



Λ THE CRITICAL Λ
LIBERALISM OF
J. M.
ROBERTSON
(1856-1933)

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**Libertarian
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FOR LIFE, LIBERTY AND PROPERTY

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CHRIS R. TAME

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I: Introduction

The old adage that history is always written by the victor is as true for the history of ideas as for the more dramatic record of conflict in political and military affairs.

In the history of both political thought and social theory J. M. Robertson was on the losing side. The ideas he expounded and the movements of which he was a part, or even led, are those which during this century have been pushed from the forefront of political and intellectual life. Why, then, should I — and hopefully the reader — be concerned with the act of reclamation which this essay is attempting? The answer is twofold. Firstly, there is such a thing as objective history, and whether or not one has any sympathy with Robertson or his outlook, his consignment to an Orwellian “memory hole” can only distort our understanding of the historical record. As Conrad Kaczkowski states in his unpublished doctoral dissertation, Robertson was “an outstanding and representative figure of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries”.¹ An understanding of his role in both intellectual matters and political life can only help illuminate the history of the period. Secondly, some of us might consider it premature, as well as less than just, to consign both Robertson and the liberal movement of which he was an important part to the ideological dustbin of history.

Admittedly, intellectual and political currents, in both “left-” and “right-wing” guises, which we can label broadly as statist, collectivist, anti-individualistic, authoritarian, and irrationalist, have been the predominant “paradigm” in economic, political and social thought for most of the twentieth century.¹ But the past twenty years have seen a steady renaissance of radical, rationalist and individualistic liberalism.² For those of us, like myself, in sympathy with this liberal revival, the rediscovery of Robertson not merely aids the propagation of the liberal perspective, but can assist in a more viable reformulation of it. In other words, we can hopefully profit from a grasp of both the strengths and weaknesses, the valid and the invalid, the successes and failures of the thought of a great exponent of liberalism.

For those not in sympathy with Robertson's political position, however, an understanding of it will at least give a clearer grasp of its ideological character, and that of its present-day liberal adherents.

II: Class Conflict and the Economic Interpretation of History

Part of Robertson's significance and greatness lies in the wealth of his intellectual concerns. A multi-lingualist of immense learning, he applied his mind to, and wrote extensively on, a multitude of subjects. In all areas his work was characterised by both breadth and depth of knowledge, clarity of expression, and intellectual insight, on which Professor Stanislaw Andreski has positively commented.⁴ However, it is primarily the political significance of Robertson with which I am concerned. As Kaczkowski declares, he was “a well-known radical-liberal theoretician and politician, he played an active role in British politics for over twenty years and was a recognised authority on economic questions, in particular free trade”.⁵ My focus will not be so much on his role in *party* politics but on his significance as a thinker, as one of the last great representatives of a major tradition of liberal thought.

The roots of one tradition of liberalism in class analysis, in a broad sociological perspective and in an economic interpretation of history have, until relatively recently, been forgotten. At best, liberal class analysts and historians have been consigned by Marxists to footnotes as vague and alleged “precursors” of Marxist sociology and historical materialism.⁶ However, in Britain this liberal sociological outlook was co-extensive with the development of liberal economics. Adam Smith's economics, for example, was very much part of a broader “sociological” concern with, as he put it, “the general principle of law and government and of the different revolutions they have undergone in different periods of society”.⁷ *The Wealth of Nations* embodied much of Smith's historical sociology and his analysis of class factors in economic and political life. This approach was in fact shared, to a greater or lesser degree, by the whole “Scottish School” or

“Scottish Enlightenment”. Smith never completed his proposed broader study although the rediscovery of a longer version of his *Lectures on Jurisprudence* gives further evidence of his philosophy of history). But his colleague John Millar, in his major work *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks*,⁸ delineated systematically a liberal analysis of class formation and conflict and of historical development.

The major stream of British liberalism chose, however, to refine the tools of classical economic analysis, rather than develop its historical and sociological insights. The last of the major classicists to maintain a class and historical analysis as a broader political economy wedded to liberal values was James E. Thorold Rogers.⁹ But he left no disciples and, insofar as he was remembered, it was as a founding father of empirical economic history. Henry Thomas Buckle was really the only nineteenth century historian to attempt a detailed liberal philosophy of history. But in spite of a brief period of popular acclaim, he too exerted little influence and left no disciples.

Robertson was, then, the last great exponent in Britain of liberal class and historical analysis. He was consciously indebted to the Scottish School,¹ to Charles Comte¹¹ and to Buckle, to whom he devoted a major critical study¹² and whose *History* he edited in a fine annotated version.¹³ Of Rogers he said that he “enlarged in a suggestive fashion” on the economic interpretation of history, but that his “application of the principle does not carry us far”¹⁴ — an incorrect assessment in my view.

III: Historical Sociology

What, then, was the nature of the liberal class and historical analysis championed by Robertson? His concern in his historical work as in all his scholarship was to apply “scientific thoroughness” in “the statement of historic causation”, to discover “general laws” and to establish “determining conditions, the economic above all” in a “true science of social evolution”.¹⁵

His interpretation was not, however, the dogmatic assertion of aprioristic axioms, for he stressed the importance of the “study of the concrete process”.¹⁶ His “economic interpretation” was largely a view of the “economic motive” in human behaviour, not an ascription of irresistible influence to particular social institutions or so-called “modes of production”. In this sense “sociological truth” is ultimately “rooted in psychology and biology”.¹⁷ “The main primary factors in politics or corporate life” are thus “all-pervading biological forces, or tendencies of attraction and repulsion” between individuals.¹⁸ He insisted on the one hand that economic motives be recognised as affecting social action in general, and on the other that “varying forms of social machinery react variously on intellectual life”.¹⁹ He explicitly rejected any view of inevitability in historical events or any mono-causal approach to them, “so many and so complex are the forces and conditions of progress in civilisation”.²⁰ Thus “functions that were originally determined by external conditions came in time to be initial causes — the teeth and claws so to speak, fixing the way of life for the body politic.”²¹

His view of class conflict is clear. “Home politics”, he declared, “is the sum of the strifes and compromises of classes, interests, factions, sects, theorists, in all countries and in all ages.”²² The history of the world is as much one of *class co-operation* as well as *conflict*, and of classes conceived *broadly* in terms of all sorts of interest groups and ideologies, not merely as some automatic reflex of the “mode of

production”. Neither did he adhere to the utopian delusion of the so-called “scientific socialist” that this conflict would ever end: “the clash of opposing tendencies is perpetual, ubiquitous, inevitable”,²³ although modes of conflict might well change (i.e., the “blind” conflict of war might well be replaced with more civilised intellectual conflict). History was, in Robertson’s view, thus an “endless process of compromise among social forces”²⁴ to which “movements of true public spirit” contribute as well as more venal clashes of “class needs and interests”.²⁵ He was not driven to crude collectivism which negated the role of individuals as compared to “classes” — “men of genius have counted for something in all stages of upward human evolution.”²⁶

We might have been spared much tedious historical exegesis if Robertson’s balanced view of motivations had prevailed over countless Marxist-inspired attempts to demonstrate the “economic basis” of *every* social phenomenon. Thus, he explicitly commented on the fruitless attempts to discuss the “class politics” of religious conflict in the late Tudor period — fruitless since “in reality class politics was for the most part superseded by sect politics”.²⁷ In other words, religious disagreements, “destructive passions”, could lead to real conflict just as much as clashes of “real” economic or political interest. Economic determinism, then, “used as a sole interpretive principle ... may lead to all manner of errors”. The correct historical method is clearly to “recognise and trace the reactions of all the factors”.²⁸ It was this balanced and sensible approach to historical causation that he saw embodied in “the method and basis of Buckle” above all others.

In view of the short shrift given to liberal class theoreticians and historians by Marxist scholars, one cannot but take ironic satisfaction in Robertson’s similar treatment of Marxist historical materialism — in his parenthetical observation that “several members of the Marxian school have dealt very acutely and instructively with the element of economic causation in ancient and modern life.”²⁹ For Robertson, Marxism represented little more than a partisan expropriation of a liberal doctrine, “arbitrarily applied by Marx to civilisation in the light of a class gospel and a doctrinaire purpose”.³⁰ Moreover, Marx’s approach was vitiated by putting a “catastrophic and finally static theory of social destiny under a pseudo-evolutionary form”.³¹ Its persistence as a political ideology, a quasi-religious hope, was to Robertson “in itself an extremely interesting sociological phenomenon”.³² Elsewhere he declared that in *Das Kapital* there was “a sociological teaching of permanent importance, and that is the principle which has been stated by [Marx’s] followers as ‘Economic determinism.’” But he emphasised again that this was not original to Marx, merely “newly applied”. The perspective originated in the Scottish writers and in Charles Comte, and Buckle was, “as it were, resuscitating a buried movement and reviving a forgotten interest”. If this point was understood, he declared, scholars would be “less dithyrambic over the service done to sociology by Marx”. What Marx had added to the approach was to wed it to absurd economic doctrines, like “surplus value”, and to “formal fallacies of the most grotesque description”.³³

IV: The Application of Class Analysis

Robertson’s studies were not dictated by simple scholarly interest. He sought a usable past. “Either we are thus to learn from history”, he declared, “or all history is as a novel without a purpose.”³⁴ His principal application of class analysis

in contemporary politics lay in his defence of Free Trade against the rising forces of Protectionism. Free Trade was not simply science itself, “the unshakable inference of a hundred years of economic experience verifying the economic science on which the great experiment was founded”, but its abridgement was a classic case of the acquisition of special privilege by a distinct class interest. Thus he declared:

Tariffs are engineered by grafters, and grafters will never, of their own accord, let go their hold. Tariffs fail to secure prosperity; and so the industries which have been trained to rely upon them, as crutches, demand to have bigger and stronger crutches to rely upon ... In all countries there is a multitude of men who have absolutely no scruple about enriching themselves at the expense of their fellow countrymen in general ... The simple principle is, ‘Get what you can, by any monopoly that you can impose. Make your neighbour pay. If you think you can make the foreigner pay, do so, of course, with all your heart’ ... [Tariffism] is the policy of plundering your fellow-citizens to fill your own pockets.³⁶

He noted that liberal democracies had not remained immune from the forces of class pressure and mutual predation:

It must be recognised that in the way of collective tyranny the modern democracies have abundantly proved that they are ‘sisters under the skins’ with the autocracies and aristocracies of the past, and are as zealous to play the game of beggar-my neighbour as were the trade guilds and monopolies of the Middle Ages.³⁷

V: Liberalism and Sociology

Other aspects of Robertson’s sociology were equally wedded to his liberal concerns. In his “The Sociology of Race”, a discussion of the “eloquent fiasco”³⁸ of Houston Stewart Chamberlain’s *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century* (the classic statement of racism), he effectively disposed of both its historical idiocies and its absurdities of reasoning. In *The Germans* he refuted the “Teutonic Gospel of Race” with a wealth of historical and ethnological evidence “which once for all reduce[s] to absurdity the theory of the hereditary possession by any race or race-mixture of qualities which ensure their progress or ‘success’ under any conditions.”³⁹ In *The Saxon and the Celt*⁴⁰ he made a similar critique of the “Anglo-Saxon” version of racial superiority, which cast the Celtic peoples in the inferior role. And he made adverse comments on racialist explanations in his book on Buckle.⁴¹

In matters of foreign affairs Robertson shared the “isolationist”, anti-interventionist orientation which characterised much of the classical liberal tradition. He thus denounced “thoughtless demands for intervention in the affairs of foreign nations, impossible proposals to redress the wrongs suffered by foreigners at the hands of their own people.”⁴² Kaczowski comments that Robertson’s position stemmed less from the *laissez-faire* classical liberal tradition than from his moral thesis that the basis of all human relations was “reciprocity”.⁴³ However, it was *precisely* the ideal of reciprocity, the harmony of human interests, that the classical liberals saw as embodied in free trade and which in their view necessitated a new order of international peace.⁴⁵ Robertson himself declared that “a sane Political Economy had done more for the promotion of peace than all the moral exhortation in other literature.”⁴⁶

Robertson was a major influence (along with such anti-war liberals as Herbert Spencer, Gustave de Molinari and Jacques Novicow) on the last great figure in the liberal anti-war tradition, Norman Angell. Angell’s essay “War as the Failure of Reason” was published along with an essay by Robertson in a volume entitled *Essays Towards Peace*.⁴⁹ I would emphasise that Robertson was not a dogmatic pacifist and never allowed his desire for peace to lead him into ignoring aggressive intentions when they arose. Thus his opposition to increased naval estimates ceased the moment Germany’s aims became obvious, and he analysed and denounced the “civicidal madness” of the theory and practice of German “Caesarism”.⁵⁰ Although a founder member (and President) with Hypatia Bradlaugh Bonner of the Rationalist Peace Society in 1910, they both supported the First World War, while allowing that Britain, “in common with other great Powers, may have been guilty of faults of omission and commission”. In a statement signed by them, and issued in the name of the Committee of the RPS in 1916, Robertson and Bonner rejected absolutist pacifism, declared that “moral appeal” was quite useless against the “ruthless barbarian”, and held that there were two classes of war which, “lamentable as they must be, might yet be quite justifiable”, namely “wars of defence and wars of independence”.⁵¹

Robertson’s position on imperialism was marked by a similar balance. Imperialism might be a bad ideal, but the British Empire was in existence and a sudden withdrawal might also have undesirable consequences.⁵² He considered imperialism detrimental for various reasons. Massive imperial concentrations of power lead, by clear psychological laws, to a spiral of enmity and to the creation of “zealous enemies”,⁵³ who perceive the concentration of power as a threat to which they respond by embarking on a similar course of imperial expansion. Imperialism, in his view, also encouraged both the “nominally defunct principle of a monopoly market”⁵⁴ and “primitive racial egoism”, destroying the “instinct of domestic sympathy”.⁵⁵

In his most detailed critique of imperialism, *Patriotism and Empire*, Robertson sought to find its class roots, the specific interests that profit from it. I find his analysis less than successful, for it is never clear whether he believed that industry, financial interests, the business class as a whole (or as distinct groups) profited from imperialism, or whether it was merely specific sections of these groups that did so.⁵⁶

Ironically, Robertson’s failure to produce a really satisfactory account of imperialism can be seen as the result of not following his own methodological precepts. Such an account would need to integrate a sensitive perception of the role and nature of classes and interest groups (without falling into fallacious reifications) with an understanding of the role of both mistaken ideas and atavistic psychological motives.

But if Robertson did not always live up to his own philosophy, he did at least make its principles clear. This philosophy lies firmly in the liberal tradition of methodological individualism that warned against raising concepts and categories into supposedly real entities, and against perceiving reality in mere allegory. “Beware of allegorical sociology”, he declared in a critique of Schaffle, the German academic sociologist who expended “enormous effort” on elaborating “the dream of a ‘social organism’”, a “kind of actual Leviathan” into a scientific demonstration.⁵⁷

VI: Robertson as a Political Thinker: Socialist, Neo-Liberal or 'Guarded Individualist'?

Characterising the nature of Robertson's liberalism has not always appeared easy, however. Martin Page has described him as "one of the unsung prophets of the British Welfare State"⁵⁸ and one of his oldest friends, J. P. Gilmour, termed him a "philosophical Socialist".⁵⁹ However, his other close friend, John A. Hobson, opined that "Robertson stood upon the whole by laissez-faire liberalism".⁶⁰ And Kaczkowski similarly describes him as "a strict Bright-Cobden Liberal when it came to economics and free-trade ... the last Liberal of the rationalist-radical tradition".⁶¹

Some of Robertson's statements do indeed suggest that he was a socialist. He once seemed to refer to himself as a "scientific socialist" although his wording is somewhat ambiguous.⁶² Elsewhere he declares "an ultimate Socialism" to be "the highest ideal".⁶³ Moreover, his work is full of critical remarks on laissez-faire and on free-market capitalism. "Mere Free Trade and laissez-faire", he declared, "have not produced and cannot conceivably produce a really sound society. They have yielded us a large and blindly multiplying proletariat, subject to deplorable fluctuations of employment and comfort ..."⁶⁴ He attacked what he described as "a deadening competitive industrialism", its "ugliness, apathy, and degradation"⁶⁶ and "the social rapine of self-seeking trade".⁶⁷ He concluded: "Decidedly, our needed social solutions are not being reached on the lines of laissez-faire."⁶⁸

Similarly, he seemed to accept the socialist view that a boom and bust cycle was inherent in a free market, saying that "the periodic miseries [arose] out of industrial anarchy"⁶⁹ and that there was something irrational about a "blind industrial competition".⁷⁰ He thus declared that he had "no fixed prejudice against legislation as such"⁷¹ and advocated such measures as "socialisation of public monopoly profits as those of railways, banks, gas-works, water-works".⁷² He also spoke in favour of state old-age pensions and taxation of "unearned wealth".⁷³ Throughout his book on Buckle he criticised that writer's laissez-faire position. Robertson's "socialism" thus seems to resemble that of those socialist and *neo-liberal* thinkers who argued that a rational and scientific society is one in which "society" scientifically chose to regulate "itself". In reality this view is actually a form of "scientism", a fallacious view of the nature of science and a profoundly unscientific understanding of the nature of social processes.⁷⁴ Some of Robertson's most "scientistic" statements can be found in his generally approving discussion⁷⁵ of the American sociologist Lester Ward, himself a classic expounder of the scientistic approach. In his 1891 essay "Outlines of Social Reconstruction", Robertson saw "a greater measure of equality in material well-being" as attainable through "the corporate action of the citizens through their political machinery".⁷⁶ Such interventionism represented in his view a "collectively conscious society, a society which has realised evolution and is constructing a universal sociology".⁷⁷

Consistent with all this is Robertson's very critical evaluation⁷⁸ of the radical libertarian writer Auberon Herbert who, as the leading American anarchist Benjamin Tucker declared, was "a true anarchist in everything but name".⁷⁹ Hopefully Martin Page's in-progress biography of Robertson will illuminate his relations with the radical liberals and individualists of the period. He certainly held one of them, Joseph Hiam Levy (not to be confused with the socialist writer Hyman Levy), in high regard⁸⁰ and, while editor of

The National Reformer, featured Levy's essays in it frequently, as Bradlaugh had done before him.⁸¹ Other individualist contributions which Robertson published in this journal included an essay on "Freedom and Marriage" by Wordsworth Donisthorpe,⁸² which had been rejected by *The Liberty Annual*, the publication of the Liberty and Property Defense League. Donisthorpe's was, along with Herbert and Levy, one of the leading radical individualist thinkers of the period, although like his fellows, now generally written out of intellectual history and mainstream views of the history of liberalism.⁸³ Whilst Editor of *The Free Review* Robertson published essays by many of these diverse individualist and anarchist writers.⁸⁴

Nevertheless, in spite of all the above, Robertson, throughout virtually all his writings, distances himself from socialism proper. Moreover, for every anti-capitalist remark, there are at least as many hostile evaluations of socialism. He castigated reformers who "interfere with reasonable freedom in their gropings after improvement" and who "openly flout the eternal yearning of men for freedom". While praising the honesty of both socialists and individualists, he stated that they represented "extremes of error". "A plague o' both your houses!" was his final judgment.⁸⁵

Robertson also repeatedly described the great classical liberal Herbert Spencer as his "intellectual father"⁸⁶ and as "one of the great minds of the modern world".⁸⁷ He considered Spencer's polemic against the sins of legislators to be "powerful and often unanswerable", and agreed that "a great deal of modern philanthropic legislation has missed its mark". Spencer, he said, "remains one of the most effective monitors against hasty legislative action".⁸⁸ He also praised John Stuart Mill for the eloquence and wisdom of his support for "a doctrine that is ever being venomously assailed and too often being sullied", namely "the doctrine that the good of mankind is a dream if it is not to be secured by preserving for all men the possible maximum of liberty of action and of freedom of thought."⁸⁹ Again, Robertson's hostile comments about laissez-faire can be balanced by favourable ones about its "fundamental truth".⁹⁰ Society, he said, had "gained much from its application",⁹¹ and while "quite done with as a pretext for leaving uncurd deadly social evils which admit of curative treatment by State action", laissez-faire "is not done with as a principle of rational limitation of State interference", and as a "wholesome caveat against hasty scheming".⁹²

Robertson distanced himself from socialism in his earliest writings, but his hostility to it does seem to become *more* pronounced and more systematic in his later works. Thus in *Fiscal Fraud and Folly*, a passionate critique of protectionism, he lumps together in an ideological rogues' gallery "political adventurers, opportunists, grafters, socialists, and sciolists in general".⁹³ He doubted the feasibility of centrally planning an entire society and attacked trade union leaders who thought they "know in advance all about the real treatment of the vast complexity of industry and international trade, and this by [their] inner light as ... good Trade Unionist[s]".⁹⁴ In this context he went on to criticise certain trade unionists for "unlimited interference with international, to say nothing of domestic trade". Socialist theorists like G. D. H. Cole were lambasted for relying on mere "well-worn doctrinary formula" instead of offering detailed expositions of how a socialist society would operate. He added:

Socialism, staking the whole frame of society on an a priori theory of an inexhaustible public spirit, is re-

vealed in its foremost exponents, as so lacking in true public spirit, as distinct from class spirit, that they have never scientifically thought out the very problem they handle, finding and offering only prophecies in support of their proclivity ... If you ask for the deeds of Socialism, you have them in Soviet Russia. Look on that picture, and then look back on the record of Free Trade.⁹⁵

He also observed sardonically that he was “unaware” that the Labour Party “possessed or accepted any economist”, and stated that he had “never detected in Mr. Cole’s polemic an economic as distinguished from a sectarian ethical ideal”.⁹⁶

The example of Soviet Russia seems to bode large in Robertson’s shift of emphasis. The socialist school had “tried its hand”, in Russia and the “terrific object-lesson” correctly accounted, in his view, for the “large body of solid scepticism among the workers as to Communist promises”.⁹⁷

One of Robertson’s last political works was the dour and memorable *The Decadence* of 1929. Written under the pseudonym “L. Macaulay” as an imaginary account, by a future historian of 1949, of the “decay of England”, it rings even truer now than when he penned it. It is a vision of the “commercial suicide of the United Kingdom” and a settling of scores with all those who had contributed to the collapse. Who, then, were the guilty men? There were the businessmen, those who had abandoned free trade for the legalised theft of tariffs, “the traders who, once honestly proud of their honest and helpful if commonplace commerce, of their service in lightening the burden of life for the mass of mankind, were now grown still prouder of their acquired function of licensed pickpockets.” There were also the socialists advocating wholesale nationalisation but who lacked intellectual honesty. Refusing to accept the evidence of individual failures of their schemes, they had always pleaded that socialism could and would succeed when applied to a whole nation. But, Robertson declared, “socialism had been so applied in Russia”, with “miserable social and industrial failure” as the result.⁹⁸ Marxian socialism was a “doctrinaire dream, scientifically on all fours with all the previous and contemporary Utopianisms ... demonstrably a spurious equation, in which the really vital factors were falsified.” The “unthinking” adherents of Marxism, in his view, “knew neither economics nor history”.⁹⁹ But it was such doctrinaires who, in Robertson’s opinion, were the “aggressive driving force” in “most labour constituencies”. Believing “all the encomiums of a non-existent prosperity” in the Soviet Union, its adherents disrupted the meetings of their liberal opponents. Moreover, such intolerance was not restricted merely to the ranks of the Marxists. Socialists generally were “scheming for a society in which not only would there be no machinery whatever for the publication of criticism, since all would be bound to do their share of productive labour for the State alone, but criticism of the new social system itself would be absolutely prohibited.” George Bernard Shaw’s “genial” comment that “when once Socialism was established, anyone who questioned the system would be sent to an insane asylum” was utterly representative of the prevailing authoritarianism of the Left. When liberals of a previous generation had pointed out that “socialism inevitably excluded the public criticism of its own validity, and involved a state monopoly of all printing and publication, the Socialists loudly denied the statement.” But now, Robertson declared, “they avowed that under Socialism all critics of the system would at least be incarcerated.”¹⁰⁰ In

general, socialism offered mere “visionary issues” and an “appeal to ignorance, thoughtlessness, to gullibility”. It relied on the “principle of inflaming and exploiting the ignorant” and, fundamentally, “on the great motive of envy” — in both class and personal respects. It was simply, in his view, the mirror-image of the predatory class politics of the Conservative Party and the business interests.¹⁰¹ Intellectually, socialism was merely “panacea mongering”. Its exponents assumed that:

While the ostensibly simple Golden Rule is incapable of strict individual fulfilment, a mathematical calculation of universal and unanimous right action for an entire nation can be imposed and successfully maintained. Men incapable of thoroughgoing morality could all be persuaded to fulfil a new commandment of completely right conduct under State Socialism. All that is needed, they proclaimed, is that the ideal way of life should be expounded. Then, even if everybody is not at first convinced, the converts can at least coerce the rest. Under coercion, the system will work to perfection.¹⁰²

He held that, economically, socialism was utterly naive. “Confidently proposing to supersede the whole machinery of individual enterprise by which economic life had been built up”, it ignored the roots of innovation. Thus socialists “took for granted that inventions of every kind would continue to abound, though nobody needed to secure or improve his own income by inventing anything, since there was already enough wealth for all, if only it were properly distributed.”¹⁰³ “To comprehend the vast complexity of free commerce was beyond the power even of the Socialist intelligentsia in face of the Russian collapse.” Their thoughts were little more than “draughts of philanthropic sentiment with grains of second-hand economic theory”, while “the proletariat seemed convinced that trade-union secretaries could manage all industry and commerce, with fifty per cent profits for all.”¹⁰⁴

The decline of Britain as outlined in *The Decadence* was fundamentally the result of *intellectual* failure. An intelligent public spirit was simply absent, and could not be appealed to against the prevalence of “sinister interests” and economic ignorance. As Robertson declared:

A self-governing industrial State, dependent on the right judgment of its voters for the choice of right policies, can subsist only in virtue of adequate knowledge and judgment on the part of the majority of its electors. Nations which make economic decisions without knowledge of economic law must pay the economic penalty.¹⁰⁵

Ultimately, the fall of Britain and the British Empire stemmed from the same “central fact” underlying that of the Roman Empire: “Men did not understand the total causation of their social system.”¹⁰⁶ Industrial Britain had “let its heritage fall from its hands” and declined “from the status of a first-rate to that of a third-rate power”.¹⁰⁷

In his final years Robertson strenuously opposed attempts to incorporate the freethought and rationalist movement into some broader so-called “progressive movement” — an incorporation sought by a number of socialists and Marxists in a typical piece of “popular front” infiltration and manipulation. Robertson held that rationalists could honestly disagree over political positions, and that the growth of rationalism was encouraged more by the “rationalizing habit” of debate between them than by a political partisanship which

would merely destroy or tear apart the established rationalist organisations.¹⁰⁸ He had always opposed such “mergers” on tactical grounds, but his later opposition seemed much more marked by opposition to Marxism and socialism, *per se*. Communism was, in his view, “working irrationalism in the name of Reason”.¹⁰⁹ In 1933 he penned his most notable refutation of the so-called “scientific Humanists” (i.e. Marxists), in an essay entitled “Contaminated Ideals”. He roundly condemned as fallacious Marxist historical materialism and “surplus value” theory, and “the deep-seated human bias to tyranny” which was manifest in Marx’s “scheme of revolutionary brute force, slaughter, and class hatred in place of fraternity”. The “dogmatic and coercive purpose ... inherent in the post-Owen Socialist ideal” was clear long ago, he declared, and in this connection he recalled the refusal of socialists in a debate with Bradlaugh to forswear censorship of non-socialist views. Both in their theory and in their practice in Soviet Russia, socialists, “after benefiting by the right of free speech, propose to abolish that right as soon as they triumph”. He concluded: “In sum, then, the ideal of logical persuasion without a shadow of coercion, which is part and parcel of the rationalist ideal, is simply incompatible with the ostensible Socialist ideal.” The “pretentious aggression” and “pseudo-science” of the Marxists were threatening “all ideals of free progress in systems which trample liberty under foot, and, dismissing persuasion, eviscerate the mental life even as we see today.”¹¹⁰ It did not escape him that Mussolini had “mentally evolved as a Socialist”.¹¹⁰

Robertson’s critique of socialism was not restricted to its Marxist or egalitarian forms. In his essay on “Utopia” he offered a biting critique of H. G. Wells’ authoritarian Fabian socialism as well as of romantic utopias in general. Such literary absurdities represented a flight from the “depressing side of life” into a situation where all human dilemmas and problems dissolved into a picture harmony of perfection. Man, he argued, is not “an animal of whom it is predicable that every member of the species must and will one day live a mental life in terms of the ideals of Mr. Wells, or yours or mine.” “Endless variation in congenital endowment, from the highest to the lowest”, is ineradicable in the species.¹¹² Robertson detected romantic utopianism in all form of socialism. Socialists were, in his view, “zealots of the impossible” and “manufacturers of mere catchwords rather than of practicable policies”.¹¹³ They were possessed by a “consummate incompetence to face the practical problem”.¹¹⁴ Like Bradlaugh, he was saddened to find socialist doctrine “appealing to and applauded by, not the clear-headed and self-controlled workers, but the neurotic, the noisy, the passionate, the riotous”.¹¹⁵

Robertson also objected strongly to the socialist *celebration* of class struggle. A class analysis of historical development did not, for him, imply an acceptance of class conflict as a phenomenon conducive to social progress or to the creation of either a more efficient or a more just society. In his view it was the “supreme duty of Liberalism”, its “special mission and function” to “guard earnestly and actively against the recurring risk of class cleavage and class conflict” and to refuse to “pander to class hate either among the rich or among the poor”.¹¹⁶ The weakness of socialism lay not merely in the massive gap between its rhetorical claims and promises and its proposals for implementing its goals, but in the even greater discrepancy between its promises to create a “new Moral World” and its blatant “exploitation of malice” and “ingrained habit of hostility and virulence”.¹¹⁷

Those who champion the cause of labour against an ill-defined “bourgeoisie” ignored, in his view, its productive activities. They had succeeded only in erecting “labour” as a “concept and principle of disunion — a league of the hand-workers against all who are not of them, and an ideal of ‘social revolution’ in which they shall set their feet on the others’ necks.”¹¹⁸

A representative example of Robertson’s shift to a more hostile evaluation of socialism can be found in his change of mind about the relationship between socialism and war. In early essays he declared that it was “hardly conceivable that, if France and Germany were socialised, the war spirit would remain as before”¹¹⁹ and that one of the great merits of the socialist movement “is that it is really destroying the spirit of national enmity, as between the workers of the different nations”.¹²⁰ By 1916 things looked a little different, and he noted then “the virtual surrender to German militarism made even by Socialists who profess to repudiate militarist ambitions”.¹²¹ He also observed the racialist tendencies of German socialist scholars such as Woltmann and Reimer, and declared:

The thesis that men exist for the State and not the State for men, the maxim of obedience, the fixed habit of thinking in terms of nationality and not of humanity — all this seems to have been rather accentuated than modified by the Socialist agitation, which had seemed to put Internationalism as its first postulate ... And latterly we find the Socialists themselves in large part permeated by the racial and national ideal, and, when not adopting it, visibly constrained to bow before it.

He concluded:

It would be rash to say that without Socialism Prussianism might have refrained from precipitating war, but Socialism has been part of the inspiration of Armageddon.¹²²

However, even in 1916, he still “recognize[d] in the Socialist ideal the highest ethical and the highest economic conception of social life.”¹²³

Robertson was quite clearly *not* a radical libertarian along the lines of his contemporaries Auberon Herbert, J. H. Levy, and Wordsworth Donisthorpe, or of such modern advocates as Ayn Rand, David Friedman, Murray Rothbard and Robert Nozick. But neither did most of the so-called laissez-faire liberals adhere to such a vigorous libertarianism.¹²⁴ Nevertheless, simply to term him a neo-liberal along the lines of Hobson or Hobhouse seems to me not quite accurate either. He had a far greater commitment to individual liberty as both goal and method than in the case of most of the neo-liberals.¹²⁵ This is reflected in his *The Meaning of Liberalism*, something of a definitive statement of his political philosophy, where he characterised liberalism as fundamentally “a movement of liberation”.¹²⁶ And although he clearly moved from a greater to a less sanguine view of socialism and state interventionism, his thought remained largely coherent and consistent in its *basic* outlook. The preface to his 1892 book *The Fallacy of Saving*¹²⁷ included a long quotation from the neo-liberal Thomas Whitaker advocating that moderate intervention be considered on its merits, case by case. And in 1928 he contributed a Foreword to Whitaker’s own treatise *The Liberal State*, which is a detailed exposition of this approach. He endorsed Whitaker’s critique of authoritarian state socialism, of “the drill-sergeants of the Fabian Society”, and distinguished between

liberal and illiberal elements in socialistic theory. Whitaker's approach, like Robertson's, was a moderate, basically individualist one, with "democratic" and "informed" state actions seen as sometimes necessary to achieve liberal and individualistic ends.¹²⁸ It is surely significant that by 1933 Robertson was referring to his position as one of a "guarded individualism".¹²⁹ A little earlier he had characterised it as endorsing:

[T]he maximum of liberty compatible with the law of reciprocity and the elaboration of that law with constant regard to the potential lawlessness of the spirit of liberty.¹³⁰

VII: Economics

Robertson may claim to be considered as an economic as well as a sociological and political thinker. The bulk of his work in this field is a defence of international free trade, the principle upon which, he declared in 1928, "Liberalism must stake its very existence".¹³¹ His other contributions, however, bear the same ambiguities we have noted in his political thought. Thus, in one of his earliest works, *The Eight Hours Question* (1893), he offered a cogent critique of the campaign for the state enforcement of an eight-hour working day and pointed to "the very real social dangers of an all-round interference with the hours of labour". Rejecting "crude Marxian economics" and the "happy-go-lucky inclination" for state interference, he offered the following assessment of the desirable division between free competition and state regulation:

The instinct of freedom, if often astray, must necessarily be often right. Many people are now proceeding from a perception that *laissez faire* has involved misery to an uncalculating determination to abolish *laissez faire* anyhow. They begin to delight in restriction for restriction's sake, thinking they establish human solidarity by every act of the kind. 'Fabian' writers are found claiming that all individual faculties are the property of society. But that is precisely the doctrine of the most fanatical of the Jacobins of the French Revolution, whose blind coercive action weakened social solidarity instead of increasing it. The evil is that humanitarians so often refuse to think out the real effects of their interferences.¹³³

If this work represents the liberal pole of Robertson's economic thought, *The Fallacy of Saving* of 1892 shows him as a critic of classical economics, of what he called "the great error of the *laissez-faire* school ... that unlimited saving can support unlimited industry". His views on this matter can certainly be termed proto-Keynesian.¹³⁵ But while he argued them more coherently than do other exponents of underconsumptionism and "funny money", they suffer, in my view, from the same fallacies as all such writings, including those of Keynes himself.¹³⁶

The tension between liberalism and interventionism was not resolved in the work of Robertson which comes closest to systematic economics, namely his *The Economics of Progress* of 1918. Here he restated his opposition to class struggle and his support for free trade and a mixed economy liberalism, where elements of nationalisation and "national management" would help eliminate "waste".¹³⁷ He also rejected the theories of the libertarian free banking advocates A. Egmont Hake and O. E. Wesslau (the authors of *Free Trade in Capital* and other works).¹³⁸ Of greatest relevance to socialism is his emphasis on the importance of produc-

tion, for socialists of his time and ours act as if economic affairs are merely a matter of readjusting distribution of some static but adequate supply of resources. Robertson declared:

Only through an increase of real production by economy of labour power of all kinds can labour be really advantaged ... There is no solution for labour on the lines of merely increasing the share without increasing the output. More and more clearly does it appear that Mill was in error in stipulating for improved distribution without increase of production.¹³⁹

A common tactic of anti-liberal scholars at least since the nineteenth century has been to challenge the validity of economic science by reference to the findings of anthropology and ethnology. The alleged existence of so-called non-commercial or non-economic societies and behaviour refutes, it is claimed, the universality of economic laws.¹⁴⁰ In one of his last essays Robertson criticised anthropological investigations of "primitive economics" for being "needlessly anxious to dispute over general conceptions of economic action and causation" and for their common "desire to discredit all 'old' methods in political economy". "Economists", he countered, "have long known well enough that in both primitive and mediaeval life there were social and political and religious forces which created a situation largely different from the modern. It was the modern problem that they were concerned to study."¹⁴¹

VIII: Elements of Philosophy

(i) Natural Rights and the Nature of Emotion

While certainly contributing to the explication of many of the techniques of reason (as in his *Letters on Reasoning*), Robertson did not attempt to explore wider epistemological or metaphysical issues or to construct a scientific ethical system. Nevertheless, in a variety of areas he made a number of extremely suggestive and penetrating observations. Many of these are remarkably prescient of the approaches of liberal rationalist philosophers of today. For instance, he perceived that the source of — or need for — any sensible moral code must be a utilitarian one. But he did not fall into the fallacies of either crude collectivist or amoralist forms of utilitarianism. The "sense of final utility is always the final standard"¹⁴³ but our "utility" can be graded or categorised hierarchically according to our natures. We owe it to ourselves to pursue "the best and the highest".¹⁴⁴

Of interest in this connection is Robertson's standpoint concerning natural rights. While such concepts were being rejected by the mainstream of philosophy and the academic world in general, his admittedly parenthetical digressions resembled the Aristotelian natural rights approach championed by most liberal philosophers today. The term, he said, has "a real content" and "a real use" in indicating the nature of reciprocity.¹⁴⁵ As he explicated:

Morality clearly rests equally on primary self-regarding instinct and on secondary sympathetic instinct ... The very sense of right rises in physical instinct, as we can see in the habits of animals; and this is the scientific justification of the term 'natural right', which covers all social arrangements that can be permanently harmonised with the first biological instinct and its social correlative, and marks off as invalid and deserving of abolition all other so-called rights set up by the legislation of either the majority or the minority.¹⁴⁶

Rights are simply the generalisation of our own individual “self-preservation and self-assertion” to all identical entities; “duty” is simply “reciprocity” in observing these others’ rights.¹⁴⁷ The elaboration of an ethical egoism on Aristotelian, natural rights/natural law lines by such contemporary liberal rationalists as Ayn Rand, Tibor Machan, Eric Mack, Murray Rothbard and others incorporates these insights.¹⁴⁸

Robertson also presented an interpretation of emotion presenting the more detailed expositions of a number of (largely libertarian) contemporary philosophers and psychologists. He thus declared that “not only are ideas and emotions not antagonistic aspects of consciousness, but they are positively inconceivable apart.” Normal emotion, in his view, “belongs to an idea”. “Affect the perception, the idea, alter or modify or supersede that, and the emotion will take care of itself as surely as your shadow.” He thus rejected the traditional assertion of anti-rationalists, conservative or collectivist, that reason is “cold” or “heartless”, and human life of necessity irrational because of its emotional constituents. “The upward path for men lies by the way of knowledge and reason — a path from which emotion is in nowise shut out, but in which it is ever more finely touched to finer issues.” It is a “motor force” which can be directed wisely or foolishly.¹⁵⁰

(ii) Individualism Versus Collectivism

Robertson’s commitment to reason, to individual autonomy and to self-sovereignty dictated his attitude not merely to political collectivism and tyranny but to other anti-individualist forces. He rejected Fascism and nationalism not merely because of their factual claims, but also because of their moral character, their “reduction of the living individual to the status an atom in the non-moral state” and their implication that “men exist for the State and not the State for men”.¹⁵¹ The submission of the individual to “the collective pride and lust-to-power of the tribe”, to the horrors of war and blind nationalism, were “due fruits of the persistence on the mediaeval path of ‘vigorous government’”.¹⁵²

Similar reasoning underlies Robertson’s rejection of sexual collectivism. “The spirit of individual self-assertion”, he said, “is the stuff of spiritual equality” and is as desirable for women as for men. Walt Whitman’s maxim of “Resist much, obey little” was his stated ideal. The relations of dominance and subservience existing between the sexes were blatantly at variance with “the indefeasible rights of personhood as such” and are an inheritance from a time characterised by the “cruel clash of brute force, and ... mindless tyranny of naked strength”.¹⁵³ Needless to say, he rejected claims (curiously reborn in the chauvinism and sexism of the contemporary socialist “feminist” movement) that women have a “mission” to “elevate” and “purify” politics. There was, he said:

no ‘mission’ held in common by women any more than by men. Women oppose each other as men oppose each other. Nor is there any reason to look to them for any special show of political wisdom. When they talk politics now they show much the same habits of mind as men; they fall into the same fallacies; they show the same sympathies, good and bad; the same philanthropy, the same snobberies, the same superstitions; the same insufficiency of logic and science. How should it be otherwise?¹⁵⁴

(iii) Robertson’s Concept of Reason

Joseph McCabe called Robertson “the most considerable figure in British rationalism after the death of Bradlaugh ... the recognized leader of the rationalist movement”.¹⁵⁵ While I am not concerned here with Robertson’s specific critique of Christianity and of religion generally, it is important to understand how he viewed reason, and to appreciate his conviction that the rule of reasoning in every aspect of life and behaviour, individual and social, was beneficent. Robertson lies in the radical rationalist and individualist tradition associated with the Levellers, the eighteenth-century Commonwealthmen, Paine, various natural rights/natural law philosophers, the *fin de siècle* individualists and, of course, modern libertarians such as Rand and Rothbard.

In the view of those committed to this tradition, including Robertson himself, the practice and exercise of reason liberate the individual from the constraints and injustices of society, politics and religion, all of which noticeably rely on anti-rational elements. As he put it:

[R]ationalism, on the side of thought, must forever mean liberty, equality, fraternity, ‘the giving and receiving of reasons’, the complete reciprocity of judgment.¹⁵⁶

Liberalism, it followed, was “a war of reason” and its adherents formed “a party of principle that shall know why it acts, and foresee its way”.¹⁵⁷ He opposed all religions because they rendered a “fictitious account of the world, and of human life” and hence “confuse men’s ideas of right and wrong, and of wisdom and unwisdom”. He explained:

Every error on a great scale is so much hindrance to human happiness ... False beliefs on the great problems of thought are bound to spoil men’s handling of the great problems of action ... I cannot conceive that the progress towards a better life for all mankind ... can ever be made to any great extent while men hold unreasonable and self-contradictory opinions about the government of the universe.¹⁵⁸

Certain eminent thinkers might, he thought, be able to function adequately while adhering to rational thought in their specialist sphere and to nonsense in another; but he felt that, for the majority, “irrational opinions are just so much dead-weight, so much rubbish in the wheels of the thinking machine, wasting its power and throwing it out of gear.”¹⁵⁹ For him, rationalism constituted a moral duty to oneself — the ideal process of “making each day a conscious new beginning in the higher life”. Progress and happiness in individual and social life are related dialectically: there is no social progress and improvement without individual progress and improvement, and vice versa — and such improvement is always an improvement of rationality:

When we see that there is no other salvation for man than that which he can compass by his own thought, we shall surely rise to the height of that great argument, and seek in a new way to make a new world by being perpetually new men.¹⁶⁰

Robertson’s concept of reason has been attacked by Kaczowski as “singularly unphilosophical” and “somewhat untraditional in approach”.¹⁶¹ Robertson in fact sums reason up as “only second thought against first thought: more precisely it is a careful plexus of our modes of knowledge and inference ... not a different function from primary thinking or believing.” In other words:

When ... in speaking of our mental processes, we lay special store by Reason, and claim to make that the guide of life, we are but proposing or claiming to live, in serious things, by our best thought, our checked and tested thought, as distinguished in degree or quality from our untested or ill-tested intuitions, prejudices or proclivities. This holds alike as to our ethics, our aesthetics, our science, our politics, and our philosophy. Our Reason, then, is just the generalisation of 'the best we can do' in the mental life, after taking all the mental pains we can.¹⁶²

Far from being unphilosophical this approach seems to me to be both perceptive and prescient of that of Sir Karl Popper.¹⁶⁷ Indeed, Popper's view of science as proceeding by a process of "conjectures and refutations", based on insight and inspiration, is also presaged by Robertson's view of the role of unsupported ideas as tools of reasoning and discovery.¹⁶⁴

IX: Robertson's Liberalism: A Critical Assessment

I have tried to show that Robertson was a productive and important thinker. That his political philosophy seems a "curious combination of the old and the new liberalism", as Kaczowski puts it,¹⁶⁵ is understandable in the light of the prevailing ignorance of the radical rationalist tradition in classical liberalism. His attempt to treat all subjects with objectivity and rational scrutiny, free from apriorism, dogmatism or fanaticism produced a body of thought that at first glance is not easy to classify. Nevertheless, as I have attempted to show, he adhered to traditional liberal individualist values and concerns, and his thought, unlike that of some so-called neo-liberals, remained quite distinct from socialism.

I have already indicated that my own interest in Robertson is not merely antiquarian. His radical rationalist and liberal approach is undergoing a revival. The issues he discussed are *still*, after all, the disputed political and economic questions of our time. What then can we learn from him?

While I would concur with Professor Andreski's estimate of the favourable balance of "correctness" in his work, it does seem to me that there *were* frequent errors both in his reasoning and — as Andreski himself admits¹⁶⁵ — in his factual evidence. The correction of those errors and a more accurate knowledge of social and economic facts appears to me, however, to lead one inevitably lead one to an appreciation of the libertarian and individualist strands in his thought, and to a rejection of the interventionist and socialist ones. study the details.

For example, it is hard to reconcile Robertson's repeated attacks on capitalist endeavour with his implicitly individualist comments on natural rights and individual assertion. Moreover, production, trade and competition in the market place — i.e. in the absence of coercive force and special privilege — is hardly "rapine" or blind egoism. As he himself put it at one point, the ideal of industry is, after all, "the honest rendering of service for service".¹⁶⁷ It is difficult to grasp the meaning of his view that socialism represented some higher "reciprocity" than that of the free market. Indeed, it is frequently impossible to see, in the light of his observations on the reality of socialist experiments and the views of actual socialists, what socialism meant at all — other than a phrase denoting a desirable state of affairs (and who doesn't desire such a state!). One suspects too that in spite of his attempt to conceive of morality in rational terms, he was still

dominated by the intellectual residue of traditional religious altruism and anti-individualism, with its rejection of individual self-assertion and self-interest.¹⁶⁵

Other ethical incoherencies are present. If one does not accept (as Robertson indeed did not) the labour theory of value, it is hard to see why "unearned increments" of any sort of property — land, capital or personal skills — should be subject to government confiscation, or why some sorts of labour (i.e. factory workers) should be favoured by state action above others (i.e. entrepreneurs).¹⁶⁹

Robertson himself stressed "how important the factual error is" that "knowledge is the soil in which judgment waxes, and ... every process of reasoning tends to be deepened and refined as it is based on a widened knowledge of the sum of things."¹⁷⁰ Among his own serious factual errors are his confident assertions about the superiority of state postal services and telegraphy, refuted by evidence available even at the time. Subsequent experience of these and other nationalised industries throughout the world has only reinforced this evidence.¹⁷¹ Robertson's naive belief that there was little danger that state employees could constitute a powerful interest group and combine against the public interest¹⁷² needs little comment in an age of mass action, strikes and violence by myriad groups of state employees.

It also seems to me that Robertson did not observe the lessons of his own class analysis. He ignored the extent to which the problems and conditions of his time were the result of coercive class legislation, the many interventions both historical and contemporary, from which the market order was still struggling to free itself but for which it was ironically being blamed.¹⁷³

Moreover, in the light of both his contemporary and historical observations, one is amazed at Robertson's failure to realise that an extension of political machinery into social and economic life could only increase conflict and disruption, as different interest groups would struggle for control and for the benefits of interventionism. As he himself wrote after some direct Parliamentary observation of real life, "every operation of State finance in peace is a battle-ground of interests, all represented in the legislature."¹⁷⁴ His own earlier account, in *The Evolution of States*, of the extension of state power in the Roman Empire really should have warned him. He wrote there: "As the scope of the State increased from age to age, the patrician class found ready to its hand means of enrichment which yielded more return with much less trouble than was involved in commerce."¹⁷⁵

Perhaps the major fallacy in Robertson's work is what has subsequently been described by Friedrich Hayek as 'scientism', the belief that scientific progress means an extension of an allegedly 'scientific control' to society as a whole — "the controlled and rational progressive action of the whole community", as Robertson put it.¹⁷⁶ Apart from the fact that such regulation in reality means the regulation of *some* people by *others* — something which Robertson's own methodological individualism should have alerted him to — it ignores the real nature of social existence. For in a market society a 'spontaneous order' emerges from uncoerced individual action. The spontaneous order of (relatively) free market societies has repeatedly shown itself to be more productive and harmonious than any type of imposed order.¹⁷⁷ Robertson occasionally deplored what he called "waste". But this — when it is not merely a derogatory misnomer for consumer decisions which do not meet with someone else's

approval — is merely the price of the process of adjustments that enable the free market to be so incredibly productive.¹⁷⁸

Scientism, then, is a profoundly unscientific doctrine, ignoring the true nature of the entities and processes for which it attempts to prescribe.¹⁷⁹ There is no way that a scientific planner can make “exact calculations” — a phrase Robertson uses in his *The Meaning of Liberalism* — for the economy as a whole. This was pointed out by his contemporary, W. H. Mallock, although only worked out systematically by the “Austrian School” economists of the later twentieth century in the so-called “economic calculation” critique of socialism. The sort of information necessary for any would-be planner is simply not accessible to any one individual. The knowledge required is tacit knowledge, implicit in the multitude of decisions and evaluations of all individuals. Rational economic calculation is hence impossible under central economic planning.¹⁸⁰

As a great exponent of radical rationalism and liberalism, and as a significant sociologist, Robertson deserves to be rescued from an unjustified obscurity. That his thought was not without its ambiguities and errors is to say merely that he was as other men. And, as he put it himself, the only “safeguard against the risks of reasoning is just — more reasoning”.¹⁸¹ I find it hard to imagine that Robertson, were he alive, would not have fulfilled the intellectual duty he proclaimed, that of “perpetually revising and widening [one’s] thought and ... knowledge, so forever reaching towards fresh enlightenment.”¹⁸² I like to think that he would have joined those of us who today champion a more vigorous and systematic rationalist and radical libertarianism, shorn of any fatal residues of statism.

NOTES

1. Kaczkowski, Conrad J., *J. M. Robertson: Freethinker and Radical*, PhD Dissertation, St. Louis University, 1964, p. 583.
2. The fact that many statists and authoritarians might, in the manner of Hegel, label mystical and irrational doctrines as “reason” should not blind one to the real nature of these doctrines. That the varieties of dialectical and Marxist thought also pose as rational or scientific does not mean that irrationalism is merely a feature of ‘right-wing’ versions of collectivism, such as German National Socialism. See Peikoff, Leonard, *The Ominous Parallels*, New York, 1982, pp. 1, 45, 176; *idem*, “Nazism Versus Reason”, *The Objectivist* (New York), October 1969.
3. For an outline of the post-war revival of liberal and libertarian ideas, see “The New Enlightenment”, in Seldon, Arthur, ed., *The ‘New Right’ Enlightenment*, Economic and Literary Books, Sevenoaks, Kent, 1985 and *The Bibliography of Freedom*, Centre for Policy Studies, London, 1980.
4. Andreski, Stanislav, “A Forgotten Genius: John Mackinnon Robertson (1856-1933)”, *Question* (Rationalist Press Association, London.), No. 12; reprinted as “J. M. Robertson: The Historian and the Sociologist”, Wells, G. A., ed., *J. M. Robertson (1856-1933): Liberal, Rationalist, Scholar*, Pemberton Publishing, London, 1987.
5. Kaczkowski, *op cit*, p. 583.
6. Marx himself commented that “no credit is due to me for discovering the existence of classes in modern society or the struggle between them. Long before me bourgeois historians had described the historical development of this class struggle and bourgeois economists the economic anatomy of the classes.” (“Letter to J. Weydemeyer”, Marx, Karl, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, n.d., p. 139) For a recent Marxist view of Scottish historical theory, see Meek, Ronald L., “The Scottish Con-

tribution to Marxist Sociology”, in *idem*, *Economics and Ideology*, Chapman and Hall, London, 1967. For non-Marxist accounts see Forbes, Duncan, “Sceptical Whiggism, Commerce and Liberty”, in Skinner, A. S. and Wilson, T., eds., *Essays on Adam Smith*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1967; Skinner, A. S., “Adam Smith: An Economic Interpretation of History”, *ibid*; Tame, Chris R., “Against the New Mercantilism: The Relevance of Adam Smith”, *Il Politico: The Italian Journal of Political Science* (University of Pavia), 43(4), December 1978.

7. Quoted by Skinner, *op cit*, p. 153.
8. Millar, John, *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks ...*, 3rd edn., 1779, reprinted in full in Lehmann, William C., *John Millar of Glasgow, 1735-1801: His Life and Thought and his Contributions to Sociological Analysis*, Cambridge University Press, 1960.
9. [1823-80]. See especially Rogers, James E. Thorold, *A History of Agriculture and Prices in England, From the Year After the Oxford Parliament (1259) to the Commencement of the Continental War (1793)*, 7 vols, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1866-1902; *A Manual of Political Economy For Schools and Colleges*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1868; 2nd edn 1869; *Historical Gleanings: A Series of Sketches*, First Series, Macmillan, London, 1869; *Cobden and Modern Political Opinion: Essays on Certain Political Topics*, Macmillan, London, 1873; *Social Economy: A Series of Lessons for the Upper Classes of Primary Schools*, London, 1871/without subtitle, Questions of the Day 23, G. P. Putnam’s Sons, New York, rev edn. 1874; *Six Centuries of Work and Wages: The History of English Labour*, Swan Sonnenschein, London, 1884; *The British Citizen: His Rights & Privileges, A Short History*, SPCK, London, 1885; *The Economic Interpretation of History*, T. Fisher Unwin, London, 1888; *The Relation of Economic Science to Social and Political Action*, Swan Sonnenschein, London, 1888. For a brief contemporary evaluation (although in my view a misleading one) see Coates, A. W., “James E. Thorold Rogers”, in Sills, David L., ed., *The International Encyclopaedia of Social Science*, Macmillan, London, 1968, pp. 542-543. Also see Kadish, Alon (1989), “The Righteous Wrath of James E. Thorold Rogers”, *idem*, *Historians, Economists and Economic History*, Routledge, London, 1989.

The same pattern of development occurred in French liberalism. Much of the work of such leading classical economists as Frederic Bastiat and Destut de Tracy was class analysis rather than economics proper. See Bastiat, Frederic, *Harmonies of Political Economy*, Edinburgh, nd; *idem*, *Selected Essays on Political Economy*, D. Van Nostrand, Princeton, New Jersey, 1964/Foundation for Economic Education, Irvington on Hudson, New York, 1968; Tracy, Destut de, *A Treatise on Political Economy ...*, Joseph Milligan, Georgetown, 1817; reprinted under the title *Psychology of Political Science, With Special Consideration of the Political Acumen of Destut de Tracy*, (Dorsey, John M., ed.), Centre for Heath Education, Detroit, 1973.

Another major French exponent of liberal class analysis was Charles Comte, whose *Traite de Legislation* (1826) Robertson called “excellent” in *Buckle and His Critics: A Study in Sociology*, Swan Sonnenschein, London, 1895, p. 8. He referred to it frequently and believed that it was a major influence on Buckle — see *ibid.*, p. 444). Charles Comte worked closely with another leading liberal, Charles Dunoyer, in elaborating liberal class theory. In their doctrine of “industrialism”, the real class conflict was seen as being between all *productive* interests (businessmen, bankers, artisans etc) and those who used *predation* and state power to enrich themselves. Typically, neither Comte nor Dunoyer has been translated into English, and it was Auguste Comte (no relation) and Saint-Simon — with whom they were for a time associated — who rose to fame partly on a statist distortion of their views. For accounts of their work see Liggio, Leonard P., “Charles Dunoyer and French Classical Liberalism”, *The Journal of Libertarian Studies* (New York), 1(3), Summer 1977; Raico,

- Ralph, "Classical Liberal Exploitation Theory: A Comment on Professor Ligio's Paper", *The Journal of Libertarian Studies*, 1(3), Summer 1977; Hart, David, M., "Gustave de Molinari and the Anti-Statist Liberal Tradition, Part 1", *The Journal of Libertarian Studies*, 5(3), Summer 1981. The only present-day sociologist to acknowledge Charles Comte's importance is Stanislav Andreski; see his *The African Predicament: A Study in the Pathology of Modernization*, Michael Joseph, London/Atherton Press, New York, 1968, p. 33; *idem*, *Parasitism and Subversion: The Case of Latin America*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1966/Schocken Books, New York, 1969, pp. 12-13; and *idem*, *Elements of Comparative Sociology*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1964, pp. 246-7.
10. See his references to Millar and to Adam Ferguson (another Scottish Enlightenment thinker) in *Voltaire, Life-Stories of Famous Men*, Watts, London, 1922, p. 87 and *Courses of Study*, Watts, London, 1904; 2nd edn 1908, 3rd edn 1932, p. 348. He also refers to "a whole school of sociology in Scotland. Hume, Adam Smith, Ferguson, Millar, Dunbar, Kames are the variously serviceable beginners in Britain of the study of human evolution which was taken up in the next age by Comte, Maine and Spencer, all of whom might have been better sociologists had they duly studied their predecessors." (*Bolingbroke and Walpole*, T. Fisher Unwin, London, 1919, p. 254)
 11. *A Short History of Christianity*, Watts, London, 1902; 2nd edn 1913; Thinkers Library No. 24, 3rd edn, 1931, p. 339.
 12. *Buckle and His Critics*, *op cit*.
 13. "Introduction", Buckle, H. T., *Introduction to the History of Civilization in England*, George Routledge, London, 1904.
 14. *An Introduction to English Politics*, Grant Richards, London, 1900, pp. x-xi, 67.
 15. *The Evolution of States: An Introduction to English Politics*, Watts, London, 1912, pp. vii-viii; "Introduction" to *Buckle*, *op cit*, p. ix. The former work was a much expanded edition of his *Introduction to English Politics*.
 16. *The Evolution of States*, *op cit*, p. viii.
 17. *Ibid.*, pp., 2f.
 18. *Ibid.*, p. 70. He added, as further explanation, that since men are "proximately ruled by their passions or emotions", the supremacy of the economic factor "consists in its being, for the majority, the most permanent director or stimulant of feeling", pp. 71-2. Elsewhere he explicated that "it will not do to say that the method of 'economic determinism', as it is called, is the whole of sociological interpretation. No one key will open all the locks of the human heart. The trouble about all methods is that they tend to make methodists. But if you are the master of your method, and not its servant, it may avail you for much." (*Essays in Ethics*, 1903, p. 58) For other applications by Robertson of his method see, for example, *Bolingbroke and Walpole*, *op cit*, pp. 21, 23 (on the complexity of motivation and conflict in religious development) and *A History of Freethought in the Nineteenth Century*, Watts, 2 vols, Watts, London, 2 vols, 1929, p. 365 (on the economic basis of priestly power).
 19. *The Evolution of States*, *op cit*, p. ix.
 20. *Ibid.*, p. 63. See also his comments on psychological factors in *Buckle and His Critics*, *op cit*, pp. 260, 290. He observes in the same book that one has to recognise that "there are other forms of determinism than the economic, though the economic may be classed as one of the most fundamental", p. 496.
 21. *The Evolution of States*, *op cit*, p. 29.
 22. *Ibid.*, p. 1.
 23. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
 24. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
 25. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
 26. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
 27. *Ibid.*, p. 405.
 28. *Buckle and His Critics*, *op cit*, pp. 433-4.
 29. *An Introduction to English Politics*, *op cit*, pp. x-xi.
 30. *A History of Freethought in the Nineteenth Century*, *op cit*, p. 343.
 31. *Ibid.*, p. 346.
 32. *Ibid.*, p. 346.
 33. *Buckle and His Critics*, *op cit*, pp. 8, 432-3, 496.
 34. *The Evolution of States*, *op cit*, p. 179.
 35. "Free Trade", Cecil, Rt. Hon. Lord Robert et al, *Essays in Liberalism: Being the Lectures Which Were Delivered at the Liberal Summer School at Oxford, 1923*, W. Collins Son, London, 1922/Books for Libraries, Freeport, Washington, 1968, pp. 74-91, p. 91. For longer expositions of Robertson's free trade views see: *The Case for Free Trade*, A. and H. Bradlaugh Bonner, London, 1904; *Full Verbatim Report of the Fiscal Debate, Protection v. Free Trade*, Mr. Samuel Storey v. Mr. J. M. Robertson ..., Andrew Reid, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, 1905; *Trade and Tariffs*, Adam and Charles Black, London, 1908; *The Great Question: Free Trade or Tariff Reform?*, Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons, London, 1909; *The Tariff Swindle*, Cobden Club/Cassell, London, 1911 1911; *The Collapse of 'Tariff Reform': Mr. Chamberlain's Case Exposed*, Cobden Club/Cassell and Co., London, 1911; *The New Tariffism*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1918; *Free Trade*, J. M. Dent, London, 1919; *The Battle for Free Trade*, Cobden Club/Cassell, London, 1923; *The Political Economy of Free Trade*, P. S. King, London, 1928; *Fiscal Fraud and Folly: A Study of the Propaganda of 'Empire Free Trade' and Other Programmes*, British Periodicals, London, nd (1913).
 36. *Fiscal Fraud and Folly*, *op cit*, pp. 64-68.
 37. *Ibid.*, p. 110. And see also *The Meaning of Liberalism*, Methuen, London, 1912; 2nd edn. 1925, p. 99.
 38. "The Sociology of Race", *The Sociological Review*, 4, 1911, p. 130.
 39. *The Germans*, Williams and Norgate, London, 1916, p. 67.
 40. *The Saxon and the Celt: A Study in Sociology*, University Press, London, 1897.
 41. *Buckle and His Critics*, *op cit*, pp. 121, 150, 418, 454.
 42. *The Meaning of Liberalism*, *op cit*, p. 226.
 43. Kaczkowski, *op cit*, p. 226.
 44. Silberner, Edmund, *The Problem of War in Nineteenth Century Economic Thought*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1957/Garland Library of War and Peace, Garland Publishing, New York, 1972.
 45. Hirst, Francis W., ed., *Free Trade and Other Fundamental Doctrines of the Manchester School, Set Forth in Selections From the Speeches and Writings of Its Founders and Followers*, Harper and Brothers, London, 1903/Augustus M. Kelley, New York, 1968.
 46. *Buckle and His Critics*, *op cit*, p. 275.
 47. Socialist scholars have succeeded in creating an image of liberalism generally and Spencerean "Social Darwinism" in particular as a system endorsing "nature red in tooth and claw", and hence endorsing militarism, imperialism, and aggressive nationalism. Nothing could be further from the truth. A key distinction in Spencer's sociology — continuing earlier themes of liberal thought — is between the "militant" society of the past and the new order of productive and peaceful capitalist industrialism. For a brief example see his "Re-Barbarisation", *Facts and Fancies*, Williams and Norgate, London, 1907, pp. 122-133, also reprinted in Andreski, Stanislav, *Herbert Spencer: Structure, Function and Evolution*, Michael Joseph, London, 1971, pp. 207-212. Alfred W. Tillet, an ardent Spencer disciple, wrote a work specifically on this topic, *Militancy Versus Civilisation: An Introduction to, and Epitome of, the Teachings of Herbert Spencer Concerning Permanent*

- Peace as the First Condition of Progress*, P. S. King, London, 1915. A modern discussion of Spencer's thought on this issue can be found in Peel, J. Y. D., "Militancy and Industrialism", *idem*, *Herbert Spencer: The Evolution of His Thought*, Heinemann, London, 1971, pp. 192-223. Andreski also discusses the relevance of Spencer's distinctions in his *Military Organisation and Society*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1984.
- The great Belgium liberal Molinari's views are described in Hart, David "Gustav de Molinari and the Anti-Statist Liberal Tradition", *Journal of Libertarian Studies*, 2 parts, V(3), Summer 1981, pp. 263-290; V(4), Fall 1981, pp. 399-434; VI(1), Winter 1982, pp. 83-104.
- Only two of the many works of French Spencerean Jacques Novicow (1849-1912) have been published in English: *Mecanisme et Limites de L'Association Humaine*, Paris, 1912, as "The Mechanism and Limits of Human Association: The Foundations of a Sociology of Peace", *American Journal of Sociology*, XXIII(3), November 1917 and *La Guerre et ses Pretendus Bienfaits*, 1894, as *War and Its Alleged Benefits*, William Heinemann, London, 1912. Amongst his major French works are: *La Politique Internationale*, Paris, 1886; *Les Luttes Contra Societes Humaines*, Paris, 1893; *Les Luttes Entre Societes Humaines et Leurs Phases Successives*, 1893; *La Critique du Darwinisme Social*, Paris, 1910.
48. Angels most famous and definitive statement of his views can be found, of course, in his *The Great Illusion: The Relation of Military Power to National Advantage*, William Heinemann, London, 1909/Putnam, New York, 1911, although he wrote other voluminous (and somewhat repetitive) works. A good analysis and bibliography can be found in Miller, J. D. B., *Norman Angell and the Futility of War: Peace and the Public Mind*, Macmillan, London, 1986.
 49. "Superstitions of Militarism", *idem et al*, *Essays Towards Peace*, Rationalist Peace Society/Watts, London, 1913.
 50. Kaczkowski, *op cit*, pp. 440, 495-496.
 51. With Bonner, Hypatia Bradlaugh, "The Rationalist Peace Society: A Letter to Members and Friends", *The Literary Guide*, New Series, No. 236, 1 February, 1916, p. 28. And see also Bonner, Arthur, and Bonner, Charles Bradlaugh, *Hypatia Bradlaugh Bonner: The Story of Her Life*, London, 1942, pp. 90-97 on the Rationalist Peace Society.
 52. Kaczkowski, *op cit*, pp. 407-8.
 53. "Empire: A Sociological Outline", *The Reformer*, 7, New Series 5, No. 49, 15 January 1903, pp. 15, 20.
 54. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
 55. "Is There a Liberal Jingoism", *The Reformer*, 3, New Series 1, No. 4, 15 April 1899, pp. 202.
 56. *Patriotism and Empire*, Grant Richardson, London, 1899; 3rd edn, 1900, pp. 140-1, 178, 183, 187.
 57. "Sociological Notes", *The Reformer*, 2, New Series 1, No. 1, 15 January 1899. On methodological individualism, see Mises, Ludwig von, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics*, William Hodge, London, 1949. pp. 41-4, and the essays pro and con in O'Neill, John, ed., *Modes of Individualism and Collectivism*, Heinemann Educational Books, London, 1973, especially those by Friedrich Hayek and J. W. N. Watkins.
 58. Page, Martin, *Britain's Unknown Genius: An Introduction to the Life-Work of John Mackinnon Robertson*, South Place Ethical Society, London, 1984, p. 18.
 59. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 55.
 60. Hobson, John A., *Confessions of an Economic Heretic*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1938, p. 51.
 61. Kaczkowski, *op cit*, pp. 60-61, 68.
 62. "Socialism and Women", *The Reformer*, 5, New Series 3, No. 36, 15 December 1901.
 63. "Memoir", Bradlaugh, Charles, *Labour and Law*, R. Forder, London, 1891/Augustus M. Kelley, New York, 1972, p. lxi.
 64. "Cobden Club Ethics", *The National Reformer*, New Series, 52, No. 11, 9 September 1888.
 65. "Freethought in Japan", *The Reformer*, New Series 3, 5, No. 32, 15 August 1901.
 66. *Modern Humanists: Sociological Studies of Carlyle, Mill, Emerson, Arnold, Ruskin and Spencer. With an Epilogue on Social Reconstruction*, Swan Sonnenschein, London/Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1891/Kennikat Press, Port Washington, 1968, p. 190.
 67. *Explorations*, Rationalist Press Association, Watts, London, nd (1923), p. 137.
 68. "Sociological Notes", *op cit*, p. 42.
 69. *Modern Humanists*, *op cit*, p. 51.
 70. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
 71. *Essays in Ethics*, *op cit*, p. 213.
 72. *Modern Humanists*, *op cit*, p. 245.
 73. *The Meaning of Liberalism*, *op cit*, p. 39.
 74. Hayek, Friedrich, *The Counter-Revolution of Science: Studies on the Abuse of Reason*, Free Press, Glencoe, Illinois, 1952. And see my critical comments in this essay, Section 9, above.
 75. *Buckle and His Critics*, *op cit*, pp. 504-13.
 76. In *Modern Humanists*, *op cit*, pp. 262, 266.
 77. *Ibid.*, p. 234.
 78. "Free Life", *The National Reformer*, New Series, 57, No. 24, 14 June 1891. Although it should also be noted that in a response to a further essay by Herbert, on religion — "Assuming the Foundations", *The Nineteenth Century*, September 1901 — Robertson declared Herbert to be "one of the most honourable and honest of controversialists"; (15 October 1901), "Egotism Versus Atheism", *The Free Review*, ns, No. 34, p. 589.
 79. Herbert's major works were: *A Politician In Trouble About His Soul*, Chapman and Hall, London, 1884; *The Right and Wrong of Compulsion by the State: A Statement of the Moral Principles of the Party of Individual Liberty, and the Political Measures Founded Upon Them*, Anti-Force paper No. 2, Williams and Norgate, London, 1885; *The Voluntarist Creed, ... and A Plea for Voluntarism*, W. J. Simpson, Oxford University Press, 1908; ed., *The Sacrifice of Education to Examination: Letters From All Sorts and Conditions of Men*, Williams and Norgate, London, 1889; and Wager, Harold, *Bad Air and Bad Health*, Williams and Norgate, London, 1894; and Levy, J. H., *Taxation and Anarchism: A Discussion Between the Hon. Auberon Herbert and J. H. Levy*, Personal Rights Association, London, 1912. A recent anthology of his work has been edited by Eric Mack: *The Right and Wrong of Compulsion By the State, and Other Essays* (Mack, Eric, ed.), Liberty Press/Liberty Classics, Indianapolis, 1978. There is a rather inadequate biography by S. Hutchinson Harris, *Auberon Herbert: Crusader For Liberty*, London, 1943, and see my own brief essay, "Auberon Herbert", *Free Life: A Journal of Classical Liberal and Libertarian Thought* (Libertarian Alliance, London), 1(2), Spring 1980.
 80. Robertson characterised Levy's work as of "exceptional competence, his knowledge being as exact as his method, and his style of a high finish" and cited Professor Bain's praise of Levy's "acute and brilliant dialectic", *A History of Free-thought in the Nineteenth Century*, *op cit*, p. 300.
 81. Levy [1838-1913] contributed to *The Reformer* under the pen-name 'D', for example, in the article "Anarchists and Socialists", 2(6), February 5, 1898. Examples of his contributions to *The National Reformer* are: "Anarchists and Socialists", *The National Reformer*, LI(6), 5 February 1888, pp. 1-2 and "The Liberty and Property Defence League", 51(14), April 1, 1888, pp. 210-11. His major works were: (26 August 1887), "Anarchy or Individualism", *Jus*, p. 10; (1873), "His Work in Philosophy", Herbert Spencer et al, *John Stuart Mill: His Life and Works*, Henry Holt, London, pp. 55-61; *The Outcome of Individualism*, P. S. King, London, 1890; 3rd edn, Free-

- thought Publishing, London, 1892/*Short Studies in Economic Subjects*, Personal Rights Series No. 1, Personal Rights Association, P. S. King, London, 1903; *The Remuneration of Labour*, Personal Rights Association, London, 1894; *Socialism and Individualism*, Personal Rights Association, London, 1904; ed., *A Symposium on Value*, P. S. King, London, 1895; ed., *The Necessity For Criminal Appeal, as Illustrated by the Maybrick Case and the Jurisprudence of Various Countries*, P. S. King, London, 1899; ed., *Transactions of the National Liberal Club Political Economy Circle*, Vol. I, P. S. King, London, 1891; ed., *Transactions of the National Liberal Club Political and Economic Circle*, Vol. III, P. S. King, London, 1901; ed., *The Fiscal Question in Great Britain*, National Liberal Club Political and Economic Circle, Transactions, V(1), P. S. King, London, 1904.
82. Donisthorpe, Wordsworth, "Freedom and Marriage", *The National Reformer*, 59(1), 3 January 1892.
83. His major works are: *The Claims of Labour; or Serfdom, Wagedom and Freedom*, Tinsley, London, 1880; *Socialism and Individualism*, London, 1883; *Labour Capitalization*, G. Harmsworth/Liberty and Property Defence League, London, 1887; *Love and Law: An Essay on Marriage*, W. Reeves, London, nd (1893/1894); *Law in a Free State*, Macmillan, London, 1895; *Individualism: A System of Politics*, Macmillan, London, 1889; *Principles of Plutology*, Williams and Norgate, London, 1876.
84. Among the essays of anarchist tendency (or discussing this tendency) published by Robertson as editor of *The Free Review* were those by the following writers: J. T. Hull and Frederick Rockell, 9, October 1, 1897 and February 1, 1898; Orford Northcote, 1(7), January 1, 1897; William Platt, 10, April 1, 1898; and R. de Villiers, 10, May 1, 1898. John Armsden advocated unregulated private enterprise banking in Vol. 2, August 1, 1894 and argued his views with Robertson in letters in Vol. 4, September 1, 1895. There were also papers by F. H. Perry Coste, J. Greeve Fisher (a vigorous advocate of hard money and free banking), Thomas Common (some of these appearing in the *National Reformer*). Good accounts of these authors and the broader classical liberal, libertarian and individualist anarchist movement of the time can be found in: Watner, Carl, "The English Individualists as They Appear in 'Liberty'", *The Journal of Libertarian Studies*, 6(1), Winter 1982, pp. 59-82, reprinted in Coughlin, Michael E., Hamilton, Charles and Sullivan, Mark A., eds., *Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of 'Liberty'*, M. E. Coughlin and M. Sullivan, St. Paul, Minnesota, 1987; Soldon, Norbert C., *Laissez Faire on the Defensive: The Story of the Liberty and Property Defense League, 1882-1914*, PhD dissertation, University of Delaware, 1969; Bristow, Edward Jay, *The Defence of Liberty and Property in Britain, 1880-1914*, PhD dissertation, Yale University, 1970.
85. "Free Life", *op cit*, p. 370.
86. Kaczkowski, *op cit*, p. 24.
87. "Herbert Spencer", in *Explorations*, *op cit*, p. 115.
88. "Herbert Spencer", in *Modern Humanists*, *op cit*, pp. 234, 240.
89. "John Stuart Mill", *ibid.*, pp. 110-111.
90. "Mandeville's 'Fable of the Bees'", *The Literary Guide*, New Series, No. 346, April 1925, p. 73.
91. *Bolingbroke and Walpole*, *op cit*, p. 234.
92. *The Meaning of Liberalism*, *op cit*, p. 64; *Buckle and His Critics*, *op cit*, p. 377.
93. *Fiscal Fraud and Folly*, *op cit*, p. 134.
94. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
95. *Ibid.*, pp. 146-7.
96. *Ibid.*, p. 132.
97. *Ibid.*, pp. 136, 137.
98. *The Decadence: An Excerpt from 'A History of the Triumph and the Decay of England'*. *Dateable 1949*, Watts, London, 1929, pp. 44, 107.
99. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
100. *Ibid.*, pp. 57-8.
101. *Ibid.*, pp. 46-7, 58.
102. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
103. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
104. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
105. *Ibid.*, pp. 34-5, 49.
106. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
107. *Ibid.*, pp. 51, 48.
108. *The Dynamics of Religion: An Essay in English Culture History*, Watts, London, 1897; 2nd edn, 1926, p. 293. And see also his "Notes and Queries About 'Scientific Humanism'", *The Literary Guide*, New Series, No. 424, October 1932.
109. *The Dynamics of Religion*, *op cit*, p. ix.
110. "Notes and Queries", *op cit*, pp. 5-8.
111. "Democracy and Religion", *The Literary Guide*, New Series, No. 427, p. 3.
112. "Utopia", *Spoken Essays*, Watts, London, 1925, pp. 7, 15.
113. *Mr. Lloyd George and Liberalism*, Chapman and Dodd, London, 1923, pp. 30-31, 36.
114. *Charles Bradlaugh*, *Life-Stories of Famous Men*, Watts, London, 1920, p. 104.
115. "An Account of His Parliamentary Struggle, Politics and Teachings", Bonner, Hypatia Bradlaugh, *Charles Bradlaugh: A Record of His Life and Work*, T. Fisher Unwin, London, 7th edn, 1908, p. 198.
116. *Mr. Lloyd George and Liberalism*, *op cit*, pp. 31-33, 95.
117. *The Meaning of Liberalism*, *op cit*, pp. 180-1.
118. *The Economics of Progress*, T. Fisher Unwin, London, 1918, p. 92.
119. *Essays in Sociology*, Vol. 1, A. and H. Bradlaugh Bonner, London, 1904, pp. 35, i, 13-14.
120. *The Blood Tax*, *Papers for the People*, No. 4, Truth Seeker, Bradford, nd (c1890s), p. 6.
121. *War and Civilisation: An Open Letter to a Swedish Professor [Dr. Gustaf F. Steffen]*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1916; 2nd edn 1917, p. 55.
122. *The Germans*, *op cit*, pp. 43, 244-5.
123. *War and Civilisation*, *op cit*, p. 55.
124. Robbins, Lionel, *The Theory of Economic Policy in English Classical Political Economy*, Macmillan, London, 1952.
125. On neo-liberalism see Clarke, Peter, *Liberals and Social Democrats*, Cambridge University Press, 1978; Emy, H. V., *Liberals, Radicals and Social Politics, 1892-1924*, Cambridge University Press, 1973; Freedon, Michael. S., *The New Liberalism*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1978; Harvie, Christopher, *The Lights of Liberalism: University Liberals and the Challenge of Democracy, 1860-66*, Allan Lane, London, 1976.
126. *The Meaning of Liberalism*, *op cit*, pp. 27-28.
127. *The Fallacy of Saving: A Study in Economics*, Swan Sonnenschein, London/Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1892.
128. "Foreword", Whittaker, Thomas, *The Liberal State: An Essay in Political Philosophy*, Watts, London, 1907; 2nd edn, 1928. Elsewhere Whittaker himself clearly states his support for liberty both as "an end in itself" and as a precondition for the attainment of other desirable ends. See Whittaker, Thomas, "The Need of Liberty", *The Literary Guide*, New Series, No. 316, October 1922, pp. 155-6. See also his "Sociolatry", *Rationalist Annual*, 1929, pp. 75-80.
129. "Contaminated Ideals", *The Literary Guide*, New Series, No. 439, January 1933, p. 5.

130. *A Short History of Morals*, Watts, London, 1920, p. 430.
131. Kaczkowski, *op cit*, p. 575.
132. *The Eight Hours Question: A Study in Economics*, Swan Sonnenschein, London/Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1893.
133. *Ibid.*, pp. 1189, 150.
134. *The Fallacy of Saving*, *op cit*.
135. Andreski, "A Forgotten Genius", *op cit*, p. 68.
136. Keynes mentions Robertson's *The Fallacy of Saving* in a footnote in his *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, Macmillan, London, 1936, p. 365). For a detailed account of his indebtedness to Robertson, Page, Martin, *Britain's Unknown Genius*, *op cit*, pp. 26-7. For thorough demolitions of Keynes and other similar inflationist doctrines, see Hazlitt, Henry, *The Failure of the "New Economics"*, D. Van Nostrand, Princeton, New Jersey, 1959/Arlington House, New Rochelle, New York, 1973/University Press of America, Lanham, Maryland, 1983; ed., *The Critics of Keynesian Economics*, D. Van Nostrand, Princeton, New Jersey, 1960/Arlington House, New Rochelle, New York, 1977; 2nd edn, 1979/University Press of America, Lanham, Maryland, 1983.
137. *The Economics of Progress*, *op cit*, p. 98.
138. See Hake, A. Egmont and Wesslau, O. E., *Free Trade in Capital; or, Free Competition in the Supply of Capital to Labour, and Its Bearings on the Political and Social Questions of the Day*, Remington, London, 1890 and *The Coming Individualism*, Archibald Constable, London, 1895/Macmillan, New York, 1896. By himself Hake was also the author of *Regeneration: A Reply to Max Nordau*, Archibald Constable, London, 1895 and *The Unemployed Problem Solved*, Hatchards, London, 1888.
139. *The Economics of Progress*, *op cit*, pp. 111-112, 114, 180.
140. Significant and representative exponents of such "anti-economic" anthropology are Polanyi, Karl, et al., *Trade and Market in the Early Empires*, New York, 1957 and Marshall D. Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*, Aldine-Atherton, Chicago, 1972/Tavistock Press, London, 1974; Helm, June et al, eds., *Essays in Economic Anthropology: Delivered in the Memory of Karl Polanyi*, American Ethnological Society, Seattle, 1965/AMS Press, New York, 1968. For a brief critique, see Mises, Ludwig von, *Epistemological Problems of Economics* [1933 in German], D. Van Nostrand, Princeton, New Jersey, 1960/New York University Press and Institute for Humane Studies, Menlo Park, California, 1981, pp. 58-66. For other criticisms see Goodfellow, D. M., *Principles of Economic Sociology: The Economics of Primitive Life as Illustrated from the Bantu Peoples of South and East Africa*, George Routledge and Sons, London, 1939; Schneider, Harold K., *Economic Man: The Anthropology of Economics*, The Free Press/Macmillan, New York, 1974; Firth, Raymond, "Capital, Saving and Credit in Peasant Societies: A Viewpoint from Economic Anthropology", Firth, Raymond and Yamey, Basil S., eds., *Capital, Saving and Credit in Peasant Societies: Studies From Asia, Oceania, the Caribbean and American Areas*, George Allen and Unwin, London, pp. 15-34; Yamey, Basil S., "The Study of Peasant Economic Systems: Some Concluding Comments and Questions", *ibid.*, pp. 376-386.
141. "Rational Anthropology", *The Literary Guide*, New Series, No. 405, March 1930, p. 157.
142. *Letters on Reasoning*, Watts, London, 1902; 2nd edn, 1905; Abridged edn, Thinkers Library No. 50, nd (1935?).
143. *Essays in Ethics*, *op cit*, pp. 52f.
144. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
145. "The History of Free Speech", *The Literary Guide*, New Series, No. 207, 1 September 1913, p. 134.
146. *Essays in Ethics*, *op cit*, p. 91.
147. *Ibid.*, p. 204.
148. See Rand, Ayn, *The Virtue of Selfishness: A New Concept of Egoism*, New American Library, New York, 1965; Machan, Tibor, *Human Rights and Human Liberties*, Nelson-Hall, Chicago, 1975; *idem*, "Recent Work in Ethical Egoism", *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 16(1), January 1979; *idem*, "Some Recent Work in Human Rights Theory", *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 17(2), April 1980; "A Reconsideration of Natural Rights Theory", *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 19(1), January 1982; Mack, Eric "How to Derive Ethical Egoism", *The Personalist* (School of Philosophy, University of Southern California), 52(4), Autumn 1971; *idem*, "Egoism and Rights", *The Personalist*, Winter 1973.
149. *Essays in Ethics*, *op cit*, pp. 186, 190, 196.
150. *Ibid.*, p. 190. This view of the nature of emotions is thus explored in far greater detail by Branden, Nathaniel, *The Psychology of Self Esteem*, Nash Publishing, Los Angeles, 1969/Bantam Books, New York, 1971, pp. 64-94 and Breggin, Peter R., *The Psychology of Freedom: Liberty and Love as a Way of Life*, Prometheus Books, Buffalo, New York, 1980, pp. 43-52. Such contemporary writers frequently draw on the seminal work of the Thomistic philosopher Magda Arnold, in her *Emotion and Personality*, 2 vols., Columbia University Press, 1960; Vol. 1: Psychological Aspects; Vol. 2: Neurological and Physiological Aspects.
151. *The Germans*, *op cit*, pp. 205, 244.
152. *Ibid.*, pp. 205, 251
153. *Essays in Ethics*, *op cit*, pp. 155, 167-8.
154. *The Vote for Women*, Papers for the People, No. 7, Truth Seeker, Bradford, nd (c1890s), p. 8.
155. Kaczkowski, *op cit*, p. 583.
156. *Rationalism*, Constable, London, 1912, p. 81.
157. *Godism*, Papers for the People, No. 3, Truth Seeker, Bradford, nd (c1890s), p. 2.
158. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
159. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
160. *Essays in Ethics*, *op cit*, p. 53.
161. Kaczkowski, *op cit*, pp. 76-7.
162. *Spoken Essays*, *op cit*, p. 187. And also see Robertson's two different essays both entitled "The Meaning of Reason", *The Literary Guide*, New Series, No. 356, February 1926 and No. 385, July 1928, as well as *Essays Towards a Critical Method*, T. Fisher Unwin, London, 1889, p. 53.
163. See especially Popper, Karl, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, Hutchinson, London, 1959/Harper and Row, New York, 1968; *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Discovery*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1963, 1969/Basic Books, New York, 1963/Harper and Row, New York, 1968; *Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1972/4th edn., Routledge, London, 1992; *Unended Quest: An Intellectual Autobiography*, Open Court, LaSalle, Illinois/Fontana/Collins, London, 1976/Routledge, London, 1992.
164. See "Bacon", *Pioneer Humanists*, Watts, London, 1907, p. 92. Robertson's refutation of attempts to deny objective reality and causality in *Explorations*, *op cit*, pp. 157-8 and his critique of logomachy and the "artificial maze of phrases" in *Letters on Reasoning*, *op cit*, p. 124 are also similar to the approach of Ayn Rand and other contemporary libertarian exponents of methodological individualism.
165. Kaczkowski, *op cit*, p. 602.
166. Andreski, *op cit*, p. ?
167. *Patriotism and Empire*, *op cit*, pp. 170-1.
168. In *The Meaning of Liberalism*, *op cit*, he seems to believe that "the highest of social ideals" is ultimately that of a pure altruism, of the form: "From each according to his abilities; to each according to his needs", p. 153. But this represents the ultimate in *parasitism* rather than reciprocity! See Rand, Ayn, *For the New Intellectual*, New American Library, New York, 1963, especially pp. 111-113, for a devastating refutation of this alleged moral ideal.

169. In *Saving and Waste*, Papers for the People, No. 5, Truth Seeker, Bradford, nd (1896) Robertson argued that the entrepreneur fulfilled no productive role, whereas in *The Meaning of Liberalism*, *op cit*, in 1912 he said that the entrepreneur was “as necessary a factor in industry as the ‘hands’”, p. 248.
170. *Letters on Reasoning*, *op cit*, pp. 21, 46.
171. In *Railway Nationalisation*, Papers for the People, No. 11, Truth Seeker, Bradford, nd (c1890s), Robertson “felt that” the Post Office was run better by the state than by private enterprise, p. 3. But in both Britain and America it was well documented even in his time that the Post Office had a horrendous record of bad service and obstinate resistance to progress. Cheaper and more efficient private carriers were repeatedly legislated out of existence. Thus see White, James Dundas, *Economic Ideals*, Francis Riddell Henderson, London, 1903, pp. 50-61; Spencer, Herbert, *Social Statics: The Conditions Essential to Human Happiness Specified, & the First of Them Developed*, Williams and Norgate, London, 1851/D. Appleton, New York, 1851/Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, New York, 1954/Augustus M. Kelley, New York, 1969, pp. 360-2; Millar, Frederick, “The Evils of State Trading as Illustrated by the Post Office”, Mackay, Thomas, ed., *A Plea for Liberty*, D. Appleton, New York, 1891/Liberty Classics, Liberty Press, Indianapolis, 1981, pp. 305-325; Robertson could have consulted Porter, Robert P., *The Dangers of Municipal Trading*, George Routledge and Sons, London, 1907, especially pp. 232-257 on telephones and pp. 285-309 on railways. Robertson’s views on the desirability of railway nationalisation find ample refutation in Cox, Harold, *The Failure of State Railways*, Longmans, Green, London, 1924. Many general critiques of socialism were also available to him, such as: Richter, Eugen, Richter, Eugene, *Profiles of the Socialistic Future* (1893), Swan Sonnenschein, London, 3rd edn 1907/Jarrols, London, 1925; Strachey, J. St. Loe, *The Problems and Perils of Socialism: Letters to a Working Man*, Macmillan, London, 1908; and O’Brian, M. D., *Socialism Tested By Facts, Being An Account of Certain Experimental Attempts to Carry Out Socialistic Principles, and Containing a Criticism of ‘Looking Backward’ and the ‘Fabian Essays’*, Liberty and Property Defence League, London, 1892 amongst many others.
172. *Railway Nationalisation*, *op cit*, p. 6.
173. This was a major concern of Thorold Rogers’ work. He attempted to “trace the historical causes of this painful spectacle [ie., contemporary economic problems] ... to discover whether or not persistent wrong doing has not been the dominant cause of English pauperism.” (*The Economic Interpretation of History*, *op cit*, p. vii) That “wrong doing”, in his view, was centuries of state interventionism in behalf of special privilege. This was also the burden of much of the work of such classical liberals as William Graham Sumner in America and Vilfredo Pareto in Italy, which was accessible to Robertson.
174. *The Economics of Progress*, *op cit*, p. 181.
175. *The Evolution of States*, *op cit*, p. 77. Instead of realising the force of this comment, Robertson felt instead that the valid laissez-faire objections to mediaevalist and mercantilist interventionism, which was “usually motivated by class interest and operated to that end”, substantially disappeared “before a system of state interference democratically motivated and scientifically planned with an eye not to the enrichment of classes but to the well-being of the entire community”, *The Meaning of Liberalism*, *op cit*, p. 55. Although he still conceded (citing some German examples) that contemporary interventions could also be irrational, chaotic or detrimental, he seemed to feel that a sufficiently enlightened and aware “collective consciousness”, *Modern Humanists*, *op cit*, p. 253, and a “multiplicity of criticism” would constitute the “true safeguard against legislative miscarriages”, *Essays in Sociology*, Vol. 2, *op cit*, p. 210. The view of libertarians, then as now, was that such a view was hopelessly delusional, that special interests — rather than the mass of the populace — would be the principal beneficiaries of state interventionism.
- “Mixed economies” or social democratic systems would in reality only provide the mechanisms and masks for plutocracy (mercantilism reborn), whilst outright Marxist central planning would be despotism reborn. The American Spencerean William Graham Sumner (1840-1910) was one of the clearest exponents of this argument, and his work should have been readily available to Robertson. His most relevant work in this regard can be found in the following works: *What Social Classes Owe to Each Other* (1883), Harper Brothers, New York, 1920/Yale University Press, 1927/Caxton Printers, Caldwell, Idaho, 1947/The Right Wing Individualist Tradition in America, Arno Press, New York Times, New York, 1972; *War and Other Essays*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1911/Books for Libraries, Freeport, New York, 1970; *Earth-hunger and Other Essays* (Keller, Albert Galloway, ed.), Yale University Press, New Haven, 1913/Social Science Classics, Transaction Books, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1980; *The Challenge of Facts and Other Essays* (Keller, A. G., ed.), Yale University Press, New Haven, 1914; *The Forgotten Man and Other Essays* (Keller, A. G., ed.), Yale University Press, New Haven, 1918/Books for Libraries Press, Freeport, New York, 1969; *Essays of William Graham Sumner* (Keller, A. G., ed.), 2 vols, Yale University, New Haven, 1934 (Collection of the above 4 volumes)/Shoe String Press, Hamden, Conn., 1969; *Selected Essays of William Graham Sumner*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1924; *Social Darwinism: Selected Essays of William Graham Sumner* (Persons, Stow, ed.), Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1963; *The Conquest of the United States by Spain and Other Essays*, Regnery Gateway, Chicago, 1965.
176. *The Economics of Progress*, *op cit*, p. 177.
177. See Hayek, Friedrich, “The Theory of Complex Phenomena”, “Notes on the Evolution of Systems of Rules of Conduct”, and “The Results of Human Action but Not of Human Design”, all in *idem*, *Studies in Philosophy, Politics and Economics*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1967; and also *idem*, *Law, Legislation and Liberty*, Vol. 1, London, 1973.
178. On the wrong-headedness of attacks on “waste”, see Rubner, Alex, *Three Sacred Cows of Economics*, Macgibbon and Kee, London, 1970.
179. For general critiques of scientism, see Hayek, Friedrich, *The Counter-Revolution of Science*, *op cit*, and Rothbard, “The Mantle of Science”, in Schoeck, Helmut and Wiggins, John W., eds., *Scientism and Value*, D. Van Nostrand, Princeton, New Jersey, 1960.
180. See Mallock, W. H., *A Critical Examination of Socialism*, John Murray, London, 1908/Harper, New York, 1908, pp. 71-8, which would have been available to Robertson. Modern critiques include: Hayek, Friedrich, ed., *Collectivist Economic Planning: Critical Studies on the Possibilities of Socialism*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1935/Augustus M. Kelley, New York, 1975; Mises, Ludwig von, *Socialism: An Economic and Sociological Analysis*, Yale University Press, 1953/Jonathan Cape, London, 1957/Liberty Classics, Indianapolis, 1981; Hoff, Trygve, *Economic Calculation in the Socialist Society*, William Hodge, London, 1949/Liberty Press, Indianapolis, 1981; Polanyi, Michael, *The Contempt of Freedom: The Russian Experiment and After*, Watts, London, 1940/History, Philosophy and Sociology of Science: Classics, Staples and Precursors, Arno Press, New York Times, New York, 1975; Roberts, Paul Craig, *Alienation and the Soviet Economy*, University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1971; Lavoie, Don, *Rivalry and Central Planning: The Socialist Calculation Debate Reconsidered*, Cambridge University Press, 1985; *idem*, *National Economic Planning: What Is Left?*, Ballinger Publishing, Cambridge, Mass./Cato Institute, Washington, DC, 1985.
181. *Letters on Reasoning*, *op cit*, p. 100.
182. “Democracy and Religion”, *The Literary Guide*, New Series, No. 439, January 1933, p. 8.

Appendix: A Selective Bibliography of the Writings of J. M. Robertson

There is no definitive bibliography of Robertson's writings. Neither Kaczkowski's doctoral dissertation nor the G. A. Well's anthology professes to have compiled one, and my own attempt below is no exception. However, I do believe it to be the most comprehensive so far. I have included all his major books, monographs and essays. I have not generally listed the original publication of essays when they have been subsequently gathered in one of his books. Also, I have not included all his regular columns "Sociological Notes" (subsequently "Political Notes") in *The Reformer*.

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