

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: Oxford Brookes University
Unit of Assessment: 32 - Philosophy
Title of case study: Ethical Socialism and the Future of the Labour Party: working with the Think Tank Labour Left
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Labour Left, the Labour Party Think Tank, is a grassroots organisation developing new public discourses that aim to move Labour towards an ethical socialist position. Professor Beverley Clack works with Labour Left to provide intellectual support for developing Labour Party policy. Her research, which focuses on a common wellbeing, has been used to inform debate in the party around notions of ethical socialism as the basis for policy. She has contributed to public events, including two fringe events at the Labour Party Conferences of 2011 and 2012, collaborated with Mags Waterhouse in producing a blog for the Huffington Post, and contributed a chapter to <i>The Red Book</i> on the theme of ethical socialism.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Professor Clack approaches the philosophy of religion as a form of ethics, where reflection on the ordinary experiences of life in this world (birth, sex, death) lend themselves to a sense of where life's meaning might lie. Her work with Labour Left draws explicitly upon aspects of her research which relate the subject to civil society.</p> <p>This distinctive approach is set out in two sets of publications:</p> <p>Firstly, in her book <i>Sex and Death</i> (2002), Clack argued that accepting one's mortality enables a deeper relationship with the world and others, in contrast to approaches focused on ideals of transcendence. Recognising vulnerability enables the significance of relationship to be placed at the heart of life and thus to affect how human beings might live with each other. This conclusion was also developed in <i>Philosophy of Religion: A Critical Introduction</i> (1st edition 1998; 2nd edition 2008). The final chapter of each edition grounded philosophical reflection in consideration of contemporary issues. In the first edition, this involved arguing for an account of religion that took seriously secularisation. In the second, this shifted to an analysis of 9/11 terrorist attacks and the effect living in what was then being described as 'the Age of Terror' might have on understandings of religion. In a recent article, 'Philosophy of Religion in an Age of Austerity: Towards a Socially Engaged Philosophy for the Well-Lived Life', Clack considered the challenges austerity poses for constructing a well-lived life.</p> <p>Secondly, alongside proposing practical applications for philosophy of religion, Clack has worked with educationalists to influence the identification of wellbeing as a key driver for public policy. This included the role of co-investigator for the ESRC seminar series 'Changing Notions of the Human Subject: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Emotional Well-being and Social Justice in Education Policy and Practice' (2008). This series of seminars brought together historians, psychologists and philosophers with policy makers, political commentators and politicians. Clack organised and spoke at the seminar on philosophical accounts of well-being. The series enabled a critical perspective on well-being as a policy initiative to develop, while also helping Clack to formulate, more explicitly than had hitherto been the case, an understanding of the practical and more directly political implications of her philosophical position. This resulted in the article 'What Difference Does It Make? Philosophical Perspectives on the Nature of Wellbeing and the Role of Educational Practice'. This article translates well-being into the well-lived life: a concern under explored in the policy material and which raises issues for future education policy. Routledge will publish this edition in a new series during 2014, showing something of the scope of influence of this theme. 'The Human Face of Socialism' (<i>The Red Book</i>, 2012) explores the policies that might emanate from thinking about what constitutes the well-lived life. Challenging the neo-liberal account of the individual as consumer, it suggests ways of changing working practices to accommodate a deeper sense of wellbeing.</p>
<p>3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)</p> <p><i>The Philosophy of Religion: A Critical Introduction</i> (1st edition, Wiley, 1998; 2nd edition, Polity Press, 2008). ISBN: 978-0745617374; 978-0745638683.</p>

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Reviews of *The Philosophy of Religion: A Critical Introduction* refer to its grounding in reflection on contemporary issues:

- Professor George Pattison, 2008: "... a superbly clear tour of the major arguments that draws on an exceptional range of illustrations and insights, closing with a discussion of religion post-9/11 that will help all who are seriously concerned to develop a truly thoughtful approach to religion for our time."
- John Waters, Times Educational Supplement, Friday 4 December 1998. "A first rate book." "A refreshing approach which draws on Wittgenstein's writings, a feminist critique of theism and the challenges facing belief in a secular age."

Sex and Death: A Reappraisal of Human Mortality (Polity Press, 2002). ISBN: 978-0745622798. Submitted to RAE2008, Oxford Brookes University, UoA60-Philosophy, BJ Clack, RA 2, Output 1

Review of *Sex and Death*:

- Stan Hooft, *Philosophy in Review*, 23 (2), pp. 87-88. "It leads readers to engage philosophically with arguments that have the potential to change their fundamental attitudes."

ESRC RES-451-26-0541 'Changing Notions of the self? Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Emotional Well-being and Social Justice in Education Policy and Practice', 2008 (£17,700). Prof Kathryn Ecclestone (Oxford Brookes University 2004-2009) was Principal Investigator, and Clack was a Co-investigator.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

A key member of Labour Left since it was established, Clack was identified by the founder of Labour Left as providing intellectual support for an ethical socialist vision. He asked her to contribute an essay on ethical socialism for *The Red Book*, published in November 2011 as an e-book and then as a paperback in January 2012. The book has generated a significant amount of attention: the e-book has been downloaded just under 30,000 times, while around 300 copies of the paperback have been sold. The ideas contained within it have been debated on Labour Party websites and Labour activist blogs. Through its websites, Twitter and Facebook, Clack's essay has prompted discussion about the future direction of Labour Party policy.

Charting a shift in political paradigms is rarely straightforward and rarely lineal. The extent to which the ideas put forward by Clack in *The Red Book* in November 2011 are shaping Labour discourse and policy can be tracked by paralleling parts of it with Ed Miliband's leader's speech to conference a year later in October 2012:

a) **Clack:** "In order to develop an ethical socialism, the vision of the individual at the heart of the neo-liberal account must be challenged, and this means considering once again the relationship between self and society. According to Aristotle, humans are 'social animals' not isolated units... Wellbeing, according to the New Economics Foundation, is to be found not just in the achievement of personal goals, but in a sense of oneself as socially grounded, part of a wider community. To focus on 'the individual' is to ignore the fact that we are human precisely because we find our fulfilment in our relationships with each other. We need each other." (p. 15).

Compared with Miliband: "One Nation: a country where everyone has a stake. One Nation: a country where prosperity is fairly shared. One Nation: where we have a shared destiny, a sense of shared endeavour and a common life that we lead together." And similarly, "with so many people having been told for so long that the only way to get on is to be on your own, in it for yourself, we just can't succeed as a country."

b) **Clack:** "A society recognising the value of all its parts would look rather different from ours. Pay differentials between the top and the bottom are shockingly out of proportion. These economic inequalities suggest a society that has failed to think about what makes for society in the first place; such failings must be addressed" (p. 18).

Compared with Miliband: “With the gap between rich and poor growing wider and wider, we just can’t succeed as a country. With millions of people feeling that hard work and effort are not rewarded, we just can’t succeed as a country.” And “I will never accept an economy where the gap between rich and poor just grows wider and wider. In One Nation, in my faith, inequality matters.”

c) **Clack:** “Consider New Labour’s promotion of ‘aspiration.’...The problem with such an ideal is that it targets the aspiration of ‘gifted’ individuals without thinking about the kind of society that enables all to flourish. Considering the way in which aspiration has been connected to education exposes the paucity of this vision...What is desperately needed is an holistic vision of society where the contribution of all its parts is recognised and treated with dignity and respect.”

Compared with Miliband: “You see for a long time our party has been focused on getting 50% of young people into university. I believe that was right. But now it’s time to put our focus on the forgotten 50% who do not go to university.”

d) **Clack:** “a society that values all and that understands the importance of strong communities as supportive places for individual flourishing” (p.19).

Compared with Miliband: “a country for all, with everyone playing their part”.

The relevance of ethical socialism for framing contemporary left politics was first discussed at a Labour Party fringe event at the national conference held in Liverpool in 2012. Clack spoke on a panel that included the Chair of Labour Left and Labour MP for Easington. From this event came a collaborative writing partnership with the Vice-Chair of Labour Left and Clack now blogs regularly for the Huffington Post UK Labour site. She has also written for the main Labour blog, Labour List, exploring the theme of kindness as a political virtue.

As Chair of the Oxfordshire group of Labour Left, Clack organised and spoke at a Red Book discussion on Ethical Socialism at Ruskin College Oxford in February 2012. This attracted a large audience drawn from the local party, the local Labour Women’s Group, as well as members from further afield. A follow up event took place in May 2013 when she discussed with the political commentator Bill Keegan the legacy of Gordon Brown and the lessons Labour policy makers might learn after the financial crisis.

The renewal of interest in issues of ethics and the need to discuss more explicitly the values that underpin political decision-making led to a further invitation to speak at a fringe event at the 2013 Labour Party conference fringe on Ethics in Public Life. Having been elected as a Labour and Co-operative Party councillor in Oxford in May 2012, Clack spoke as a philosopher who is also a local politician. This debate on ethics took the form of Clack debating, with the MP for West Bromwich East, the impact of the Leveson Enquiry. The points highlighted by Clack focussed on the challenge it poses to the last 30 years of neo-liberal consumerist values and the importance of moving towards policies that enshrine a more communitarian form of society.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

The Red Book, edited by Eoin Clarke and Owain Gardner (for e-book download <http://eoin-clarke.blogspot.com/2011/11/download-red-book-here-only-way-is.html>)

Reviews of *The Red Book*:

Though Cowards Finch website: “a fascinating read, and at over 200 pages, insightful and complete” (<http://thoughcowardsfinch.com/2011/11/23/the-red-book-labour-lefts-book-to-win/>)

Sales of the Red Book as an indicator of its influence: 300 paperback sales; 30,000 copies downloaded.

For supporting statements:

For Labour Left:

Corroborating statement author 1 Founder of Labour Left – **written statement** to corroborate status as intellectual mentor for ethical socialist positioning of Labour Left and for influence of ideas on wider Labour Party discussions

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Corroborating contact 2, Chair of Labour Left, House of Commons – **can be contacted to corroborate** role in Labour Left

Corroborating statement author 3, Vice-Chair of Labour Left – **written statement** to corroborate role in Labour Left and blogging partnership for Huffington Post

For influence on Labour opinion formation:

Corroborating statement author 4, MP for West Bromwich East – **written statement** to corroborate influence of Clack's writing on ethical socialism for Labour policy development

Corroborating contact 5, Member of Labour's National Executive Committee – **can be contacted to corroborate** involvement in Labour Left activities organised in Oxford

Author, Blogs for New Statesman, Labour List – **can be contacted to corroborate** influence of Clack's writing for discussion of philosophy that should underpin Labour policy making
Contact details available from Oxford Brookes University Research & Business Development Office on request

Secretary of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, Left Futures – **can be contacted to corroborate** involvement in Labour Left and for discussion in Labour Party of the Red Book
Contact details available from Oxford Brookes University Research & Business Development Office on request