. It was not used for "talk and ostentation, but when there [was] a real use for it."[13] This functional understanding of wealth expressed Watson's understanding of civil society. He did not define property as good for individuals alone but for society as a whole. Consequently, even though he thought society should extend the right of property to all citizens, he also thought that this right imposed duties.

The task of instilling this social ethic formed a large part of Watson's moral philosophy. J.M. MacEachran, who was a professor at the University of Saskatchewan and previously one of Watson's students, noted that Watson brought from Scotland a British ideal of education in which "the training of character and the inculcation of the sense of public service constituted an important aspect." The ideal character was not the egoism of hedonism but Aristotle's definition

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[12] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 4, 193, 138-9.

[13] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 1-2.

of the "high-minded man" who embodied the ideals of refinement, public service and well-developed capacities to think and act. Although MacEachran noted that this ideal was sustained in Aristotle's time by the resources of aristocracy, he wrote that Watson and the other idealists had used it as common example for all of their students. This example, MacEachran wrote, encouraged a profound concern to serve one's country in important fields of activity, whether it be in academia, commerce, national or local politics.[14]

Watson's student addresses illustrated how this moral ideal translated into civic virtue. In a lecture "Education and Life" given in 1873, Watson said that individuals "fall into errors of judgement not so much from imperfect reasoning, as from the want of a sufficiently commanding point of view and of a more comprehensive sympathy." In other words, proper behaviour required moral concern and correct principles of action. One important principle of action, Watson claimed, was the social quality of individualism. "Be not misled," he cautioned,

> by the stupid fallacy that your failure in duty will be hurtful only to yourself. No man liveth to himself -- no man dieth to himself. The influence for good or evil which each of you may exert upon others is incalculable.

The importance of duty reflected his Christian sense of concern for others and his philosophical understanding of individuals' social nature. In terms of broader sympathy, Watson made a strong claim for the moral effects of liberal-arts education. His comments are worth a long quotation because they illustrate well his understanding of how education should enlighten the economic activities of citizens. "The fundamental mistake," Watson pointed out,

> of a purely technical education is, that it tends to concentrate the mind upon what is

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[14] J.M. MacEachran, "John Watson," *Some Great Men of Queen's*, ed. Robert Charles Wallace (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1941) 29.

exclusively personal, and thus to warp the judgement by a variety of prejudices. And this is especially the case with those who are engaged in commercial affairs. The members of the learned professions, while they are by no means freed from the danger of narrowness of thought, find a certain safeguard against it in that breadth of view which all intellectual labour has a tendency to foster. It is otherwise with those devoted to business, where the temptations to indulge in inordinate self-interest are peculiarly strong; and hence they, above all others, require such a training as will counteract this unhappy bias. What is needed is an education other than practical life supplies, which, by raising the mind above purely personal or class interests, and fixing it upon more impersonal subjects, will generate a love of all that is fitted to elevate mankind, and to hasten on the progress of humanity.

With the correct moral point of view, therefore, the tendency of commercial activities to undermine the community could be checked.[15]

Watson recognized though that a state based on private property, even if it was managed by the most enlightened citizens, would still entail a significant degree of inequity and struggle. Although he wanted all citizens to own property, he noted that its actual distribution would "depend upon the general social arrangements of the community." Unfortunately, he did not elaborate on what he meant by the "general social arrangements." He did write, however, that "inequality of property is in harmony with the common good, and in any case it is hard to see how it can be prevented in any community which allows freedom of competition." He also wrote that, given the existence of private property, citizens could not "fairly object to the accumulation of property in the form of capital." These characteristics were not necessarily problematic for the state. The ability to accumulate property was a significant incentive for economic activity. Competition was also an efficient way to distribute rewards for labour. But, for Watson, liberal market society was not only an efficient way to make wealth, it was also a way to develop the ethical bonds of society and the responsibilities of citizens. It was through economic activity (or

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[15] John Watson, "Education and Life: An Address," Queen's University, 1873: 11, 19.

the "reciprocity of services and functions") that citizens entered into obligations with each other

and matured as moral beings. Consequently, Watson asserted, as Hegel and Bosanquet also had

asserted, that the instability and insecurity of dependence "on the vast system of wants is not

really insecurity, but results in the highest stability."[16]

Watson's ethical view of private property and capitalism was not unique among idealists.

In *Philosophy, Politics and Citizenship: The Life and Thought of British Idealists* (1984),

Raymond Plant and Andrew Vincent claim that T.H. Green and other idealists had wanted an

economy based on "responsible private enterprise." They suggest, however, that the idealists did

not fully explore the extent to which their economic views undermined their moral and political

views about the common good. According to Plant and Vincent:

> Idealists overall had an ambiguous view of property, competition and capitalism. It was
> as if they wanted to achieve a unity of the competitive instinct with the moral and
> rational good, within a moralized form of competition, yet all the time realizing that the
> two were exclusive, and providing no detailed account of an institutional resolution of
> the conflict.[17]

The question about the incompatibility of the idealists' moral vision of society with their

endorsement of capitalism has been the subject of some debate among historians. [18] Although

Watson argued that his moral vision was compatible with capitalism, he clearly recognized some

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[16] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 136, 234.

[17] Raymond Plant and Andrew Vincent, *Philosophy, Politics and Citizenship: The Life and Thought of British Idealists* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell , 1984) 26, 32.

[18] Peter Nicholson, *The Political Philosophy of the British Idealists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 112-5, 193-4, 190. I.M. Greengarten, *Thomas Hill Green & the Development of Liberal-Democratic Thought* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981) 108-9, 125. Taking his cue from C.B. Macpherson's definition of possessive individualism, Greengarten argues that Green's developmental liberal understanding of individual rights was inherently contradicted by his endorsement of competitive market society. Nicholson takes aim at Greengarten's Marxist interpretation and reconciles Green's understanding of rights with capitalism on the basis of the emancipatory, wealth-generating capacities of liberal market society.

tension between his ideal and reality.

This tension revealed itself in some poignant criticisms of market society. At times, the language he employed betrayed a sense of moral outrage, which perhaps suggested some frustration in Watson's perspective. "There are two ways," he wrote, "of acquiring wealth: firstly, by cultivating the earth, and secondly, by exploiting one's fellows, either by selling commodities at a large profit or by lending money at heavy interest." The "art of profit-making is unnatural because it takes advantage of individual necessity." Watson also singled out the middlemen who grew wealthy at the "expense of others by forgetting the true end of life."[19] Watson made these comments throughout *The State in Peace and War* but he did not specify any examples of who had committed these acts.

His comments would likely have resonated with those sympathetic to the social gospel in Canada. In *The Social Passion* (1971), Richard Allen has noted that, during the war, advocates of the social gospel were increasingly concerned about the profit-making aspects of the economy. There was a belief that the economy could be improved if businessmen checked their desire to make a profit and considered the needs of community in their decisions.[20] Watson's indictment of profit-making would also likely have appealed to Canadian farmers, who, as mentioned, were becoming a powerful political force in Canada at that time. In *The Farmers in Politics* (1920), the Progressive politician William Irvine had argued that farmers were particularly vulnerable to the whims of demand and supply. On the one hand, seed companies, railways, bankers and implement dealers established the farmer's costs. On the other hand, the farmer could only sell his

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[19] *Watson, The State in Peace and War*, 39, 40, 132, 138.

[20] Richard Allen, *The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada 1914-28* (1971; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990) 64, 164-7.

product at market price. From these conditions, Irvine and many farmers blamed the self-interest

of bankers, railway builders, manufacturers and other established interests for making profit at the

expense of hard-working farmers.[21] When Watson suggested that "cultivating the earth," as

opposed to being a middleman or lender, was a legitimate way of making of wealth, he may have

been partly appealing to this farm-based radical element in Canada.

Watson's concern about the moral nature of capitalism corresponded to a widespread

concern about the nature of liberal market principles. Although Watson was concerned about

profit-making at the expense of others, he defended the principles of private property and freedom

of competition. Indeed, Watson's analysis of market injustice focused primarily on the

shortcomings of individual conceptions of the common good rather than on any necessary

structural problems of market society. Far from being uncontested, Watson's liberal position

stood in opposition to a wide variety of left-leaning critiques of capitalism. In Britain, Jay Winter

argues that the First World War occasioned a consensus in terms of praxis among socialists and

left-liberals in the Labour Party. While the Liberal and Conservative Parties reconciled their

social concerns with a belief in the merits of capitalism, the Labour Party adopted a much more

critical position that reflected the Webbs' state-centred socialism.[22] The success of Britain's

Labour Party following the war was reflected in Canada by the political success of Progressives,

United Farmers and the Independent Labour Party in the western provinces and Ontario. The

success of these groups indicated not only a drop in esteem suffered by Borden's Union

government and the Conservative and Liberal Parties but also a leftward shift in political thought

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[21] Irvine, *The Farmers in Politics*, 112, 237.

[22] J.M. Winter, *Socialism and The Challenge of War: Ideas and Politics in Britain 1912 - 18* (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974) 270-3.

and behaviour.

Historians in Canada are somewhat divided about the extent of this leftward shift. Richard

Allen claims that between 1916 and 1918 the social gospel underwent an increasing radicalism

and moved leftwards towards labour and socialist perspectives.[23] Michael Gauvreau and Nancy

Christie, on the other hand, challenge Allen's account of radicalism and claim that the majority of

church- and labour-affiliated social reformers remained within a progressive-liberal political

perspective.[24] Even if Allen overestimates the presence of a left-wing radicalism in Canada, there

was still the presence of a left-wing critique. William Irvine's polemic about the plight of the

farmers and Salem Bland's call for a *New Christianity* (1920) reflected this spirit. Although both

balanced their criticism of market society with an acknowledgement of the need for political

harmony, they also emphasized how capitalism created an imbalance of power and antagonism

between the labourer and farmer classes and the capitalist class of manufacturers, transporters and

financiers. While Irvine called for a parliament based upon cooperation between productive

interests, Bland called for the complete public ownership of production. According to Bland:

> Public ownership, more extensively and powerfully than any other human agency,
> teaches men to say we and ours. It teaches them to think socially. To discredit and
> attack the principle of public ownership is to discredit and attack Christianity: It would
> seem to be the special sin against the Holy Ghost of our age. He who doubts the
> practicability of public ownership is really doubting human nature and Christianity and
> God.[25]

Whereas Bland believed in the potential of human nature to create a state based on public

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[23] Allen, *The Social Passion*, 61.

[24] Michael Gauvreau and Nancy Christie, *A Full-Orbed Christianity: The Protestant Churches and Social Welfare in Canada 1900 - 1940* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill - Queen's University Press, 1996) 15 -7, 33, 57-8, 88.

[25] Irvine, *The Farmers in Politics*, 10, 248; Salem Bland, *The New Christianity or The Religion of the New Age* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1920) 49, 27, 46-9, 94 -100.

ownership, Watson, in comparison, believed in the potential of human nature to establish a just

society based on private property.

Watson justified his belief in liberal market society through a critique of socialism. In *The*

State in Peace and War, he took issue with three kinds of socialist schemes. The first kind he

identified would give politicians the control "of all departments of industry." The second, which

referred to the approach of the Fabians, would "separate the political from the industrial State,"

and "appoint expert commissions" to manage industrial production. The third kind represented

Guild Socialism. This approach "would commit production to the autonomous administration of

trade unions, under their selected chiefs." In Watson's view, the essence of these proposals

sought to dispense with industrial competition through collective control of the means of

production and allocation of reward for economic service. Watson recognized that these forms of

socialism were not interested in abolishing private property completely but in abolishing private

capital, which, they alleged, depressed the wages of workers and inflated the earnings of

capitalists.[26]

Although Watson sympathized with the socialists' goals of social justice, he thought that

their strategies would not work because they would undermine important conditions for a united

and prosperous political society. The first and third types of socialism, which would place

industry under the control of either politicians or workers' guilds, would inevitably result in a

divisive sectionalism. For Watson, the guild socialists sought to reduce the powers of

government as much as possible because they thought "that central control implies a bureaucracy

and a defective electoral machinery." By giving workers control of industry, these socialists

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[26] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 238.

thought that they could circumvent the problems of this defective central power. A propos guild socialist G.D.H. Cole's view of the state, Watson argued that this theory inadequately conceived of the importance of the national government to represent the interests of citizens as a whole and to mediate political and economic disputes between individuals and organizations. In other words, Watson thought that workers' guilds would introduce obstacles to the development of a national common good and would undermine the effectiveness of the central organ of the state.[27]

Fabianism suffered from two problems. First, because of the difficulties of allocating remuneration according to an objective value of labour, the Fabians decided to give an equal amount to all. Watson thought that this was a recipe for indolence and the stifling of creativity and hard work. "How are we to decide," Watson asked rhetorically, "how much is due to the creative skill displayed by the great captains of industry?" Watson also rejected schemes of remuneration that were based on need because these schemes would simply encourage everyone to claim need. More importantly, however, Watson disagreed with the Fabians, and socialism in general, about the nature of private capital. They argued, he wrote, that the concentration of wealth by the capitalist was not "available for distribution among the workers" and prevented the ability of the market to produce wealth. Watson countered by noting that capital was largely reinvested in production and thereby benefitted both capitalist and worker. He added that "it is admitted by Kautsky that only greater productivity could lead to improvement in the condition of workmen." Watson's understanding of capital reflected his belief in the functional importance of wealth. In his discussion of Pericles's funeral oration, he noted that wealth should be used for the common good and not for talk or ostentation. The presence of private capital was not, therefore,

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[27] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 241-2.

necessarily bad; capital's ethical standing was relative to how it was used by its owners. As his daughter Harriet Sweezey wrote, Watson "was the last to minimize the value of money properly used."[28]

The second problem with the Fabians' plans, and indeed all socialist schemes, was an inadequate recognition of how private property and competition encouraged ingenuity and enterprise. The Fabians had argued that the increase of government intervention in the twentieth century was the beginning of a process that would lead to complete collective control of industry. The government, they noted, was already the largest employer in Britain. Watson countered this argument by claiming that public ownership presupposed the existence of private capital and could only work in an economy based on the "perpetual experimentation" of private enterprise. Watson did not reject the role of government in the economy. He thought it could provide an important service by eliminating inefficiency and allowing the savings from greater efficiency to be reinvested. Still, he argued that government agencies were only effective through a "perpetual interchange of influence" with private enterprise. Under complete government control, on the other hand, "individual initiative would be cramped and social progress retarded."[29]

Although Watson criticized socialist strategies for change, he did not lightly dismiss the socialist analysis of market society. Before he offered his own views on socialism, he devoted a couple of pages to explaining its analysis. For example, he wrote:

> The mass of invested capital at the present day, it is said, arises from the returns on capital, and is saved out of the profits of employees [sic]. The accumulation of great fortunes is made possible because the wage-earner receives less than the full value of the

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[28] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 240-1, 2; Harriet Watson Sweezey, "John Watson of Queen's -- As Teacher and Philosopher," t.s., Box 1, file 11, 96, Harriet Sweezey Papers, Queen's University Archives.

[29] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 236-41.

produce of his labour, so that the surplus falls to the share of the capitalist. The workman is forced to take the wages he can get by the intense competition of his fellow-workmen, the fluctuating condition of social production, the disturbing effect of machinery, changes in technical manufacture, foreign competition, and many other circumstances.[30]

In comparison to his brief, virtually non-existent accounts of MacIver's, Laski's and Cole's criticisms of idealism, Watson's comparatively lengthy description of socialism was uncharacteristically generous. His choice to present a fuller description perhaps reflected a rhetorical strategy of awakening in his readers a concern for social reform.

Other liberals, notably some of the political economists at Queen's University, also saw in socialism a powerful force that could be used to promote progressive-style reforms. Adam Shortt, for instance, held this view. Following his attendance at the National Congress of Socialists in 1908, Shortt wrote in his diary that "Socialism as such and in the hands of its customary advocates will not work, but it may assist in promoting, negatively at least, certain, other practical reforms.[31] O.D. Skelton seems to have adopted a similar pragmatic appreciation of socialism. In his book *Socialism: A Critical Analysis* (1911), which incidentally Watson cited as a source for his understanding of socialism, Skelton defined socialism as an "indictment, analysis, panacea and campaign" against capitalism.[32] Although he thought socialism resulted essentially from the higher expectations created by the wealth-creating dynamism of capitalism, he did not dismiss this ideological force. It was a constant reminder of the inequities of society and Skelton

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[30] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 42, 240, 235 -242, 239.

[31] Adam Shortt, Diary, 13 May 1908, 45-6, Adam Shortt Papers, Queen's University Archives. It seems Shortt held some rather pejorative views about socialists. For Shorrt, the National Congress of Socialists apparently had provided many examples of the "specimen of the agitator." Socialists "by reason of their physical and mental composition are restless and dissatisfied with anything and everything." "These people are naturally attracted by the general features of socialism, anarchy, freak religions, or anything which promises a radical alteration of what is."

[32] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 237.

believed that a better distribution of wealth would only occur through the "candid recognition of

the full extent of existing evils."[33] In his examination of political and economic thought at

Queen's University, Barry Ferguson, in *Remaking Liberalism* (1993), remarks that Skelton had a

greater affinity with socialist critiques of society than he perhaps had realized.[34]

Another reason why Watson rejected socialists' strategies for change, even though he was

sympathetic to their concern, stemmed from his belief in the efficacy of moral conduct. One of

the common criticisms of Marxism among idealists was that it privileged the determinacy of

economic factors in "the final explanation of all social changes and political revolutions." Material

determinism and the corollary of class antagonism, Watson suggested, was "too simple to account

for the facts." Watson believed that this materialism also characterized Durkheim's argument that

economic factors determined the specialization of function in modern industrial society. Although

economic considerations were an important part of the national will, Watson admitted, they were

"by no means the most important part." "The conditions under which the life of man is carried

on," Watson wrote, "differ for different societies, and change as a society realises that there are

ever new conditions by which man is enabled to realize himself." In other words, Watson pointed

to how the ideals and decisions of society shaped how individuals encountered their material

environment. As Watson noted in his discussion of Hegel, it was "spiritual wants in society [that]

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[33] O.D. Skelton, *Socialism: A Critical Analysis* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Hart, Schaffner and Marx, 1911) 3, 40, 43, 59. According to W.A. Mackintosh, James Bonar, who had written the article on socialism in the 9th edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, had apparently wished O.D. Skelton to have written this article because he was, in Bonar's view, the authority on socialism in the English-speaking world. W.A. Mackintosh, "O.D. Skelton 1878-1941," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* 7.2 (May 1941) 72.

[34] Barry Ferguson, *Remaking Liberalism: The Intellectual Legacy of Adam Shortt, O.D. Skelton, W.C. Clark and W.A. Mackintosh, 1890 - 1925* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill - Queen's University Press, 1993) 114.

become predominant, so that man makes his own necessity."[35]

Watson needed to overcome a problem, however, in reconciling the fact of industrial specialization with his belief in the general will. As noted, one of his main criticisms of Plato was that the rigid allocation of function to members of the polis broke down a common basis of shared understanding. Private property represented for Watson a major advance by providing the conditions for a more open, interactive and diversified civil society. And yet, in modern society the specialization of economic activity often meant repetitive and dreary tasks in the closed walls of a sweatshop or factory. Watson did not think that this external condition, however, necessarily undermined individual and social integrity. To make this point, he referred to the idealist F.H. Bradley and his seminal work *Ethical Studies* (1876). For Bradley, what constituted individual personality was "not the visible outer work so much as the spirit in which it is done." "The breadth of my life," he further wrote, "is not measured by the multitude of my pursuits, nor the space I take up among other men; but by the fullness of the whole life which I know as mine." Thus, although "less" depended upon each person in modern society, this did not mean, Watson and Bradley claimed, that individuality was "lessened."[36]

For Watson, what determined the conditions of individual activity was the "change in outlook of society as it develops." Not materialism, but consciously recognized spiritual principles shaped how a state arranged its inner affairs. Because of this faith in moral conduct, Watson thought that society could overcome the selfish tendencies of private property and form a moral state. A unified general will was necessary however for the state to organize itself,

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[35] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 136, 238, 243-5.

[36] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 245.

according to Watson. Materialist understandings of the state, on the other hand, could only provide insufficient justification for individuals to curb their behaviour. For Watson, because these theories described the state as only providing the conditions for self-interest, they could not offer a sufficient argument for altruism. And yet, if the state was to fulfil its obligations as an ethical entity it needed a citizenry willing to see its own interests in the common good. This dynamic was illustrated by Watson's discussion of individual rights. Rights, Watson claimed, were neither absolute nor given to individuals in isolation. Rights were a thoroughly social phenomenon and, as such, they were subject to the needs of society. Furthermore, in his discussion of Hegel, Watson wrote that "the order of law and property is found to break down at a certain point." Hence, the state needed recourse to override individual rights in the name of the common good.[37]

On this basis, Watson argued that the state which was based on private property needed not only a responsible but also a more active government. In making this claim, Watson articulated a formula for government intervention that diverged from the formula that Green and Bosanquet promoted over twenty years earlier. Green and Bosanquet had argued that the state promoted morality indirectly by "hindering hindrances" to the common good. These hindrances were primarily intemperance, the absence of public education and poor housing, which undermined self-reliance and the ability of individuals to manage private property and compete in market society. As Melvin Richter insists in his study of Green, those historians who have seen the beginnings of greater state intervention in Green's philosophy have often minimized his affinity with classical liberal thought and free market perspectives of the Manchester School.[38] Watson's

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[37] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 236, 195, 213, 132-3.

formula moved away from this classical legacy and opened a broader space for government

intervention. Watson wrote:

> It has been said, following Kant, that [the state's] object is to 'hinder hindrances.' And no
> doubt this may be taken as on the whole its function; but it seems better to conceive of
> that function as rather to promote by all legitimate means the physical, mental and moral
> well-being of its citizens. [Therefore the state has a] right to pass laws, such as Factory
> Acts, which promote the physical well-being of the individual, not to speak of the effort to
> provide such conditions of existence as will make it possible that all citizens shall have the
> opportunity of living a decent life.[39]

Merely protecting individual freedom was no longer an appropriate guide. It appears that Watson

was more open than either Green or Bosanquet about the possibilities of government intervention

in the reform of society.

In *The Faces of Reason* (1981), Armour and Trott claim that Watson was less

conservative than Bosanquet. Watson may very well have been less conservative in terms of

practical politics. Bosanquet, for instance, opposed welfare measures such as free-school meals

and old-age pensions because they undermined self-reliance and initiative.[40] The differences in

their theoretical formulation of the state's role may not, however, have reflected a very significant

difference of opinion on practical matters. After all, Watson published *The State in Peace and

War* twenty years after Bosanquet published *The Philosophical Theory of the State* in 1899 and

much had occurred in political economy about how governments could affect the human side of

production and the distribution of wealth.[41] When Watson reviewed *The Philosophical Theory of*

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[38] Melvin Richter, *The Politics of Conscience: T.H. Green and His Age* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1964) 225, 267-71; Bosanquet, *The Philosophical Theory of the State*, 176, 245, 267.

[39] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 215.

[40] Nicholson, *The Political Philosophy of the British Idealists*, 220.

[41] Ferguson, *Remaking Liberalism*, 91-3.

the State in 1900, although he took issue with Bosanquet's formula of government to "hinder

hindrances," it seems his main point of issue regarding "hindrance" and "promotion" was a

question of terminology. Watson asked if the "Kantian distinction between promotion and

hindrance of the 'best life' can be consistently maintained." The removal of ignorance by public

education or the removal of intemperance by prohibition, was as much an act of promotion as an

act of hindrance, Watson argued. Instead, he thought that Bosanquet's argument would be better

served if he had merely stuck to the principle that government force was unjustified when it was

"hostile to the growth of the higher self-consciousness." Beyond this principle, however, Watson

claimed that the question of government intervention "was so much a matter of practical politics

that no general rule can be laid down."[42]

This last remark illustrates Peter Nicholson's argument concerning Green's approach to the

issue of government intervention. Nicholson asserts that Green's conception of government did

not necessitate any substantive proposals for its intervention. Green had argued that the state

needed to protect individual independence and conditions for individual morality but he did not

propose any specific program for governments to achieve these goals. This problem he left for

politicians to work out. According to Nicholson, Green's approach to government legislation

reflected a utilitarian ethos of experimentation and insistence on utility as the measure of

government programs. It also reflected Green's appreciation that philosophy could only provide

principles for action. The particular knowledge needed to create government programs was best

developed by politicians who were aware of the practical considerations involved with

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[42] John Watson, review of *The Philosophical Theory of the State*, by Bernard Bosanquet, *Queen's Quarterly*, vol. 7, (1900) 320-322.

legislation.[43]

In *The State in Peace and War*, Watson's formula for government intervention did

suggest, however, a positive role for government in the economy. In his review article in 1900,

Watson had discussed government activity in relation to the issues of education and temperance.

In 1919, when he discussed the role of government, he associated this role with issues such as

working conditions and Factory Acts. Apart from education and intemperance, Watson placed an

onus on governments to promote the "physical well-being" of citizens. Elsewhere, Watson

argued that the state should promote "equality of opportunity."[44] Watson continued these themes

in a speech given to Queen's alumni in New York in 1926. Watson said:

> that the Government should allow the freest play to business in all its forms, taking care
> to prevent the abuses of monopolies which . . . close the doors to opportunity. The
> Government should see that the relations of employer and employed were just, that the
> safety and health of the workman was cared for, that the charges for transportation by
> railways and steamships were equitable, and that the finance and banking of the country
> prevented selfishness. It is not the business of Government, he claimed, to interfere with
> the process of production, but it is its business to see that the methods of distribution are
> fair.[45]

Through these measures, democracy could fulfil the true ideals of the state.

Watson's political philosophy illustrated how he thought government should be used to fix

problems of civil society. Though his comments were not a very thorough exploration of how the

state could modify economic activity, they were a statement of principle. Instead of putting forth

a conservative, laissez-faire perspective of economy or merely restricting governments to issues of

education and intemperance, Watson suggested a closer relationship between government and

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[43] Nicholson, *The Political Philosophy of the British Idealists*, 193-4.

[44] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 233.

[45] John Watson, "Democracy and The Universities," *Queen's Quarterly*, 33 (1926) 361-2.

economic processes. And it was a relationship based on more than simply ensuring that the market worked as efficiently as it could in producing wealth. On the one hand, he suggested that the public interest should override private interests of property and contract to ensure that the integrity of workmen or those dependent on railways or banks was not compromised. On the other hand, he couched his program of intervention in terms of distribution. And yet, because this evidence is quite brief, it is difficult fully to characterize Watson's views on how far government should intervene in the economy to affect distribution. The question remains as to how far, if at all, he thought government should attempt to redistribute wealth beyond ensuring that micro-economic transactions were in themselves fair. Nonetheless, Watson encouraged his audience to accept a wider role for governments in the economy.

This point of view placed Watson's political philosophy within the developments of new liberal thought that accompanied the expansion of state activity in the early twentieth century. Barry Ferguson chronicles how Adam Shortt and O.D. Skelton pioneered in Canada the study of government as a means to adjust the inequalities present in liberal market society. Deeply concerned by the amount of social injustice and conflict, they rejected socialist paths for change but still sought the modification of market society.[46] Watson, who had taught both of these people and worked at the same university with them, generated similar views about the necessity of government intervention as the way to correctly modify capitalism. In Watson's view, government was not opposed to self-reliance and private property but in fact constituted the necessary condition for these principles to work towards the betterment of individual lives. Watson's political philosophy illustrates how one prominent liberal in Canada advocated an

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[46] Ferguson, *Remaking Liberalism*, 93, 103-7.

increased role of government from within his core values to remedy the problems associated with industrialism.

It was through Watson's idealist political philosophy that he in part justified this expanded role of government. As he invoked Pericles's funeral oration and the ideals of a communitarian and participatory democracy, Watson focused attention on how the individual prospered within a prosperous community. His political philosophy meant more, however, than simply encouragement of a public spirit willing to accept the burdens of greater government. Watson defended liberal market principles of private property, competition and inequality of wealth as components of the common good at a time of massive economic adjustment and radical politics. Again, in a sense, Watson offered a salve for the worries of Canadians by pointing to the possibilities of greater government intervention and greater social concern on behalf of citizens as the way to cure the deep political and economic fissures that marked liberal capitalism in 1919.

4/
The Prestige of Idealism in 1919

The State in Peace and War represented Watson's efforts to order, discipline and shape

public opinion about the state at a time when western civilization was coming to terms with the

meanings of the First World War. By delineating the "true principles" of the state, Watson

illustrated the democratic spirit of idealism in response to charges of statism and set forth a

communitarian- and progressive-liberal approach to social reform. Fortunately, and likely because

of his status as an internationally renowned philosopher, his book received a number of reviews in

newspapers and academic journals. This exposure provides an opportunity to examine

contemporary responses to idealism and to expand upon the ways in which idealism and state

power were important topics in assessing the meaning of the war. These reviews illustrate that

Watson's idealism was indeed a topical aspect of political thought. Although his idealist political

message was met with skepticism by some, it was also received positively by leaders of important

constituencies of social reform in Canada. These reviews suggest that Watson's political thought

was still an important and living outlook in the early 1920s despite the challenges to idealism

raised by the war.

It should be pointed out that *The State in Peace and War* was not Watson's most popular

publication. *Selections from Kant* (1888), *An Outline of Philosophy* (1898), *Philosophy of Kant*

Explained (1908) and *The Interpretation of Religious Experience* (1912) were his most popular

and enduring works.[1] There was still, though, some interest in this work from professors in

Britain and the United States, as well as, it seems, Japan.[2] Also, some of the leaders of the Social

Gospel in Canada were interested in *The State in Peace War* because originally it was recruited to

be a part of the "Canadian Library of Religious Literature." This series of books was edited by

Rev. G.C. Pidgeon, among others, and sought to promote "scholarly, literary and spiritual study

within the Christian Church." Although Watson's work appeared in an advertisement, it seems he

withdrew his agreement due to insufficient royalties proposed by the publisher.[3] In terms of sales,

Watson perhaps would have been better off to have included his book in this library. Nonetheless,

apart from the comparatively low publication numbers, *The State in Peace and War* received a

respectable number of reviews in Britain, the United States and Canada.

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[1] From the few reports from Watson's publisher, Maclehose, Jackson and Company, that are in his archives, zero copies of *The State in Peace and War* were sold in 1922. In comparison, his *Selections from Kant* (1888) sold 206 copies, *Interpretation of Religious Experience* (1912) 66 copies, *Philosophy of Kant Explained* (1908) 83 copies and *An Outline of Philosophy* (1908) 55 copies in that year. In 1935, 12 copies of *The State in Peace and War* were reported as sold. The *Selections from Kant*, on the other hand, was clearly his most popular work. In that year, 231 copies were sold and another 1550 were printed. Maclehose, Jackson and Company, letter to John Watson, 29 March 1923, 31 January 1935, Box 1, John Watson Papers A, Queen's University Archives.

[2] R.M. Wenley, a Kantian scholar from the University of Michigan, wrote that he would recommend *The State in Peace and War* to his students. R.M. Wenley, letter to John Watson, 26 May 1919, Box 1, John Watson Papers A, Queen's University Archives. S. Alexander, an idealist philosopher from Manchester, expressed interest in using *The State in Peace and War* as textbook for his students. S. Alexander, letter to John Watson, 24 August 1919, Box 1, John Watson Papers A, Queen's University Archives. Watson also had received a letter from J.L. Bates, President of Kwansei Gakuin College in Kobe, Japan, who had secured Dr. Kenkichi Kodera as a possible translator for *The State in Peace and War*. According to Bates, British political science was popular in Japan because many were interested in creating a parliament without weakening loyalty to the Emperor "and thus to supplant the German system of irresponsible Cabinet government which has prevailed hitherto." Unfortunately, Watson's archives do not contain any indication that his book actually was translated. J.L. Bates, letter to John Watson, [undated], Box 1, John Watson Papers A, Queen's University Archives.

[3] George C. Pidgeon, letters to John Watson, 9 January 1918; 3 August 1918; 17 August 1918, Box 1, John Watson Papers A, Queen's University Library. See also: R.E. Welsh, letters to John Watson, 4 February 1918; 20 April 1918; 10 August 1918, Box 1, John Watson Papers A, Queen's University Archives. "Canadian Library of Religious Literature," Box 1, John Watson Papers A, Queen's University Archives. Other than Pidgeon, the editorial board of this project included Rev. R.E. Welsh, Professor W.S. Milne and Rev. Herbert Symonds. The series was intended to be published by Messrs. Hodder & Stoughton Limited, Toronto.

In Britain, the *Dundee Advertiser*, *Scotsman*, and *Aberdeen Free Press* carried short

descriptions of *The State in Peace and War*.[4] *The Times Literary Supplement* described Watson's

book "as a gathering together of well-recognized material." It endorsed Watson's effort --

characterized as an "educational handbook" -- as "useful" and "simple, lucid and sensible."[5] The

Yorkshire Post praised Watson for offering "a distinctive contribution to literature of political

science."[6] *The Expository Times* recommended his book for its clarity about the supremacy of

individual conscience in relation to the state.[7] Other reviews were less favourable. According to

the *Glasgow Herald*, the war was fought over the Germanic conception of state sovereignty. It

was not convinced that Watson had articulated a viable position in his depiction and defence of

the sovereignty of the general will.[8] The *Contemporary Review* was more direct in its criticism.

Challenging positive views of Athenian democracy, it claimed: "The German state is a distorted

magnification of a Greek City-State, and, like it, is based on the slavery of the individual."[9] In

short, both the *Glasgow Herald* and the *Contemporary Review* criticized idealism for undermining

the integrity of the individual.

Reviews in the British philosophy journal *Mind* and literary magazine *The Athenaeum* also

criticized Watson's perspective for subordinating individual liberty and conscience to national

purpose. In *Mind*, C.C.J. Webb aligned Watson's perspective with that begun by T.H. Green.

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[4] Rev. of *The State in Peace and War*, *Dundee Advertiser*, 5 May 1919; *Scotsman*, 4 May 1919; *Aberdeen Free Press*, 20 June 1919, Box 1, file "Reviews of *The State in Peace and War*," John Watson Papers A, Queen's University Archives.

[5] Rev. of *The State in Peace and War*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, 1 May 1919: 2239.

[6] Rev. of *The State in Peace and War*, *Yorkshire Post*, 4 June, 1919, Box 1, file "Reviews of *The State in Peace and War*," John Watson Papers A, Queen's University Archives.

[7] Rev. of T*he State in Peace and War*, *The Expository Times*, [undated], ibid.

[8] Rev. of *The State in Peace and War*, *Glasgow Herald*, 5 May 1919, ibid.

[9] Rev. of *The State in Peace and War*, *Contemporary Review*, June 1919, ibid.

The essence of this tradition, he wrote, was the reconciliation of individual obligation to a common good and general will. Webb thoughtfully recognized Watson's emphasis on the "ethical and spiritual interpretation of human life." He also found interesting Watson's distinction between absolute and relative sovereignty and his criticism of G.D.H. Cole. Nonetheless, Webb objected to Watson's definition of the common good on the grounds that in practice it sanctioned state autocracy and was therefore dangerous. This principle of obligation "had an unfortunate effect upon the attitude toward political authority of a generation brought up in an intellectual atmosphere which these members [idealists] have done much to form." Because Watson combined Kant's notion of deontological freedom with the nation's common good, Webb thought he had given the individual's "consciousness of obligation . . . priority." Watson, consequently, had subordinated the critical capacity of individual conscience and distorted the true spirit of Kant. Also, this review ended with a criticism of Watson's historical accuracy. Webb thought that Watson's summaries of Medieval thought were, simply, superficial. Based upon "a scant survey of some accredited books of reference," Watson had uncritically described the nature of scholastic thought as well as some points about the Roman Empire. In summary, Webb was impatient with the political consequences of an emphasis on the common good and with breezy historical generalizations.[10]

E.F. Carritt in *The Athenaeum* focused on the same lines of criticism but subjected Watson to harsher judgement. He found Watson's discussion of political obligation, individual rights, the common good and general will to be a rather vague and drawn-out statement that a "good citizen

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[10] C.C. J. Webb, rev. of *The State in Peace and War*, *Mind*, vol. XVIII, 1919: 487-488.

is one who does what he believes is right." "And," Carritt continued,

> the doctrine is not only otiose, but dangerous, for in less impartial hands than Professor
> Watson's, by a natural equivocation between this ideal general will and the will of all or
> of the majority, it becomes a potent argument against independence and dissent.

Carritt also found Watson's historical summary, like all "historical summaries of philosophy," to

be "unsatisfying" because it tended to describe previous theories of obligation in simplistic ways

as either altruistic or selfish. This strategy gave an unwarranted impression that these

philosophies suffered from a "perverse vagueness." The consequence of Watson's philosophy,

according to Carritt, was a proclivity to decide what was moral in advance. It merely saved those

who were "lazy" from engaging in the "painful consideration of actual conditions and the balance

of conflicting obligations." Carritt also dismissed Watson's optimism in people's ability to

reconcile their claims with a common good as pious hope. Finally, Carritt challenged the viability

of moral philosophy to offer a reasonable and critical account of the state. All moral philosophy

seemed to provide, he wrote, were theories of ideal Republics and Utopias.[11]

These more negative reviews of *The State in Peace and War* pointed to the contested

nature of idealism. Although some still found Watson's ethical message appealing, others,

particularly those inspired by realism, questioned the viability of using classical Greek and idealist

thought to explain contemporary political reality. References to the state embodying a

consensual, ultimately harmonious, body politic seemingly had dangerous consequences for

individual autonomy and legitimate disagreement with the directions of the state. As Michael

Freeden notes in *Liberalism Divided* (1986), the war occasioned not only a sense of anxiety about

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[11] E.F. Carritt, "Is There A Theory Of The State?" rev. of *The State in Peace and War*, *The Athenaeum*, no. 4667, 10 October 1919: 486-7.

state power but also an ascendency in the importance of individual autonomy in the core values of

new liberalism. Many new liberals, among them readers of L.T. Hobhouse's *The Metaphysical*

Theory of the State (1918), were dissatisfied with idealism as an influence on practical politics.[12]

Although idealism had fallen significantly in prestige during the war, especially from the criticisms

of the popular Hobhouse, not all political commentators held idealism in low repute.

In the *American Political Science Review*, Watson's work received a patient and

thoughtful assessment by A.N. Holcombe. He thought Watson's work offered an insightful

perspective for defining the state. How were political scientists, he asked, to address that

"ambiguous" term, the state? How did it differ from the nation? For Holcombe, these two terms

were not identical and political scientists should not use them interchangeably. Watson's

distinction between the state and government he thought was apt. It allowed Watson to preserve

a sense that the political life of the state involved a whole range of institutions. This perspective

also allowed Watson to conclude that national guildsmen, such as G.D.H. Cole, were not really

"attacking the state, as they had supposed, but [were] merely discussing theories of government."

Unfortunately, Holcombe's review did not delve into these issues much further. He did not, for

instance, explore more fully how Watson's definition of the state incorporated the sense of nation

when discussing political power or the ways in which Cole's criticisms of government were

compatible, despite initial differences, with Watson's definition of the state. Still, Holcombe

recommended Watson's book as a welcome and refreshing statement of idealist political

philosophy. He described this perspective as perhaps "already too rare" in what he called a

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[12] Michael Freeden, *Liberalism Divided: A Study in British Political Thought 1914 - 1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 12, 31, 19, 26.

"realistic generation."[13] In comparison to the bias towards realism in *Mind* and *The Athenaeum*, Holcombe maintained that Watson's idealism provided a valuable perspective on the meaning of the state and needed to be preserved in post-war political thought.

In Canada, *The State in Peace and War* also received positive reviews. The *Canadian Gazette* praised Watson's book for appearing at "an opportune moment and being a useful guide for [contemporary] political complexities." As a point of minor criticism, the *Gazette* would have preferred more discussion on political philosophy of the Italian republics during the Renaissance.[14] The *Christian Guardian*, *Queen's Quarterly* and *The Globe* also carried reviews. Before considering them, however, it is perhaps worthy to note that Watson's book was not reviewed in many newspapers or journals in Canada. Neither the *Kingston Standard* nor the *Kingston Whig* reviewed it. Apart from *The Globe*, it was not reviewed by the prominent papers in Toronto, or in Halifax, Montreal and Ottawa. Compared to Britain, where *The State in Peace and War* received mention in a number of newspapers, Canadian coverage was slight, especially considering Watson's reputation. This fact raises some questions about why it did not receive more coverage. Perhaps review copies were not distributed to these papers. Perhaps editors simply did not find Watson's book sufficiently compelling to endorse or criticize. Perhaps the popular press in Canada considered academic thought marginal in political discussion. Or, perhaps the editors of popular newspapers were somewhat hermetically cut off from academic perspectives. The low subscription rates of university journals suggest that academic-centred

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[13] A.N. Holcombe, rev. of *The State in Peace and War*, *The American Political Science Review* 13.4, November 1919: 680-681.

[14] Rev. of *The State in Peace and War*, *Canadian Gazette*, 29 May 1919, Box 1, file "Reviews of *The State in Peace and War*," John Watson Papers A, Queen's University Archives.

debate about social issues occupied a marginal place in public opinion. Between 1890 and 1920,

Queen's Quarterly -- which reached at most 750 subscribers yearly -- was representative of the

limited appeal of such journals.[15] Furthermore, national academic journals, such as *The*

Canadian Historical Review and *Canadian Journal of Political Economy*, only began to publish

in the early 1920s.

By comparison, the journal of the Presbyterian Church, the *Christian Guardian*, had a

large circulation. In 1924, it had 30 000 subscribers.[16] In was in this magazine that Rev. Ernest

Thomas reviewed *The State in Peace and War* in a provocative article titled "Democracy,

Socialism and the State." Thomas also reviewed J.A. Hobson's *Democracy After the War* and

Bertrand Russell's *Proposed Roads to Freedom -- Socialism, Anarchism and Syndicalism*. The

introduction to this article revealed the flavour of Thomas's worldview. It was an important and

no small task, he wrote, "to gather into some systematic whole the best thinking of our time, so

that we represent not merely one phase or mood, but the whole spirit of our age." To this end,

Thomas welcomed Hobson's criticism of imperialism and Russell's criticism of state and economic

autocracy. Their politics rested, though, on certain understandings of the state. For Thomas,

both Hobson and Russell held "distrust" for the state but then returned to it as "indispensable!"

This view did not sit well with Thomas. While Hobson and Russell raised legitimate criticisms,

their perspective, Thomas wrote, inadequately described the nation as an aggregate of individuals.

They consequently understood the state as "either an inevitable contrivance to keep these

individuals from killing each other, or an alien power against which they have to assert

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[15] Barry Ferguson, *Remaking Liberalism: The Intellectual Legacy of Adam Shortt, O.D. Skelton, W.C. Clark, and W.A. Mackintosh, 1890 - 1925* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993) 17.

[16] Ferguson, ibid.

themselves." In Thomas's view, Watson provided a way out of this zero-sum perspective. He asked rhetorically: "What is more urgently needed just now than such a book as *The State in Peace and War. . . ?*" Thomas found persuasive Watson's arguments about the social nature of individuality, his rejection of egoism and his characterization of the state as the "true self writ large." Thomas noted that Watson described the state as a phenomenon that develops historically. Watson was thus able to define the state in "such a way as to obviate the necessity of mingling in the fierce polemics to which the war has given rise."

In comparison to the reviewers in *Mind* and *The Athenaeum*, Thomas did not think that Watson's idealist definition of the state would promote the abuses of power that Hobson, Russell and others criticised. Indeed, even amid the contemporary antipathy to German culture, Thomas agreed with Watson's defence of Hegel. Thomas also found in Watson's definition of the state an important perspective to appreciate "the whole spirit of the age." Thomas recognized, however, the limits of Watson's principles. For Thomas, the most important question in post-war democracies was the exact relation of the government to the economy. How preoccupied with economics will the state become? he asked. Would the state eventually "be merged in the economic organization?" Although *The State in Peace and War* discussed socialism, Thomas wrote that Watson, perhaps wisely, left this question about the exact relationship between government and economy open for history to decide. Another topic that Watson did not discuss was conscription and the "treatment of conscientious objectors." The question that Bertrand Russell and others had raised, Thomas wrote, was whether or not conscription was an acceptable government action or a usurpation of individual rights. Some comment from Watson about this issue would have been much welcomed according to Thomas. On the other hand, Thomas found

The State in Peace and War to be instructive about the League of Nations. He too was hopeful that the League would eventually embody an international consensus for peace. Thomas concluded his review by endorsing Watson's work as an essential book for those interested in social reform.

Finally, Watson's book was reviewed in *Queen's Quarterly* and *The Globe* by Rev. R.J. Wilson. He was a good friend of Watson and minister at Chalmers Presbyterian Church in Kingston, which Watson attended. In a letter thanking Watson for a copy of *The State in Peace and War*, Wilson wrote that "people are anxiously looking for statesmen" and that the book "comes to a world of thought that is in much need of guidance."[17] In his published articles, he promoted Watson's book as a timely and worthwhile read for all Christians. He even called it "epoch making." He explained that the book could be read by "lawyers, doctors, ministers and other professional men whose philosophical equipment is general rather than particular." Even the "ordinary layman who has an open mind and an appreciation of a clear statement of truth" could read it. Wilson drew attention to a number of Watson's main points. For instance, he outlined Watson's contention that the state was more than the government and that it was founded on people's social nature. He noted that sovereignty lay in the general will, not in the power possessed by any person or group, and that the general will was realized through the many organisations of the community. For the most part, Wilson's review was a summary though he did raise of couple of suggestions for improvement. Watson's discussion of rights in chapter ten was "too condensed for the ordinary reader." Wilson would also have preferred a more extensive

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[17] R.J. Wilson, letter to John Watson, 23 May 1919, Box 1, John Watson Papers A, Queen's University Archives.

treatment of socialism. Wilson concluded his review in *Queen's Quarterly* by reiterating Watson's

call for all "Christian men" to promote the good of humanity, overcome self-interest in

statesmanship and realize the "true ideals" of the state.[18]

What is noteworthy in the reviews of Thomas and Wilson was a concern that

contemporary society was in a state of confusion and uncertainty. Thomas had noted that

Watson's book was "urgently" needed. Wilson had noted that people were "anxiously looking for

statesmen." During this moment of questioning, Thomas and Wilson, unlike the reviewers in

Mind or *The Athenaeum*, did not find Watson's philosophical outlook to have dangerous

consequences for individual integrity. Instead, they found in *The State in Peace and War* a

perspective that gave legitimacy and place of purpose to their Christian sense of social reform. If

political society rested upon the ethical notions of society, the general will, then it was quite

possible to envision social reform based on a change of values in society.

Their recommendations of *The State in Peace and War* suggests that idealism still had

some importance for Protestant social thought in Canada. The support of Thomas was

particularly important. He was not only an editor of the *Christian Guardian* but also a field

officer for the Methodist Department of Evangelism and Social Service. In *A Full-Orbed*

Christianity (1996), Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau consider Thomas to have been an

integral leader in the revived social Evangelicalism of the 1920s. Through his positions in the

church, they note, Thomas attempted to provide clergymen with the latest ideas about political

society and social reform. He attempted not only to promote a service ideal among clergy but

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[18] R.J. Wilson, rev. of *The State in Peace and War*, by John Watson, *Queen's Quarterly* 27, January 1920: 313-316; R.J. Wilson, rev. of *The State in Peace and War*, by John Watson, *The Globe*, 31 May 1917: 17.

also to inculcate a sophisticated approach to social reform. For Christie and Gauvreau, Thomas

and other prominent members of the Protestant Churches, such as S.D. Chown, were important

influences on mobilizing a progressive social reform ethic in Protestantism. This ethic ultimately

contributed to the passage of progressive government legislation and ultimately to the welfare

state.[19]

Watson's work was also received well by at least one prominent political economist in

Canada. In a private letter to Watson, O.D. Skelton praised *The State in Peace and War*. He

wrote:

> I have just finished reading your State in Peace and War, and want to tell you how much I
> have enjoyed it. It is remarkable in the wealth of detail along with the clear and firm
> grasp of principle, and makes fresh and vivid what in many hands has been hackneyed
> [summary]. It is particularly fortunate to have the subject treated with so full a
> background and so long a perspective now that many theories rooted only in the day's
> whims are being showered upon us. It is all that we would have expected from Dr.
> Watson.[20]

Unfortunately, Skelton did not elaborate on exactly what he agreed with in Watson's work. But,

this letter is significant because, although Skelton was a student of Watson, he has been described

as having drifted away from idealism in favour of developing secular social science.[21] Moreover,

during the war Skelton was a major voice against conscription. Whereas many liberals in Britain

responded to this issue with an increased concern for individual rights and a negative view

towards idealism, Skelton did not share this response. Rather than reverting to traditional liberal

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[19] Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity : The Protestant Churches and Social Welfare in Canada, 1900 - 1940* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill - Queen's University Press, 1996) 21, 42-3, 77, 91.

[20] Oscar Douglas Skelton, letter to John Watson, August 30, 1918, Box 1, John Watson Papers, Queen's University Archives.

[21] Doug Owram, *The Government Generation: Canadian Intellectuals and the State 1900 - 1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986) 121.

arguments about individual liberty -- as, according to Michael Freeden, liberal critics in Britain did in their polemics against conscription -- Skelton based his arguments against conscription on the basis of efficiency in organising the nation's resources.[22]

The acceptance of *The State in Peace and War* by Skelton, Thomas and Wilson suggest that, although the prestige of idealism suffered during the war, it was not a completely spent philosophical force. Watson's moral view of the state resonated to some degree with the thought of prominent social reformers in the church and academe in Canada. The continued strength of idealism is recognized by Doug Owram in *The Government Generation* (1986). He suggests that although Watson's philosophical position was on the defensive in the First World War, it still represented the prominent view of the state among Canadian intellectuals. Owram further suggests that Stephen Leacock's *Unsolved Riddle of Social Justice* (1920), Mackenzie King's *Industry and Humanity* (1918) and Salem Bland's *The New Christianity* (1918) all illustrated the contours of idealism. These contours, he maintains, were an insistence that individuals seek the higher good, that spiritual renewal occurred in organic relation to society, and on a rejection of an older laissez-faire individualism.[23]

Though Owram claims that idealism found agreement in Canada following the war, his portrayal of idealism perhaps warrants a reconsideration. The three criteria that link together the works of Leacock, King and Bland were certainly supported by Watson. But, these criteria are not sufficient to characterize a work as idealist. Watson employed a set of formal philosophical

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[22] Michael Freeden, *Liberalism Divided*, 18-31. Also, Barry Ferguson notes that, on the issues of conscription and the right of the state to political obligation, Skelton did not significantly diverge from the position of Watson. See, *Remaking Liberalism*, 155-6.

[23] Owram, *The Government Generation*, 103.

arguments to support a view of the state that encouraged a sense of moral duty to the community. These ideals were not, however, simply the result of an idealist world view. Watson's ethical philosophy sought to elucidate the principles of existing moral customs in order to transform moral conduct from opinion to knowledge. The ethical ideals of idealism represented in part an exploration of ideals already existing in society. In *The Decline of Politics* (1976), an examination of the Conservative Party and Union government, John English notes that a service ideal pervaded social thought in Canada during the First World War.[24] Similarly Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau have argued that a sense of morality, community and civic virtue were important elements in a rejuvenated social Evangelicalism in the 1920s. As well, in Britain there was a presence of community and religion. Eugenio Biagini and other scholars have noted that religious and civic virtues were profound in Britain's sense of collective identity in the late Victorian and Edwardian era. While nineteenth-century market society may have supported an atomistic individualism, British culture was pervaded, they note, by appeals to duty and community.[25]

A better way to appreciate Watson's idealism is to preserve its nature as a formal philosophical outlook. As Owram notes, in the intellectual culture of Canada following the war, there was not one but a number of dominant philosophies -- although, in his perspective, idealism

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[24] John English, *The Decline of Politics: The Conservatives and the Party System 1901 - 1920* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976) 3-4.

[25] Eugenio F. Biagini, ed., *Citizenship and community: Liberals, radicals and collective identities in the British Isles, 1865 - 1931* (Cambridge: Cambrdge University Press, 1996) 2, 21, 44. Biagini argues that historians need to take a second look at Victorian and Edwardian culture. Instead of characterizing this period as one of intense individualism, he explores a complex relationship between emphases on individual integrity and community responsibility.

was the most important during and immediately following the war.[26] By defining idealism broadly

enough to include the works of Leacock, King, and Bland however, Owram obscures the

distinctness of Watson's position apart from other arguments in favour of organicism and civic

duty. As Michael Freeden notes, the idealists' emphasis on community in their social thought was

compatible with the ideals of a number of philosophical systems "seemingly remote from its basic

maxims." Although idealism promoted certain social ideals about the state and civic virtue, it was

just one, albeit important, source of knowledge in a culture that had many voices advocating a

sense of duty and community.[27]

Nonetheless, Watson's idealism did receive support from a number of important

individuals in Canada. As the esteemed Professor of Moral Philosophy at Queen's University,

Watson had influenced a number of students who would later occupy important positions in the

Church, public education and even the civil service. For instance, Watson had instructed and was

a lifetime friend of Rev. S.W. Dyde, who was principal of Queen's Theological College from 1918

until 1926.[28] S.D. Chown, elected in 1910 as superintendent of the Methodist Church, was

another major Protestant figure influenced by Watson.[29] Also, Adam Shortt and O.D. Skelton

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[26] Owram, *The Government Generation*, 121.

[27] Freeden, *New Liberalism*, 17-19.

[28] George Rawlyk and Kevin Quinn, *A History of Queen's Theological College 1912 - 1972* (Kingston: Queen's Theological College, 1980) 11, 30.

[29] A.B. McKillop, *A Disciplined Intelligence: Critical Inquiry and Canadian Thought in the Victorian Era* (Montreal: McGill - Queen's University Press, 1979) 207, 226 - 227. McKillop draws attention to Chown's lecture, "Socialism and the Social Teachings of Jesus" (1914), in which he indicated his intellectual debt to Watson and then propounded his hope that "a perfect social state" would become a reality if Christian values were adopted by all citizens.

had been students of Watson.[30] Indeed, both O.D. Skelton and particularly W.A. Mackintosh

noted the seminal influence of Watson's idealism on Shortt and the beginning of the department of

political economy at Queen's University.[31] It is also worthy to note that the Rev. Ernest Thomas

was a student of political economy at Queen's University, which likely had something to do with

his positive assessment of *The State in Peace and War*.[32] From an historical perspective, when

one looks at how many leaders of social and political thought and reform came from Queen's

University, most often the intellectual climate that had influenced such people had been strongly

affected by Watson. In this regard, Watson illustrates quite well Raymond Plant's and Andrew

Vincent's thesis about the influence of idealist forms of citizenship on a generation of social

reformers, including new liberals.[33]

Plant and Vincent contend that there was a large degree of agreement between idealist

political philosophy and the views of the state held by new liberals. For instance, the idealists and

new liberals, such as Hobhouse and Hobson, understood the premise of state intervention to be a

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[30] S.E.D. Shortt, *The Search for an Ideal* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976) 102, 99, 115. S.E.D. Shortt argues that Watson's influence on Shortt was quite strong. This influence often manifested itself in a metaphysical tone or statement in Shortt's writing. Indeed, in an unpublished essay on "The origin of organized society or the state", Adam Shortt stated that "the real question is, not as usually put, how has society developed from an aggregate of independent individuals, but how does the individual gain independence in the midst of society." Individualism and independent individuals were new, not society and the state, he argued. Adam Shortt, "The Origin of Organized Society or the State," n.d., Box 52, file 22, Adam Shortt Papers, Queen's University Archives.

[31] O.D. Skelton, "Fifty Years of Political and Economic Science in Canada," *Fifty Years in Retrospect: Royal Society of Canada* (1932) 87; William Mackintosh, "Adam Shortt, 1859 - 1931," *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, vol. 14, no. 1 (1938) 164- 176. "In our day," Mackintosh noted, "the enthusiasm for Kant and Hegel has waned and Mental and Moral Philosophy no longer hold the place they did in the Scottish universities, but John Watson had an important influence on Shortt."

[32] G.T. Johnston, letter to Adam Shortt, 16 November 1910, v. 58, file 1910-1912, Adam Shortt Papers, National Archives of Canada. Johnston, a bond investment broker in Montreal, asked Shortt to write a letter of recommendation in support of Thomas's bid to be an editor of the *Christian Guardian*. He wrote that Shortt had a grasp of Thomas's abilities and knew that he would be able to provide "the kind of interpretation best calculated to serve the Church's purpose by moulding public sentiment in favour of the establishment of the Kingdom of God among men."

[33] Raymond Plant and Andrew Vincent, *Philosophy, Politics and Citizenship: The Life and Thought of the British Idealists* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984) 44-7, 72.

balance between the needs of self-government and central government.[34] Ferguson's portrayal of the progressive liberalism of Adam Shortt and O.D. Skelton suggests that Watson shared a number of values with them. For all three, history represented the process by which there was a gradual growth in the level of individual independence, reason and self-realization. All three realized that parliament had an important role in harmonizing conflict in society and reflecting the will and sentiment of its people. All three had envisioned the possibility of harmony, cooperation and consensus between individual self-government and an increased importance for central government. For instance, Shortt, as government negotiator for labour disputes under the Lemieux Act, emphasised the importance of communication between conflicting parties in reaching agreement. Skelton too held open the possibility for harmony as illustrated by his hope for parliamentary parties to overcome their sectional interests and promote the common good. Shortt and Skelton seemed to display, in summary, a similar understanding about the nature of history and the possibility for consensus that animated Watson's understanding of state power and the general will.

Furthermore, Skelton's belief in social consensus was reflected in his understanding of the nation-state. "Since Canada was never fully defined in Skelton's writing," Ferguson writes,

> it may be dismissed as a vague, vapid patriotism. Yet, "Canadianism" was a presupposition in his many assertions about national autonomy and the national interest. Skelton's concept of Canadianism can perhaps be thought of as the social embodiment of the holistic approach to understanding social phenomena, so was there a holistic means to conceive the nation. The "common Canadianism" of Skelton was a kind of synthesis of the many groups and economic and political elements that made up the nation.

This definition of the nation-state corresponded closely with Watson's understanding of the

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[34] Plant and Vincent, ibid.

nation-state. Watson too had understood the state as an organization of a number of groups and he thought that these groups formed a general will throughout the nation and determined government policy. Conversely, Skelton, as well as Shortt, understood the government as having a responsibility to reflect the will of citizens. The government, in their view, was not simply a mechanistic instrument to regulate individual rights. Rather, the government had an important place in the nation as the arbitrator of conflicts in the national will. And yet, this notion about the state's responsibilities rested upon the belief that the government could express a common good rather than being simply the means by which elites consolidated power.[35]

This view of government informed Shortt's interest in the Civil Service Commission. As Ferguson notes, Shortt was concerned that government in Canada was ill-prepared to carry out the new demands made upon it in urban-industrial society. Shortt sought to increase the efficiency of government, Ferguson writes, by placing at its disposal a highly trained and educated group of civil servants. Shortt looked to Britain, especially its foreign service, as an example. In Shortt's view, a civil service formed on the basis of merit would remove the inefficiencies of patronage and of unnecessary administrative work for politicians. Politicians would then have more time to consider policy. This role of the civil servant reflected, in part, Shortt's view of the social scientist's role in society as an impartial advisor to government. Ferguson further suggests that Shortt expected the civil service to be staffed by "men trained in the newly secular curriculum of the university" and ready to create a new, expert orientated structure of government. Shortt, Ferguson notes, did not think that the civil service should be a refuge for "superfluous humanistic arts and science graduates." To illustrate Shortt's attempt to have social scientific expertise shape

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[35] Barry Ferguson, *Remaking Liberalism*, 128-34, 158-9, 152.

the civil service, Ferguson notes how Shortt called upon other social scientists, such as G.M. Wrong and Archibald McMechan, for assistance in drafting the civil-service exam and for recommending candidates.[36] Yet, the moral philosophy of Watson had a place in this initiative at government reform. He too drafted and marked a section on philosophy for the entrance exams to the civil service. The questions dealt with issues of moral philosophy such as the moral nature of reason and habit.[37] It seems that state-building by social scientific expertise in early twentieth century Canada was also touched by the humanistic ideals and perspectives of idealism.

Nonetheless, if idealism remained, as Owram suggests it did, an important philosophical paradigm in Canada until the 1920s, it was nearing the end of its widespread prestige and appeal. Despite Watson's influence on students at Queen's University, political economy and philosophy were moving on to new methodologies and new problems. Also, there was not a strong third generation of idealists who might have modified idealism and help it to remain a potent philosophical force.[38] As S.E.D. Shortt notes, Adam Shortt had switched his interests away from metaphysics to more empirical studies of Canadian history and political economy because he was tired of being "merely a voice from the wilderness."[39] Owram sees this switch by Shortt from

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[36] Ferguson, Remaking Liberalism, 127-31, 274 n. 25.

[37] William Foran, letter to John Watson, 21 April 1913, John Watson Papers A, Queen's University Archives. A sample of Watson's questions for civil service hopefuls: "7. What is the relation of habits to the nerve-centres? How does an habitual act differ from a purely voluntary act? Give some practical rules for the formation of new habits. 10. 'The end of morality is pleasure.' 'To make pleasure the end of is to destroy morality.' Contrast these two theories of conduct and give your own view. 11. What is the function in the moral life that great art subserves? Discuss the view that the presentation of ideals is a 'criticism of life.'" See: "Civil Service of Canada, 2nd Division, General Philosophy," Box 1, file 1, John Watson Papers B, Queen's University Archives.

[38] R.M. Wenley, letter to John Watson, 21 November 1924, Box 1, John Watson Papers A, Queen's University Archives. Wenley confided to Watson that he was not encouraged by the philosophical appointments in Britain and Scotland, which he thought represented a poor "commentary on the younger generation." In particular, he thought Hetherington, who was appointed at Oxford, was "a descent from his predecessors, just as Jones was from Caird."

[39] S.E.D. Shortt, *The Search for an Ideal*, 102, 99, 115.

philosophy to social science as symptomatic of an important shift in Canadian intellectual thought. By the late 1920s, Owram contends that social science became the dominant intellectual authority for understanding the state and social reform among Canadian intellectuals. Idealism's influence increasingly became marginalized, he further contends, in radical and conservative approaches to social reform.[40] Barry Ferguson similarly describes the rise of political economy of Queen's University. Whereas Watson focused on the need for individual moral reform, the new political economists increasingly looked towards how the external actions of the state could affect social reform through the production and redistribution of wealth.[41]

New forms of social thought, specifically realism, were an important development that seriously undermined the prestige of idealism and the potential legacy of *The State in Peace and War* as a powerful contribution to an enduring political outlook. Late twentieth-century political scientists, such as Yosef Lapid, consider that the 1920s and 1930s witnessed the debate between and the eventual triumph of realist over idealist approaches to the concept of sovereignty and social knowledge in general.[42] The emerging strength of realism in the twentieth century has led Walter Kaufmann to claim that the death knell of idealism was sounded when G.E. Moore published his "Refutation of Idealism," and *Principia Ethica* in 1903.[43] Owram and Ferguson also point to the ascendency of realism as an important factor in the eventual demise of idealism, though they perhaps too strongly accentuate the discontinuities between idealism and new forms

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[40] Owram, *The Government Generation*, 117, 120.

[41] Ferguson, *Remaking Liberalism*, 48.

[42] Yosef Lapid, "The Third Debate: On the Prospects of International Theory in a Post-Positivist Era," *International Studies Quarterly* 33 (1989) 236.

[43] Walter Kaufmann, "Coming to terms with Hegel," rev. of *Hegel*, by Charles Taylor, *Times Literary Supplement* (2 January 1976) 12.

of thought in Canada, particularly at Queen's. For Owram, idealism's appeal in the nineteenth century slowly diminished in the twentieth century when its remedies for social problems seemed less resonant and appeared less sophisticated than those advocated by social scientists. Owram further maintains that there was a degree of conflict between these two paradigms. Whereas idealism focused on individual moral renewal, social science emphasized changing the conditions of society. "When even political economists like Adam Shortt," Owram notes, "retained a strong belief that inner spiritual reform was more important than reform of the environment in which many lived, it was apparent that the social sciences were not completely autonomous." In other words, these paradigms represented not only a difference in "attitude" to social problems but also a degree of incompatibility.[44] Similarly, Ferguson describes the relationship between idealism and Queen's political economy as including a conflict in method. For instance, in his discussion of Adam Shortt, Ferguson argues that Shortt developed a "science of society," a term that Watson had taught him to "abhor"; whereas Watson had focused on individual character, Shortt had broadened investigation by focusing on how institutions affected human character. According to Ferguson, Shortt had broken away from the positivist accounts of political society and "from Queen's own idealist environment" by "asserting that interdependence rather than conflict between the individual and the social good constituted the ends of social science and social existence." Thus, Ferguson too portrays idealism to have been in demise and conflict with the emerging social science.[45]

Whereas Watson premised his theory on metaphysical assumptions about human nature,

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[44] Owram, *The Government Generation*, 8-14, 90.
[45] Ferguson, *Remaking Liberalism*, 10, 48.

the new social sciences explored questions of a more practical nature such as how government

policies can affect the distribution of wealth. In "Platonism, positivism and progressivism"

(1996), José Harris notes that there has been some attention as to why Britain did not develop a

school of sociology as in North America with the Chicago School or in the Continent with

figures such as Durkeim, Mosca, Pareto and Weber. Among the multitude of theories put forth to

explain this phenomenon, some have criticised an alleged anti-sociological tendency in idealism.[46]

In his essay "Sociology and Idealism in Britain 1880 - 1920" (1978), Stefan Collini has had a

central role in this debate. On the one hand, he argues that idealists incorporated an anti-

sociological tendency into their philosophy through their reluctance to engage in empirical

analysis and their attention to ancient Greek models of political society. This caused the idealists

to focus on traditional questions of political theory rather than more social scientific questions

about society. On the other hand, Collini suggests that the idealists' attention to community and

the social aspects of individuality contained the seeds of sociological inquiry.[47]

In *British Idealism and Social Explanation* (1996), Sandra den Otter investigates the

sociological aspects of British idealism and argues that the social thought of idealism was not

theoretically moribund as Collini and other critics contend. Although the idealists' metaphysical

speculations and epistemology quickly became outdated during the twentieth century, den Otter

asserts that British idealists nonetheless had made important theoretical contributions to the

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[46] José Harris, "Platonism, positivism and progressivism: aspects of British sociological thought in the early twentieth century," *Citizenship and community: Liberals, radicals and collective identities in the British Isles, 1865 - 1931*, ed. Eugenio Biaginni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 358., 343, 347-8.

[47] Stefan Collini, "Sociology and Idealism in Britain 1880- 1920," *European Journal of Sociology*, 19 (1978) 4.

problems of defining the social nature of individuals and of creating an objective, value-neutral

sociology. Some of the idealists' critique of such objectivity would be echoed, den Otter suggests,

by later twentieth-century hermeneutical philosophers such as Habermas and Ricouer. Besides,

she asserts that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, British academics in general

had displayed a reluctance to adopt sociological study, especially the methodology of Comte. In

comparison, the idealists had shown an interest in considering these new forms of social inquiry.

For instance, both Edward Caird and John Watson had published works on Comte when both Mill

and Spencer had emphasized their aloofness from him. Though there were important

metaphysical differences between the idealists and positivists like Comte, den Otter suggests that

Watson and especially Caird had recognized in Comte a shared "preoccupation with unity and

synthesis." Rather than envisioning a clear distinction between early forms of social science and

the metaphysically informed idealism, den Otter's study outlines a much more complicated

relationship between these two forms of social thought.[48]

In the viewpoint of Harris and den Otter, philosophical idealism had an important

influence on the development of social science in Britain in the 1910s and 1920s. The

introduction of social science "was a direct offshoot not just of Edwardian social work but of

Edwardian philosophical idealism -- and of the social, educational and civic reform movements

which idealism was an integral part." Idealism contributed to this movement through an

insistence on social categories of investigation, such as community, social organism, plurality and

collective mentalities. Although idealists did not adopt the word sociology, they did develop a

form of social thought which tried "to integrate the traditional study of ethics and political

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[48] den Otter, *British Idealism and Social Explanation*, 5, 120-22, 214, 125.

philosophy with the newer disciplines of economics, anthropology, psychology and sociology."

Bosanquet's inclusion of psychological principles in *The Philosophical Theory of the State*

illustrated this attempt. In examining how idealism directed social thought, Harris echoes the

arguments of Plant and Vincent in privileging the influence of idealism on the development of new

liberalism.[49]

These recent developments in historical writing suggest that Watson perhaps did not

"abhor" a "science of society" in quite the same way as Ferguson suggests. Watson's

metaphysical views certainly privileged spiritual concerns over material determinism in the course

of history. (But this privileging, as Watson argued, was not automatic but dependent upon the

moral principles and reflective pursuits of society.) Moreover, in Watson's discussion of

specialization of function in modern society, he did not discount economic or external factors in

determining this specialization. He argued, simply, that one could not "reduce" this social

phenomenon to external factors. As long as social scientific endeavour maintained the right moral

principles, then Watson's concern as moral philosopher likely would be met. In his address to

Queen's Alumni at New York, Watson wrote that each university should impart to its students

four subjects: science, literature, history and philosophy. A liberal-arts curriculum could exist

with a concern for the insights of moral philosophy and the study of "political science."[50]

By focusing on the discontinuities between Watson's philosophical idealism and

developing social scientific liberal thought, Ferguson and Owram perhaps obscure more salient

continuities. Although political economists may not have been all that interested in Watson's

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[49] Harris, "Platonism, positivism and progressivism: . . . ," 352.

[50] Watson, *The State in Peace and War*, 244-5; Watson, "Democracy and The Universities," 362-3.

metaphysics, they were perhaps still influenced by his emphasis on recognizing the state as a unity

based upon the social nature of individuality. In *Liberalism Divided* (1986), Michael Freeden

argues that following the war there was a split in new liberal thought, between a right wing that

emphasized individual autonomy and a left wing that emphasized community. He further argues

that the decline of idealism, and its emphasis on community, was a significant factor in this shift.[51]

This description of liberal thought in Britain raises some interesting questions about liberal

thought in Canada. If the war occasioned for some a disenchantment with the claims of

community over the individual, then how was this trend present in Canada? The positive

responses to *The State in Peace and War* of Thomas and Skelton suggest that idealism had not

significantly declined in prestige for at least two influential figures in Protestantism and political

economy. Their favourable appreciation likely reflected the influence of Watson as the esteemed

moral philosopher at Queen's. These responses raise the question: if Watson's idealism survived

the war in prominent social reform circles, then were important sections of social reform in

Canada united in their hopes about a progressive liberal approach to social reform? Further, did

Watson successfully help to preserve this consensus in social reform along progressive liberal lines

by eschewing socialism and conservative individualism? That is, Watson thought that through

individual moral reform and an increased role of government in society, the problems of

industrialism could be ameliorated. Watson's legacy was therefore a contribution to post-war

beliefs that liberalism could incorporate the needs of individual and community and provide the

right basis for social improvement.

Although tracing the legacy of any specific philosophical statement is difficult at the best

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[51] Freeden, *Liberalism Divided*, 31-40.

of times, *The State in Peace and War* fortunately had enough exposure in popular media to

examine some of the responses to Watson's outlook. These responses suggest that Watson's

effort confirmed either suspicion of idealism and state power or beliefs that social reform was

possible through idealist principles of a united and harmonious political society. Perhaps not too

surprisingly, some of the more influential leaders of social and political thought and activism in

Canada, who had previously been students of Watson, voiced approval of, not skepticism about,

idealist political philosophy. This approval suggests that Watson may very well have been

successful in defending the prestige of idealism and that Watson was still an important voice in

confirming the virtues of communitarian liberal political economy as the appropriate set of

principles for political society following the First World War.

5/
Epilogue

Historians have well documented the importance of philosophical idealism in shifting

political thought in the late nineteenth century from an emphasis on individual liberty to an

increased concern for community. Consequently, the legacy of idealism has often been explored

in the development of new liberal forms of political economy and government legislation. Watson

can claim to have participated in these movements through his emphasis on the social nature of

Christianity and his tutelage of important advocates of social Evangelicalism and political

economy in Canada. *The State in Peace and War* represented his commitment to communitarian

liberal political economy based upon his normative ethical theories. The significance of this work

lies not in it being merely a statement of idealist political philosophy; he did not make any new

claims for idealism in 1919. Rather, the significance lies in how he needed to defend idealism,

and an idealist-inspired communitarian liberalism, at a moment of significant uncertainty about the

virtues of liberal political economy. For Watson, the level of social conflict occasioned by the

First World War did not signal any necessary defects with the nation-state and private property.

Instead, he maintained a belief in the amelioration of social conflict through the teleological and

historical development of the general will.

The First World War was an important moment for the prestige of idealism. As Watson

called upon Canadians to fulfil their duties as citizens and defend the principles of democracy, he

used philosophical techniques that were largely associated with Germany, which was the very

example of militarism and statism. Although there was criticism of idealist political philosophy

before the First World War, Dewey, Hobhouse, Laski, Burns, Cole, Russell and many others saw

lurking behind the war and German militarism dangerous idealist conceptions of the state. These

writers contended that the idealists' grand visions about the ethical importance of the state and the

general will uncritically and dangerously reified state power and shifted focus away from the

complexity and very real plurality existing in society. To this challenge Watson responded. He

maintained his belief in the veracity of the general will and argued that only the idealist conception

of state power provided the appropriate check for individual autonomy and the necessary unity of

purpose for state action. For Watson, an emphasis on community and the needs of society was

not opposed to individual autonomy. Whereas critics of idealism revolted from an emphasis on

national community in political philosophy, Watson retained his confidence that the importance of

national community could be maintained and still provide international peace and civil liberty.

Central to Watson's political philosophy was a high regard for private property. It was the

necessary condition, he argued, for individual self-government and diversity in the state. And yet,

when he expressed his belief in private property in 1919, left-leaning critiques of how the

economy alienated its labourers were becoming more resonant and politically powerful. Indeed,

shortly following the appearance of *The State in Peace and War* in the spring of 1919, the

Winnipeg General Strike rocked a Canadian society already worried about the level of

unemployment and labour protest. Despite these fissures in industrial capitalism, Watson

promoted an optimistic belief in the power of individuals and society to rise above the insecurities

and travesties of an economy based on private property and to realize the ethical importance of

the state. To this end, he used idealist principles to advocate for the expansion of government

power in society. He joined the ranks of new liberals in believing that government involvement in

the economy did not compromise the principles of liberal market society but provided the

necessary correctives for it to flourish. The support for *The State in Peace and War* from key

figures in the church-based social Evangelicalism and the university-based political economy,

Ernest Thomas and O.D. Skelton, suggest that Watson's optimism in a communitarian liberal

political economy met some agreement with social and political thought in post-war Canada.

Although Watson's influence helped secure the continuing importance of idealism and

idealist reasons for greater state involvement in the post-war political culture of Canada, his

political philosophy was in the twilight of its existence. Doug Owram points to the seeds of

idealism's decline in an emerging skepticism about human rationality. For instance, he identifies

George Sidney Brett's arrival on the Canadian intellectual scene as an important sign of this trend.

In his essay, "The Revolt Against Reason" (1919), Brett did not take Watson's belief in rationality

in human behaviour for granted. Instead, he suggested that the travesty of war provoked a major

reconsideration of whether or not life was "essentially rational or irrational?"[1] Despite this line of

questioning about the presence of the Absolute, José Harris asserts that, although the prestige of

idealism suffered during the war, this philosophy did not go into "precipitate decline" until the

1930s. What ultimately caused the decline of idealism, Harris claims, was the "onslaught of

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[1] Owram, *The Government Generation*, 104-6; G.S. Brett, "The Revolt Against Reason: a Contribution to the History of Thought," *Royal Society of Canada*, 3rd series, vol. XIII (May 1919) 17.

linguistic positivism."[2]

In the correspondence of L.P. Chambers with Watson, this decline is apparent. Chambers, who was a student of Watson, pursued graduate work at Harvard and in 1927 accepted a position in the philosophy department at Washington University in St. Louis. In 1925, he noted that realists (he did not say who) were mistaken in their criticisms of idealism as merely a development of Berkleyism. In 1926, he encouraged Watson to make a statement on behalf of the Hegelian tradition now that Bosanquet, Bradley, Royce and Creighton had all passed away. In 1929, he again complained that realism was in ascendence. He rhetorically asked if the new generation even had heard of the "Hegelian revolution." At the heart of the realist mistake, Chambers thought, was a misconception of the world as comprised of particulars whereas idealism understood the universe as an organic whole. Chambers further noted that idealists were as real as the realists. In 1930, Chamber's concern about the decline in idealism prompted a request -- unfortunately stillborn -- to edit Watson's notes on Hegel.[3]

As Watson's idealism overcame Spencer's evolutionary empiricism in the late nineteenth century, Moore's and Russell's realism eventually replaced Watson's idealism in prestige. When James Bonar wrote in 1919 that he admired Watson's "staunch defense of the old flag" with *The State in Peace and War*, he perhaps recognized that idealism was being eclipsed by other philosophical paradigms.[4] Looking back from 1998, Watson's metaphysical views about the

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[2] José Harris, "Platonism, positivism and progressivism: aspects of British sociological thought in the early twentieth century," *Citizenship and community: Liberals, radicals and collective identities in the British Isles, 1865-1931*, ed. Eugenio Biaginni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 359.

[3] L.P. Chambers, letters to John Watson, 30 December 1925, 14 March 1926, 23 December 1929, 15 September 1930, Box 1, Correspondence, John Watson Papers A, Queen's University Archives.

[4] James Bonar, letter to John Watson, 26 May 1919, John Watson Papers A, Queen's University Archives.

teleological nature of political society and state power seem like relics of a more confident age.

His statements about the "universal principles of reason," the general will being more than simply

the will of all, or his belief in historical analysis revealing the contours of the Absolute have been

so sundered by realism that they appear naive and out of place. And yet, if idealist metaphysics

have been discarded, idealist ethics and political philosophy have seen a rebirth of interest in the

late twentieth century.[5] Much of this interest has grown out a dissatisfaction with utilitarian and

realist accounts of political society and institutions. Many of these writers see in the

fragmentation of modern society a flaw with a liberal political economy that stresses the rights and

independence of individuals above that of community.[6]

An example of one such communitarian critique of liberalism is *Hegel's Critique of*

Liberalism (1989) by Steven Smith. Although he does not suggest a return to belief in Hegel's

world spirit or *Sittlichkeit*, Smith argues that Hegel's philosophy provides theoretical resources

that can rejuvenate liberalism by correcting the individualistic tendencies of recent political theory.

He asserts that much of contemporary theory on liberalism has focused too much on procedural

guarantees of rights and not enough on the substantive ways to exercise rights. He singles out

John Rawls and his *A Theory of Justice* as a good example. Rawls defines the protection of

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[5] Beiner, Ronald and William James Booth, eds., *Kant & Political Philosophy: The Contemporary Legacy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) 1-6.

[6] In their study of idealism, Plant and Vincent call for a return of political philosophy that stresses the importance of a strong social ethic. They contend that this focus is needed to counter what they describe as mechanistic attempts at social reform, which incorrectly place faith in governments to redistribute wealth without correspondingly building a consensus on the need for altruism and civic virtue among people. Raymond Plant and Andrew Vincent, *Philosophy, Politics and Citizenship: The Life and Thought of the British Idealists* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984) 180-3. Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor has been an instrumental figure in the rebirth of interest in Hegel and communitarian aspects of political philosophy. His contrast between utilitarian and more idealist accounts of national institutions has figured in his critique of modern society and his writings about the communitarian nature of Quebec nationalism. Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975); "Institutions in National Life," *Reconciling the Solitudes: Essays on Canadian Federalism and Nationalism*, ed. Guy Laforest (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993).

individual rights as being a moral act on behalf of the state. Yet, for Smith, this guarantee of rights

merely allows people to pursue their own affairs in a fragmentary, relativistic way. By suggesting

that the provision of rights satisfies the state's moral obligation to its citizens, Rawls can avoid,

Smith contends, a more contentious debate about the quality of individual pursuits or about the

creation of systems to evaluate ends and establish a hierarchy of social values.

Liberal theories that privilege individual autonomy over community standards, Smith

notes, have received criticism from both the left and the right of political spectrum. Marxists, on

the one hand, have criticized this form of liberalism with defending possessive individualism and

ignoring the bonds of community. Conservatives, on the other hand, have seen in this liberalism

an assault on real differences in individual talent and ability. "It is now virtually a commonplace,"

Smith notes,

> that as a theory of politics, not to mention human personality, liberalism is seriously
> impoverished. Liberalism has emphasized individual rights at the expense of cultivating
> any conception of the public good and has consequently become anomic, rootless, and
> uncertain of its purposes. The focus on such private ends as security and property has led
> to a specifically liberal form of conformism, mediocrity, and philistinism. The decline of
> "the political" or the res publica has furthermore left liberal societies defenceless in
> dealing with other societies equipped with alien political doctrines.

What Smith finds important is Hegel's critique of Kant for much the same faults as displayed in

modern liberalism. Smith does recognize that Kant's definition of deontological freedom is

different than Rawls's more relativistic conception. (Indeed, Smith sees some influence of

neoclassical economic theory in recent liberal thought with its emphasis on rights as means used

for the calculation of particular ends.) Nonetheless, the charges against current liberalism, "its

abstract, individualistic methodology, its excessive concern with private nonpolitical goals, and its

insensitivity to public issues of citizenship and civic virtue," were the same charges that Hegel

dealt with in the thought of Kant. Hegel's solution was to find direction in the ideals and standards of one's culture.[7]

This was the same point that Watson made in his political philosophy. He too found in Hegel's *Sittlichkeit* a response to the abstract qualities of Kantian liberalism. Indeed, it was this very modification of Kant's theory of rights for which the journal *Mind* criticised *The State in Peace and War* for having dangerous statist consequences. Although Watson's belief in the Absolute may seem strange and outdated today, his call for a communitarian liberal ethic anticipated late twentieth-century concerns about the fragmentary aspects of an individualistic liberal political economy. Or rather, *The State in Peace and War* illustrates how recent appeals to community in countering the fragmentary aspects of liberal political economy are not entirely new in this century.

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[7] Steven B. Smith, *Hegel's Critique of Liberalism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989) 2-4, 232, 3, 55, 6, 238.

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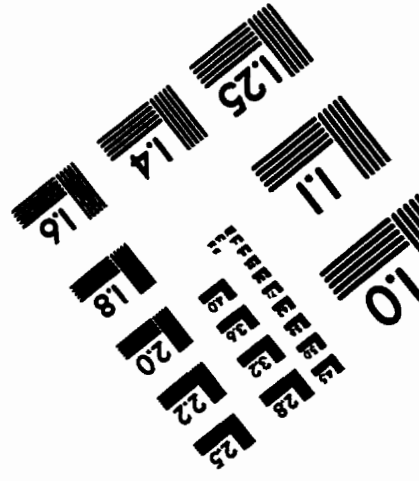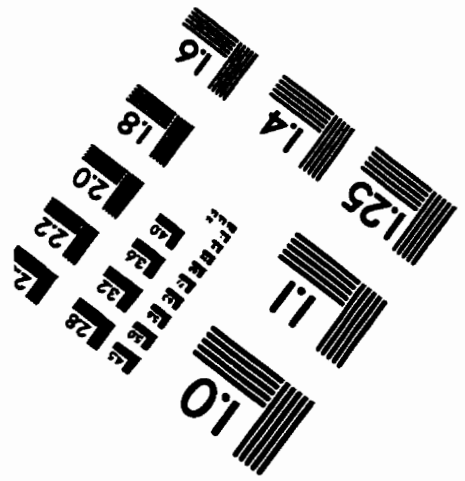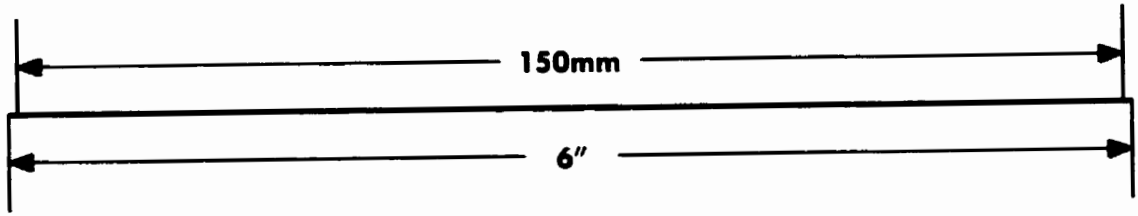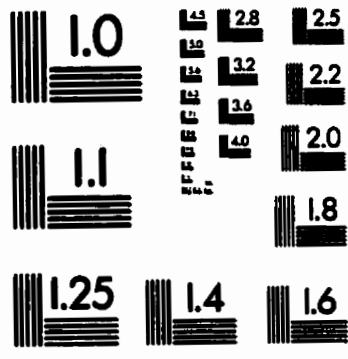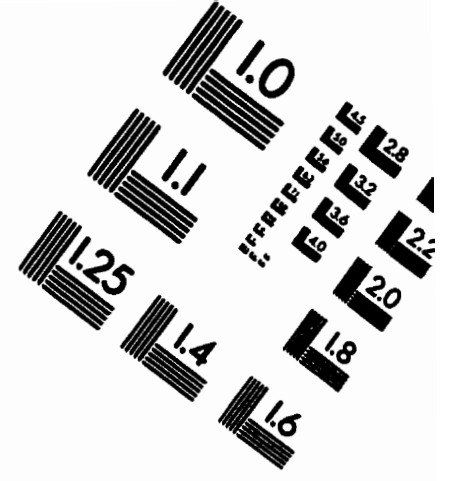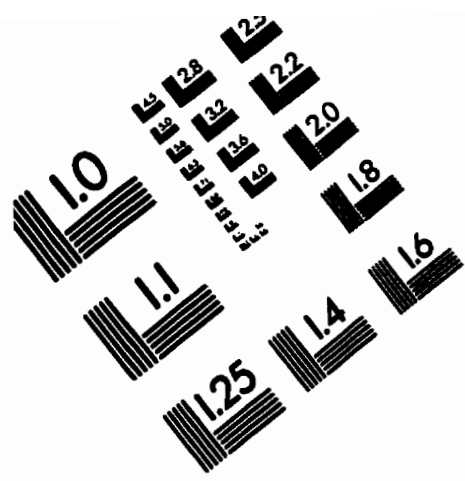
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