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ARTICLE

# William Rathbone Greg, Scientific Liberalism, and the Second Empire

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*William Rathbone Greg's name is well known to historians of nineteenth-century Britain, but the content of his political thought is not. This article, based on a comprehensive reading of Greg's prolific published output, has two aims. The first is to pin down his politics. The article positions Greg as a leading spokesman for the rationalistic, antidemocratic strand of mid-Victorian Liberalism. It argues that his thought centered on the idea that politics was a science, and that scientific statesmanship might solve many of the problems of the age. The article's second aim is to show that Greg was a sophisticated thinker on politics overseas. He developed distinctive arguments about the structures of European politics, and especially about France under the Second Empire (1852–70). Greg's writings cast important light on the connections between abstract, domestic, and European issues in less familiar reaches of Liberal thought, and on how Victorian political science grappled with Continental despotism.*

William Rathbone Greg has not been well served by the historiography of Victorian ideas. An exceptionally prolific and wide-ranging writer on political, social, religious, and economic issues, his name is a familiar sight across the literature on mid-nineteenth-century British thought and culture. Greg may not have stood in the front rank of public moralists, but there is no question that he was a conspicuous figure in the intellectual landscape of the period.[1] His essays, however, are more often cited than they are studied. Historians cannot really claim to know what his overarching vision of politics was, or what themes unified his output. Most scholars classify Greg as a Liberal, but what his work can tell us about the intellectual architecture of mid-Victorian Liberalism remains unclear.

The few existing studies of aspects of Greg's politics hint at important possibilities, as well as highlighting how elusive he has been. Richard Helmstadter's examination of Greg's biblical criticism and economic thought argues that his work had a definite unity, with his views on different issues forming "a coherent mosaic in

[1]Greg is rightly described as a "moralist" in Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People? England 1783–1846* (Oxford, 2006), 624. But he does not feature in Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain, 1850–1930* (Oxford, 1991); in Noel Annan, "The Intellectual Aristocracy," in J. H. Plumb, ed., *Studies in Social History: A Tribute to G.M. Trevelyan* (London, 1955), 241–87; or in William Whyte, "The Intellectual Aristocracy Revisited," *Journal of Victorian Culture* 10/1 (2005), 15–45.

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which the parts clearly interrelate."[2] Greg's rejection of orthodox Christianity was, in this analysis, of a piece with his condemnation of an effete and outworn aristocracy.[3] For Gregory Conti, writing more recently, Greg was by contrast an unsystematic thinker who did not prioritize theoretical consistency.[4] Nonetheless, he was "as interesting as any figure from the period," and his reflections on parliamentary representation were distinctive.[5] Conti has also drawn attention to the striking resemblances between Greg's political thought and that of Walter Bagehot, his intimate friend and a fixture in the Victorian canon.[6]

Most historians deal with Greg more cursorily. Scholars have drawn on his writings in relation to many of the leading creeds and problems which organized Victorian Britain, including utilitarianism, "Manchesterism," industrialism, political economy, social science, democracy, the slave trade, the women's movement, statesmanship, higher criticism, and Darwinism.[7] With most discussions of Greg resting on one or two of his articles, it is no surprise that his politics have not been characterized consistently. A. V. Dicey, writing in the 1900s, saw Greg both as one of a number of "rigid utilitarians" who had turned towards a "peculiar conservatism" after mid-century, and as "the representative of economists and mill-owners"; A. W. Benn picked him out as an agent of Unitarian intellectual

[2]Richard J. Helmstadter, "W. R. Greg: A Manchester Creed," in Richard J. Helmstadter and Bernard Lightman, eds., *Victorian Faith in Crisis: Essays on Continuity and Change in Nineteenth-Century Religious Belief* (Stanford, 1990), 187–222, at 190.

[3]Ibid., 188.

[4]Gregory Conti, *Parliament the Mirror of the Nation: Representation, Deliberation, and Democracy in Victorian Britain* (Cambridge, 2019), 30.

[5]Ibid., 29 n. 64, 141–6.

[6]Ibid., 179. See also William Selinger and Gregory Conti, "Reappraising Walter Bagehot's Liberalism: Discussion, Public Opinion, and the Meaning of Parliamentary Government," *History of European Ideas* 41/2 (2015), 264–91.

[7]See e.g. in each case: for utilitarianism, M. W. Taylor, *Man versus the State: Herbert Spencer and Late Victorian Individualism* (Oxford, 1992), 62; for the Manchester School, William D. Grampp, *The Manchester School of Economics* (Stanford, 1960), 107–10; for industrial paternalism, Patrice Bouche, "Les ouvriers des filatures dans les années 1830: La vision paternaliste libérale des frères Greg," in Gilbert Millat, ed., *La classe ouvrière britannique, XIXe–XXe siècles: Proscrits, patriotes, citoyens* (Paris, 2005), 23–53; for political economy, Donald Winch, *Wealth and Life: Essays on the Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain, 1848–1914* (Cambridge, 2009), 393–4; for social science, Lawrence Goldman, *Science, Reform and Politics in Victorian Britain: The Social Science Association, 1857–1886* (Cambridge, 2002), 315; for democracy, Robert Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote in British Politics, 1848–1867* (Farnham, 2011), 91–4; and Hugh Dubrulle, "'We Are Threatened with … Anarchy and Ruin': Fear of Americanization and the Emergence of an Anglo-Saxon Confederacy in England during the American Civil War," *Albion* 33/4 (2001), 583–613; for the slave trade, G. R. Searle, *Morality and the Market in Victorian Britain* (Oxford, 1998), 59–60; for the women's movement, Susan Hamilton, *Francis Power Cobbe and Victorian Feminism* (Basingstoke, 2002), Ch. 2, which rather overrates Greg's significance; and Ellen Jordan, *The Women's Movement and Women's Employment in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London, 1999), 160–63; for statesmanship, David Craig, "Statesmanship," in David Craig and James Thompson, eds., *Languages of Politics in Nineteenth-century Britain* (Basingstoke, 2013), 44–68; for biblical criticism, Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Impact of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1785–1865* (Oxford, 1988), 271; and for Darwinism, Peter Morton, *The Vital Science: Biology and the Literary Imagination* (London, 1984), 123–6; David Stack, "The Death of John Stuart Mill," *Historical Journal* 54/1 (2011), 167–90, at 173; and Richard Allen Soloway, *Birth Control and the Population Question in England, 1877–1930* (Chapel Hill, 1982), 15. For every theme these references could be multiplied.

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trends.[8] Historians working more recently have offered a wide variety of readings. Some place Greg as a "conservative," others as a "Whig," others even as a "Whig of the traditional school."[9] More often he is a "liberal journalist," a "good liberal," "a spokesman for Manchester liberalism," or, more precisely, "essentially a conservative member of the Manchester school."[10] The soundest estimate is offered by Jonathan Parry, who describes Greg as an "ex-Manchester School radical" and "utilitarian," one of a number of "[h]ard-headed rational intellects" aligned with the Liberals who supported interventionist policy in the field of social reform, belonging ultimately to the expansive category of "Whig–Liberal."[11] What nearly all this work has in common, however, is that it treats Greg as an insular thinker, focused on problems in Britain. This was emphatically not the case, and appears to be an artefact of the omission of nearly all Greg's writing on foreign politics from the published collections of essays on which most historians have relied.

This article attempts to do two things. The first is to pin down the foundations of Greg's political thought. The article positions Greg as a leading spokesman for the rationalistic, antidemocratic strand within mid-Victorian Liberalism. It argues that his thinking centred on the idea that politics was a science, and that scientific statesmanship offered the best hope of solving the social and political problems of his age. In elaborating these claims, Greg wrote extensively about politics overseas, and especially about the internal politics of the major Continental states. The second aim of the article is to do justice to Greg's thinking on Europe, and especially his real overseas fascination: France. That he had an interest in French politics has been noted by Georgios Varouxakis, but Varouxakis follows Greg only as far as the Revolution of 1848.[12] This was before Greg's writing career had begun in

[8]A. V. Dicey, *Lectures on the Relation between Law and Public Opinion in England during the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1905), 164, 244; Alfred William Benn, *A History of English Rationalism in the Nineteenth Century*, 2 vols. (London, 1906), 2: 64. Some historians maintain the industrial theme, calling Greg a "leading member of the industrial elite in Manchester," an "industrialist and social critic," and an "ideologue closely associated with the manufacturers." Craig, "Statesmanship," 48; Duncan Andrew Campbell, *English Public Opinion and the American Civil War* (Woodbridge, 2003), 48; Anthony Howe, *The Cotton Masters, 1830–1860* (Oxford, 1984), 232.

[9]Eric Rowley and Leonard Minkes, *William Rathbone Greg: Industrialist, Essayist, and Pamphleteer* (Manchester, 2009), 1; P. B. M. Blaas, *Continuity and Anachronism: Parliamentary and Constitutional Development in Whig Historiography and in the Anti-Whig Reaction between 1890 and 1930* (The Hague, 1978), 181; D. P. Crook, "The British Whigs on America: 1820–1860," *Bulletin of the British Association for American Studies* 3 (1961), 4–17, at 11.

[10]Robert Saunders, "'Let America Be the Test': Democracy and Reform in Britain, 1832–1867," in Ella Dzelzainis and Ruth Livesey, eds., *The American Experiment and the Idea of Democracy in British Culture, 1776–1914* (Farnham, 2013), 79–92, at 84; David Brown, "The Press," in David Brown, Robert Crowcroft, and Gordon Pentland, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Modern British Political History, 1800–2000* (Oxford, 2018), 154–72, at 161; Helmstadter, "W. R. Greg," 211; William B. Thesing, *Victorian Prose Writers before 1867* (Detroit, 1987), 114. For Greg as a "progressive journalist" see Caroline Shaw, *Britannia's Embrace: Modern Humanitarianism and the Imperial Origins of Refugee Relief* (Oxford, 2015), 156.

[11]J. P. Parry, *Democracy and Religion: Gladstone and the Liberal Party, 1867–1875* (Cambridge, 1986), 114, 76, and, for a very Gregian distillation of the "Whig–Liberal" agenda, 450–51; Jonathan Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism: English Liberalism, National Identity, and Europe, 1830–1886* (Cambridge, 2006), 81.

[12]In fact citing only a single, very rich, *Economist* article: Georgios Varouxakis, *Victorian Political Thought on France and the French* (Basingstoke, 2002), 68–70. See also Varouxakis, "1848 and British Political Thought on the 'Principle of Nationality'," in Douglas Moggach and Gareth Stedman Jones, eds., *The 1848 Revolutions and European Political Thought* (Cambridge, 2018), 140–61, at 158; and Ruth

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earnest, and in fact he went on to become one of the most authoritative mid-Victorian interpreters of Napoleon III's Second Empire. Even *The Spectator*, which often took issue with his claims, conceded after his death that "[n]o writer of the day forced Englishmen to look so closely at those French facts which were most disagreeable to them, as Mr. Greg," and it is certainly true that Greg subjected Bonapartist despotism to one of the closest political-scientific anatomies of the period.[13] The broader purpose of the article, then, is to explore where European politics—and especially European politics of the "Caesarist" variety, often seen as a defining counterpoint to Liberal aspirations and doctrines in the nineteenth-century world—fitted within the intellectual landscapes of conservative Victorian Liberalism.[14]

The rest of the article is in three parts. The first examines Greg's environments, his assumptions, and his guiding political principles. The second deals with his attitudes towards Continental politics in general. The last part then explores his analysis of French politics in particular, and especially of the imperial rise and fall of Napoleon III.

## W. R. Greg and scientific Liberalism

Even the writer of one of the only nineteenth-century memoirs of Greg admitted that the circumstances of his life "offer little that is striking to record."[15] His experiences are, nonetheless, important for making sense of his mature political views. William Rathbone Greg, born in 1809, was a scion of the Greg family of industrialists, headquartered at Quarry Bank Mill in Cheshire. He was raised a Unitarian, and sent to Lant Carpenter's school in Bristol and to university at Edinburgh, where he associated with Charles Darwin.[16] There he became fascinated with animal

Dudley Edwards, *The Pursuit of Reason:* The Economist, *1843–1993* (London, 1993), 154 and Ch. 13. There are further references to Greg's writing on foreign politics in Parry, *Politics of Patriotism*.

[13]*The Spectator*, 19 Nov. 1881, 1462. See also *The Times*, 25 Aug. 1884, 3.

[14]Most work on Liberal political thought about Europe in this period focuses on the more "progressive" thinkers John Stuart Mill and Richard Cobden. See esp. Georgios Varouxakis, *Mill on Nationality* (Abingdon, 2002); Varouxakis, *Liberty Abroad: J. S. Mill on International Relations* (Cambridge, 2013); Anthony Howe, "Re-forging Britons: Richard Cobden and France," in Sylvie Aprile and Fabrice Bensimon, eds., *La France et l'Angleterre au XIXe siècle: Échanges, représentations, comparaisons* (Paris, 2006), 89–104; Howe, "Two Faces of British Power: Cobden versus Palmerston," in David Brown and Miles Taylor, eds., *Palmerston Studies II* (Southampton, 2006), 166–92; Peter Cain, "Capitalism, War, and Internationalism in the Thought of Richard Cobden," *British Journal of International Studies* 5/3 (1979), 229–47. On Liberalism and "Caesarism" more generally see Helena Rosenblatt, *The Lost History of Liberalism: From Ancient Rome to the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton, 2018), Ch. 5.

[15]W. R. Greg, *Enigmas of Life*, 18th edn (London, 1891), viii. The following details are drawn mainly from the anonymous but well-informed prefatory memoir attached to this edition, which was edited by Greg's second wife (vii–xliii), and from John Morley, "W. R. Greg: A Sketch," in Morley, *Critical Miscellanies*, 4 vols. (London, 1886), 3: 213–59. For Greg's business career see Mary B. Rose, *The Gregs of Quarry Bank Mill: The Rise and Decline of a Family Firm, 1750–1914* (Cambridge, 1986).

[16]On the social context of Manchester Unitarianism see John Seed, "Unitarianism, Political Economy and the Antinomies of Liberal Culture in Manchester, 1830–50," *Social History* 7/1 (1982), 1–25; Simon Dentith, "Political Economy, Fiction and the Language of Practical Ideology in Nineteenth-Century England," *Social History* 8/2 (1983), 183–99, at 194–6. See also, on Manchester politics, Anthony Howe and Simon Morgan, eds., *Rethinking Nineteenth-Century Liberalism: Richard Cobden Bicentenary Essays* (Aldershot, 2006).

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magnetism and phrenology, the latter the subject of his first publication.[17] He began writing on politics overseas in 1833, in a pamphlet on Greece and Turkey, based on his travels around Europe after graduation.[18] Most of the next two decades were spent working increasingly disconsolately in the family textile business, which Greg succeeding in running into the ground in 1850. During these years he became heavily involved in Manchester cultural and political life, cofounding the Manchester Statistical Society in 1833, standing unsuccessfully for Parliament for Lancaster in 1837, and campaigning for Corn Law Repeal in the early 1840s.[19] In 1847 Greg became a contributor to the *Economist* newspaper, and from 1850 he devoted himself fully to literature.[20] These pursuits were leavened by his accession to a seat on the Board of Customs in 1856 (secured for him by the Liberal minister George Cornewall Lewis), which necessitated a move to London, and translation to the Stationery Office as controller in 1864, in which capacity Greg materially reduced governmental consumption of quill pens.[21] He continued to travel widely, as far afield as Egypt. He became well connected in London society, thanks especially to his intimate relationship with Walter Bagehot after 1858, and to memberships of the Athenaeum and the Metaphysical Society later on. His acquaintance was a litany of the mid-Victorian intellectual aristocracy: A. H. Clough, Herbert Spencer, James Fitzjames Stephen, J. A. Froude, Thomas Carlyle, Nassau Senior, George Eliot, Harriet Martineau, James Martineau, Cornewall Lewis, Earl Grey, Francis Newman.[22] He also moved in elevated circles in France, corresponding and sometimes staying with Alexis de Tocqueville, who wrote in complimentary terms of Greg's work.[23] It is not clear whether he met John Stuart Mill, but Mill certainly read some of his publications.[24] All the while

[17]W. R. Greg, *Observations on a Late Pamphlet by Mr Stone, on the Phrenological Development of Burke, Hare, &c.* (Edinburgh, 1829).

[18][W. R. Greg], *Sketches in Greece and Turkey: With the Present Condition and Prospects of the Turkish Empire* (London, 1833).

[19]See the prizewinning W. R. Greg, "Agriculture and the Corn Law: Showing the Injurious Effects of the Corn Law upon Tenant Farmers and Farm Labourers," in *The Three Prize Essays on Agriculture and the Corn Law* (Manchester, 1842). John Almack's *Character, Motives, and Proceedings of the Anti-Corn Law Leaguers* (London, 1843) was dedicated to Greg as "one of the most conspicuous members" of the League (ibid., 3). For Greg's correspondence with Cobden, with whom he had little in common politically after 1846, see John Morley, *The Life of Richard Cobden*, 2 vols. (London, 1881), 2: 23; Anthony Howe, ed., *The Letters of Richard Cobden: Volume Two, 1848–1853* (Oxford, 2010), xxv.

[20]For Greg's *Economist* career see now Alexander Zevin, *Liberalism at Large: The World according to the Economist* (London, 2019), 34–6.

[21]"W.R.G.," *Saturday Review* 72/1864 (1891), 74. His pen policies attracted some criticism as an example of short-sighted governmental cheeseparing: *Saturday Review* 27/692 (1869), 140–41.

[22]Most of these encountered in company with Bagehot: see Mrs Russell Barrington, *Life of Walter Bagehot* (London, 1914), *passim*; *The Collected Works of Walter Bagehot*, ed. Norman St John-Stevas, 15 vols. (London, 1965–86), vols. 14–15 *passim*; *Harriet Martineau's Autobiography*, 3 vols. (London, 1877), 3: 274; Herbert Spencer, *An Autobiography*, 2 vols. (London, 1904), 1: 367, 372.

[23]See M. C. M. Simpson, ed., *Correspondence and Conversations of Alexis de Tocqueville with Nassau William Senior, from 1834 to 1859*, 2 vols (London, 1872), 1: 17, 2: 31; Alexis de Tocqueville, *Memoir, Letters, and Remains of Alexis de Tocqueville*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1861), 2: 444, 225. Greg's correspondence with Tocqueville was more than just social, involving developed exchanges on French history and on the mechanics of electoral and party systems.

[24]J. S. Mill to Edwin Chadwick, 2 Jan. 1859, in *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. J. M. Robson, 33 vols. (Toronto and London, 1963–91), 15: 587–8; J. S. Mill to Harriet Mill, 9 Jan. 1854, in ibid., 14: 126.

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Greg wrote like a train. He published more than 150 lengthy periodical articles, which form the main basis for this article.[25] He was responsible for six collections of essays, made up mainly of his periodical writing.[26] He produced a major work of biblical criticism, *The Creed of Christendom*, in 1851, and two books on politics and religion towards the end of his career.[27] He died in 1881, attracting neither a *Life* nor a collected works thereafter.

Greg's contemporaries recognized him as a significant figure. Various literary and political luminaries, of the order of Goldwin Smith and John Morley, engaged critically with his writing, and offered appraisals of his thought.[28] Lord Acton cited two of Greg's essay collections in his inaugural lecture at Cambridge.[29] Thomas Carlyle, more summarily, called him "a writing Hodman of some name."[30] But Victorian commentators were split over whether Greg was a distinctive thinker or a representative man. In some accounts he wrote with unusual independence from all sections of opinion, and with considerable originality of conception.[31] In others he had no views of his own, and simply reflected middle-class trains of thought.[32] There was further debate about whether his attitudes had changed over time, or whether he had remained consistent.[33] Greg was strikingly described by the Liberal politician and imperial administrator Sir Mountstuart Grant Duff, writing in the 1890s, as "an almost perfect example of the typical English liberal, *as English liberals were during the first thirty years of the reign of the Queen* ."[34]

[25]These have been traced mainly through Walter E. Houghton, ed., *The Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals, 1824–1900*, 5 vols. (Toronto, 1966–89). Difficulties in attribution preclude the systematic use of Greg's writing in *The Economist*.

[26]And otherwise from *Economist* articles, and pamphlets. W. R. Greg, *Essays on Political and Social Science, Contributed Chiefly to the Edinburgh Review*, 2 vols. (London, 1853); Greg, *Literary and Social Judgments*, 2 vols. (London, 1868); Greg, *Political Problems for Our Age and Country* (London, 1870); Greg, *Mistaken Aims and Attainable Ideals of the Artizan Class* (London, 1876); Greg, *Miscellaneous Essays* (London, 1882); Greg, *Miscellaneous Essays: Second Series* (London, 1884).

[27]W. R. Greg, *The Creed of Christendom; Its Foundations and Superstructure* (London, 1851); Greg, *Enigmas of Life* (London, 1873); Greg, *Rocks Ahead: Or, the Warnings of Cassandra* (London, 1874). *Rocks Ahead* was previously serialized in the *Contemporary Review*.

[28]Goldwin Smith, "Mr. Greg on Culpable Luxury," *Contemporary Review* 22 (1873), 126–37; Morley, "W. R. Greg"; R. H. Hutton, "William Rathbone Greg," in Hutton, *Criticisms of Contemporary Thought and Thinkers*, 2 vols. (London, 1894), 2: 137–44. Even Greg's potboiling articles were picked out for comment in the highbrow press: e.g. anon., "Life at High Pressure," *Saturday Review* 39/1008 (1875), 242–4.

[29]John Emerich Edward, First Baron Acton, "Inaugural Lecture on the Study of History," in *Lectures on Modern History, by the Late Right Hon. John Emerich Edward, First Baron Acton*, ed. John Neville Figgis and Reginald Vere Laurence (London, 1906), 1–30, endnote references at 331, 342.

[30]Thomas Carlyle to John A. Carlyle, 15 April 1853, in *The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle* (Durham, NC, 1970–), 28: 109–12, at 111.

[31]*Westminster Review*, quoted in Greg, *Enigmas* (1873), [309]; *The Academy* 503 (24 Dec. 1881), 468.

[32]"Greg's Essays on Social Science," *The Leader* 4/149 (1853), 113–14, at 113; *The Examiner*, 2351 (19 Feb. 1853), 116–17. See also Francis Watt, "The Teaching of the Late Mr. W. R. Greg," *St James's Magazine* 4/42 (1882), 35–44, at 35, 42; and "Mr. W. R. Greg," *The Examiner*, 27 May 1876, 599–600, which described Greg as a "slovenly thinker, frequently inconsistent, and always incomplete."

[33]Percy Greg, "The Late Mr. W. R. Greg," *The Spectator*, 16 Aug. 1884, 15.

[34]Mountstuart E. Grant Duff, in Greg, *Enigmas* (1891), lxxiv, original emphasis. Engaging more combatively with Greg's writing elsewhere, Grant Duff noted that Greg had been "long known as one of the best political writers in England." M. E. Grant Duff, "Must We Then Believe Cassandra?", *Fortnightly Review* 16/95 (1874), 581–604, at 581.

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As we will see, it is not a coincidence that Grant Duff's time frame ends with the Second Reform Act in 1867. Taking their judgments together, it is clear that Greg's contemporaries recognized him as a Liberal, and one deserving of serious consideration. But what kind of Liberal?

We might begin with the terminology and the reference points Greg himself used. He did not regard himself as a Utilitarian, and in fact explicitly rejected the philosophy. He certainly did not see himself as a Whig, believing that the party and the creed had run their course by 1850.[35] While he owed part of his political education to Manchester, Greg was never a political "radical" in any sense beyond supporting free trade, and he maintained that the "Manchester school" had turned in the wrong direction after 1848.[36] He did think that "Liberalism" was the great political tendency of his age, and that its advance was to be welcomed. And he did fitfully describe himself and his views as "Liberal."[37] But he was anything but an enthusiastic supporter of the Liberal Party. Greg found all its leaders distasteful, for different reasons. Russell was too partisan and doctrinaire; Palmerston's character made him unfit to lead at times of crisis; Gladstone was exceptionally able, but erratic, and dangerously wrong about the merits of popular judgment in politics.[38] As this suggests, Greg's Liberalism had (as his memorialist put it) "strong conservative elements," and he apparently talked when a younger man about becoming a conservative after Corn Law repeal and education reform had been achieved.[39] But by the 1850s Greg was positioning himself as a "conscientious opponent" of the Conservative Party.[40] He abominated Disraeli, a "mere gladiator," and it was his opposition to Beaconsfieldian foreign policy that prompted him to break an established habit of not voting in 1880.[41] It is true that some contemporaries came to see Greg as a crypto-conservative: the *London*

[35]Greg had a measured opinion of the vices and virtues of "Whiggism," which he identified mainly with the parliamentary party and its leaders. The Whigs had lost their way because of their rigidity and dogmatism, but they deserved gratitude for having steadily championed constitutional freedom and religious liberty: [W. R. Greg], "Crisis of Political Parties: The Grand Desideratum," *North British Review* 17/34 (1852), 559–82, at 571–2; Greg, "Prospects of British Statesmanship," *Essays on Political and Social Science*, 2: 364–421, at 371, 421.

[36]Cobden had lost his way in turning towards the "economical" school of foreign policy, Bright in converting himself into a democratic tribune. W.R.G. [W. R. Greg], "Statesmanship in Constitutional Countries," *National Review* 19/1 (1864), 143–58, at 145; [Greg], "Mr. Bright, Painted by Himself," *National Review* 10/20 (1860), 522–44, at 523–5. By 1855 the Manchester school were "few and discredited": [Greg], "Cabinets and Statesmen," *North British Review* 24/47 (1855), 183–96, at 186.

[37][W. R. Greg], "Louis Napoleon at Home and Abroad," *National Review* 6/12 (1858), 472–95, at 487; [Greg], "Tests for the Public Service," *National Review* 12/23 (1861), 129–44, at 129. See also, for a contemporary perspective on Greg's Liberalism, "W.R.G," *London Review* 17/435 (1868), 502–3.

[38][Greg], "Statesmanship in Constitutional Countries," 144–5; [W. R. Greg], "The Statesmen of the Day," *National Review* 1/2 (1855), 411–38, at 436; [Greg], "Mr. Gladstone's Apologia," *Quarterly Review* 126/251 (1869), 121–34.

[39]Memoir in Greg, *Enigmas* (1891), xxxvii–xxxix.

[40][W. R. Greg], "Sir Robert Peel and His Policy," *Westminster Review* 58/113 (1852), 205–46, at 208. In the same year, however, he wrote that it tended to be the outworks rather than the essential principles of conservative policy that were hard to defend. see [Greg], "Investments for the Working Classes," *Edinburgh Review* 95/194 (1852), 405–53, at 424.

[41][W. R. Greg], 'Past and Present Political Morality of British Statesmen,' *North British Review* 21/42 (1854), 545–86, at 579; Memoir in Greg, *Enigmas* (1891), xxxviii–xxxix.

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*Review* charged him in the 1860s with having "sacrificed everything of Liberal but the name."[42] Most such criticism, however, centred on his opposition to the extension of the franchise, on which subject Greg was quite consistent.[43]

So despite his support for religious liberty, free trade, and the principle of constitutional freedom, Greg was no partisan cheerleader. After the repeal of the Corn Laws, he celebrated few major legislative developments. Nor was he especially concerned with prognosticating the political future.[44] What he was mainly interested in was dissecting political systems. Appropriately for a manufacturer who had cut his journalistic teeth writing on political economy, Greg's abiding preoccupation was with how the gears in machines of state meshed together. He spent his life ruminating on the connections between organic reform, public opinion, and political leadership, and on the relations between institutions, national character, and political virtue. Greg rarely spelled out precisely what concrete measures ought to be taken in order to secure the best possible practical outcomes, in any area of policy: his emphasis was typically on the structures through which the best decisions would be reached.[45] Understanding modern politics at this more abstract level necessarily involved looking beyond Britain's shores, and thinking about how other advanced polities worked.

In undertaking these inquiries, Greg never strayed far from the concept of "science." Doubtless this owed something to the centrality of the natural sciences within the Unitarian culture in which he had been raised.[46] But for Greg it became an organizing idea of unusual range and flexibility. At one time or another he referred to "social science," "religious science," "moral science," "economic science," "military science," "agricultural science," the "science of taxation," the "science of statesmanship," the "science of self-government," and even "scientific fortresses." For Greg, however, "science" was much more an ideal than it was a particular method. It was, moreover, a framework he took for granted, not one which required explanation, or assertions of allegiance to specific schools of thought. The kinds of categorical distinction Greg drew were between the "moral preacher" and the "scientific thinker," and between the "scientific and mathematical" and the "practical and empirical", rather than anything more precise.[47] If a distinct concept of "science" and "scientific" practice can be distilled from Greg's writing, the term seems simply to have denoted the systematic study of general principles, and in certain contexts, their comprehensive application. Very often the concept was placed

[42]"Liberal Waverers," *London Review* 17/433 (1868), 441–2, at 442. See also *The Spectator*, 19 Sept. 1868, 2, which charged Greg with "almost every species of Tory sympathy."

[43]The tone of pessimism which many noticed in Greg's work of the 1860s and 1870s stemmed not from any change of view, but from the advance of democracy, which he had always abhorred. See [W. R. Greg], "The Achievements and the Moral of 1867," *North British Review* 47/93 (1867), 205–56; and cf. Dicey, *Law and Public Opinion*, 164.

[44]At least until the last phase of his career, with *Rocks Ahead* (1873).

[45]As noted in Parry, *Democracy and Religion*, 113.

[46]Ruth Watts, *Gender, Power and the Unitarians in England, 1760–1860* (London 1998); Paul Wood, ed., *Science and Dissent in England, 1688–1945* (Aldershot, 2004); Jean Raymond and John Pickstone, "The Natural Sciences and the Learning of English Unitarians: An Exploration of the Roles of Manchester College," in Barbara Smith, ed., *Truth, Liberty, Religion: Essays Celebrating Two Hundred Years of Manchester College* (Oxford, 1986), 127–64.

[47][W. R. Greg], "The Claims of Labour," *Westminster Review* 43/2 (1845), 445–60, at 449; [Greg], "Unsound Social Philosophy," *Edinburgh Review* 90/182 (1849), 496–524, at 502.

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closely in harness with, and sometimes acted as a synonym for, the more basic notion of "system."[48] Greg saw merit in both the "mechanical" and "organic" modes of Victorian political and social science that historians have often ranged against one another: his steady commitment was to the value of rational, systematic, sustained inquiry.

For Greg, politics as much as anything else needed to be seen through this "scientific" lens. It was neither a game nor a high art: properly understood, it was "a science, on the thorough knowledge and right appreciation of which hang the progress, the welfare, and the dignity of nations."[49] Greg's first collection, *Essays on Political and Social Science*, was one of the first volumes published in Victorian Britain to refer in its title to "political science." Greg became one of the most prolific members of a mid-Victorian generation of writers who were seeking to develop new codifications of the workings of politics—and so influence its practice—through appropriately intensive study and reflection.[50] He deplored political commentators for whom "politics is not a science but a taste," and often used analogies drawn from medicine and the physical sciences to make his framework unambiguously clear.[51]

Greg's writings were, accordingly, heavy with references to other authorities. His main intellectual touchstones were the men he regarded as the great modern masters of political science: Tocqueville, Machiavelli, Montesquieu, and Burke.[52] Burke's writings, above all, were "perfect arsenals of political wisdom," and what contemporaries would have started to regard as a classically "Burkean" hostility to radical reform infused Greg's political thinking.[53] John Stuart Mill stood slightly behind these figures, treated as significant mainly for his work on political economy, and by no means above criticism.[54] As the character of this pantheon suggests, there was little room for the past in Greg's vision of politics.[55] The romantic, backwards-looking schemes of Thomas Carlyle and Young England were anathema to Greg, as much on account of their philosophical underpinnings as of their practical Toryism.[56] His favourite historian, by a distance, was Thomas Arnold, for the simple reason that Arnold believed in laws of political science, and regarded them

[48]E.g. [W. R. Greg], "Principles of Indian Government," *National Review* 6/11 (1858), 1–37, at 21.

[49][W. R. Greg], "Life and Correspondence of Thomas Arnold," *Westminster Review* 42/2 (1844), 363–81, at 380.

[50]On this theme see Stefan Collini, Donald Winch, and John Burrow, *That Noble Science of Politics: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Intellectual History* (Cambridge, 1983), which, however, passes over Greg.

[51][W. R. Greg], "Resources of an Increasing Population: Emigration or Manufactures," *Westminster Review* 40/1 (1843), 101–22, at 101.

[52][W. R. Greg], "M. de Tocqueville," *National Review* 12/24 (1861), 275–99, at 286. See also [Greg], "M. de Tocqueville's *France before the Revolution*," *Edinburgh Review* 104/212 (1856), 531–61. James Mackintosh and Thomas Macaulay were also regularly used weapons from Greg's armoury of citation.

[53][Greg], "Past and Present Political Morality of British Statesmen," 566. Greg ought to be seen as part of the group recovering and reconceiving "Burke" in the mid-Victorian era described in Emily Jones, *Edmund Burke and the Invention of Modern Conservatism: An Intellectual History, 1830–1914* (Oxford, 2017), Ch. 4.

[54][Greg], "Mr. Gladstone's Apologia," 131. For criticisms of Mill see e.g. [W. R. Greg], "Mary Barton," *Edinburgh Review* 89/180 (1849), 402-35, at 430-2.

[55]Unusually: see Angus Hawkins, *Victorian Political Culture: "Habits of Heart and Mind"* (Oxford, 2015).

[56][W. R. Greg], "The Relation between Employers and Employed," *Westminster Review*, 57/11 (1852), 61–95, at 72–4.

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as the main lesson to be learned from history.[57] Greg wrote with warm approval of how Arnold's opinions on the general principles of politics were derived not from party affiliation, but from "the deliberate, scientific deductions of a mind profoundly versed in the rich stores of historical wisdom."[58]

In focusing his work in this way, Greg felt he was supplying an important deficiency in British politics. He is recorded as speaking in conversation of how surprised and disappointed he was by the indifference of leading public men, including giants like Sir Robert Peel, "to anything like general views and abstract principles of politics and society." They might, Greg thought, listen to such views with reasonable interest, "but only as matters lying quite apart from their own business in the world."[59] This meant that there was a gap in the market. By educating public opinion about political and social principles, Greg argued, political writers could play a decisive role in shaping the nation's future.[60] Greg thought, then, that politics should be studied systematically, rationally, and with due attention to general principles and leading authorities. He took these precepts seriously. At the same time, however, he was a controversialist, who wanted to demonstrate the superiority of a particular vision of social and political order for Britain. In his writing on domestic affairs, his arguments about how politics *did* work were almost invariably linked to claims about how politics *should* work.

In looking for the anchor of Greg's political thought, it is hard to improve on the abstract offered by the Liberal statesmen and scholar John Morley. Morley, who was well read in Greg's work, claimed at one point that his politics were impossible to classify.[61] Doing his best nonetheless, Morley contended that "Greg's theory of government from first to last" was that "[t]he few ought to direct and teach, the many to learn," and that this vision was likely derived from Burke.[62] As Morley showed, Greg had been insisting on this point since he was an undergraduate, and it remained the anchor of his politics throughout his life. His writing career can be understood as an effort to discharge his duties as a self-identified member of the directing class. Greg assumed that, whatever advances they might make, the masses would always be more ignorant, more unqualified to consider the remote consequences of decisions, and more unable to deal patiently and consistently with the questions that affected the life of nations, than the classes to whom wealth gave leisure to grow wise.[63]

[57][W. R. Greg], "Dr. Arnold," *Westminster Review* 39 (1843), 1–33. Arnold's undogmatic Christianity increased his appeal. Greg similarly admired Barthold Niebuhr for applying political science to ancient institutions. [Greg], "Life and Letters of Niebuhr," *Edinburgh Review* 96/195 (1852), 95–110, at 95.

[58][Greg], "Life and Correspondence of Thomas Arnold," 379–80.

[59]Morley, "Greg," 244. For this reason, he greatly admired the intellectual-in-politics George Cornewall Lewis.

[60]Greg, "Prospects of British Statesmanship," 379; [Greg], "Repeal of the Corn Laws: Prospective Results," *Westminster Review* 46/1 (1846), 119–31, at 120. Greg thus specified an attractive political role for those enlightened by theory, meeting a key condition required for such theories to gain purchase, as per Stefan Collini, "Political Theory and the 'Science of Society' in Victorian Britain," *Historical Journal* 23/1 (1980), 203–31, at 211–12.

[61]Morley, "Greg," 253.

[62]Ibid., 229. Others agreed that Greg "represented vigorously enough that distrust of democracy which most economists of his class and generation indulged." *The Spectator*, 19 Nov. 1881, 1455.

[63]Greg, *Enigmas* (1873), 44–5. Cf. Chris Barker, *Educating Liberty: Democracy and Aristocracy in J. S. Mill's Political Thought* (Rochester, 2018), Ch. 4.

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Convictions of this kind about the permanent inferiority of the working classes did not, of course, necessarily issue in hostility to democracy. Greg, however, did not share the faith of Gladstonians that the uneducated might somehow be able to see more promptly and keenly to the heart of major political questions, or that of Tory Democrats that the mass of the population was at least capable of selecting those most fit to rule. For Greg, the masses were inevitably driven primarily by their passions, and lacked the power to do justice to the reasoned arguments of their superiors in rank—indeed, they were often unable follow the advice even of their own recognized leaders. He always feared the prospect of the working population acting as a class interest, and placing its own selfish interests before those of other parts of the community.[64]

Greg's views on the changing shape of the English constitution were consistent with these principles. The Great Reform Act of 1832 had been a boon, because it had brought the House of Commons into harmony with the influential, propertied, and educated portion of the national community which properly deserved the name of "the people." It had corrected proven abuses, infused a spirit of progress into the whole political system, and made it possible to pursue the practical social and administrative reforms which the country sorely needed.[65] In doing so, it had instituted necessary safeguards against the dangers presented by both democracy and oligarchy. Greg did not dismiss the potential merit of further instalments of parliamentary reform after 1832, provided they were based on equally sound premises. But any change which tended to advance the constitutional preponderance of those without property was anathema.[66] For Greg, therefore, the Second Reform Act was a calamity, inverting the sound propertied principle on which the First had rested, and dealing not in the correction of real abuses but in the pursuit of false theories. Greg understood that measure as assimilating England's representative institutions to those of the United States and Europe, where they had altogether failed to secure the great desideratum: reflective leadership.[67] Certainly, he considered the tone and quality of the Commons much lowered after 1867.[68]

The second main plank in Greg's political thought was the conviction that society followed rigid laws. He believed in the improvability, even the perfectibility, of the world: no other conception was compatible with his notion of a benevolent Creator.[69] He believed in the inevitability, and desirability, of progress, in politics and society alike, asserting that the age was one in which new discoveries might take human happiness to fresh heights. But he claimed that progress could be

[64]W. R. Greg, "A Modern 'Symposium' (No. V): Is the Popular Judgment in Politics More Just Than That of the Higher Orders?", *Nineteenth Century* 4/17 (1878), 174–92.

[65][W. R. Greg], "The Expected Reform Bill," *Edinburgh Review* 95/193 (1852), 213–80, at 214–16. Greg identified drawbacks in the Act too: there is much more that could be said about his attitudes towards Parliament and reform, in addition the excellent reflections in Conti, *Parliament the Mirror*.

[66][W. R. Greg], "Representative Reform," *Edinburgh Review* 96/196 (1852), 452–508; [Greg], "Parliamentary Purification," *Edinburgh Review* 98/200 (1853), 566–624. For the context see Jonathan Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian Britain* (New Haven, 1993), 207–17.

[67]For the wider debates here see Christopher Kent, *Brains and Numbers: Elitism, Comtism, and Democracy in Mid-Victorian England* (Toronto, 1978).

[68]Greg, "A Modern 'Symposium'," 179–81.

[69]Greg, *Enigmas* (1873), Ch. 1, esp. 4–7; [Greg], "Resources of an Increasing Population," 105–6.

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secured only by the rigorous observation of natural laws. Despite his Unitarian upbringing, and his later slide towards deism, Greg was firmly a man of the Age of Atonement, and a student of Thomas Chalmers on the inviolability of general Providence.[70] All human misery and degradation, Greg argued, could be traced to the violation of divine ordinances.[71] God's punishments were "*consequences*, legitimate, logical, inevitable results, flowing from crime in natural course."[72] Schemes of social amelioration, then, demanded "close observation and humble imitation of the plans of Providence, as far as it is given to man to discern them."[73] These Providential schemes were played out in the market, and the rules of political economy were of the same order of certainty as God's law.[74] So while it was the duty of the wealthy and powerful to offer assistance to their less fortunate fellow subjects, this was to be done by creating conditions in which energy, intellect, and virtue would have free play, not by dispensing enervating charity.[75] This would not be achieved, however, by brute application of the felicific calculus. Greg abhorred hollow utilitarianism, and the reduction of political and social questions to arithmetical standards.[76] Government could not be left safely in the hands of either the masses or the mathematicians.

Greg insisted, third, on certain positive points about how government ought to work. In the first place, it ought to be active. After the repeal of the Corn Laws he argued consistently that England's rulers were working in good faith to mitigate social misery and to rectify abuses.[77] Those who continued to represent the governing class as a body hostile to the people, driven by incurable jobbing propensities, were describing a condition which had long since passed away.[78] By the 1860s he was suggesting that it was time to think of "enlarging the functions of central Government, and … teaching ourselves a new-born confidence."[79] Greg always argued that while economy in the public finances was a meaningful political value, there were higher values to which Britain ought to aspire, both at home and on the global stage. The implementation of effective interventionist social measures, moreover, might help neutralize pressure for further democratization. Second, and more fundamentally, Greg believed that government ought to be

[70]Hilton, *The Age of Atonement*, *passim*. See also G. R. Searle, *Morality and the Market in Victorian Britain* (Oxford, 1998).

[71]W. R. Greg, "England as It Is," in Greg, *Essays on Political and Social Science*, 1: 297–343, at 322–3.

[72][Greg], "Principles of Indian Government," 8, original emphasis.

[73]W. R. Greg, "English Socialism," in Greg, *Essays on Political and Social Science*, 1: 458–504, at 471; for Chalmers see ibid., 460.

[74][W. R. Greg], "The Great Social Problem," *Edinburgh Review* 100/203 (1854), 163–92, at 168.

[75][Greg], "Mary Barton," 419–21; [W. R. Greg], "The Proletariat on a False Scent," *Quarterly Review* 132/263 (1872), 251–94.

[76][W. R. Greg], "Charity, Noxious and Beneficent," *Westminster Review* 59/115 (1853), 62–88, at 62–3.

[77]W. R. Greg, "The Fermentation of Europe," in Greg, *Essays on Political and Social Science*, 2: 1–21, at 20.

[78][W. R. Greg], "Principles of Taxation," *North British Review* 16/31 (1851), 49–88, at 82. For the broader trajectory of the discourse here see Jonathan Parry, "The Decline of Institutional Reform in Nineteenth-Century Britain," in David Feldman and Jon Lawrence, eds., *Structures and Transformations in Modern British History* (Cambridge, 2011), 164–86.

[79][W. R. Greg], "Scientific versus Amateur Administration," *Quarterly Review* 127/253 (1869), 41–68, at 63.

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integrative.[80] The most profound enemy of good government was class legislation. The Corn Laws before their repeal were "the triumph of class legislation"; universal suffrage "would be the most flagrant piece of class-legislation on record"; while the doctrine that the poor should be removed from the tax system was similarly "class legislation of the most sweeping, flagrant, and demagogic character."[81] Government by an insulated caste apart, as existed in corners of contemporary Europe, was equally to be despised.[82] Sound government, in short, was dynamic, disinterested, and conducted with a view to harmonizing potentially conflicting groups and interests.

All this meant that Greg was deeply concerned with the problem of political leadership. He claimed that statesmanship was the highest "branch of practical science," and his corpus of writing around the issue is probably the most serious and detailed of the mid-Victorian era.[83] If politics was to be structured around a public-spirited elite interpreting the laws of nature and governing the masses for their own good, then the circumstances and characteristics of that elite mattered enormously.[84] Political leadership ought to be rational: statesmen should be allowed to mature their plans in isolation from the erratic pressures of partisan politics, in order to be able to act for the benefit of the state as a whole, rather than that of lobbies or interest groups.[85] It ought to be educated: those without leisure and the correct training could never grasp the breadth of interests in a polity, or the laws by which social and political progress was to be achieved. And it ought to be unswerving: Greg always maintained that Britain would gain incalculable benefits if it were to pursue a policy more definite in its principles, purposes, and means, at home and abroad. In the 1850s and 1860s, Greg brimmed with practical proposals for alterations to the English parliamentary and cabinet systems which might promote this kind of scientific statesmanship. But as far as Britain was concerned, he knew that he was offering counsels of perfection. Under constitutional self-government, especially after 1832, only approximations to his ideal were possible.[86] The partisanship, materialism, and doctrinal politics which were inevitable corollaries of party government placed insuperable obstacles in the way of the construction of longer-term political schemes, and the rational application of state power.

[80]For the centrality of this theme to Victorian Liberalism see Parry, *Rise and Fall*.

[81][W. R. Greg], "Corn Law Debate," *Westminster Review* 37/2 (1842), 348–67, at 348; [Greg], "The Expected Reform Bill," 250; [Greg], "Principles of Taxation," 71.

[82][W. R. Greg with James P. Lacaita], "Italy; Its Prospects and Capacities," *National Review* 9/17 (1859), 229–68, at 258.

[83][Greg], "Unsound Social Philosophy," 501. See also [W. R. Greg], "The Reform Bill: Its Real Bearing and Ultimate Results," *National Review* 10/20 (1860), 421–46, at 445. Greg's writing on the theme is drawn on selectively in Craig, "Statesmanship."

[84]Greg believed equally fervently in the desirability of factory owners exercising a benign despotism over the workingmen committed to their care. It has been suggested that Greg may have been the model for John Thornton in Elizabeth Gaskell's novel *North and South*; see the discussion and references in Chris R. Vanden Bossche, *Reform Acts: Chartism, Social Agency, and the Victorian Novel, 1832–1867* (Baltimore, 2014), 229.

[85]This meant that Greg set little value on party consistency. W. R. Greg, "Political Consistency," in Greg, *Political Problems for Our Age and Country*, 172–86, at 172–4, 186.

[86][W. R. Greg], "Cost of Party Government," *Quarterly Review* 126/252 (1869), 394–413; [Greg], "The Expected Reform Bill," 249.

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Attempts at reform hence invariably became "a mass of anomalous, contradictory, confused elements."[87] There were, however, parts of the globe where leadership closer in form to Greg's ideal model could be found. One was in the tropical quarters of the British Empire. India, in particular, he regarded as the grandest arena for doing good which political science had ever faced: Greg argued that whatever was "truly great and far-seeing" in English statesmanship had long been found in the East.[88] In the wake of the Mutiny, he set out a series of measures by which "for once, and in one quarter of the globe, British policy shall be systematic, uniform, and persistent."[89] The other possible site of more concerted scientific statesmanship, as we shall see, was continental Europe.

In summary, then, Greg's fundamental political commitments were to enlightened, educated, scientific leadership, and to promoting the understanding and observance of the laws of nature and political economy. His concrete political positions all flowed from these premises. In imperial policy, he argued that national duty demanded the retention of an empire which had lost its economic rationale after 1846.[90] Distancing himself further from the Manchesterism of Cobden and Bright, he maintained that the British possessed an exceptional capacity not just for colonial self-government, but also for authoritarian imperial rule.[91] While disclaiming any desire for further territorial expansion, he supported Rajah Brooke's extraordinary regime in Sarāwak, and claimed that British tutelage would be the best thing for China and Japan.[92] The communication of civilization to underdeveloped parts of the world by advanced European states was to be welcomed in general, and Napoleon III's 1860s intervention in Mexico struck Greg—unusually among Liberals—as eminently reasonable.[93] As far as the United States was concerned, he was certain that the American Civil War meant the end of the Union, and that this would be a positive development—the war ultimately being a conflict not over slavery, but over the tyrannical and unconstitutional policy of the North,

[87][W. R. Greg], "Juvenile and Female Labour," *Edinburgh Review* 79/159 (1844), 130–56, at 150.

[88]W.R.G. [W. R. Greg], "England's Future Attitude towards Europe and towards the World," *Fraser's Magazine* 71/426 (1865), 719–35, at 734.

[89][Greg], "Principles of Indian Government," 6. Greg thought that England's destiny might ultimately be as an Asiatic rather than a European power: see [Greg], "England's Future Attitude," 732–4; and W. R. Greg, "Employment of Our Asiatic Forces in European Wars," *Fortnightly Review* 29 (1878), 835–49.

[90]The settler colonies were to be retained at least until they showed a clear desire to separate. [W. R. Greg], "Shall We Retain Our Colonies?", *Edinburgh Review* 93/190 (1851), 475–98; [Greg], "Our Colonial Empire, and Our Colonial Policy," *North British Review* 19/38 (1853), 345–98; [Greg], "Our Colonies," *North British Review* 36/72 (1862), 535–60.

[91]Cf., however, the reading of Manchester Liberalism and imperialism in John M. Hobson, *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics: Western International Theory, 1760–2010* (Cambridge, 2012), Chs. 2–3.

[92][W. R. Greg], "The Foreign Policy of the English Ministry," *National Review* 4/8 (1857), 441–74, at 473–4; [Greg], "Foreign Policy of the English Government and the English Nation," *National Review* 17/34 (1863), 465–92, at 472–3; [Greg], "England's Future Attitude," 729–30. He also remained convinced that British rule would be the best thing for the black population of Jamaica, though by the time of the Morant Bay rebellion it was clearly too late for effective direct rule. [Greg], "The Jamaica Problem," *Fraser's Magazine* 73/435 (1866), 277–305. On Rajah Brooke in British politics see Alex Middleton, "Rajah Brooke and the Victorians," *Historical Journal* 53/2 (2010), 381–400.

[93][Greg], "Foreign Policy of the English Government," 481–3. Greg thought it a shame that Britain had not participated more vigorously in the enterprise.

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which had turned away from integration and towards sectional interests. American politics was in any case an object lesson in the dangers of democracy.[94] On the basis that the Irish race benefited from intermixture with and the leavening influence of other nationalities, Greg strongly supported the Union.[95] If he had lived to see the Liberal Party split in 1886, Greg's sympathies would unquestionably have lain with the Liberal Unionists. His views on the principles behind Home Rule were unambiguous, and it was obvious that scientific statesmanship would be less attainable than ever if the government was handed over to democratizing Gladstonians.

## W. R. Greg and European politics

European issues mattered enormously in the shaping of mid-Victorian Liberalism. Most work around this theme, however, has focused either on partisan or "high" politics, or on tracing broad currents of opinion.[96] Historians have spent less time on the more elaborate analyses of European affairs developed by reflective writers on politics, and most such studies deal with representatives of the more "advanced" varieties of Liberalism.[97] Greg wrote as extensively on Continental affairs as anyone of his class and generation, and represents an important case study in how conservative Liberals handled European questions.

It makes sense that someone of Greg's cast of mind should have taken an interest in Continental affairs. Mid-Victorian Liberals who aimed to neutralize pressure for domestic constitutional reform and democratization were often the most enthusiastic about celebrating the advance of "liberty" abroad. In 1850s Manchester in particular, as Anthony Howe has pointed out, an interest in Continental politics became "the hallmark of a conservative liberalism at home."[98] But Greg's concern with developments on the other side of the Channel had deeper roots. He had travelled across Europe as a young man, and in adult life returned regularly, especially to Paris and northern France. His claims about the general tendencies of European politics were sharply drawn, and his understanding of the forces involved

[94][W. R. Greg], "The Civil War in America," *National Review* 13/25 (1861), 150–69; [Greg], "The American Conflict," *North British Review* 37/74 (1862), 468–504; [Greg], "The American Republic: Resurrection through Dissolution," *North British Review* 36/71 (1862), 233–72. Greg seems to have ceased writing on American politics before 1865, so it is unclear how he reconciled himself to later developments.

[95][W. R. Greg], "Johnston's *Notes on North America*," *Edinburgh Review* 94/191 (1851), 46–64, at 57–8; [Greg], "Highland Destitution and Irish Emigration," *Quarterly Review* 90/179 (1851), 163–205, at 196–8; [Greg], "The Modern Exodus and Its Effects on the British Islands," *North British Review* 18/35 (1852), 259–302, at 275; and, most emphatically, [Greg], "Ireland," *North British Review* 4/95 (1868), 243–290, at 288; [Greg], "Ireland Once More," *Quarterly Review* 125/249 (1868), 254–86.

[96]Derek Beales, *England and Italy, 1859–60* (London, 1961); Gregory Claeys, "Mazzini, Kossuth, and British Radicalism, 1848–1854," *Journal of British Studies* 28/3 (1989), 225–61; Olive Anderson, *A Liberal State at War: English Politics and Economics during the Crimean War* (London, 1967); David Brown, *Palmerston and the Politics of Foreign Policy, 1846–55* (Manchester, 2002); E. D. Steele, *Palmerston and Liberalism, 1855–1865* (Cambridge, 1991); Miles Taylor, *The Decline of British Radicalism, 1847–1860* (Oxford, 1995), Chs. 6–9. See also the synthesis by Geoffrey Hicks, "Britain and Europe," in Brown, Crowcroft, and Pentland, *The Oxford Handbook of Modern British Political History*, 544–62.

[97]See note 14 above.

[98]Howe, *Cotton Masters*, 241.

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characteristically systematic. His writing on France was of a different order of sociological specificity, and ambition, and is dealt with separately in the following section.

Most of Greg's writing on Europe dates from between 1848 and 1871, when European affairs were at their most arresting, and when they bore most strongly on British domestic politics.[99] Before the "year of revolutions" in 1848 Greg's European articles were more concerned with religion than with politics, and after the Franco-Prussian War he turned his attention back to domestic affairs and to more abstract issues.[100] In the 1850s and 1860s, however, Greg consistently made the case that Continental developments ought to be subjects of consuming interest to the public. With Britain's most pressing political and social challenges temporarily resolved after 1846, there was an opportunity to devote more attention to politics overseas.[101]

Greg was far from the only writer to arrive at these conclusions, and far from the only Liberal to start to emphasize the fundamental significance of "national character" in the operation of political systems after 1848. But his "scientific" perspective lends particular interest to his analyses of the structures of European politics in the mid-nineteenth century. Though Greg commented on most of the major Continental developments of this period, he always sought to reach beyond particular circumstances, and to distil general political principles. His observation of Europe not only added depth to his understanding of English politics, but also helped clarify his arguments about the relative merits of different kinds of political system.

For Greg, European politics in the 1850s and 1860s provided quantities of new evidence for the exploration of two major problems in political science. The first was about the relations between political institutions and national character. Greg shared the common post-1848 view that institutions alone were not enough to secure lasting political progress.[102] Dissenting sharply from doctrinaire Utilitarians, he placed national character far above constitutional or legal mechanisms as a factor in the success and failure of polities. He complained that too much political philosophy was vitiated, and too many schemes of policy doomed, by their architects' failure to consider "the fundamental characteristics, intellectual and moral, which distinguish different nations."[103] To imagine that the same political institutions would fit all peoples alike was a dangerous mistake. Greg was particularly frustrated by the strand of domestic thinking which wanted to see every country as an embryo England, and to introduce English institutions everywhere.

[99]On responses to the 1848 revolutions see Roland Quinault, "1848 and Parliamentary Reform," *Historical Journal* 31/4 (1988), 831–51; Fabrice Bensimon, *Les britanniques face à la révolution française de 1848* (2000); Leslie Mitchell, "Britain's Reaction to the Revolutions," in R. J. W. Evans and Hartmut Pogge von Strandmann, eds., *The Revolutions in Europe, 1848–1849: from Reform to Reaction* (Oxford, 2002), 83–99.

[100]E.g. W. R. Greg, "Laing's German Catholic Schism," in Greg, *Essays on Political and Social Science*, 1: 81–117.

[101][W. R. Greg], "The State of Parties," *National Review* 7/13 (1858), 220–43, at 237; [Greg], "Principle and No-Principle in Foreign Policy," *National Review* 13/26 (1861), 241–73, at 252.

[102]Hawkins, *Victorian Political Culture*, 224.

[103][W. R. Greg], "Difficulties of Republican France," *Edinburgh Review* 92/188 (1850), 504–33, at 504.

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English liberty had flourished, he argued, not because of, but in spite of, the nation's "anomalous and defective" constitution, and rather as a consequence of national virtues without which it would have been completely unworkable.[104] Institutions did not supply wisdom and virtue, but were rather instruments by which wisdom and virtue could work out wider benefits.[105] And some nations needed, and were accustomed to, more government than others.[106] Europe demonstrated all these truths, and incidentally helped Greg to refine his arguments about the determinants of England's political success.

The second problem was, as anticipated, about statesmanship. Contemporary Britain, as we have seen, did not permit the realization of scientific political leadership; the United States, suffering under a Procrustean tyranny of the majority, was in an even worse position. But the Continent was still a field for farsighted, trained, systematic statesmanship. Greg was openly fascinated by the "glorious power which belongs to the rulers of autocratic states" to decide on sweeping measures, and to carry them out.[107] Whereas in England ministers had to frame legislation with a view to getting them through a hostile Parliament and press, autocrats and their creatures could formulate policy with sole regard to the public good.[108] Peter the Great, Colbert, Stein, and Richelieu had been able to mature their schemes over decades, and act precisely as the situations they faced demanded.[109] Napoleon I had been, for all his obvious flaws, a great civil ruler, and France had continued to throw up visionary statesmen since.[110] Even Metternich had shown consistency, firmness, and lofty powers.[111] There was something to be learned from all this about public policy. But Greg was emphatically not one of the few mid-Victorians who thought despotism the best form of government in the abstract.[112] There were circumstances in which it might make sense: he eventually came to the view that Ireland was effectively ungovernable under a constitutional regime.[113] But he argued that while despotisms *could* be beneficent, they were always crushing and sadistic when resisted.[114] They tended to destroy patriotism and citizenship, and to dissolve social bonds.[115] He agreed that democracy was preferable to autocracy, or even oligarchy.[116]

[104][W. R. Greg], "France in January 1852," *North British Review* 16/32 (1852), 559–600, at 578.

[105][Greg], "Life and letters of Niebuhr," 107; [W. R. Greg], "The True Difficulties of the Italian Question," *National Review* 8/16 (1859), 488–502, at 494.

[106]These points rested on similarly commonplace arguments about divisions of race, and about the relative capacities of "Celtics," "Latins," and "Anglo-Saxons" for self-government.

[107]Greg, "England as It Is," 341.

[108][Greg], "Difficulties of Republican France," 530.

[109]Greg, "England as It Is," 341.

[110][W. R. Greg], "Alison's *History of Europe*," *Westminster Review* 41/2 (1844), 388–416, at 399–404; [Greg], "The Duke of Wellington," *Westminster Review*, 58/114 (1852), 531–49, at 534–5.

[111][W. R. Greg], "Net Results of 1848 in Germany and Italy," *North British Review* 15/30 (1851), 359–88, at 375–6.

[112]Cf. Richard Congreve, *The Roman Empire of the West* (London, 1855), 60–62.

[113][W. R. Greg], "The Truth about Ireland," *Quarterly Review* 127/253 (1869), 270–92, at 284–5.

[114][Greg], "The True Difficulties of the Italian Question," at 491–2.

[115][Greg], "M. de Tocqueville's *France before the Revolution*," 560.

[116][Greg], "Principle and No-Principle," 266.

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Greg's scientific interest in the systems of Continental politics, then, was married to a more commonplace conception of what was at issue in mid-nineteenth-century Europe. There were "two great parties in the Continental struggle"—the causes of despotism and of freedom.[117] For all their fascination, the despotic states were on the wrong track. Rome under the popes stood as "the most corrupt, imbecile, mischievous administration of the western world."[118] Further east, the "deadening, benumbing, iron rule of Austria and Russia" mobilized all the machinery of Church and state to repress mental development and intellectual freedom.[119] The advance of freedom, then, was to be celebrated, and Greg was gratified that "the great European movement towards free institutions" had been "the key-note of history since 1815."[120] Britain's own responsibility towards Europe was obvious, and the diametric opposite of the "narrow, selfish, and insulting" views of international policy promoted by Greg's former Corn Law comrade Richard Cobden.[121] Britain ought to act as the friend of constitutional freedom everywhere, whether the despotism against which it struggled was embodied in an emperor or a mob, and with no regard to Britain's own national interests.[122]

Greg argued that Europe had been in a provisional state ever since the Congress of Vienna. The arbitrary lines which the Great Powers had drawn on the map had not respected concrete affinities of nationality and race.[123] The rise of free trade, and of the cause of democracy, had hammered additional nails into the coffin of the old international order.[124] What 1848 had done was reveal the hollowness behind the apparently solid edifice of European polity.[125] While the despots eventually managed to reassert themselves, the weakness of their positions was clear from the ease with which their thrones had fallen, and the revolutionaries' defeat was not as total as it appeared. The most important lesson Greg drew from the events of 1848–51 was that the prestige of absolutism had been fatally undermined, and that monarchs had learned that they held their power only by their peoples' forbearance.[126]

The year 1848 also underlined that securing durable freedom was not as easy as pulling down a throne. It was axiomatic for Greg that the stable possession of political power depended on the fitness to possess it, as much for the working classes at

[117][Greg], "Net Results of 1848," 359.

[118]Ibid., 360.

[119][W. R. Greg], "The War in the East and Its Political Contingencies," *North British Review* 20/40 (1854), 523–68, at 551–2. Ottoman rule was hardly blue-chip, but it at least had the merit of governing very little, and rested on efficient municipal institutions (ibid.). On the wider purchase of these despotic stereotypes see Bernard Porter, "'Bureau and Barrack': Early Victorian Attitudes towards the Continent," *Victorian Studies* 27/4 (1983–4), 407–33.

[120][W. R. Greg], "Progress and Prospects of the War," *North British Review* 22/43 (1854), 255–88, at 263.

[121][Greg], "The Foreign Policy of the English Ministry," 456.

[122][W. R. Greg], "The Kingdom of Italy," *Edinburgh Review* 113/229 (1861), 253–82, at 262; [Greg], "Our International Relations," *North British Review* 19/37 (1853), 45–84, at 63–6; [Greg], "Principle and No-Principle," 256.

[123][W. R. Greg], "Italian Character and Italian Prospects," *North British Review* 24/48 (1856), 537–68, at 564–5; [Greg], "Progress and Prospects of the War," 285.

[124][Greg], "Principle and No-Principle," 243.

[125][W. R. Greg], "The Diary of Varnhagen von Ense," *National Review* 15/30 (1862), 370–88, at 387–8.

[126][Greg], "Net Results of 1848," 375–7.

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home as for struggling nationalities abroad.[127] Constitutional liberty could be won only by the gradual extortion, and judicious exploitation, of concessions from sovereigns. It was safe neither where it was conferred too easily, nor where it was seized by sudden uprisings of democracy.[128] Paper constitutions, therefore, were invariably dead letters: the growth of real freedom was slow, painful, and laborious, concessions having to be extorted one by one.[129] Greg sympathized most ardently with the cause of Italian freedom, and the processes by which Italy's liberation and unification were achieved came the closest to meeting his general strictures.[130]

Greg's ultimate vision for Europe was "stable equilibrium."[131] This meant a political system and a set of territorial arrangements which were permanent and enduring, because they were in harmony with the laws of justice, and the fixed desires of the human mind. No longer would unnatural arrangements be forcibly upheld.[132] Arriving at such a state of equilibrium would require the wider recognition of the twin irrepressible principles of constitutional freedom and of nationality.[133] Greg's scheme did not include the liberation of all discontented nationalities under alien sway, since not all had the capacity for independent existence—he admitted that "nationality" was, for all its political importance, a "somewhat vague term."[134] But nationality was a fact, and there could be no stability for political unions which did not in some way respect it.[135] By the 1870s, Greg had become confident that his vision would be realized by a predictable mechanical process. All that was required was that the general principle of nonintervention in the disputes of other nations should be acknowledged, by those on both sides of the struggle.[136] With foreign spokes removed from the wheels of domestic politics, and the system cleansed of artificial interpositions, freedom would be the inevitable output.

## W. R. Greg and the Second Empire

France was the European nation in which Greg was primarily interested, and his analysis of its politics was considerably more sustained and detailed than in the case of any other country. This was conventional enough, given that France was

[127]A position he maintained throughout his life. For an early formulation see [W. R. Greg], "The Outbreak of August in the Manufacturing Districts," *Westminster Review* 38/2 (1842), 391–413, at 411–12.

[128][Greg], "Net Results of 1848," 383. This was also true in Britain: [Greg], "The Expected Reform Bill," 232–3.

[129][Greg], "France in January 1852," 589–90.

[130][W. R. Greg], "Recent Italian Autobiographies," *Edinburgh Review* 99/202 (1854), 557–73; [Greg], "Italian Character and Italian Prospects"; [Greg and Lacaita], "Italy; Its Prospects"; [Greg], "The Kingdom of Italy."

[131][Greg], "Italian Character and Italian Prospects," 564; [Greg], "Principle and No-Principle," 263.

[132][W. R. Greg], "The Significance of the Struggle," *North British Review* 24/47 (1855), 268–88, at 283.

[133][Greg], "Principle and No-Principle," 263–5.

[134][Greg], "The Significance of the Struggle," 284. Greg's concept of nationality was basically that of most mid-Victorian Liberals. See H. S. Jones, "The Idea of the National in Victorian Political Thought," *European Journal of Political Theory* 5/1 (2006), 12–21; Georgios Varouxakis, "'Patriotism,' 'Cosmopolitanism' and 'Humanity' in Victorian Political Thought," *European Journal of Political Theory* 5/1 (2006), 100–18. Certainly Greg did not indulge in the critiques outlined in Richard Smittenaar, "'Feelings of Alarm': Conservative Criticism of the Principle of Nationality in Mid-Victorian Britain," *Modern Intellectual History* 14/2 (2017), 365–91.

[135][Greg], "Our International Relations," 84.

[136]W. R. Greg, "Popular *versus* Professional Armies," *Contemporary Review* 16 (1871), 351–73, at 355.

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unquestionably the most significant foreign country in the Victorian political imagination.[137] In the 1850s and 1860s, in particular, claims about the character and foreign policy of Napoleon III's Second Empire proved an essential bond of unity for a Liberal Party that was badly divided on many domestic issues.[138] Georgios Varouxakis has examined how certain Liberal intellectuals, including John Stuart Mill, Walter Bagehot, and Matthew Arnold, made sense of France in this era, and there is more to be said about the ideas of Henry Reeve, editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, on the subject.[139] But Greg was the equal of these men in the quantity of his writing on French politics, and went beyond all of them in the intensity of his interest. He offered probably the fullest mid-Victorian dissection of how the machine of the French state worked.

There were substantial overlaps between Greg's analysis and that of Bagehot, as might be expected, given their shared connection with the *Economist* newspaper and their personal intimacy. Both men emphasized the curious specificities of French "national character," and the unsuitability under present circumstances of English institutions for France; both initially welcomed the Napoleonic regime. Where Bagehot largely maintained his enthusiasm for the empire, however, and even looked back fondly on it after its collapse, Greg was much more quickly disappointed.[140] This was, essentially, because Napoleon III proved obstinately unwilling to fulfil his duty of moving Europe in the proper constitutional direction.

Greg's reasons for paying such close attention to French politics were clearly expressed. Britain and France were "the two greatest powers in the world."[141] They were far ahead of the rest of Europe in literature, material progress, wealth, and the science of administration, and indeed made the Continent what it was.[142] So much was obvious. But Greg's investigations of France went well beyond commonplaces. Tocqueville's comment to him, in a letter of 1853, that 'of all countries this is the one as to which it is most dangerous to form an opinion by what usually takes place in others,' dovetailed neatly with attitudes Greg had already formed.[143] Greg had an encyclopedic knowledge of the French press, a vividly detailed grasp of French history, and a network of well-placed Parisian contacts.[144]

[137]Indeed there is a whole historiographical subfield which interrogates this relationship. See in general Robert Tombs and Isabelle Tombs, *That Sweet Enemy: The French and the British from the Sun King to the Present* (London, 2006); and Aprile and Bensimon, *La France et l'Angleterre*.

[138]J. P. Parry, "The Impact of Napoleon III on British Politics, 1851–1880," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 11 (2001), 147–75. See also Matthew Kelly, "Languages of Radicalism, Race, and Religion in Irish Nationalism: The French Affinity, 1848–1871," *Journal of British Studies* 49/4 (2010), 801–25; Hawkins, *Victorian Political Culture*, 224–6.

[139]Varouxakis, *Victorian Political Thought on France*; see also Henry Reeve, *Royal and Republican France*, 2 vols. (London, 1872).

[140]See Zevin, *Liberalism at Large*, 92–8.

[141][W. R. Greg], "The Fall of Sebastopol," *National Review* 1/2 (1855), 478–87, at 485.

[142][Greg], "Progress and Prospects of the War," 258–9. But England was the clear leader: [Greg], "M. de Tocqueville," 296.

[143]Alexis de Tocqueville to W. R. Greg, 23 May 1853, in Tocqueville, *Memoir, Letters, and Remains*, 2: 220.

[144]See e.g. [W. R. Greg], "French Judgments of England," *Edinburgh Review* 103/210 (1856), 558–90. Greg's study of French politics began early on: Morley, "Greg," 255; and see e.g. [Greg], "Alison's *History of Europe*" (1844).

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His periodical writing was able to probe the prospects and social constitution of all the competing parties in French politics in a lucid and up-to-date fashion. He was convinced that he understood France: British politicians who did not attracted some of his sharpest strictures.[145]

In exploring French specificities, however, Greg was also pursuing broader scientific goals. He saw France as a laboratory of political pathology. Contemporary French politics was "a perfect mine of political wisdom," and the country's annals since 1789 constituted a "vast dissecting room … where physiological experiments are carried on on a gigantic scale, and where operations of every degree of cruel ingenuity are performed on the unhappy victims."[146] At the same time, Greg insisted that the French, more than any other nation, possessed social and moral peculiarities which made it impossible to prescribe remedies for them as an "average" civilized people.[147] So he was cautious about drawing analogies between British and French politics—another point on which Tocqueville had insisted in their correspondence.[148] His diagnosis of political evils, however, clearly applied to both countries. He explained the 1789 Revolution as a rebellion against his two great hatreds: class legislation and the abdication of social responsibility on the part of elites.[149] His writing on France, as this suggests, combined themes visible in both his domestic and his European thought. But Greg's abiding concern was with the issue of why the French polity kept failing.

In the years between 1848 and 1852, Greg conducted an extended inquiry into France's inability to support free government. Louis Philippe's regime, which the 1848 Revolution had cast down, had aimed to shackle and demoralize the country, and its collapse was not worth regretting.[150] But Greg did not see the revolution as a new dawn, and insisted that any attempt to erect a republic on the ashes of the Orléanist order was doomed to fail. His explanation for why no democratic constitution could produce political stability in France was exceptionally thorough: but the problem, in essence, was that the French national character, reshaped to some extent by the recent institutional history of the nation, could not tolerate it. At the core of Greg's analysis was the idea that no government of any kind could achieve stability without a critical, albeit nebulous, mass of wisdom and virtue supporting it. That wisdom might pervade the masses, in which case democracy was conceivable; if it did not, then it had to be concentrated in the men who were to govern.[151] France after 1848 possessed neither an appropriately virtuous populace, nor any great men who could compensate for that absence.

[145]E.g. [Greg], "Mr. Bright, Painted by Himself," 543.

[146][Greg], "Representative Reform," 465–6.

[147]W. R. G. [W. R. Greg], "*Suum Cuique*: The Moral of the Paris Catastrophe," *Fraser's Magazine* 4/19 (1871), 115–34, at 115.

[148][W. R. Greg], "Priests, Parliaments, and Electors," *Quarterly Review* 133/265 (1872), 276–92, at 279; [Greg], "Parliamentary Purification," 611–13; Alexis de Tocqueville to W. R. Greg, 27 July 1853, in Tocqueville, *Memoir, Letters, and Remains*, 2: 225–6. See, however, e.g. [Greg], "Ireland," 244. America was more straightforward to compare with Britain: [Greg], "Scientific versus Amateur Administration," 62.

[149][Greg], "Alison's *History of Europe*," 391.

[150]Greg, "Fermentation," 2.

[151]Ibid.,13. See also W. R. Greg, "France since 1848," in Greg, *Essays on Political and Social Science*, 2: 63–112, at 72.

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Greg's writing on French politics after the 1848 Revolution consisted of a catalogue of exhibitions of this absence of necessary political virtues. These fell into two main categories. The first were the incapacities and eccentricities connected to the fact that the essential principle of French government had for so long been centralized and bureaucratic. Having been kept in leading strings, the French felt an instinctual need to be governed.[152] Without the requisite training in self-rule they could not even conceive of changing the despotic principle of their administration: and without the ability to understand liberty, there was no chance of a revolution conferring it.[153] Under these conditions even universal manhood suffrage offered "not liberty, but merely the selection of your head oppressor."[154] As such, French attempts to force republicanism to work in defiance of history, social structure, and national character could only ever be unavailing.[155] The year 1848 offered no plausible foundation for effective and stable government, and Greg interpreted it instead as an "aggressive negation."[156]

Alongside these arguments stood broader claims about how the nature of French culture and society vitiated its politics. Greg argued that durable freedom could be maintained only where genuine patriotism pervaded the nation, where there was habitual respect for established law and a rigid love of justice, and where sobriety of character prevailed.[157] France possessed none of these qualities. As a Celtic people the French sought always after national power and grandeur: they were "essentially and above all, a military people."[158] Their lack of true patriotism, and disrespect for the law, were manifested in the "vague, greedy, illimitable Gallic thirst for territory, influence, and dominion."[159] There was also the fundamental problem of irreligion. Since the Edict of Nantes, Greg argued, the intellect of the French people had ranged itself on the side of skepticism, and this "national deficiency in the religious element," undermining belief in a supreme being whose laws were above question, made it all but impossible to build up society or government.[160] Pervasive urban irreligion also led directly to materialism, "the deepest and most dangerous malady which the state physician has to deal with."[161] It was closely linked to the licentiousness and barbarity which had overrun metropolitan France, and the prevalence of a low tone of public morality was another bad augur for the nation's future.[162] The morally reprehensible nature of so much French literature was both a key culprit and a key piece of evidence for this absence of necessary sobriety of character.[163] So until the French learnt the lesson that Greg sought to teach—

[152][Greg], "France in January 1852," 562.

[153]Greg, "Fermentation," 5; Greg, "France since 1848," 102–8.

[154]Greg, "France since 1848," 108; [Greg], "Difficulties of Republican France," 524.

[155]Greg, "France since 1848," 72.

[156]Ibid., 111.

[157][Greg], "Difficulties of Republican France," 512, 516, 518–19.

[158]Greg, "France since 1848," 109.

[159]W. R. Greg, "The Great Duel: Its True Meaning and Issues," *Contemporary Review* 16 (1870), 142–64, at 145.

[160]Greg, "France since 1848," 76–8.

[161]Ibid., 83. See also [Greg], "France in January 1852," 598–9.

[162][Greg], "Crisis of Political Parties," 564.

[163][W. R. Greg], "Modern French Literature," *Edinburgh Review* 101/205 (1855), 92–120; [Greg], "French Fiction: The Lowest Deep," *National Review* 11/22 (1860), 400–27. There were, however,

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that institutions were of little value without the requisite virtues and habits—their experiments would continue to end in failure. France had sought "in the barren and narrow range of the mechanical, what can only be found in the rich resources of the moral world," and it was fruitless to abolish the *ancien régime* when "each man carried his *ancient regime* within himself."[164] What the country needed in the short term was a ruler who understood it.

All this was the context for Greg's extended, detailed, and highly engaged encounter with the French regime of Louis Napoleon. Most Liberal intellectuals of the era who wrote for publication on the Second Empire produced an essay or two on the subject. Greg, however, followed it from its inception in 1852 to its collapse in 1870, writing hundreds of pages of articles specifically on France, and exploring aspects of Napoleon III's policy in pieces on other subjects. Existing scholarship does not adequately stress the sheer amount of time and energy devoted by the mid-Victorians to divining the motivations behind Napoleon III's initiatives in both domestic and foreign policy: but few were as devoted to the theme as Greg.

Louis Napoleon earned a cautious welcome from Greg as he first assumed command of France.[165] His assumption of the presidency with unlimited powers was certainly illegal, but it was not necessarily wrong. Power seized criminally could still be used for good.[166] And his uncle Napoleon I, after all, had been a truer representative of the wishes and opinions of France than any assembly the country had ever elected.[167] If France's new ruler was wise and patriotic, he might be able in time to cultivate that solemn reverence for law without which no government could achieve stability.[168] He needed to avoid militarism, trenching upon the free press, neglecting the demands of the middle classes, or relying on the priesthood.[169] It was no surprise when the nation converted President Louis Napoleon into the Emperor Napoleon III: Greg claimed that this was less because he dazzled its imagination than because voters felt that he best suited the position and the character of France.[170] This point was supported by a forensic discussion of the degree of his support among different groups in French society.[171] Greg disclaimed any intention to be an apologist for a tyrant, however, presenting himself rather as an analyst of the choice of political evils facing France.[172]

Though Greg was not always sure what to make of Napoleon III, it is clear that the emperor fascinated him. We have seen that Greg had a sneaking admiration for

glimmerings of light here: [W. R. Greg], "British and Continental Characteristics," *North British Review* 21/41 (1854), 45–68, at 45–6. More broadly see Michael Ledger-Lomas, "French Novels in Mid-Victorian England," in Rosalind Crone, David Gange, and Katy Jones, eds., *New Perspectives in British Cultural History* (Newcastle, 2007), 214–31

[164][Greg], "France in January 1852," 580.

[165]This does not seem to have generated any great friction with Tocqueville, who was bitterly hostile to the coup and the empire. Greg stayed with him for a few days in 1853.

[166]Ibid., 573, 590.

[167]Ibid., 588.

[168]Ibid., 585–7.

[169]Ibid., 591–8. Greg, like most Liberals, despised "priestcraft." [Greg], "Dr. Arnold," 11–12.

[170][W. R. Greg], "The Prospects of France and the Dangers of England," *North British Review* 18/36 (1853), 303–50, at 305.

[171]Ibid., 306–11.

[172]Ibid., 350.

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Continental autocrats: here was a leader with untrammelled power, the more secure for being endorsed by the populace, who might reshape France in his own image. By the mid-1850s it seemed to Greg that the character of Louis Napoleon had become the single most influential element in the state of France.[173] It was unclear whether the emperor knew right from wrong: but he at least had a definite goal, which was to govern his country, and probably to govern it well.[174] In many respects, in fact, he came to fit Greg's notion of the ideal "scientific" statesman, in outline if not in the details of his policy.[175] He had a strong notion of doing his work; he had his own distinct ideas, even if not consistent ones; and he sought to make France great and prosperous.[176] As a result, Napoleon III produced effects almost as great as had his uncle.[177] He was, as Greg once put it, the worst and most vulgar man of genius in the Western world.[178] In this vein, after the passage of the Second Reform Act, Greg was particularly struck by the analogy between Louis Napoleon and Disraeli. Both possessed an unshakeable self-belief; both began their careers on unlikely paths; both had a patient and persistent disposition; and both were possessed by the same idea in politics, of taking their authority from the masses.[179]

During the early years of the empire Greg made allowances for the emperor's more questionable acts. His haste to remodel Paris was certainly a mistake; much more so his needlessly draconian restrictions of press freedom.[180] But the existence of elements of danger and disorder in France which did not exist in England, especially the extreme political excitability of the country, made it reasonable to postpone judgment.[181] The problem, by the middle years of the 1850s, was that the emperor had offered no sign of regarding his arbitrary sternness as transitional.[182] The absence of any incipient moves in the right direction made it increasingly difficult to defend him. Greg argued that it was sensible to continue supporting his regime, nonetheless, if only as a guarantee of the Anglo-French alliance, but that it was impossible to feel confidence or ease with regard to the empire.[183] By the end of the 1850s, however, Louis Napoleon had disappointed Greg's more optimistic expectations. It was clear that he was not, in fact, the man to unite necessary repressive energies with desirable temperate freedom.[184] After the clampdown following the attempt on his life in 1857 it had finally become obvious that the tendency of his measures was not, after all, towards liberty or the encouragement of constitutional action.[185] Napoleon had achieved great things on the international

[173][W. R. Greg], "The Present State of France," *National Review* 2/3 (1856), 123–56, at 131.
[174]Ibid., 132–3.
[175]He was included in Greg's modern pantheon of great French statesmen in [Greg], "Statesmanship in Constitutional Countries," 146,
[176][Greg], "The Present State of France," 133.
[177][W. R. Greg], "Napoleonism," *National Review* 15/30 (1862), 327–50, at 327–8.
[178][W. R. Greg], "The Cost of a Napoleon," *Fraser's Magazine* 1/4 (1870), 474–88, at 487.
[179]W. R. Greg, "The Great Twin Brethren," in Greg, *Miscellaneous Essays*, 149–60; Greg, "A Modern 'Symposium'," 180; [Greg], "Representative Reform," 466. Cf. Parry, "Napoleon III," 171–3.
[180][Greg], "The Present State of France," 136–42.
[181]Ibid., 149–50.
[182]Ibid., 151.
[183]Ibid., 152–6.
[184][Greg], "Louis Napoleon at Home and Abroad," 473–4.
[185]Ibid., 474–7.

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stage, but at the cost of paralyzing his state politically, and strengthening its materialistic tendencies.[186]

When Greg looked back on the empire after its fall, the picture was barren. Napoleon III had spent unwisely, gone to war unnecessarily, lowered the tone of public morality, and corrupted French politics and government.[187] His policy, boiled down, had been to make men rich as compensation for not making them free, a policy which had "narcotised the conscience."[188] Prussia's victory in the war of 1870–71, then, was to be welcomed.[189] It was not a glorious demonstration of Prussian might, but a reflection on the indolence, conceit, incapacity, and rottenness of France, and on "the astounding incapacity of the Imperial rule."[190] If France learned the lessons of the conflict, it might be able to regenerate itself, stop disturbing the peace of Europe, and finally find a stable system of government.[191] But given the selfishness, decadence, and degeneracy which had overrun the people of France in the years of the Second Empire, there was not much hope.[192] Greg returned, finally, to the analysis of 1848 he had offered twenty years earlier, maintaining again that nugatory revolutions provided no foundation for robust government.[193] The Second Empire, for all its early promise, had ultimately ended up encouraging and accentuating all the worst characteristics of French politics, rather than finding any means of moving France down the path to political freedom.

## Conclusion

William Rathbone Greg was a Liberal of a very particular kind. His politics were non-partisan, but he was philosophically committed to fundamentally Liberal values of progress, rational inquiry, and natural law. He combined a profound faith in political economy with a commitment to a domestic constitutional settlement which steered a middle path between aristocracy and democracy, and which allowed as much room as possible for the free play of responsible elite leadership. He idealized the notion of a "scientific" approach to the practice of politics, although he considered it unrealizable in Britain. This fastidious, antidemocratic, paternalist Liberalism at home was married to a commitment to the spread of constitutional freedom abroad, which dictated hostility to Continental despots, despite the dark glamour of the power they wielded. In Napoleon III Greg found a figure who brought his established interests in both French politics and scientific statesmanship into sharp focus. Ultimately, however, the emperor's failure to tackle the moral bases of France's congenital political instability led Greg back towards

[186][Greg], "Napoleonism," 343–7.

[187][Greg], "The Cost of a Napoleon," 476–80, 483–4.

[188]W. R. G. [W. R. Greg], "The Condition of French Politics," *Fraser's Magazine* 3/17 (1871), 541–54, at 553.

[189]Greg, "The Great Duel," 145. The proceeds from the version of this article republished as a pamphlet went to the "Victoria Institute for Providing for the Widows and Orphans of the German Soldiers." W. R. Greg, *The Great Duel: Its True Meaning and Uses* (London, 1871).

[190]Greg, "The Great Duel," 146; [Greg], "The Condition of French Politics," 544.

[191]Greg, "The Great Duel," 159–63.

[192][Greg], "The Condition of French Politics," 542, 551.

[193]Greg, "The Great Duel," 162.

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the negative estimation of his leadership shared by most mid-Victorian Liberal thinkers and commentators. The case study underlines that Greg's version of a "science of politics" after 1848 was not utilitarian and universal, but intricately detailed and national. The two developed systemic analyses he offered, of Britain and France, demonstrated how particular forms of government were only appropriate to, and could only be operated by, particular peoples. Few other mid-Victorians offered such full dissections of the relationships between institutions, opinion, political leadership, and "national character."

Even though he moved socially in the world of the mid-Victorian intellectual aristocracy, Greg is rightly omitted from its very highest ranks. But his contemporaries thought that he mattered nonetheless, and historians of nineteenth-century Liberalism and Liberal politics can benefit from taking him more seriously. The point is not that his claims about the science of politics, the ideal forms of social and political order, or the details of public policy, were particularly distinctive. In most cases they were not, and Greg did not claim any great originality for himself. Greg's real significance is, first, as a leading member of an important class. There is much which can yet be learned about patterns of political thinking and argument in nineteenth-century Britain by looking more systematically at the ideas of extra-canonical figures like Greg, whose writing did not aspire to permanent relevance, but who aimed to teach the educated Victorian public what to think.[194] Such characters clearly played a vital part in moulding the intellectual contexts within which both practical politics and more rarefied theorizing took place, and in mediating the ideas of the greater names privileged in the history of political thought to a wider audience.[195] They mattered especially in framing thinking about the internal politics of foreign states: a subject which demanded expert knowledge and interpretation, and to which most of the best-known thinkers in mid-Victorian Britain did not pay sustained attention.[196]

Greg is significant, second, in offering privileged access to the intellectual switchboard of the rationalistic, conservative Liberalism of which he was a prominent representative. He wrote on all the central dilemmas that confronted mid-Victorian Liberals, including the discontents of democracy, the virtues of political economy, the government of Ireland, and the paradoxes of ruling India. He sought to rationalize his positions on all these issues by reference to what he represented as general "scientific" principles, and ineluctable laws. He deserves, as such, to be treated by historians not just as a convenient fount of brisk "Liberal"

[194]On this theme see Conti, *Parliament the Mirror*, 6; and the article Conti cites, Jan-Werner Müller, "The Triumph of What (If Anything)? Rethinking Political Ideologies and Political Institutions in Twentieth-Century Europe," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 14/2 (2009), 211–26. There is some work on members of this class in the early nineteenth century. See Biancamaria Fontana, *Rethinking the Politics of Commercial Society: The Edinburgh Review, 1802–1832* (Cambridge, 1985); Jonathan Cutmore, ed., *Conservatism and the Quarterly Review: A Critical Analysis* (London, 2007); Michael J. Turner, *Independent Radicalism in Early Victorian Britain* (Westport, 2004); Michael Michie, *An Enlightenment Tory in Victorian Scotland: The Career of Sir Archibald Alison* (East Linton, 1998).

[195]John Morley, once again, grasped a version of this point from the outset. Morley, "Greg," 214.

[196]On the nature of the "intellectual" contexts required to understand practical politics see J. P. Parry, "The State of Victorian Political History," *Historical Journal* 26/2 (1983), 469–84, esp. 470–71; and Alex Middleton, "'High Politics' and its Intellectual Contexts," *Parliamentary History* 40/1 (2021), 168–91.

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viewpoints on discrete contemporary phenomena, but as a more significant way into the nineteenth-century Liberal mind in all its complexity.

Finally, what does this reading of Greg add to larger current debates about the character of nineteenth-century Liberalism? Though this article has not focused on Greg's attitudes towards empire—because the subject was not one of his major preoccupations—he was an unusually enthusiastic Liberal supporter of Britain's (and other European nations') imperial projects in all their forms, even the most fantastical. He will prove of service in elucidating some of the murkier intellectual and political hinterlands behind "liberal imperialism," a subject on which there have been so many important advances in the last twenty years.[197] As far as even broader attempts to pin down the nature of Liberalism are concerned, Greg's implications are ambiguous. Helena Rosenblatt's recent bid to recast Liberalism as a fundamentally ethical project, essentially concerned with moral reform, has been met with an equally powerful reply by William Selinger and Gregory Conti, arguing instead that the lowest common denominator of Liberalism was a particular set of claims about representation and representative institutions.[198] Greg, like most Liberals, cared about both ethical uplift and constitutional architecture, though the bent of his thought led him to write more about the latter. Like most *English* Liberals, he was at least equally committed to finding the best possible means of "integrating and harmonising different classes and interest groups within the political nation."[199] An individual case study cannot, of course, demand the upending of cross-national interpretive schemes. But it is worth reminding ourselves of the existence of a current of nineteenth-century thought, exemplified by Greg, in which Liberalism rested as much on a commitment to "science" as it did on morals or institutions.

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[197]See esp. Duncan Bell, *Reordering the World: Essays on Liberalism and Empire* (Princeton, 2016).

[198]Rosenblatt, *The Lost History of Liberalism*; William Selinger and Gregory Conti, "The Lost History of *Political* Liberalism," *History of European Ideas* 46/3 (2020), 341–54.

[199]Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government*, 3.

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