

# Lectures on Political Theory

## 1941-45

by

**John Anderson**

Challis Professor of Philosophy  
University of Sydney 1927-1958

Edited by Creagh McLean Cole

Senior Research Fellow in the  
School of Philosophical and Historical Inquiry  
University of Sydney



SYDNEY UNIVERSITY PRESS

SYDNEY UNIVERSITY PRESS  
Print on Demand Service  
SETIS at the University of Sydney Library  
University of Sydney  
[www.sup.usyd.edu.au](http://www.sup.usyd.edu.au)

Texts digitized from manuscripts held in the University of Sydney Archives of lectures delivered at the University in the years 1941, 1942 and 1945.

© 2007 Sydney University Press

Reproduction and Communication for other purposes  
Except as permitted under the Act, no part of this edition may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or communicated in any form or by any means without prior written permission. All requests for reproduction or communication should be made to Sydney University Press at the address below:

Sydney University Press  
Fisher Library  
University of Sydney  
NSW Australian 2006

E-mail: [info@sup.usyd.edu.au](mailto:info@sup.usyd.edu.au)

ISBN 978-1-920898-81-6

Designed and printed in Australia at the University Publishing Service at the University of Sydney

# Contents

Foreword to the John Anderson Series	i
Introduction	iii
Lectures on Political Theory 1941-45	1
I. Lectures on T. H. Green's Principles of Political Obligation 1941	3
Introduction	3
A. The Grounds of Political Obligation	5
G. Will, not Force, is the Basis of the State	22
H. Has the Citizen Rights against the State?	31
I. Private Rights: the Right to Life and Liberty	41
K. The Right of the State Over the Individual in War	45
L. The Right of the State to Punish	56
M. The Right of the State to Promote Morality	72
II. Lectures on Political Theory: Bosanquet and Lenin 1942	75
Introduction	75
Lecture 1: Politics and history	75
Lecture 2: Philosophy and politics	77
Lecture 3: The social and the psychological	80
Lecture 4: Consciousness and choice	83
Bernard Bosanquet: the Idealist Theory of Politics	86
Lecture 5: The state and society	86
Lecture 6: Hegelian totality and historical development	89
Lecture 7: The pursuit of totality and the need for security	91
Lecture 8: Idealism and mental unity	94
Lecture 9: Idealism's criticism of individualism	96
Lecture 10: Anti-historical view of self and society	100
Lecture 11: Rousseau's general will	103
Lecture 12: The state arises from opposition not unity	106
Lecture 13: The need to resist the notion of totality	109
Lecture 14: Bosanquet and institutional conflict	111
Lecture 15: Bosanquet's view of harmony as a natural state	114
Lecture 16: Bosanquet and Hegel on "Civil Society"	117
Lenin: Class Doctrine	120
Lecture 17: Engels on class division and domination	120
Lecture 18: Working class democratic achievements	123
Lecture 19: Marx and Lenin on the state machine	124
Lecture 20: Marxists' anti-parliamentary views	127

Conclusion: Bosanquet and Lenin	129
Lecture 21: Goods exist in struggle – the value of discussion	129
Lecture 22: Equality and liberty in the socialist movement	133
III. Lectures on Socialism 1945	137
Introduction	137
Lecture 1: Marx – class differences and their abolition	137
Lecture 2: Distributive and productive socialism	138
Lecture 3: Marxist view of history	140
Lecture 4: How societies work vs how goods work	141
Lecture 5: Cooperative activities vs unity of purpose	144
Lecture 6: Hierarchical and non-hierarchical societies	146
Lecture 7: Social movements prior to theory	150
Theory and Practice: The Theses on Feuerbach	153
Lecture 8: Thesis 11 – theory and practice	153
Lecture 8A: Thesis 1 – sense object and sensory activity	156
Lecture 9: Theses 1 and 2 – activity and passivity	159
Lecture 10: Coincidence of activity and the object in Marx	163
Lecture 11: Thesis 3 – the possibility of reform	164
Lecture 12: Ways of living – theory and practice	167
Lecture 13: Theses 4–7 – religion and history	170
Lecture 14 Thesis 8–10 – civil society and individualism	173
The Socialist Movement and the Interpretation of History	176
Lecture 15: The notion of essential features in history	176
Lecture 15A: History as the history of class struggle	177
Lecture 16: The working class not socialist	179
Lecture 17: Marx’s negative conception of the proletariat	183
Lecture 18: Kautsky and Lenin’s conception of the state	185
Lecture 19: Democracy and publicity	188
Lecture 20: The state and the concentration of power	190
Lecture 21: Bourgeois democracy – workers’ rights	192
Lecture 22: Political responsibility and discussion	195
Lecture 23: False doctrine of proletarian dictatorship	197
Lecture 24: Distribution and consumers’ ideology	199
Lecture 25: Rejection of socialism as quest for security	201
Index	205

## **Foreword to the John Anderson Series**

In 2006 a senior academic advisory committee was established at the University of Sydney to oversee the publication of a series of books which would present the intellectual achievement and development of John Anderson, Challis Professor of Philosophy 1927–1958. In 2006–08 the committee members are Emeritus Professor David Armstrong, Emeritus Professor Paul Crittenden, and Professor Stephen Gaukroger. The committee is convened by the John Anderson Senior Research Fellow undertaking research into and publication of the papers of Professor Anderson.

To some extent a proper appreciation of Anderson's work requires an experience of his lecture room. From the notes in the University Archives we may be able to provide something of this experience. Many of these lecture notes have been transcribed and are available at the John Anderson Archive along with Anderson's previously published writings, allowing researchers and students to access the chief resources and to follow the course of his thinking over many years.

The published series to be selected from this material aims to provide scholarly editions of the most complete and significant lectures now available and will include works devoted to Anderson's metaphysics, logic, ethics, politics and aesthetics. The series will help younger students and scholars to understand why John Anderson was the most important, the most controversial and the most influential philosopher ever to have worked in Australia.

Ongoing research into Professor Anderson's unpublished writings and the series of books drawn from this research has only been possible due to the generous bequest to the University of Sydney by his son, Alexander (Sandy) John Anderson (1923-1996).



# Introduction

*“The question is of freedom versus servility,  
the attitude of this age”  
—John Anderson.*

These lectures of the 1940s present Anderson’s criticisms of the political thought of the British Idealists, T. H. Green (1836-1882) and Bernard Bosanquet (1848-1923), and his mature assessment of socialist political thought as this was expressed in the writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin. During these years of the Second World War Anderson chose to present to his students an examination of the major questions in political theory, and in a way that reflected upon the primary influences on his own early philosophical and political education: modern Idealism and Marxism.<sup>1</sup>

Anderson subsequently turned away from these broad political questions to concentrate on defending the cultural, critical and custodial role of the university against utilitarian and commercial interests. This refocussing of the libertarian elitism that sets Anderson’s political thought apart from both conservative and radical standpoints alike may have indicated a general disillusionment with politics in his later years. It was also, however, a natural development from the position elaborated in these lectures, that special interests pertaining to independent movements (such as those concerned with learning and academic inquiry) are much more important to the cultural vitality of a society than the pursuit of any supposed general interest or common purpose associated with the “community as a whole”.

According to Anderson, idealist political theorists assumed that the state, representing the common interest, must be secured before any attempt to secure more specific cultural interests. Marxists and utilitarians, on the other hand, believed that cultural activities must be seen as secondary to, and consequent upon, the work of securing the necessities of life; activities central to creative forms of life must be

<sup>1</sup>Other lectures concerning political theory, also from the 1940s, are those on the Socratic Dialogues of 1940. They can be consulted at the *John Anderson Archive* web site (<http://setis.library.usyd.edu.au/anderson/>).

subordinated to those activities central to making a living. Anderson thought he had identified a common source for these ethical and political attitudes in a pervasive relational view of “the good” as that which our activities should aim at, as opposed to a conception of the good as a quality of those productive and self-sustaining activities themselves. The fundamental idealist error, shared by Marx, is the idea that what a thing *is* is determined by what it is *for*. This relational view of ethics must be resisted in the interests of liberty and the extension of creative forms of enterprise throughout society.

These general considerations underlie more specific and practical errors. Idealists and Marxists in their own ways promoted programmes and policies which inevitably created a culture of servility: programmes of charity and state-based welfare reforms for the poor, on the one hand; and policies designed to gain power on behalf of the workers by a highly organised revolutionary party on the other. The very idea of a benevolent state or party assumes that “the good” is such that it can be *delivered* to people, rather than being a character of their own actions. Idealists and Marxists were equally in error in this, but while the Idealists lacked any sense of social and economic realities, the Marxists lacked any political sense. Marx’s emphasis upon the existence of class divisions and material forces operating throughout history initiated a realist criticism of Hegelian idealism, but he fell into error by assuming the existence of a classless society in some post-historical future, conceived as “the good” towards which the socialist movement could be directed.

Anderson agreed with Marx that individualism is an intellectual tendency associated with and promoted by the contractual practices and activities we engage in as members of civil, or bourgeois society. Marxist criticisms of civil society were sound in that we need to heed the material conditions under which contracts are made. Nonetheless, he criticised the “simple-minded” view of ethics and politics maintained by Marxists for whom altruism was taken to be the height of moral activity. In this they had been taken in by the truncated moral possibilities presented by the civil, contractual society they were criticising. In their ethical

writings the Marxists seemed to be peculiarly ignorant of the idea of goods existing in struggle or of “the moral value of devotion to a cause”.

Idealists and Marxists both criticised the individualism of previous British liberalism and for Anderson their criticisms had merit, but without a developed logic they ended up treating the collective (whether the community, state, party, or class) as itself an “unenviored individual”, and so fell into the error of “solidarism”. It was Anderson’s response to this problem that gave his political philosophy its highly distinctive profile. Although he was drawn to the new realist philosophies of Russell, Moore and Alexander, he was not inclined to reverse the criticisms his idealist teachers had made of atomistic individualism, nor the importance they attributed to historical inquiry in the study of ethics. In contrast to other realist philosophers his approach was to deny *all* ultimates, whether particular or universal, individual agent or social totality, and to insist upon complexity at all levels. For Anderson this was the most radical and complete challenge that could be made to idealism, and it provided a position from which he would criticise all theories in the grip of “atomism”, “individualism”, “solidarism”, “moralism” and “voluntarism”, all those errors, according to Anderson, caused by the intellectually crippling idea of some self-justifying, self-determining thing.<sup>2</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

At the time these lectures were delivered it was widely thought that systematic philosophical inquiry into political questions was finished. The tradition had long been subjected to serious intellectual pressure from sociologists, and from Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, for whom the realm of conscious political activities had to be understood in terms of more fundamental social, economic, evolutionary, or psychological forces. Anderson was familiar with, and lectured on all of these “theorists of suspicion”, urging his students in turn to be suspicious of ethical reflections and

<sup>2</sup>The strong anti-foundationalist and anti-teleological stance of Anderson’s thinking is quite extraordinary, inviting comparison with the *epistemological* anti-foundationalism of many postmodernist writers. The association is, of course, confounded by Anderson’s propositional view of reality and the primacy of the independent issue. Any suggestion of perspectival impositions upon a formless reality is out of the question.

theorising conducted at a level removed from psychological and political reality.

Anderson's first statement in these lectures is that he means to evaluate idealist political theory in relation to the "social facts". Idealism has failed to propose a theory to be tested in its adherence to an imaginary unifying state. However, contrary to the teachings of the logical positivists and verificationists, Anderson did not think that there was a distinction to be drawn between positive and normative science. Indeed, he thought that the distinction between fact and value gained traction only because of the idealist assumptions that he was criticising, in particular, the illusory attachment to unattainable ideals that are yet meant to guide our thinking and practice in the real world.

Anderson aimed to initiate a naturalist study of society which would at the same time indicate the importance of a vital, pluralist culture of discussion, criticism and opposition. In doing so he intended to combat all yearnings for a consensual ethics based on the presumption that social harmony and unity trump all other values. Prior to the elaboration of any system of rights and any question of political obligation there are activities and independent movements and these are the proper subjects of study for political theory. Rights are elaborated and codified only as a result of conflict between such pre-existing ways of going on. Established common rules are simply an index to the relative strength of the contending forces.

In place of a simplistic contrast between individual and state Anderson insisted upon the complex interplay of movements, institutions and traditions. In place of an unargued tendency towards ever greater social harmony he insisted on the inevitability of conflict and constant adjustment, the persistent danger of regress, and the consequent need for clear lines of critical engagement. Order is a Heraclitean state of balance between complex interacting forces rather than a normative standard by which to measure existing social and political formations. Conflict is not an indication of social dysfunction which needs to be overcome or rationalised away, but a necessary feature of any social institution. Any notion of an ideal state without

such features can have no bearing on our present real life situation.

From Socrates until the present the state and all its subsidiary social institutions have been understood and valued in terms of the assumed aim of social unity and harmony. The result has been a form of political inquiry obsessed with the nature of state legitimacy, the relationship between the individual citizen and the state, and the duties, obligations, rights and responsibilities of each with respect to the other. For Anderson, any political philosophy in this form will inevitably lead to “quietism”. Theorists of the ideal state necessarily regard all forms of disorder as evil, as a falling away from the ideal, yet they provide no theoretical means for discriminating real world processes. This can only lead to the suppression of those independent movements upon which the vitality and strength of a culture depends. The ability of workers to strike, the most common form of “disorder” within our culture, is simply one of the forms of democratic participation available to them. As with all other democratic forms and processes, it was achieved through struggle and is subject to reversal. Lenin’s disregard of these direct forms of participation and his own conception of the “common good” resulted in the dismantling of workers’ rights in soviet Russia.

The importance of activities to Anderson underlies the value of traditions and historically established ways of going on. Lenin’s call for *all power to the soviets* was politically cynical because the soviets, established hastily and without any continuous history of their own, were incapable of sustaining effective and continuous political action over any length of time. The result of Lenin’s call was that all power passed rapidly to those institutions which did have such a history and tradition, the Bolshevik party and the Russian bureaucracy.

Anderson considered political theory as subject to logic but not itself philosophical. However, it is only because the philosopher is interested in particular matters that philosophical problems become more definite. One “can’t philosophise in the abstract”. There seems to be a close connection between political theory and philosophy, however, for he suggests that philosophy is itself concerned with

“public reality”. Vico’s description of the “political age” could as well be called the “philosophic age”, the age of public discussion which began with the Greeks.

Anderson taught the importance of “social facts” because these remind us of the complexity of the subject by drawing our attention to the variety of existing states, classes, conflicts and ways of life that we have any experience of. These social facts were Anderson’s “reminders” to his students. Idealist and rationalist conceptions in political theory are a persistent hindrance to critical thinking and they need to be constantly challenged and upset. He did not, however, conceive his project as contributing to the collapse of a philosophical tradition into linguistic analyses and empirical studies of political behaviour.

Any tradition, including that of general political inquiry, will be characterised by conflict and contested viewpoints. Anderson means to combat the influence of idealism in our thinking on political issues evident since Plato’s *Republic*. His own modernist, realist project will draw upon the major theorists of conflict, struggle and cyclic historical movement: Heraclitus, Vico and Sorel.

\* \* \* \* \*

Moments of heightened national security and appeals to the “common interest” worried John Anderson because such appeals inevitably concealed the dominance of some hidden special interest. He regarded the virtue of solidarity as pertaining solely to one’s involvement in an independent movement, not to a projected, illusory, unifying social purpose. Anderson rejected any view of the state as an organic functional whole or as a machine designed to produce results of benefit to all. He proposed instead a view of the political sphere as an *arena*, a sphere in which opposing forces meet. Notions of common interest in that arena could only be considered as agreed rules of procedure reflecting the current balance of forces between the participants.

Appeals to a common interest during wartime in particular raised fundamental issues in political theory for Anderson.<sup>3</sup> His experience as a student in Glasgow during the first war no doubt contributed to his belief that any rights and privileges surrendered to the state in times of war will never be reclaimed in times of peace, at least not without enormous struggle. Wartime planners and reformers of the 1940s were once again pressing their view that every form of social activity and independent enterprise could be accommodated within a general scheme for social improvement. Besides the unforeseen negative effects of social reform, Anderson was particularly concerned that a general failure to resist the application of merely utilitarian and instrumental values would lead inevitably to a loss of cultural vitality and creativity. Planners don't realise that "planning can advance only *what can be planned for*—and that is not culture but commerce".<sup>4</sup>

That these lectures were addressing issues of some historical importance to Anderson can be seen in his classic article, "The Servile State" (1943). In the book of that title published in 1912, Hilaire Belloc had judged that recently legislated welfare measures were contributing to a culture of servility and dependence among the working classes. Further, socialism was no longer a restraining force on this development but had become an active and enthusiastic agent in the process. Although critical of Belloc's conservative analysis and conclusions, Anderson suggested that thirty years later "the *ideology* of servility (was) once again rapidly gaining ground", and that an examination of Belloc's thesis in relation to the contemporary situation would prove to be important to his students:

"There is the real intention of permanently reducing political independence and extending the powers of the State, and this, as Belloc saw, has to be combined with promises of 'benefits' in return for the surrender of rights. The expectation

<sup>3</sup>Major essays by Anderson at the time of the Second World War included "The Meaning of Good" (1942), "The Nature of Ethics" (1944), "The One Good" (1945), "The Servile State" (1943), and "Freudianism and Society" (1940). Other articles referred to in these lectures include a series of review articles that appeared in the journal *The Australian Highway*. Earlier articles included "Marxist Philosophy" (1935), "Marxist Ethics" (1937), "The Place of Hegel in the History of Philosophy" (1932) and "Realism versus Relativism in Ethics" (1933).

<sup>4</sup>John Anderson, "The Servile State", *Studies in Empirical Philosophy*, hereafter *SEP*, p. 336. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1962, p. 330. Originally published *Australasian Journal of Psychology and Philosophy* (A.J.P.P.) XXI (2/3) December 1943: 115–32.

of such benefits is misguided for there is no system which can abolish insecurity and guarantee sufficiency. By the time that is realised, however, it will not be possible to have back for the asking the rights that have been surrendered in the name of solidarity. Solidarist conceptions, of course, have always been widely accepted, but in ordinary times their influence is checked by independent movements. In time of war the doctrine of 'national service' gains enormous force, which can be turned to the establishing, for peace-time, of a corresponding doctrine of service to the community. Thus war, by undermining political independence, gives impetus to the movement in the direction of the 'social service' (or servile) State."<sup>5</sup>

Here are many of the major themes elaborated in the lectures to follow, particularly the rejection of the notion of "social unity" ("solidarism"), and the acceptance of the overwhelming value and importance of independent movements as the real bearers and defenders of rights and privileges.

\* \* \* \* \*

When Anderson enrolled at the University of Glasgow in 1911 absolute idealism dominated the Scottish universities, and Anderson most commonly referred to it simply as "modern idealism". The Hegelian teachings in Scotland of Edward Caird and Henry Jones created a responsive environment there for the work of the English philosophers Green and Bosanquet. Many of their students would establish outposts for idealism in the major universities of British empire. Anderson found upon his arrival at Sydney, for example, a university devoted to the doctrines of spiritual unity and totality as expressed in the lectures of his predecessor Frances Anderson, and those of the professor of modern literature, Mungo MacCallum who had sponsored the speaking tour to Sydney of Henry Jones in 1908.<sup>6</sup>

British philosophers in the late nineteenth century found in Hegel's idealism an intellectual support for Christian belief in a materialist age, a way of reconciling the claims of religion with those of empirical science. However, the practical orientation of Hegel's philosophy in its emphasis

<sup>5</sup> John Anderson, "The Servile State", op. cit., p. 334.

<sup>6</sup>These lectures were later published as *Idealism as a practical creed: being the lectures on philosophy and modern life delivered before the University of Sydney*, Glasgow: Maclehose, 1909.

upon concrete realisation also helped its adherents to address real problems emerging in liberal social thought. An abstract notion of the individual apart from community had become a block to progressive forms of state intervention, one expression of this being the “survival-of-the-fittest” evolutionary views of Herbert Spencer. The social and political problems created by the accelerating processes of industrialisation required a new political and moral response from liberal reformers.

Green proposed against individualist and utilitarian analyses of social life a philosophy that would uphold the importance of moral ideals and community. He aimed to overcome the one-sided thinking of earlier reformers for whom any form of state interference represented an imposition upon the rights of individuals and their capacities for self-realisation. Green’s moral and political theory helped to lay the intellectual foundations for the modern welfare state, and his students in their parliamentary and civil service careers would be prominent in the attempt to introduce and to implement a more humane and politically effective response to the misery and dislocation caused by economic, social and political change.

Bernard Bosanquet attempted to extend Green’s system of rights by elaborating a theory of the actual workings of a political system in *The Philosophical Theory of the State*. He aimed to explain the basis of state authority over individuals and the nature of individual human rights within society. Following Rousseau, he regarded the development of human life as an expression of a “general will”, and the modern state as an organism or totality united in a shared understanding of the good. One’s station with its associated rights and duties would determine one’s function within this inclusive totality.

Green and Bosanquet came to be identified with a form of liberalism that had ventured too far towards paternalism and unjustified communal interference in the lives of individuals.<sup>7</sup> Green’s emphasis upon real interests implied that particular individuals might be deluded, and, further

---

<sup>7</sup> Cf., Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty”, *Four Studies on Liberty*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969, p. 150.

that the real interests of these individuals could be advanced by educated liberal reformers who had reached a more advanced stage of awareness.<sup>8</sup> Proponents of classical liberal individualism accused the humane, benevolent liberalism of Green and Bosanquet of creating the conditions for new forms of tyranny.

Liberals concerned with the dangers of collectivism agreed that the notion of positive liberty that Green had accepted from Rousseau and Hegel could only lead to arbitrary community interference in the lives of individuals and to oppressive social conformity. Anderson certainly agreed on the dangers of collectivism, and on the paternalism of Green's moral and political philosophy. ("The canting humbug!" exclaims one of his marginal notes to these lectures.) The classical liberal notion of negative liberty as freedom from obstacles and interference, however, could mean nothing to him. Goods exist, after all, only in struggle. Moreover, it is not individual wants and pursuits that are the primary bearers of liberty, but social movements and activities. Individuals are taken up in such movements and activities which promote their acceptance of the productive values required by practices of disinterested and creative endeavour. Through their participation in such activities their interests change and develop.<sup>9</sup> The problem with Green for Anderson was his assumption of a common good and his view that goods can be legislated or commanded. There is no one good life common to all and any morality based on prescription and command, obligatory for all, will be repressive.

It should be said that Green was more aware of social and economic realities than his critics, including Anderson, allowed. His example of working class alcoholism as a real infringement upon the capacities and so the liberties of

---

<sup>8</sup>Anderson later considers this issue in relation to Marx's similar criticisms of the utopian socialists in the *Theses on Feuerbach*.

<sup>9</sup>Philip Pettit has suggested against Berlin a third, *republican*, conception of liberty as secure non-domination. (Philip Pettit, *Republicanism: a theory of freedom and government*, Oxford Oxford University Press, 1997.) Anderson's contrast between culture and commerce, the idea of liberty in struggle against servitude and the persistent dangers of corruption and mediocrity to productive movements are familiar republican themes in the history of political thought (cf., J. G. A. Pocock's "The Eighteenth Century Debate: Virtue, Passion and Commerce", in *The Machiavellian Moment*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1975.) Anderson could not have agreed, however, to strengthening the state for its role in creating and maintaining the juridical conditions for liberty. Most likely the description of republican liberty in terms of security and guarantees against domination would have seemed to him a servile starting point for any political conception of liberty.

individuals at the time was not simply a case of Victorian wowseryism. Moreover, his argument that the financial constraints upon workers should be considered in any view of workplace contracts was one that Marxists and Anderson accepted and insisted upon. Green's emphasis upon the importance of individual self-realisation within a moral community was a theme shared with John Stuart Mill and one which would recur throughout the twentieth century, from John Dewey to John Rawls. In considering Green's Lectures on Political Obligation delivered more than sixty years earlier, Anderson was criticising a persistent and contemporary strand in liberal political thought.<sup>10</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

Anderson was deeply affected by the political radicalism of his family and his own experiences as a student in Glasgow. He was briefly an advisor to the Communist Party of Australia in the 1930s, and throughout those years endured and participated in the agonising debates within the left on the course of socialism in Russia, producing dozens of occasional papers and addresses on these matters.<sup>11</sup> Anderson understood that the Russian experience represented the total suppression of independent movements in the establishment of a new form of tyranny of the party and bureaucracy over the workers. He progressively abandoned his contact with Marxism and with socialist theory and practice generally, and his lectures in the 1940s register his final assessment of socialism as a movement whose time as a progressive, creative force had passed.

Anderson's education at Glasgow coincided with the enormous social and political upheavals which immediately preceded and continued throughout the First World War, and which for many radical thinkers of the early twentieth century signalled the abrupt end of that political world imagined by philosophers like Green and Bosanquet. Anderson was a student witness to the major historical

---

<sup>10</sup>After a period of almost total neglect there has lately been a revival of interest in the British idealists and political theory. Cf., Peter P. Nicholson, *The political philosophy of the British idealists: selected studies*, Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990. David Boucher and Andrew Vincent, *British idealism and political theory*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000.

<sup>11</sup>A useful companion volume to these lectures is the collection of occasional articles and addresses compiled by Mark Weblin in *A Perilous and Fighting Life: From Communist to Conservative: The Political Writings of Professor John Anderson* Sydney: Pluto Press 2003.

processes and movements which would determine the course of much of the twentieth century. Glasgow was the most industrialised city in Scotland and the massive social impact of the continuing migration of unskilled workers to the city (whose population had doubled in the previous half century) was leading to extreme pressure on pay and conditions, and to acute housing shortages.<sup>12</sup> Workers' efforts to resist these pressures no doubt suggested to Anderson that the philanthropic and benevolent state proposed by Green and Bosanquet would not be required. Indeed, for the workers to appeal to such a state could only weaken their position.

The wartime industrial disputes in Glasgow, however, were not simple disputes about pay and conditions. Known as the Red Clydeside struggles, these disputes were characterised by an ambiguous mixture of conservatism and political radicalism. The most radical groups acted to protect the privileges and rights of skilled craftsmen in response to the official government policy of *dilution* (the employment of unskilled workers to diminish the force of the traditional demands and expectations of the craftsmen). The resistance of craft workers to the deskilling of machine production had become a hindrance to wartime productivity in key industries like munitions and ship building. For the skilled workers themselves, however, machine production meant the loss of independent judgement and initiative in their working lives. Such workers struggled in their union representations to find common ground with the less skilled workers who seemed to be leading the movement towards new forms of industrial servitude. Decades of industrialisation in weaving, mining and now in the engineering and steel industries had created a clash of ways of life as much as a deterioration in workers' levels of pay.<sup>13</sup> This clash within the working class itself seemed to undermine any conception of moral community as a unifying ideal.

Glasgow intellectuals close to the workers' movement could not help but be affected by these events and the intellectual turmoil surrounding them. Workers in Wales and Scotland

---

<sup>12</sup>Cf., James Hinton, *The first shop stewards' movement* London, G. Allen & Unwin, 1973; Iain McLean, *The legend of Red Clydeside*, Edinburgh: J. Donald, 1999, c1983; William Kenefick and Arthur McIvor (eds.), *Roots of Red Clydeside, 1910-1914?: labour unrest and industrial relations in West Scotland*, Edinburgh: J. Donald, c1996.

<sup>13</sup>Cf., E. P. Thomson *The Making of the English Working Class*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968.

seemed to one historian “particularly susceptible to European brainstorms”.<sup>14</sup> Although the brainstorms playing on the Glasgow workers were as likely to be a product of their calvinist inheritance (the Scottish mine owners and the leaders of the workers in the Lanarkshire coal fields where Anderson grew up were considered the most intransigent industrial opponents in Britain), there seems little doubt about the influence of the writings and outlook of the French writer Georges Sorel on John Anderson’s intellectual development.<sup>15</sup>

Sorel’s writings were introduced to English readers by the translation of *Reflexions sur la violence* in 1914 by T. E. Hulme, a writer for the radical modernist journal *The New Age* to which the Andersons, father and sons, were devoted. Sorel’s “new school” of socialism contributed significantly to Anderson’s understanding of what socialism was all about: the opposition to Hegelian totality and teleology; the rejection of unfounded optimism in progress and all forms of socialist utopianism; the emphasis on socialism as a movement rather than an end to be achieved; the view of socialism as a producers’ movement concerned with the equitable distribution of enterprise and production rather than a consumers’ quest for equitable distribution of the product and material reward; the emphasis on historical movements as the real bearers of rights; the cyclical view of history underlying the view of productive movements as subject to relentless forces of corruption and mediocrity; the emphasis on systems of judicial rights established through struggle (an emphasis Anderson thought entirely absent in Marxist theorists with their focus upon economic structural determinism); and the refusal to countenance the strengthening of the role of the state at any stage of the workers’ struggle.

---

<sup>14</sup>George Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England*, London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1966 (1931). p. 248.

<sup>15</sup>Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, Collier Press, 1962. Anderson was not alone at the university in his admiration for Sorel. J. W. Scott, a philosophy lecturer at Glasgow, argued for a link between new forms of philosophical realism in Russell and Bergson with what he took to be the most radical wing of the workers’ movement, syndicalism—*Syndicalism and Philosophical Realism*. The book was published in 1919 and dedicated to his teacher Henry Jones—the new enthusiasts for realism and revolutionary syndicalism did not entirely dismiss their teachers! Sorel’s writings were at that time associated with the French syndicalist movement, although he had long since abandoned any hope that syndicalism might become a true producers’s movement.

Sorel defended a cyclic conception of history drawn from Vico, but one which contrasted movements predominantly directed towards external rewards and consumption, on the one hand, to those movements which promoted heroic values of self-sacrifice and the pursuit of those rewards which were internal to the continuing practices and activities of the movement itself. His account of the heroic virtues of self-denial in the struggle against consumptive and corrupting mediocrity seemed to provide Anderson with an elevating moral vision of “devotion to a cause” that nonetheless suited his stringent requirements for a thoroughgoing realist, anti-utopian, and pessimistic conception of history and political activity. There was a theological element underlying Sorel’s conception of history and one that Anderson did not walk away from in his lectures on socialism, the position that good can exist only in the struggle against evil.

The conception of the “ethic of the producers” was fundamentally important to Anderson’s positive science of ethics and recurred throughout his writings up to and including the final articles written for *Studies in Empirical Philosophy*. Socialism’s ultimate failure for Anderson was in not meeting the standards of Sorel’s producers’ ethic.<sup>16</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

Peter Laslett declared in 1956 that the tradition of classical normative political theory had died with Bernard Bosanquet in 1923.<sup>17</sup> In the intervening years, however, political theorists had been forced to examine liberal and democratic political assumptions in the context of the historical advances of fascist and collectivist ideologies. Despite his relative isolation these lectures by Anderson should be seen in relation to the political writings and commitments of such

<sup>16</sup>The importance of Sorel to Anderson is widely accepted but its significance contested. His interest in Sorel is seen as a youthful enthusiasm. In the major work on Anderson’s social and political thought Jim Baker devotes a chapter to Sorel but doubts the extent of Anderson’s familiarity with Sorel’s writings other than *Reflections on Violence*. Anderson’s personal papers in the University Archives and his lecture notes seem to me to confirm Anderson’s extensive reading and appreciation of Sorel’s works. Peter Coleman argues that Anderson drew upon a single element of Sorel’s, the ethic of the producer, extracting it from the wider system of thought that alone could give it significance. I think Anderson accepted its wider implications and that the influence of Sorel is more important than Baker and Coleman allow. That is not to say, however, that syndicalism as an industrial and political standpoint had any importance for Anderson. Sorel himself had abandoned any hope in syndicalism as a producers’s movement by 1910. (Jim Baker, *Anderson’s Social Philosophy: The Social Thought and Political Life of Professor John Anderson*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1979, p. 64; Peter Coleman, “Was Sorel an Andersonian?”, *Quadrant*, September 2002.)

<sup>17</sup>Peter Laslett (ed.), *Introduction to Philosophy, Politics and Society I*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1956, p. vii.

contemporary writers as Arendt, Hayek, Popper, Oakeshott, Collingwood, Horkheimer and Adorno who all endeavoured to make sense of this dangerous new world.

Yet comparisons are difficult to achieve in the case of John Anderson. The consumer outlook that Anderson so determinedly repudiated perhaps had its theorist in F. A. Hayek, the author of *The Road to Serfdom* which was published at the same time these lectures were delivered. There seem to be real similarities between Hayek and Anderson yet there are almost no points of real contact or engagement. Both emphasise the value of liberty almost to the exclusion of all other values, and Hayek was concerned to expose many of the same dangers that worried Anderson.<sup>18</sup> Like Anderson, Hayek drew his readers' attention to pervasive historical trends within the liberal democracies themselves, the same trends which had produced totalitarian regimes in Germany, Spain and Italy. A copy of Hayek's work exists in Anderson's personal library, pencilled with occasional marginal annotations which demonstrate no real enthusiasm. In these notes Anderson balks at Hayek's reference to "our immediate great purpose" of winning the war, but agrees with his general criticisms of central planning on the grounds of our inevitable ignorance of outcomes, commenting that "our predictions will always be false". He also agrees with Hayek's call for an equality of enterprise rather than an equality of reward. Yet Hayek's book sought to restore the pre-interventionist (that is, pre-T. H. Green) liberalism of Bentham, Mill and Spencer, which for Anderson would have seemed an impossible project.

Hayek's rejection of planning was based on his view that the real forces motivating individuals' decisions and actions were different to those assigned to them by social planners and theorists. There was enormous significance for Hayek in the creation of order from individual decisions and actions. His methodological individualism introduced an interpretive aspect to social and political studies and the identification of real social processes and mechanisms based on the limited but globally significant perspective of the individual agent which Anderson could not admit to. For Anderson this all

---

<sup>18</sup>F. A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, Sydney: Dymocks Book Arcade, 1944.

belonged to the inevitably formless and servile realm of the consumer rather than the producer, and had no place in his science of ethics. For Hayek, on the other hand, quests such as Anderson's for an empirical, naturalist social and political theory had led to an excessive suspicion of purposive, teleological forms of reasoning. Without such reasoning and without the perspective of the intentions of individual agents social studies could deal only in abstractions.

Anderson's emphasis on the producers' outlook suggests that the entire realm of means-end reasoning, utilitarian values and goal-directed activities so important to Hayek is in itself rather formless, culturally and historically insignificant except as the source of those evils that goods must struggle with. History, Anderson was fond of quoting Croce, is the story of liberty. Production is creative, profound, deep, mysterious, passionate and substantial. Consumption is merely distributive of the product, shallow, simple, superficial, and reductive of all values to a common measure. Following Sorel again, Anderson views these aspects of the consumer outlook as promoting the "little science" of economics.

\* \* \* \* \*

His emphasis on productive activities, traditions and ways of life perhaps invites further comparison with recent Aristotelian practice-oriented approaches to ethics and traditionalist conservatism. Alasdair Macintyre, for example, certainly cites with approval the Heraclitean and Sophoclean insights of "the great Australian philosopher John Anderson".<sup>19</sup> Macintyre's own depiction of modernity as a culture in which "pleonexia (acquisitiveness) has at last made a social world for itself to be at home in" relies upon his contrast between the practice-oriented virtue ethics of pre-modern social forms with the emotivist and instrumentalist ethics of modernity.<sup>20</sup>

Anderson occasionally draws his distinction between productive and ethical goods as against economic and consumptive goods in the context of a discussion of Aristotle's

<sup>19</sup>Cf., Alasdair Macintyre, *After Virtue* (London: Duckworth 1981, pp. 163-64) and *Whose Justice Which Rationality?* (London: Duckworth 1988, p. 12).

<sup>20</sup>Alasdair Macintyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* London: Duckworth, p. 313.

emphasis upon goods as activities.<sup>21</sup> In his *Lectures on Greek Philosophy* of 1928, for example, Anderson expressed his appreciation for Aristotle's emphasis upon that form of the good applicable to human beings and most particularly for his theory of goods as self-sustaining activities. Anderson is not keen on the term "virtue", but he is prepared to accept its use as applied to the sort of activity which is itself good.

Ultimately for Anderson, however, Aristotle cannot be "divested of his metaphysical accretions", his essentialism and his teleology, and his Socratic equating of the good with good order. He agrees that "the way things are" includes moral facts: "it is impossible to discuss social processes except in terms of ways of living or forms of enterprise, and that is moral characterisation".<sup>22</sup> But he cannot accept that moral characterisation entails moral prescription, since to do so would be to commit to a morality of commands, and to programmes for action and reform designed to achieve an external good. Any such moral view has lost sight of that conception of goods which alone makes a true science of ethics possible, that is, goods considered as ongoing productive activities in which individuals engage without consideration for the end result or reward to be achieved.

For Anderson, the same logic applies to Aristotle as to the emotivist, instrumental rationality that contemporary Aristotelians like Macintyre seek to undermine. Macintyre, for his part, would no doubt argue that Anderson cannot explain the value of productive activities over consumptive pursuits without recourse to Aristotelian teleological categories, and most fundamentally to his conception of goods as internal to practice.<sup>23</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

For Edward A. Shils by the 1950s it seemed that a new generation of students following the defeat of fascism, could never fully appreciate the impact of Sorel's "new school" on earlier radical intellectuals and socialists who came to

<sup>21</sup>John Anderson, "Realism and Relativism in Ethics", (1933) *Studies in Empirical Philosophy*, p. 244–45.

<sup>22</sup>John Anderson, "The Servile State", op. cit., p. 330.

<sup>23</sup>Interesting comparisons can be made in their respective treatments of Marx's "Theses on Feuerbach" Cf., Anderson's lectures on socialism and Macintyre, "The Theses on Feuerbach: a road not taken", *Artefacts, representations and social practice: essays for Marx Wartofsky*, edited by Carol C. Gould and Robert S. Cohen. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1994.

maturity in the 1920s. A barrier of incomprehension had grown between these generations.

“The fresh self-confidence, the wonderful feeling of relevant discovery, the convincing air of ethical righteousness, and the vibrant expectation of a total—and significant—transformation of the entire life of society have nearly disappeared from the socialist movement and from socialist thought since the mid-twenties. The belief that socialist aims enabled one to see reality more realistically and fruitfully, the belief that socialism was a ‘way of life’ and not just a scheme for operating factories and wholesale enterprises has in the main evaporated.”<sup>24</sup>

For Anderson in the 1940s the socialist movement had become a movement devoted to material improvement and state protection, and had turned away from “the chief ‘heroic’ values of proletarian life” as these had been elaborated by the engineer Georges Sorel, the values of “initiative, emulation, care for exactitude and rejection of the notion of ‘reward’”,<sup>25</sup> the values of disinterested activity typical of the scientist and the artist. Socialism could no longer be seen as a true cooperative producers’ movement, a cause to which one could devote one’s energies.

When Anderson assessed the humane, progressive liberalism exemplified in the writings of T. H. Green by declaring that “this kind of liberalism has very little force against an enlightened conservatism” it may have been unclear whether he was outlining his intention to resist, or to accept, such an enlightened conservatism. It is clear, however, that his enduring political commitments, from the early years in Glasgow to his final years in Sydney, became difficult for his students to accept in those increasingly bitter political debates in which they would become involved. In the end, Anderson’s political position would have little appeal to either libertarian or traditionalist conservatives. Proponents of progressive state intervention and social reform in the post-war years would find even less support in Anderson’s teaching.

There is, however, no doubt that Anderson presented to his students a rich and suggestive account of major political

---

<sup>24</sup> Edward Shils, Introduction to *Reflections on Violence* by Georges Sorel. New York: Collier 1961, pp. 11–12.

<sup>25</sup> John Anderson, “Marxist Ethics”, *SEP*. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1962, p. 325. Originally published *A.J.P.P.* XV (2) June 1937: 98–117.

questions in the middle years of the twentieth century. At the time these lectures were delivered the proponents of logical positivism and ordinary language philosophy could find no place for substantive political inquiry outside the special sciences. Within the socialist movement the emerging theorists of “western Marxism” were attempting to rediscover some kind of moral compass in the early Hegelian writings of Marx. In that broad theoretical context John Anderson developed in these lectures an original and provocative position, providing his students with a unique perspective from which they could survey for themselves the philosophical and political landscape. More than sixty years later, however, it seems that we are yet to achieve a clear perspective on Anderson himself. Hopefully the publication of these lectures will contribute to new and productive forms of inquiry into the value and importance of Anderson’s political theory.

Creagh McLean Cole  
*November 2007*

## **Note on the Text**

The lectures are transcribed from Anderson's handwritten notes in the *Personal Archives of John Anderson* at the University of Sydney Archives (hereafter *P.A.J.A.*). They are

- a. Lectures on T. H. Green's *Principles of Political Obligation* 1941 (*P.A.J.A.*, Series 3, Box 12, Item 19), 66pp.;
- b. Lectures on Political Theory 1942 (*P.A.J.A.*, Series 3, Box 13, Item 23), 53pp.;
- c. Lectures on Socialism 1945 (*P.A.J.A.*, Series 3, Box 14, Item 26), 68pp.

The series entitled "Political Theory" of 1942 deals mainly with Bernard Bosanquet's *Philosophical Theory of the State* and includes a comparison of Bosanquet's "solidarism" with Lenin's less inclusive but equally prescriptive version of the "common good" in *State and Revolution*. The series on "Socialism" includes a critical study of Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach* on the crucial political question of the relation between theory and practice, as well as a critical account of Lenin's views on parliamentary democracy, and an outline of Anderson's own positive views of pluralist democracy under conditions of publicity.

## **Abbreviations**

*FHM* — Sidney Hook, *From Hegel to Marx: Studies in the Intellectual Development of Karl Marx*, London: Victor Gollancz, 1936.

*LPO* — T. H. Green, *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation*, London: Longmans Green, 1941.

*PAJA* — The Personal Archives of John Anderson at the University of Sydney Archives.

*PTS* — Bernard Bosanquet, *The Philosophical Theory of the State*, London: Macmillan, 1965.

*SEP* — John Anderson, *Studies in Empirical Philosophy*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1962.

*SR* — V. I. Lenin, *State and Revolution*, London: Communist Party of Great Britain, 1926.