

[Rodrick on Goldman, 'Welfare and Social Policy in Britain since 1870: Essays in Honour of Jose Harris'](#)

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Reviewed by Anne Rodrick (Wofford College) **Published on** H-Albion (June, 2020) **Commissioned by** Douglas Kanter (Florida Atlantic University)

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In *Welfare and Social Policy in Britain since 1870: Essays in Honour of Jose Harris*, editor Lawrence Goldman has curated a collection of essays that testify to the centrality of Harris's work in the intellectual and social history of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Britain. Harris's own work has spanned decades, beginning with her first book, *Unemployment and Politics: A Study in English Social Policy 1886-1914* (1972), and has ranged in focus from the Victorian idealist philosophers to the decline of the welfare state. Goldman has placed her work within an exploration of what he terms "genres of welfare history"—"conceptual, biographical, prosopographical, institutional, legislative, and micro-historical"—demonstrating for the reader how essential Harris's work has been and continues to be to a fuller understanding of the modern British state in all of its apparent contradictions and messiness (p. 9). Goldman organizes these essays around four themes: philosophical idealism and the idealists who imagined a modern welfare state, the changing nature of economic and social planning, the resistance to the welfare state after 1945, and the relations between nineteenth-century idealist philosophy to new models of voluntary and community activism.

Part 1, "Idealism and Its Legacy," draws its focus from Harris's work on T. H. Green and his followers. In "'The Organized Selfishness of Empire': Welfare Philosophies, Human Rights, and Empire in Britain, 1870-1920," Sandra den Otter explores the ways imperial politics and economics shaped and were shaped by the authors of the modern welfare state. Rather than focus solely on how domestic policies framed an understanding of imperialist thinking, she examines instead how empire influenced Green's conceptualization of a moral and interventionist state, especially how the realities of colonization and its hierarchical power structures affected the idealists' understanding of individual autonomy, voluntarism, and citizenship. Den Otter argues that while many idealists accepted a general imperial narrative of "civilization" and modernization, they also wrestled with the often brutal realities of imperial greed and conquest. These conflicting tensions forced Green and his fellows to grapple with the nature of the state and the limits of political obligation, leading Green to argue that "a state that did not enable active citizenship, but saw subjects as passive recipients, was not a moral state" (p. 21). The overall response of the idealists, she argues, was to reject the language of natural rights and instead to underscore the "the social embeddedness of rights" (p. 22).

Den Otter's exploration of community and citizenship is interpreted within a domestic frame in H. S. Jones's "The Civic Movement in British Social Thought: Civil Society and the Ethics of Citizenship." Jones explores how Harris challenged the contention that early notions of British citizenship were

under-developed and shows how she identified the language of citizenship within the political discourse of 1880-1945. Jones then broadens this understanding beyond political discourse, examining how and why notions of “good citizenship” gained centrality in moral and educational debates at the local level, especially in provincial cities. The concept was primarily ethical rather than political or legal during this period, and Jones explores the “near equivalence of ‘character’ and ‘citizenship’” especially in understandings of masculinity and patriotism (p. 35). “The language of ‘good citizenship’ ... grew out of indigenous moral discourses focused on character, duty, and mutual responsibility,” argues Jones, rather than out of discourses that parsed “citizenship” in terms of social and political rights (p. 42).

Goldman’s contribution, “Founding the Welfare State: Beveridge, Tawney, and Temple,” looks at the “intertwined lives” of these three reformers, exploring not only the benefits and limits of the so-called group biography but also the ways the relationships between these three men served to influence the political and social landscape that gave rise to the welfare state. Goldman argues that their temperaments and mutual relationships—through education, family background, marriage, and friendship—formed an important collective influence on the work of these men. Their “remarkably similar early lives” linked them even in their dissimilar later lives (p. 50): William Beveridge as a politician, R. H. Tawney as an educator, and William Temple as a churchman, where their shared education and experience helped temper their significant ideological differences as Socialist, Labour, and Liberal. Goldman argues that exploring “something anterior to ideology, something more deeply personal and internal,” helps us understand both their shared commitment to social reform and their quite dissimilar approaches to achieving this reform (pp. 58-59).

In the final essay in part 1, “Private Benefit, Public Finance? Student Funding in Late Twentieth-Century Britain,” William Whyte looks at another dissimilar pair, Richard Titmuss and Sir Colin Anderson, and their common goal of grant funding for higher education. Titmuss, one of the idealists figuring largely in Harris’s early works, and Anderson, a relatively minor figure in the applied arts, were key figures in the 1958 debate over how to establish and protect the system of funding for undergraduates that endured until the late 1990s. Whyte traces the debate and its aftermath, showing how the byzantine problem of student financing was not merely economic but also deeply embedded in political and philosophical questions of access to higher education, the moral and social relationships between the individual and civil society, and the changing nature of undergraduate instruction. Adopting Harris’s approach of looking at “the practical process by which change occurred,” Whyte explores the disparate influences on debates over funding, ranging from idealist notions of citizenship to worries over the privileging of the already-privileged (p. 64). He argues that the late twentieth-century move from grants to loans and the removal of students from the system of social security that had underwritten most higher education are examples of what Harris had noted as “the collapse of idealism as a key element of changing ideas about social policy” (p. 74). Titmuss and Anderson, coming from very different starting places, had forged a pragmatic bond that endured until the extraordinary pressures of post-Thatcher Britain forced a reevaluation of education and citizenship.

Part 2, “Planning,” shifts the focus of this collection toward the philosophical and practical instantiations of rational, future-oriented social policy. Brian Harrison’s “Planning in Modern Britain: Its History and Dimensions” provides a framework for the subsequent essays in this section. Harrison explores various “overlapping polarities” that help us understand the dimensions of the modern state,

including the tensions between individual and state, the contrasts between socialist and positive/market-driven planning, and the differences between direct and indirect state action (for example, the difference between mandates and voluntarism). Such polarities often operated together and were never completely straightforward: “collectivism and individualism did not necessarily conflict” (p. 89). Harrison argues that “public welfare could hardly have made its way without a moral impulse,” and he defines that impulse as incorporating the values of respectability and reason and the ideology of separate spheres, all of which helped shape the ways planners between the mid-Victorian and the post-Thatcher worlds imagined and incorporated ideas of state intervention (p. 87).

Daniel Ritschel hones in on one brief period of planning in his essay, “‘Socialist Realism’: The Short Life of Left-Wing Economic Revisionism in the 1920s.” Looking at the work of G. D. H. Cole, John Strachey, and H. N. Brailsford, Ritschel explores the pragmatic turn of the Labour Left in the late 1920s. Beginning with the collapse of the “Living Wage” campaign in 1926, he argues, there was a brief, important but largely ignored period of “socialist revisionism” that led directly to the “accommodationist strategy” believed to be more pragmatically attuned to the management of industry and markets (p. 106). Ritschel argues that Cole, Strachey, and Brailsford led the Left in its modification of socialist economic thought by acknowledging both “the chronic failures of capitalism and persistent vitality of bourgeois society” and rejecting what they saw as the increasing theatricality of the Communist and Independent Labour Parties (p. 109). Instead, they argued for pragmatic, incremental economic policies that differed from the gradualism of Labour leaders who failed to offer practical strategies for a seemingly unending postwar slump. Ritschel identifies the key innovation of this “left-revisionist” agenda as growing out of the work of E. M. H. Lloyd, an interwar economist who criticized efforts to return to the gold standard, called for loan-funded state spending on public works, and urged the expansion of credit for consumers via a “socialized banking system” (pp. 112-13). While Lloyd’s direct influence had waned by the late 1920s, Cole, Strachey, and Brailsford revived many of his policy proposals and incorporated them into proposals for consumer-focused banking policies, expanded credit, and loan-funded modern public works projects. Cole argued that “what really matters is not ownership, but control of policy,” and the three adopted a “technocratic” approach to economic organization (p. 116). Ritschel explains their apparent failure as an example of “the very isolated position of middle-class intellectuals within the interwar Labour movement” and argues that the case of these revisionists illustrates Harris’s critique of a binary approach to policy debates within the Labour Party (p. 120). Ultimately, he argues, this episode illustrates “the complex and hybrid nature of Labour economic thought” during the 1930s (p. 126).

While Ritschel examines the enthusiastic but failed planning of these economic revisionists, Julia Moses takes on the revival of interest in the planning work of T. H. Marshall in “The Reluctant Planner: T. H. Marshall and Political Thought in British Social Policy.” Marshall’s tripartite theory of citizenship, most notably articulated in his 1940s lectures, identified and historicized the emergence of civil rights, such as freedoms of speech and religion; political rights, such as the right to vote; and social rights, including the right to an education and to welfare. Civil rights emerged in the eighteenth century, political rights in the nineteenth, and social rights in the twentieth. So straightforward was Marshall’s paradigm of development that, Moses argues, it has become an accepted and largely unquestioned plank of modern debates over human rights and citizenship. Moses uses Marshall’s own life to examine how his theory of citizenship was, in fact, inflected by conceptions of community, state, and social policy that were particularly European and, even more specifically, particularly German. Marshall’s life experiences in and around Germany—his years in a

prisoner-of-war (POW) camp for the duration of World War I and his subsequent work on Germany in the Foreign Office beginning in 1939—shaped his ideas about the state and the individual. His POW observations of a “natural” emergence of social hierarchy and community and his Foreign Office work on the all-powerful German Nazi state provided the framing experiences that helped shape his theories about the role of the individual as a participatory citizen in a local community. This role embodied tensions over planning, social rights, individual freedoms, and “communal fellowship.” Moses argues that for Marshall, “planning and older traditions of communitarianism were not incompatible; they were inherently linked in a form of ethical socialism,” in a model that grew out of Marshall’s own lived experiences (p. 140).

Part 3, “Contesting Welfare,” focuses primarily on the varieties of resistance to the welfare state encountered in the twentieth century. Ben Jackson’s “Richard Titmuss versus the IEA: The Transition from Idealism to Neo-Liberalism in British Social Policy” returns to Harris’s argument that by the mid-1950s, idealist philosophers no longer shaped the national conversation about the welfare state. In that vacuum, new theories about individual and society could emerge, and neoliberalism easily occupied the left-leaning spaces left empty by an idealist perspective that was defeated in part by a more intellectually rigorous Marxism. By the 1960s, the neoliberal perspective argued that the private sector should take over state-provided services except where “direct state intervention” was indicated (p. 148). Jackson tests this argument by examining the postwar debates between Titmuss of the London School of Economics (LSE) and Arthur Seldon of the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) in a lengthy conflict, nominally over the supply of blood to the National Health Service (NHS) but actually encompassing a much broader sweep of welfare services. Sketching out the approaches of each man to the larger question of social welfare, Jackson argues that Titmuss grounded many of his arguments in the relatively new field of sociology, claiming that market forces could temporarily eclipse such innate human characteristics as altruism, while Seldon continued to deploy the “neutral” language of economics to combat those whom the IEA regarded as “sentimental left-wing sociologists.” Thus, while Titmuss argued for “an inclusive form of social insurance,” Seldon urged only “a safety net for the weak and vulnerable” (p. 161). The idealists, argues Jackson, lost hold of the terms of the debate in mainstream political discourse by deploying the language of sociology rather than economics.

Moving forward in time, Edmund Neill’s “Conservative Thinkers and the Post-War State, 1945-79” explores how conservative thinkers understood state growth in the period before Margaret Thatcher, an area only hinted at in Harris’s works. Neill points to “the sheer variety of conservative views,” especially the contrasts between libertarian and paternalist modes of conservative thought, and then hones in on Michael Oakeshott, the political philosopher whose work significantly influenced conservative theorists and politicians (p. 164). Oakeshott’s philosophy of the state, Neill argues, can be summed up thus: “the best kind of state is one that enables individuals to enjoy the maximum freedom possible” rather than seeking “to direct society in line with one particular, determinate end” (p. 166). A state pledged to preserve individual liberty, Oakeshott argued, had to accommodate several ideas: first, a modern state could and should accommodate individual difference within its legal framework; second, laws must in some way reflect the moral judgments of the people; third, the best way to ascertain this reflection was through an emphasis on common-law tradition; fourth, the fundamental protection of private property is key to “the genuine expression of individual preference”; and finally, the state, even in the modern era, rests on a shared sense of patriotism (p. 167). This ideal conception of the state thus included both “a moral and a constitutional dimension”

that enhanced the model articulated by Green and provided conservatives a framework within which they could accommodate such modern problems as nationalism, militant unionism, the rise of numerous special-interest groups, and the “electoral dictatorship” of a powerful executive (pp. 174-75).

Matthew Grimley’s essay, “You Got an Ology? The Backlash against Sociology in Britain, c.1945-90,” sketches out the rise and temporary decline of sociology as a field of intellectual endeavor after World War II. Harris’s work has argued that “systematic political theory” virtually disappeared from public discourse after the war, and Grimley’s examination of sociology seeks to explore one of the strands of intellectual argument that emerged to take over that space. He shows how academics, sometimes fearfully, laid responsibility for the death of political theory at the feet of “linguistic philosophy, Marxism, and sociology” as early as the mid-50s and then explores the “intellectual backlash” against the field (pp. 179, 181). Using examples drawn from university curricula, student protest movements, popular press reports of criminality, and other snapshots of what seemed to many to be a terrifyingly broad rejection of traditional authority, Grimley shows how two particular centers of that authority—the Thatcherite government and the Anglican church—reacted to the ubiquity of sociology as a tool of social analysis and social reform. While sociology had seen “its status diminished and its radicalism blunted” by the 1980s, Grimley concludes that as a framework for analyzing society, it was so omnipresent that it would form an important tool for New Labour (p. 193).

Part 4, “Beyond the Welfare State,” concludes this festschrift with two essays that focus on community and state change after 1960. In “Reshaping the Welfare State? Voluntary Action and Community in London, 1960-75,” John Davis explores how the “rediscovery” of specific populations challenged the assumptions underlying the welfare state as it was built in the 1940s. The elderly, the disabled, the homeless, the single parent—these groups had been virtually invisible examples of “poverty in affluence” (pp. 197-98). In the 1960s, especially in the cities, these groups and others became the focus of voluntary agencies and local planners who found themselves redefining poverty and “reinventing the welfare state” to care for the needs of runaway youth, immigrants, drug users, and others who had not figured in postwar perceptions of society (p. 198). Davis focuses specifically on the City of London, exploring the ways voluntary groups and local city authorities often sparred over jurisdiction and responsibility. These “disputed boundaries” were instantiated in the dichotomized approaches to relief, with some areas attempting to preserve old neighborhoods through public-works programs and others choosing to embrace wholesale redevelopment that often ignored the needs of residents in these “twilight zones” (p. 211). He concludes by arguing that “the concept of public welfare had become more elusive by the 1970s than it had been in the 1940s” (p. 212).

The final essay, Mark Bevir’s “A New Governance: Hierarchies, Markets, and Networks, c.1979-2010,” brings Harris’s work into the twenty-first century. Building on Harris’s elucidation of changing patterns of social and state responsibility, Bevir presents “a genealogy of governance” that explores how modernist social science—defined here as reliant on “formal explanations based on economic models or sociological correlations”—has moved from government to governance (p. 214). That is, he argues that the twentieth-century notion of government, built around a nation-state and characterized by a corporate bureaucracy, has grown into the twenty-first-century model of “new governance,” built on ideas of rational choice, a neoliberal perception of the state, the development of

markets and networks rather than borders and empires, and “performance accountability” (p. 215). Rehearsing the crises that pushed “government” into “governance,” he explores the emergence of the “wicked problem,” such as climate change or international terrorism, that has demanded new approaches to management (p. 220). Finally, he examines the levels of management structure, from the permanent secretary to the “street-level bureaucrat,” that characterize the new governance, concluding that “the world of hierarchies and bureaucrats” that emerged out of the welfare state is now “overlain by some features of markets and networks” (pp. 225, 228).

Taken as a whole, this collection of essays does a thorough and careful job of elucidating the broad sweep of Harris’s rich intellectual interest. Each essay engages specifically with some portion of Harris’s work, so that the overall picture is a coherent exploration and expansion of the ideas, structures, successes, and failures of the twentieth-century welfare state. Importantly, however, each essay is also a powerful stand-alone addition to the scholarship of social and political relations in modern British history. Any tendency to focus entirely on England and London is effectively countered by the work of den Otter and Jones, who provide important imperial and provincial perspectives on the language and meanings of citizenship, while the examination of continental influences is ably provided by Moses’s essay on Germany. The perspectives provided by Whyte, Jackson, and Neill show the complex counterweights offered by twentieth-century conservative intellectuals, while the important milestones in the evolution of “planning” are ably described by Harrison, Grimley, Davis, and Bevir. Finally, Goldman and Ritschell remind us how important human agency remains in our exploration of ideas and their application. This collection does careful justice to the powerful influence of Harris’s work; the ideas and provocations explored in this volume are timely, persuasive, and valuable.

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