

ALAN MILNE

With the death of Alan Milne earlier this year, this country lost one of its most penetrating, forthright, and original political thinkers. It is fortunate that Milne survived to see through the publication by Macmillan of *Ethical Frontiers of the State*, though regrettable that this work was intended to be only the first of two volumes, the second of which was to cover issues, such as the role of the market, deliberately omitted from the first.

Milne was born in 1922. After the war, in which he was blinded by a sniper's bullet in Germany, he became a student at the LSE, where he was greatly influenced by Laski and Popper and wrote a doctoral thesis comparing Bentham and Coleridge. After twenty years at Queen's, Belfast, Milne was appointed to the Chair of Political Theory and Institutions at the University of Durham. He retired in 1987, but continued to play an active part in discussion at conferences and similar events.

Some complain that political theory has become too specialized, and that its consequent narrowness of focus is leading to the loss of insights embedded within the traditions from which contemporary questions emerge. Such critics will find no fault with Milne's work. His first book was a pathbreaking study of the English idealists, in which he attempted to hive off their social philosophy from what he saw as their dubious metaphysics. On the basis of this idealist analysis, Milne began to develop his own position in a series of books, the most important of which was perhaps *Freedom and Rights* (1968), concerned with the question of the necessary conditions for civilized life.

His later writings – including *The Right to Dissent* (1983) and *Human Rights and Human Diversity* (1986) – also discussed rights and their grounding in social life, considering issues of great contemporary relevance from the same original standpoint, informed but not excessively constrained by the liberalism of nineteenth century thinkers such as Green. *Ethical Frontiers* concerns the proper scope of government, and it is telling that in his introduction Milne quotes Green alongside Margaret Thatcher. Political obligation, democracy, the common good, authority, conflict: these are issues of importance for many readers of this journal, who will no doubt be pleased to hear that a review article of *Ethical Frontiers* by Peter Nicholson will be published in a later number.

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