

# **The London School of Economics and Political Science**

*The History/Theory Dialectic in the Thought of Herbert Butterfield, Martin Wight and E. H. Carr: A Reconceptualisation of the English School of International Relations*

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## Abstract

The aim of my thesis is to reconceptualise the English School of International Relations according to what I describe as the history/theory dialectic. The origins of this dialectic are sought in the thought of E. H. Carr, Herbert Butterfield, and Martin Wight, who drew attention to the interpenetration of history and theory. In their capacity as historians, the writers examined in my thesis struggled with problems normally associated with theoretical work in International Relations and elsewhere and tried to combine personal and impersonal accounts of history. They also emphasised the role of the historian which is no different from that of the theorist in attributing meaning to a series of apparently unrelated events. As international theorists, Butterfield, Wight and Carr underlined the historicity of international theory, and offered a historicist conceptualisation of international change that assigned priority to European interests and values. Their belief in the co-constitution of history and theory, has important consequences for contemporary English School debates concerning the proper definition of the relationship between order and justice, international society and world society, pluralism and solidarism. What lies at the end of the history/theory dialectic is not an unproblematic combination of opposites but the recognition of the need to be cautious towards the categories we use in order to capture and analyse a multidimensional reality which is subject to change.

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## Introduction: Debating History and Theory

Despite its importance for the founding English School thinkers Herbert Butterfield, Martin Wight and E. H. Carr, the relationship between history and theory has not yet been fully elucidated. In *The British Committee on The Theory of International Politics: The Rediscovery of History* Brunello Vigezzi (2005) emphasises the precarious and contested nature of this relationship for the British Committee scholars. However, what he describes as a crisis of historicism provides at best a background against which the views of the leading British Committee participants can be understood. In the form conceptualised by Vigezzi, historicism is a nineteenth-century doctrine which has to do with a simplistic belief in progress and the possibility of drawing a sharp distinction between subject and object. The notion of neo-historicism, which Vigezzi introduces in order to clarify the point of view adopted by Bull and Watson in *The Expansion of International Society*, is poorly defined and includes phenomena such as “the lack of any recourse to providence, the constant sense of alternatives, the care taken in noting the variety and the often controversial formation of values, the frequent mingling of subjective and objective elements, the focus on both structures and perceptions...” (Vigezzi, 2005: 89). For Ian Hall (2008), the problems with Vigezzi’s otherwise commendable book have to do with its narrative mode of exposition and the fact that the writer is more interested in what the members of the Committee did and less in why they did it. The fact that Butterfield and Wight wrote a lot about history and the philosophy of history before joining the Committee complicates the matter further. In any case, Vigezzi’s admission that the words “the rediscovery of history” were added to the title of the book after some hesitation indicates that his work provides only a starting point for understanding the relationship between history and theory without fully clarifying it.

Any successful attempt to evaluate the theoretical importance of the work of the English School thinkers discussed in this thesis presupposes the recognition of the fact that their self-understanding does not always provide the best guide to understanding what they were doing, and that no interpretation of their work can do justice to the many—and not always congruous—dimensions of their thought. Butterfield’s self-understanding as a technical historian is contradicted by an intellectual career devoted to historical criticism, the philosophy of history and International Relations. Wight’s self-understanding as a Christian intellectual does not always explain the ebbs and flows of the importance of his religion for his politics and his academic work. Although the ideas examined in Chapter 4 cannot be understood independent of his commitment to historical Christianity, his international views are not reducible to it. As the most methodologically self-

conscious among early English School thinkers, Carr can be more easily interpreted and classified. However, even in his case, there are tensions between Marxism, liberalism and socialism, which are explored in the relevant chapters. The aim of these remarks is to show that the importance of the English School contribution to the study of history and IR cannot be inferred from the self-understanding of its leading members and the personal or other connections existing among them. For Vigezzi, and those thinking along similar lines, Carr's non-participation in the British Committee means that he cannot be considered a member of the English School of IR. For me, however, this is a problem which *ex post facto* can be addressed only by considering the intellectual affinities that exist between him and some of the participants in the Committee, in particular Butterfield and Wight. As I will argue, the crucial role that Butterfield, Wight and Carr played in the development of the history/theory dialectic justifies their presentation as the founding members of the English School of International Relations.

In the case of Barry Buzan and Richard Little (2000), the meeting of history and theory takes place with the help of the notion of international systems. This notion replaces the Waltzian anarchy as a way of studying international relations across history. Despite their justified critique of the Westphalian assumptions that permeate mainstream international theory, Buzan and Little use the notion of an international system in a rather ahistorical way in order to describe the patterns of interaction taking place among barbarian tribes, city states, empires, and modern sovereign states. Although writers such as Martin Wight and Adam Watson are favourably mentioned in the book and the English School as a whole is praised for avoiding the dangers of Eurocentrism, ahistoricism, and presentism, Buzan's and Little's theoretical ambition to offer a theoretical framework applicable to a 60,000-year historical period brings them closer to neorealism than they probably realise. They also do not altogether avoid the problems arising from treating "history" and "theory" as separate entities that can be combined in more or less successful ways. Although particularly useful for world historians, their approach is arguably less useful for those IR theorists who understand international theory itself as bound to particular historical experiences and periods. Their reference to Bull regarding the dangers of pushing a historicist line of argument too far also indicates that their understanding of "theory" does not depart from mainstream interpretations of this concept as a set of neutral conceptual tools that can be used to study a given set of historical data. Navari's (2000) emphasis to the adoption of a Participant Standpoint avoids some of the pitfalls of positivism, but still leaves open the question if the theorist accepts the values of those he is studying. Her observation that in English School circles there is little agreement regarding what history and historical approaches actually involve is an accurate one, but it does not really help to show how exactly history and theory could be synthesised.

The most detailed discussion of history and theory from an English School perspective can be found in Andrew Linklater and Hidemi Suganami (2006) and especially in Suganami (2011). Linklater and Suganami (2006) note that one important link between English School writers has to do with the recognition of the importance of history for the study of international relations. However, from their point of view, the very belief that historical knowledge is important to the study of international relations is based on the recognition of their different nature and scope. The examination of the work of Hedley Bull, Adam Watson and Martin Wight leads the writers to distinguish among eight different propositions summarising English School attitudes to history and theory. These propositions are by no means presented as a coherent set and include a belief that the subject matter of IR is historical by nature, that the search for historical generalizations is legitimate but it should not be carried too far, that historical knowledge does not always provide an adequate guide to political action, and that it can limit available political options by indicating what is possible and what not. Although Linklater and Suganami mention the English School belief that historical interpretations are necessarily theoretical and therefore reading histories of international relations and comprehending international theories are one and the same thing, they argue that these ideas have not yet been adequately discussed from an English School perspective.

In Suganami (2011) the eight different propositions regarding the English School understanding of history and theory are summarised according to two general principles. The first principle states that the attempt to offer theoretical generalisations faces serious limitations, but it may produce some results; the second principle states that historical knowledge can deepen our understanding of international affairs, but it also faces serious limitations. Despite their careful examination of early and later English School authors, Linklater and Suganami are unable to arrive at any definite position on the relationship between history and theory. Indeed, Suganami's two propositions manage to offer only a negative understanding of the relationship between history and theory: history and theory need each other only because of their imperfections and mutual limitations, and not because their union can lead to something promising. Suganami's (2011) proposals for the addition of new areas of research into the English School research programme appear only at the end of his interesting article, and suggest that English School theorists have so far neglected to examine how historical narratives relate to Schools of international thought, and how historical interpretations and international theory complement each other.

The inability to offer any conclusive definition of the relationship between history and theory from an English School perspective, and the problems that

according to their own admission Buzan and Little (2000) faced in finding the right mix of history and theory, can be attributed to the understanding of history and theory as separate spheres of intellectual activity that can be combined at will. This depiction of theory and history as different and separate intellectual enterprises provides the general background of Hedley Bull's (1966) defence of the classical approach, where philosophy, history and law are presented as old traditions of thought from which international theory can derive inspiration in order to answer some fundamental political and moral questions. Such questions concern the legitimacy of war, the right to intervention, and the very nature of international society. Apart from not showing how exactly the recourse to history can help international studies apart from contributing to self-criticism, Bull relates philosophy to the adoption of an arbitrary point of view when discussing fundamental moral questions. Although clearly different from the American search for strictly verifiable propositions, the kind of international theory to which Bull's defence of the classical approach hints at seems to be interested in history understood only as the history of thought; such history teaches humility and helps the international theorist to understand that he is part of an intellectual project that precedes him and will likely continue to exist after him. Despite the fact that Bull's confusion of philosophy with the adoption of an arbitrary point of view could hardly be accepted by professional philosophers today, the way in which he describes international theory actually brings it closer to philosophy than either history or law<sup>1</sup>.

The pitfalls of Bull's methodological separation of history from theory will be more fully analysed in the first chapter, which also argues that his anti-dialectical mentality is responsible for some of the most problematic aspects of his major contribution to the study of IR, *The Anarchical Society*. This chapter introduces as a working hypothesis the idea that Alain Badiou's (1982/2009) dialectic of scission provides a suitable point of departure for understanding the workings of Butterfield's, Wight's and Carr's history/theory dialectic. By depicting every ideational, material or psychological entity as fundamentally split, Badiou provides a powerful alternative to Bull's dichotomous and deeply anti-dialectical logic. Although Badiou's formulation of the dialectical method is not entirely devoid of problems, he certainly provides a philosophical background against which the historicity of theory and the theoretical dimension of history can be better understood and evaluated. Badiou's important philosophical insights are later complemented by an overview of Slavoj Žižek's engagement with what he defines as *dialektika* after the Greek word *politika*. Žižek refuses to reduce the dialectical method to one simple truth or idea but he ultimately arrives at a more positive understanding of its role. The fact that Žižek (2014) consciously offers only studies



*in* and not *on* dialectics means that he cannot be used as a point of departure for understanding dialectical logic. However, he retains his value as a point of arrival.

Contrary to the understanding of history and theory as separate domains—which inspires Bull’s delineation of the classical approach and still influences English School attempts to bring history and theory together—the aim of the history/theory dialectic in the form described in this thesis is to show that history and theory form a dialectical unity. Although history and theory may be distinct in principle, in practice they refer to very similar forms of intellectual activity. As writers such as Thomas Smith (1999) and Richard Little (1991; 1995) have pointed out, both historians and international theorists find themselves obliged to find a balance between offering generalisations and paying attention to contextual factors and considerations. Far from being opposites in the sense of excluding one another, history and theory should be understood as the two ends of a continuum within which the vast majority of actual works of history or theory occupy intermediate positions, since they contain both historical and theoretical elements. Although taken as a whole works of history may be considered to find themselves closer to the history end of the continuum, and works of theory may be considered to find themselves closer to the theory end, the difference is one of degree and not kind. More importantly, the difference between prioritising generalisation or particularisation does not have to do with whether one is a theorist or a historian, but rather with how exactly one chooses to do theory or history. The way in which the writers examined in this thesis chose to engage in conceptual thinking when working as historians, and to emphasise particularity and context when working as theorists, shows that, if taken literally, the distinction between history and theory is unsustainable. This understanding of history as theory, and of theory as history, is an expression of the essential dialectical principle of the unity or interpenetration of opposites, which in different forms is accepted by Heraclitus, Hegel and Marx<sup>ii</sup>.

Among early English School thinkers, this dialectic can be distilled from the writings of Herbert Butterfield, Martin Wight and E. H. Carr who all saw history as an inescapably theoretical enterprise and theory as a historical one. Like Badiou and other dialectically inspired thinkers, Butterfield, Wight and Carr refuse to treat “history” and “theory” as internally homogeneous entities, and are particularly interested in the ways in which they can be considered to contain their dialectical opposite. Instead of trying to bring together apparent opposites, as those inspired by the classical approach are trying to do, Butterfield, Wight and Carr help us realise that the historical is already theoretical, and the theoretical can also be historical. My discussion of their historical work in Chapters 3, 4, and 5, aims to provide an overview of their contribution to narrative history, the methodology of

historical writing, and the speculative philosophy of history. What emerges from this discussion is the acknowledgement of the important fact that there can be no historiography without a theory of historiography, and that the role of the historian is akin to that of the social scientist in trying to illuminate and analyse the personal and impersonal forces that mould human history. Historiography both presupposes and leads to assumptions and hypotheses of general interest which, as Carr (1961/1987) aptly observed, are not interested in the unique but rather in what is general the unique. For the writers examined in this thesis, the individual events of the past that are frequently described as “history” acquire their meaning only within the framework of wider historical narratives which are influenced by religious, philosophical, and other ideological considerations.

Although Butterfield’s, Wight’s and Carr’s theoretically informed understanding of historiography brings it close to the social sciences and their effort to know the causes of events, their historicist conceptualisation of international change examined in Chapters 6, 7, and 8, brings international theory close to history in the sense of change and the cultivation of an interest in the particular rather than the universal<sup>iii</sup>. Like Robert Cox (1986), the English School thinkers examined in this thesis believed that theory is always for someone and for some purpose. Their historicist conceptualisation of international change confirms Peter Wilson’s (2012) belief that English School thinkers are empiricists without being positivists. Although Butterfield, Wight and Carr derive their normative ideals from the real world, they are very sceptical about causal statements of universal validity and especially the possibility of formulating universalizable laws of action. Their interest in causality does not make them lose sight of the human factor and of what is usually understood as a normative orientation in international politics. By presenting the founding English School thinkers as deeply immersed in the international politics of their time, I put into question the mainstream interpretation of the English School as an apolitical enterprise<sup>iv</sup>. I also challenge the equally widespread assumption that English School theorists are primarily interested in continuity and therefore underestimate change in international affairs<sup>v</sup>. The question of whether the end product of the history/theory dialectic is a theoretically informed form of historiography, a historicised form of international theory, or something else, will be answered in Chapter 9 which will also offer some thoughts on the relevance of the history/theory dialectic for contemporary English School thinking. For better or worse, this thinking seems to have abandoned Bull’s dichotomous and ahistorical logic in favour of a dialectical conception of societal forms and a historically grounded account of international institutions.

The importance of the history/theory dialectic for understanding not only the English School but also intellectual production in general has led me to adopt the

method of biographical contextualisation of ideas employed by intellectual historians such as Marci Shore (2006; 2014) and Mary Gluck (1985)<sup>vi</sup>. Although this method should not be confused with a fully-fledged research program, such as those offered by the representatives of the Cambridge School of intellectual history or the idealist historians, it aims to do justice to the complex phenomenon that could be described as the intrusion of life in the realm of ideas. For Shore and Gluck, this intrusion does not assume the form of a one-dimensional determination of the public by the private. It rather means that ideas do not exist and circulate independent of people and they necessarily occupy a particular place in space and time. From the point of view of intellectual historians interested in the non-determinist biographical contextualisation of ideas, human history should be understood as both underdetermined and overdetermined: underdetermined in the sense that different outcomes were possible if individuals had made different choices, and overdetermined in the sense more than one causes are frequently responsible for the same result<sup>vii</sup>. It is for this reason that attributions of causality are always fraught with danger.

In the framework of my research, the recourse to the method of biographical contextualisation has meant that before starting writing about my chosen thinkers I familiarised myself with the course of their lives in the way narrated in their biographies<sup>viii</sup>. Although I have consciously avoided establishing causal connections between their personal and social experiences and their intellectual output in the way that, for example, Robert J. Richards (2004) has done in another context, my engagement with biography enabled me to develop a more holistic understanding of my subjects. In particular, this engagement helped me realise that what primarily distinguishes Butterfield (1900-1979), Wight (1913-1972) and Carr (1892-1982) from other writers of their generation, is their dissatisfaction with both history and theory in their established forms. During their working lives, my subjects travelled constantly between History and International Relations (IR) and it is very doubtful whether their intellectual oeuvre enables one to classify them as either historians or theorists in the conventional meanings of these terms.

Wight's decision to leave the Department of International Relations of the London School of Economics (LSE) in order to become a Professor of History at the University of Sussex is a personal one, but it also deserves further theoretical consideration. Likewise, Butterfield's choice to withdraw from the British Committee on the Theory of International Politics in order to devote himself to the study of history, and Carr's decision to abandon IR for Soviet History, show how divided their academic loyalties were. Despite the fact that Butterfield's, Wight's and Carr's academic background in History and shared British citizenship do not explain their methodological views, they certainly help one to understand their

trajectory understood as series of successively occupied positions by the same agent in a space which is itself subject to transformation<sup>x</sup>. Briefly, although life does not explain ideas, it provides the indispensable background against which ideas can be understood<sup>x</sup>. Prioritising life over ideas or vice versa would be to succumb to the kind of reductionism and dogmatism which are the very negation of dialectical thinking, and also to lose sight of the complex phenomenon that Marx has described as dialectical movement<sup>xi</sup>. The way in which Butterfield, Wight and Carr travelled between history and theory as narrated in their biographies, cannot be dissociated from their belief that history is theory, and theory is also history.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **On Alain Badiou's Dialectic of Scission and Hedley Bull's *Anarchical Society***

As we saw in the Introduction, what separates the intellectual oeuvre of Herbert Butterfield, Martin Wight and E. H. Carr from conventional interpretations of the English School, is their appreciation of the historicity of theory and the theoretical presuppositions and consequences of history. What I would like to discuss in this chapter is the ways in which their belief in the interpenetration of history and theory can be further understood and corroborated by reference to Alain Badiou's (1982/2009) idea of dialectic of scission. This idea provides a plausible ontological foundation to the history/theory dialectic of Butterfield, Wight and Carr by assuming that every identity is by definition split. By dividing everything into two parts, Badiou offers a background against which the historicity of theory and the theoretical dimension of history can be better understood and evaluated. The reason why history and theory cannot be separated from one another is that each of them already contains its dialectical opposite. After analysing and critically evaluating the workings of the dialectic of scission as developed by Badiou, I will try to show what is wrong with Bull's methodological separation of history from theory.

Far from accepting the Badiouian insight that history=theory+history and theory=history+theory, Bull's defence of the so-called classical approach takes place within the conceptual limits of an unproblematic logic of identity which takes for granted that history=history and theory=theory. Within such a restricting conceptual framework, history and theory are employed as weapons against the scientific pretensions of the American students of IR, but no sound foundations are laid for a new discipline. Indeed, by identifying history with objectivity and theory with subjectivity and the exercise of judgement, Bull's classical approach seems very well suited to the early period of the discipline described as "the golden age of the amateur" (Wilson, 1995: 17). The problems inherent in any non-dialectical approach to IR will be further analysed in my discussion of how Bull separates order from justice in *The Anarchical Society*. The inconsistencies and contradictions that can be found in both his methodological and substantive writings show that thinking about the world in terms of binary oppositions such as order versus justice and history versus theory has its price and an alternative conceptual framework might be necessary.

## Alain Badiou and the Dialectic of Scission

Badiou's reading of Hegel in his first book *Theory of the Subject* (1982/2009) provides a plausible starting point for thinking about the relationship between history and theory. As one of Badiou's most dialectical works, *Theory of the Subject* provides philosophical support for the thesis that everything already contains its dialectical opposite within itself, and the aim of dialectical reasoning is to break an entity into its constituent parts. Far from accepting the validity of the triad thesis, antithesis, synthesis, the early Badiou suggests that what lies at the end of dialectical reasoning is nothing else than the engendering of a new scission. The writer's anti-idealism and rejection of the facile hope that we can in some way overcome alienation, make him base his argument not on *The Phenomenology of Spirit* but rather on the *Science of Logic*. Although the relationship between the two books is a complex one to the extent that they both belong to the same philosophical project, Howard Williams (1989) is justified in associating Hegel's *Science of Logic* not so much with the exposition of any particular philosophical doctrine, but rather with the attempt to offer a grammar of dialectics. Lenin's belief that one should master that book before starting to analyse any particular issue was by no means unfounded, since its range of application exceeds by far the writer's points of reference, and the philosophical tradition to which it objectively belongs. In the same way that his former teacher, Louis Althusser, broke Marx into two parts, Badiou breaks Hegel into two parts while, at the same time, putting into question the belief that the subject is a by definition bourgeois category. The kind of political subject delineated in *Theory of the Subject* is interested in actively creating its own history and not simply situating itself in history understood in Althusserian fashion as a process without a subject.

In order to protect Hegel from the appropriation of his work for essentially conservative political purposes, Badiou claims that one should distinguish between two different dialectical matrices in Hegel: an idealist dialectic, which explores the conditions of overcoming alienation and restoring the original unity of a thing at a more concrete form, and a materialist dialectic of scission, which assumes that every term is fundamentally split. In the first case, the opposite of something is assumed to be something else; in the second case, however, the opposite of something should be found within itself, and every hope of achieving some form of unproblematic synthesis between opposites drops out of the picture. For example, contrary to what philosophical idealists such as Gavin Rae (2011) argue, consciousness cannot ultimately overcome alienation because, from a Badiouian point of view, it does not find itself opposed to something else—in this case the objective world—but it rather emanates from a fundamentally divided psychological subject. Scission as the operator of the dialectical matrix favoured by

Badiou concerns both ideational and material phenomena, and it functions within a materialist framework in the sense that it assumes that dialectic is the law of being and not just an argumentative strategy.

In order to provide support for the thesis that there is no entity that is not fundamentally split, Badiou draws attention to Hegel's discussion of Something and an Other and especially of Being and Nothing in the *Science of Logic*. According to Badiou, by arguing that Something is also an Other, Hegel shows that dialectic presupposes and underlines division. The workings of the materialist dialectic of scission are revealed with particular clarity in Hegel's masterful analysis of the relationship between Being and Nothing at the very beginning of the book where he makes the remarkable statement that Being and Nothing are the same thing posited twice. Additional examples provided by Badiou concern the dichotomous existence of the working class under capitalism as, on the one hand, a necessary productive force and, on the other hand, a revolutionary political subject, and the fundamental Christian belief that God=Father +Son. In all these cases, Badiou reduces dialectics to two terms, and denies that a third dialectical term is necessary or desirable.

It should be noted that, apart from limiting his attention to the *Science of Logic* at the expense of Hegel's overall philosophical system, Badiou offers a selective reading of this complex work by failing to mention, for example, that, for Hegel, the difference between Being and Nothing is ultimately erased by the movement encapsulated in the notion of Becoming. Although Hegel notes that both in heaven and in earth every actual thing contains both Being and Nothing and therefore is fundamentally divided within itself, the notion of Becoming seems to point towards some form of dialectical synthesis, which, however, is achieved diachronically rather than synchronically. To the extent that, *pace* Badiou, Hegel is not a conservative in disguise but rather shares the interest of all dialectical thinkers in the phenomenon of movement, the unity of Being and Nothing cannot be understood independent of the core dialectical idea that all things flow and are necessarily subject to change. Therefore, it could be plausibly argued that in his reading of Hegel Badiou misrepresents a temporal relationship as a logical one, and attributes to the nature of things qualities that derive from their position in time and not in space. Acknowledging this problem, Badiou makes the point that Hegel examines the scission of a given entity not statically but within the context of a movement the direction of which is determined by the entity's in question divided and bifurcated nature. It is this emphasis on an original scission within an entity itself that makes Badiou particularly relevant for my purposes here. Although within the framework of an idealist dialectic history and theory are opposed to one another before the desired synthesis ultimately arrives in the form, for example, of

the so-called classical approach, within Badiou's dialectic of scission history and theory are seen as fundamentally bifurcated entities that already contain their dialectical opposite within themselves. From the point of view of the Badiouian dialectic of scission, history=theory+ history and theory=history+theory. The divided nature of all ideational and material entities means that, in order to conceptualise anything at all, it should be split into two parts. For example, as Badiou goes on to argue, theory and practice, the letter and the space in which it is written, are one and the same thing, or, to be more precise, one thing split in two. The same applies to the complex intellectual activities known as history and theory.

What the Badiouian dialectic of scission does not consider is the possibility of using a third dialectical term that would make dialectical reasoning something more than a process of division. As it will be more analytically argued later in the thesis, the Badiouian emphasis on division as the primary dialectical law is not self-evident and can generate problems of theoretical but also practical nature. Badiou's rejection of the possibility—or even the desirability—of a third dialectical term that would make division something different than an end in itself, is not unrelated to his Maoist political background and the fact that the *Theory of the Subject* is clearly inspired by Maoism understood as a form of post-Leninism (Bosteels, 2009). Despite his methodological debts to Althusser, Badiou never completely rejected the Maoist belief in destruction as a creative process and his overall understanding of dialectics is saturated with negativity. By suggesting that one part of Hegel should be retained and another part should be discarded, Badiou forgets that, as Marx (1900) pointed out, approaching a phenomenon dialectically means approaching it in its totality and not mechanically separating its “good” from its “bad” side. In the final analysis, Badiou's distinction between a good and a bad Hegel is equally problematic with Althusser's (1965/1990; 1970) distinction between an early Marx who should be ignored and a mature Marx who is idolised in a rather unhistorical way. From the point of view of the non-reductionist biographical contextualisation of ideas followed in this thesis, a thinker cannot be easily separated from his cultural and material environment or be read selectively in the way that Althusser and Badiou do for Marx and Hegel respectively.

What is more, despite the lip service that Badiou is paying to the subject, it is very doubtful whether his dialectic of scission overcomes structuralism. In the same way that Lacanian teachings confirm the primacy of the structure, and Althusser (1965/1990) employs the notion of overdetermination in order to locate each and every contradiction within what he defines as a pre-given complex structured whole, Badiou invents the neologism “splace” in order to describe the structural element that accounts for the development of Something and ultimately



explains its contradictory nature. For Badiou, the opposite of Something is its space of placement (or “splace”), its position within a spatial, temporal, or even fictive, structure. By attributing such a privileged role to structure, Badiou offers an addition and not a challenge to the structuralisms of Saussure, Levi-Strauss, Lacan and Althusser. Although Badiou’s subject is by no means as passive as Althusser’s subject, it is only in his later work that he engages seriously with a notion of subjective freedom that owes a lot to Sartre (Pfeifer, 2015). However, as we shall see later, by the time that Badiou comes to celebrate the moment of freedom encapsulated in what he describes as the event, he also expresses doubts regarding the importance of dialectics. In a nutshell, despite that the Badiouian dialectic of scission as presented in *Theory of the Subject* offers a useful point of departure for thinking about history as theory and theory as history, it does not exhaust the problem of the *form* of their interpenetration. This problem can be properly addressed only by considering what might be positive in the negative and challenging the established definition of terms. By associating what could be described as a third dialectical moment or term with idealism, and not paying proper attention to the Hegelian idea of the negation of the negation, Badiou fails to see that the dialectical method should be understood as something more than a process of division or destruction. After all, as the course of the Cultural Revolution in China proved, when division is not placed within a wider dialectical context, it can continue *ad infinitum*, and it can easily be transformed from a means to an end to an end in itself.

### **The Dialectic of Scission as an Alternative to the Classical Approach**

Although not entirely devoid of problems, Badiou’s dialectic of scission can provide a methodological alternative to Bull’s classical approach, which depicts history and theory as separate spheres of intellectual activity. From the vantage point of the dialectic of scission, history and theory can be considered to be the same thing posited twice, and to be divided not so much among but rather within themselves. In other words, what Badiou’s dialectic of scission can help us realise is that before one tries to see how history and theory can be combined, one should try to take into account the ways in which history is already theory and theory is already history. The mutual constitution of history and theory completely eludes Bull’s discussion of the classical approach which, as Richard Little (1995) points out, primarily offers a justification for the exercise of judgement when studying international politics. Although Bull explains the reasons why International Relations cannot be a “scientific” enterprise in the way that his rivals on the other side of the Atlantic wanted it to be, he by no means offers an adequate methodological basis for studying international relations from an English School – or indeed any other— theoretical perspective.

The best place to start in order to understand Bull's methodological views is probably his discussion of the development of the theory of international politics in *The Aberystwyth Papers*. According to Bull (1972a), what unites the various theoretical approaches that developed during the twentieth century, giving birth to a new discipline, is their opposition to history. Although history familiarises us with the facts themselves, theorists of all stripes stand united in their belief that in and of itself history cannot provide the tools necessary for the theoretical understanding of a problem or situation. The body of general propositions comprising the theory of international politics does not necessarily claim universal validity in the sense of covering all places and all times. However, according to Bull, it should be clearly distinguished from the merely factual statements pronounced by the historians. These statements always aim to explain particular events, such as why Germany attacked Belgium in 1914, and are not supposed to explore the more general significance of an event, and in its relationship with other similar events taking place in a different context. At best, history provides a laboratory for testing the various general propositions put forward by the theorists.

The clear separation of history from theory also provides the backbone of Bull's (1966) famous defence of the classical approach which, as I argued in the Introduction, tends to reduce history to the history of thought, and does not adequately explain how the thorny questions that comprise the usual stuff of international politics can be analysed and evaluated from a theoretical point of view. To say that the exercise of judgement is necessary in order to evaluate a particular intervention or to judge a particular war is different from providing theoretical grounds which will make the theorist's judgement something more than an expression of personal opinion. Like all theorists and historians who guard the borders of their artificially separated domains, Bull does not consider how theoretical understanding can build upon historical understanding and constitute an extension of it. History, theory, and law, are not presented by him as different aspects of a promising new discipline of IR, but as different academic disciplines which should somehow be combined and co-operate with one another while retaining their separate logics and institutional bases. Even Morton Kaplan's (1961) admission that historians necessarily deal with theoretical concepts, such as that of the balance of power, is missing from Bull's impoverished understanding of the relationship between history and theory. The classical approach in the form adumbrated by Bull expresses the academic background and the philosophical sensibilities of those influencing the development of IR in Britain during his lifetime, but can hardly be seen as a research programme able to challenge the American mainstream. Indeed, by putting undue emphasis on the exercise of judgement and arguing in favour of a poorly defined interdisciplinary ideal, Bull's

classical approach seems to continue rather than to reject what Peter Wilson has portrayed as “the golden age of the amateur” (Wilson, 1995: 17). Like the thinkers of the twenty years’ crisis, Bull’s international theorist derives from a variety of disciplinary perspectives in order to address the problems of his time in a rather ad hoc way. Keene’s (2009) observation that Bull’s position may be considered to represent a denial of method as such may sound harsh, but it shows the difficulties that Bull faced in placing IR within the existing academic map consisting of history, the social sciences, and the natural sciences.

What the classical approach apparently disregards and what the dialectic of scission can potentially help us realise when applied to the problem of the interaction between history and theory, is that, as Thomas Smith (1999) and Richard Little (1991; 1995) have pointed out, the tension between generalisation and historical context does not characterise the relationship between theory and history understood as separate and autonomous entities, but it rather characterises *both* history *and* theory in themselves. In accordance with the presuppositions of Badiou’s dialectic of scission, Smith and Little depict history and theory as divided not with regard to their dialectical other, but rather as divided within themselves. The attempt to find the right combination of generalisation and attention to contextual factors influences the work of historians and theorists alike. For Little, the aspiration to explain particular events and to address general tendencies makes the social sciences divided within themselves and not with regard to historiography. The problems facing social scientists in their effort to meet apparently contradictory expectations are also shared by practising historians who, according to Little, can argue that they are concerned with unique events only to the extent that they lack awareness of what they are actually doing. Butterfield’s, Wight’s and Carr’s conceptualisation of history as theory and vice versa makes especially evident how misleading the conventional criteria for distinguishing between history and theory are. Like Smith and Little, Butterfield, Wight and Carr do not argue in favour of completely abandoning the distinction between history and theory, but they rather argue in favour of drastically rethinking and re-examining that distinction. The past events that concern the historians and the present and future events that concern theorists acquire meaning only within larger intellectual constructions which assume the form of theories and historical narratives.

Such a critical re-examination of the relationship between history and theory is crucial for both the English School of IR and the social sciences in general, and it cannot happen so long as one continues to think in the non-dialectical terms offered by Bull’s classical approach. As John Lewis Gaddis (1997) has argued about academics in general, this approach points in the direction of interdisciplinary co-

operation in the feeble way that sovereign states call for international co-operation while, in reality, jealously guarding their own borders and interests. Apart from not showing how exactly history, philosophy, law, and IR, can co-operate with one another, Bull's understanding of those disciplines in their individuality is also problematic. History is identified with absolute objectivity and with a form of unmediated access to the "facts" that completely disregards what Smith describes as a constructionist view of historiography. With regard to international theory, Bull wants it to speak a timeless and politically disinterested language which, at the same time, will offer plenty of space to the theorist to voice his personal views and anxieties regarding the issues under discussion. The only place where Bull displays a genuine awareness of the problems posed by the interpenetration of history and theory is his 1972 article "International Relations as an Academic Pursuit". His frank admission that every historical study contains intellectual hypotheses and arguments is starkly at odds with the methodologically naïve understanding of history espoused earlier.

To sum up, far from accepting the dialectical equations  $\text{history}=\text{theory}+\text{history}$  and  $\text{theory}=\text{history}+\text{theory}$ , the defender of the classical approach adopts the identitarian logic  $\text{history}=\text{history}$  and  $\text{theory}=\text{theory}$ . At best, the classical approach in the form elaborated by Bull expresses the need for bringing together history and theory, without, however, showing the way in which this can be done and providing grounds for anything else than a marriage of convenience between history and theory. Although equally threatened by the American proponents of a scientific approach, traditionalist international theorists and empiricist diplomatic historians felt quite comfortable within the boundaries and the distinct institutional bases of their artificially separated disciplines. The image of a grand discipline of IR which would put under the same umbrella international theory, international history, and international law, is clearly missing from Bull's vaguely interdisciplinary argument which treats history, theory, and law as unproblematic concepts externally related to one another.

Although as James Richardson (1990) mentions Bull's greatest contributions to IR are substantive and not methodological, what I intend to show next is that his anti-dialectical philosophical predisposition accounts for the most problematic aspects of his magnum opus, *The Anarchical Society*. In the same way that as methodologist Bull separates history from theory, as international thinker he separates order from justice. Despite that the apparent problem in Bull's argumentative strategy is the prioritisation of theory at the expense of history, and the prioritisation of order at the expense of justice, his primary intellectual failure lies in refusing to recognise the impossibility of separating order from justice and history from theory. Despite that the kind of theory defended by Bull already

includes history, and the kind of order inspiring him already includes justice, Bull fails to recognise this important fact. Ultimately, it is the internal inconsistencies of his arguments that primarily show the limits of any non-dialectical approach to IR and emphasise the need for an alternative methodology. The contours of such a methodology are delineated in my discussion of Butterfield's, Wight's and Carr's history/theory dialectic.

### **The Anti-Dialectic of Bull's Anarchical Society**

The substantive equivalent of Bull's separation of history from theory in his methodological writings is the separation of order from justice in his major contribution to the study of IR, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*. As John Williams (2006) points out, the book's subtitle is both indicative of what can be found between its covers and intriguing for a number of reasons. The discerning reader is first of all surprised by the writer's claim in the Preface that the book does not follow any particular theoretical paradigm, and it is not based on any particular form of historical research. This declaration should not drive attention away from the fact that *The Anarchical Society* is based on the anti-dialectical separation of the element of order from the element of justice which is fully reflected in its subtitle. Although the rhetorical brilliance of Bull's *The Anarchical Society* is analogous to that displayed by Carr in *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, what I would like to argue in this section is that by artificially separating order from justice the writer does a disservice to both concepts. He also proves the limits of any non-dialectical attempt to conceptualise international politics. Despite Bull's apparent debt to Wight and the rather superficial similarities that exist between *The Anarchical Society* and *Systems of States*, what has actually shaped Bull's approach is the teaching of John Anderson at the University of Sydney and, perhaps more importantly, H. L. A. Hart's particularly influential *The Concept of Law* (1961/1994).

Despite that Bull remained quintessentially Andersonian throughout his academic career, the influence of Anderson's philosophical intellect should be mainly sought in the way in which he understood academic inquiry as a particular form of intellectual activity, which possesses its own morality and its own internal standards, and should not be corrupted by direct contact with other spheres of social activity, such as that of politics. Of more direct significance is Hart's (1961/1994) attempt to develop a theory of law which would be both general and descriptive. In the same way that as a legal theorist Hart dissociates the notion of law from particular legal systems and cultures and avoids any explicit normative commitment, Bull chooses to portray order as the basis of every form of society, and also abstains from assigning to it explicit priority when it collides with the

pursuance of other values. Hart's refusal to identify international law with morality is also echoed in Bull's scepticism towards the natural law tradition, and positivist understanding of both international law and all the other institutions which together comprise his anarchical society. As it will however become evident, Bull's positivism is not absolute but it is rather tempered by a personal commitment to a historically contingent form of international society. As Buzan (2006) has argued, Bull's commitment to pluralism not only interferes in various instances with the internal logic of his argument, but also accounts for his unnecessarily pessimistic evaluation of the future prospects of international society.

The internal problems in Bull's separation of order from justice stem in part from his own choice to reject a neutral definition of order which would identify it with any discernible pattern in the arrangement of things. According to such a definition, everything that is not haphazard and determined by pure luck could be reasonably described as orderly. For example, assorting one's books according to subject would be orderly in the same way with arranging them according to the last name of the author. In cases such as these, "order" is simply the opposite of luck or randomness. However, as Bull explains in the course of his rejection of such a morally neutral definition of order, the fact that states behave in patterned ways when conducting war with one another does not mean that they behave in an orderly fashion. The kind of order that Bull analyses and supports is by its nature value-laden in the sense that it consciously aims at the realisation of certain values: security against violence, observance of agreements and respect of rules regarding property rights. The reason why the goals and aspirations encapsulated in Bull's ideal of order do not fall within the domain of justice is simply that, according to him, their value can be objectively confirmed. What separates order from justice is not that the first is morally neutral and the second is value-laden, but the assumption that the values encapsulated in the idea of order are objective in a sense that the various goals falling under the rubric of justice are not.

Bull's meticulous distinction among different forms of justice in an Aristotelian fashion is starkly at odds with his identification of order with goals that do not inspire this or that society but rather define society as such. To the extent that all known societies have to some extent recognised the importance of protecting the life and the possessions of their members, as well as the importance of generally observing agreements, these values in Bull's eyes lose the subjective character that all values as values have, and are being treated as the constituent parts of a transhistorical and morally unproblematic idea of order. Of course, Bull's idea of order is in reality derived from a contractual type of society which has little in common with some of the pre-modern forms of society explored in the work of Wight and Watson. In the same way that, as C. B. Macpherson (1962) has shown,

the individuals described by classical liberalism correspond to historically determined actors and to a historically contingent form of society, the goals that Bull identifies with social co-existence apply primarily to a liberal form of society which, however, can by no means be identified with society as such (Buzan, 2006).

As regards international order, Bull presents it as coterminous with the kind of international society that emerged in Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and was based on the respect for the sovereignty and nominal equality of its constituent units. Despite facing both nationalist and cosmopolitan pressures, and therefore being in retreat during the twentieth century, Westphalian international society is according to Bull still preferable to its alternatives. As Edward Keene (2009) has noted, the very assumption that international society is in decline would not have been possible if Bull viewed it simply as a fact and not a value. It is interesting to note that in the course of his critical examination of alternatives to the contemporary international political system understood as a society of sovereign states, Bull uses arguments similar to those employed later by Kenneth Waltz in order to defend the relevance of state-centric thinking in a changed world. Like Waltz (1979; 2000), Bull essentially makes a distinction between changes in the system and changes of the system, and actually tries to minimise the importance of the first type of change, while systematically questioning both the existence and the desirability of the second type of change.

Regarding change that takes place inside the system, Bull discusses and evaluates critically a number of alternative forms of states system which are broadly compatible with the principle of sovereignty. These alternatives examined in chapter 10 assume the form of a disarmed world, the strengthening of international organisations, a world with many nuclear powers, and an ideologically homogeneous international society. With the exception of the pursuance of ideological uniformity, which is clearly rejected at the end of his examination of alternative forms of states system, Bull shows some understanding towards all the other changes that do not fundamentally challenge Westphalian international society. To be more specific, the pursuance of a less heavily armed world is not rejected in principle, the empowerment of international organisations, such as the UN, is presented as something that could happen in the future, and even the advent of a world of many nuclear states is portrayed as a realistic expectation. In a nutshell, changes within the confines of the system are portrayed by Bull as incomplete, to some extent premature, but not as fundamentally misguided.

It is in the discussion of changes that do not represent a transition from one historical phase of the system to another but they rather signify the supersession

of the system itself that Bull's defence of Westphalian international society becomes obvious. By rejecting world government as a matter of principle, Bull echoes the Waltzian belief that, if freedom is desirable, the insecurity associated with the existence of a multiplicity of sovereign states must be accepted. Even the divided loyalties and overlapping authorities that could define a neo-medieval international order are portrayed by Bull as inimical to international order as we know it. By also rejecting the desirability of a new isolationism and the advent of an international system which would lack the rules and institutions constituting a society, Bull completes his defence of the modern international system conceived as a society of sovereign states. Although in the course of his examination of moderate and radical alternatives to the states system Bull makes a number of valid observations, one cannot help but feeling that his evaluation of change is coloured by status quo interests and anxieties. For example, more recent English School scholars, such as Andrew Linklater (2007), have offered a more positive evaluation of neo-medieval ideas without presenting them as a panacea of global application.

The deep-seated scepticism towards all forms of change is very much at odds with Bull's positivist understanding of international society as constituted around rules and institutions created and maintained by states. To the extent that for Bull even the primary societal institutions of the balance of power, international law, diplomacy, the great powers and war are not self-sustaining and self-serving but they rather promote the common goals of states, one could expect a more sympathetic evaluation of both changes within the system and changes of the system itself. What stops Bull from engaging creatively with the problem of international change is a feeling that his preferred form of international society is under threat and that the pluralist institutions he identifies with it are gradually losing their importance in international politics. Although a general balance of power continued to exist at the level of the international system, particular areas of the world were heavily penetrated by superpower competition rendering the freedom of small states a remnant of the past. The contribution of international law to international order had actually been reduced and, as Bull admits, consensual diplomacy had been replaced by open political warfare. The very existence of the kind of international society within which the balance of power, diplomacy, the great powers, international law, and even war, could perform their proper functions was therefore being called into question. Bull, on the one hand, related the ability of the modern international system to contribute to order to its ability to retain its societal dimension of common rules and institutions, and, on the other hand, doubted the very existence of an international system which was still a society. Even at the purely analytical level, Bull does not explain in detail



where the international system ends and where a system-plus-society emerges (Buzan, 1993). Distinguishing among not only more or less advanced models of international society but also among different *forms* of international society would have enabled Bull to see that justice is not ultimately so different from order in the sense that they both can assume a variety of expressions and forms, and they cannot be separated from one another in the name of their supposed objectivity (order) and subjectivity (justice). Without being ideal, the Cold War international society within which Bull found himself was still distinguishable from a mechanically conceived international system, and not all the political initiatives associated with the United States or the Soviet Union were dismissible. Despite the obstacles they had to overcome, attempts at disarmament and control of the nuclear weapons were pretty understandable in a world where an actual military confrontation between the superpowers was not simply wrong but actually unthinkable.

Leaving practical considerations aside, to the extent that the institutional morphology and culture of co-operation that Bull associates with international society was in crisis, the type of order defended in *The Anarchical Society* acquires the subjective and aspirational character of justice. Since the type of order adumbrated by Bull corresponded more to a value and less to a fact, the very grounds on which he separates order from justice are being called into question. Like the separation of history from theory, the separation of order from justice proves to be unsustainable in practice. Despite his critique of liberalism for promising to bring together order and justice, Bull moves within the confines of a liberal philosophy of history, which assigns positive change to the past and denies it to the present. In the same way that for domestic liberals political progress stops with the advent of the liberal democratic state, for international liberals, like Bull, international progress stops with the advent of the Westphalian international society. By clinging to the European past, Bull was unable to address satisfactorily the problem of institutional change and to analyse the relationship between international and world society. By separating international society from the international system that provides its material basis and the world society that provides its moral basis, Bull ends up depicting it as a precious but very fragile entity. The post-Cold War English School scholars examined in the ensuing chapter were right to doubt the contemporary relevance of his main institutional recommendations, but maybe these recommendations were inapplicable to his own age as well.

## Conclusions

What I have argued is that the problems inherent in Bull's separation of order from justice show the limits of any non-dialectical approach to the study of IR. Apart from the various external criticisms that will be discussed in the next chapter, Bull's unwillingness to identify order with any kind of pattern in international affairs constitutes an indirect admission of the fact that order cannot be separated from justice for purposes of social or international analysis. Bull's personal allegiance to a particular form of international society stops him from recognising that those who speak in the name of states are frequently more flexible from the intellectual representatives of the Westphalian order. To the extent that the primary institutions of international society serve the purposes of states and not vice versa, these institutions are inevitably subject to change as the environment and the preferences of the actors develop. Apart from the early post-Cold War international developments analysed by writers such as Nicholas Wheeler (2000), Bull's rigid conceptual framework cannot fully address even the historical period from which it is derived, since the important phenomenon of colonialism does not receive proper attention (Keene, 2002).

The game of states can assume a variety of forms, and other English School writers have treated in a different way the problem of the primary institutions of international society (Buzan, 2006; Wilson, 2012). Bull's failure to discuss colonialism, sovereignty or nationalism as primary institutions of international society does not mean that he was wrong where other English School writers were right; it means, however, that any analysis of primary institutions is necessarily subjective and is also tied to particular historical contexts and self-understandings (Wilson, 2012; 2016). Bull's reification of a particular set of pluralist institutions was to some understandable within the historical context in which he found himself, but it shows an indifference towards the essential dialectical insight of the inescapability of change. Contrary to what Bull believed, this change does not always reflect the agendas of certain academics or political activists, but it frequently occurs as a result of the action of forces internal to the system. By identifying international society as such with a historically contingent form of international society, Bull appeared to be unnecessarily pessimistic regarding the future, and virtually ignored the possibility of actually strengthening international society by taking advantage of material forces and moral ideas that apparently undermine it.

A more dialectical approach would break the confines of formal logic and would enable Bull to realise that, to the extent that, as Badiou argues, every identity is fundamentally split, order= justice+order whereas justice=order+justice. The

interpenetration of history and theory, order and justice, does not mean that they are identical or that in each and every particular case they correspond to exactly the same thing or course of action. It means, however, that they cannot be conceptualised, develop or progress without taking into account the fact that their dialectical other is already present. Adopting a dialectical point of view would have enabled Bull to see that the kind of choice actually facing statesmen is not one between order and justice, but one of finding ways to recognise in practice their interpenetration and mutual constitution.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **The English School as a Historically Constructed Entity**

Although the definition of a school of thought is never an easy matter, it becomes even more complicated in the case of the English School of International Relations. Conjured into existence by one of its most famous critics in 1981, the English School creates questions different from those concerning the development of the Frankfurt School in Germany, or the emergence of the *Annales* historiographical movement in France. Without having an undisputed institutional basis or an official journal, its main characteristics can only be recognised *ex post facto* and are therefore the object of considerable dispute among both friends and critics. Starting from Andrew Linklater's and Hidemi Suganami's (2006) conceptualisation of the English School as a historically constructed entity, this chapter aims to present and evaluate the competing academic discourses which have been central to its development and self-understanding. As Suganami (2011) has admitted, the different stories that have so far been told about the School and its origins do not represent more or less accurate depictions of the truth, but they rather represent a reflection of where the narrator stands in relation to it. My own version of the English School as a historically constituted entity is not an exception to this.

The recognition of the fact that the international society cannot be understood independent of particular historical contexts leads me to search for the School's origins in a complex history/theory dialectic which is based on the interpenetration of history and theory. This dialectic was initially analysed by E. H. Carr but was further developed by Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight. As historically inspired theorists and theoretically informed historians Butterfield, Carr and Wight provide the grounds for reconceptualising the English School and curtailing its links with an ahistorically conceived international society. As the next two sections of this chapter make evident, these links were largely taken for granted by all those writing about the English School during the 1980s and 1990s. An alternative image started to emerge after the ending of the Cold War and presupposed the rejection of the internal discursive approach favoured by the proponents of international society. Although indebted to the contextually informed views of writers such as Rick Fawn and Jeremy Larkins (1996), my reconceptualisation of the English School departs from them to the extent that I do not portray the history/theory dialectic as a means to an end, i.e. understanding international society, but rather as the School's most important characteristic and contribution to the study of IR. By substituting a substantive understanding of the English School for a methodological one, I contribute to the School's methodological sophistication which, as Martha

Finnemore (2001) has argued, should be further cultivated in order for it to acquire a global audience and strengthen its cooperation with other research programs.

### **The 1980s: Suganami and Wilson**

During the 1980s, the English School was identified with the idea of international society by both critics and allies. For Roy Jones (1981), who first referred to a distinct English School in IR, its essence lied in the investigation of the nature of international society. The main protagonists of such an investigation were Charles Manning, Martin Wight, Hedley Bull, Michael Donelan, F. S. Northedge and Robert Purnell. Jones admitted that there were differences between Manning and Wight, with the first to focus primarily on the workings of international law and the second to rely on historical scholarship, but he argued that their common commitment to the study of international society outweighs their differences. For Jones, the methodological holism associated with the investigation of the nature of international society was deeply problematic in moral and political terms. By focusing on the collectivity of states, English school theorists were unable to recognise the importance of the particular frameworks within which individuals live their lives; they were also unable to protect the individual against the state. Indeed, the representatives of the English School occupy a strange place in the academy since they find themselves alienated from modern liberals, classical political theorists, and the proponents of a scientific approach to the study of IR. In the first positive evaluation of the School Hidemi Suganami (1983) reinterpreted the intellectual oeuvre of Manning, Bull, Northedge and Alan James without, however, challenging Jones' main methodological or institutional assumptions<sup>xii</sup>.

For Suganami, what distinguishes the British "institutionalists" from other schools of thought is their preoccupation with the degree of order that exists in the international system despite the absence of a central authority. In particular, the "institutionalists" are defined according to five factors or characteristics: their aspiration to intellectual impartiality; the rejection of behaviourism; the employment of sociological methods; their belief in the independence of IR as a discipline; and the firm rejection of utopianism. Their aspiration to intellectual impartiality made them unwilling to engage in overtly normative theorising and led them to adopt the kind of legal positivism common to Manning, Bull and Alan James. The rejection of behaviourism was the logical consequence of the belief that mathematical precision is unattainable in the study of IR and sociology provides a more adequate model from the natural sciences. Sociological methods refer primarily to the empathetic understanding associated with the notion of *Verstehen* and are integral to Suganami's overall understanding of the English School. The kind of institutions with which Suganami is concerned have a strong

normative dimension, and this dimension cannot be grasped without seeing what is going on in the minds of those speaking and acting in the name of states. This understanding of IR as an autonomous discipline is very closely linked to the “collectivism” with which Jones associated the English school. The “institutionalists” portray IR as independent discipline precisely because of their belief in the existence of a rule-governed international system which should be clearly demarcated from both individual states and domestic political phenomena. Finally, the belief in the rejection of utopianism as an essential feature of the English School echoes some of the criticisms that Jones levelled against Wight and, in particular, his supposed indifference towards change<sup>xiii</sup>.

Suganami certainly captured some of the intellectual habits and beliefs characterising Manning and his followers. But his version of the English School is very distant from any kind of historically informed inquiry into international politics. It is also worth emphasising that not all aspects or characteristics of the “institutionalist” approach fit together as harmoniously as Suganami suggests. The belief in the autonomy of IR as a discipline cannot easily be reconciled with the reliance on sociological methods, and the opposition to normative theorising is at odds with the explicit defence of the idea of international order. One cannot help but notice that what Suganami included in his original account of the English School or the British institutionalists is less important from what he failed to mention regarding either ideas themselves or the academics responsible for those ideas<sup>xiv</sup>. Although Suganami’s 1983 article might be acceptable as an inquiry into the British institutionalism of the period, it is by no means adequate as an account of the English School in the sense conceptualised in my thesis.

Sheila Grader’s (1988) critique of both Jones and Suganami was motivated by the belief that they were wrong in assuming the existence of a discrete English School united by common principles and methods. The fact that writers such as Manning and Bull discuss – or even defend—the idea of international society does not mean that they refer to the same thing. For Grader, Bull’s empirical and normative inquiries have a different character from Manning’s speculative engagement with linguistic philosophy, whereas Northedge preferred to talk about the international system of states instead of referring to an international society. Therefore, for both historical and practical reasons, the notion of an “English School” should be abandoned in favour of assessing the importance of the work of the individual scholars associated with it. Grader was neither negative nor positive towards the English School because she believed that no such school exists. Although she made a number of valid points, such as emphasising the historical determination of the notion of international society, Grader did not manage to move away from the 1980s consensus regarding the link that exists between the English School and the

international society. In the same way that Jones had called for its closure based on the undesirable implications of the notion of international society, Grader claimed that no English School exists because no acknowledged definition of the international society exists.

The 1980s understanding of the English School found its most systematic exposition in the thought of Peter Wilson (1989). In his response to Grader, Wilson rejected as largely meaningless the accusation that there is no single conception of the international society claiming the allegiance of all the members of the School, and analysed the link that exists between its methodology and its substantive arguments. The reason why its members seek the interpretative understanding encapsulated in the notion of *Verstehen* is precisely that the international society is a notional one, and therefore its existence cannot be substantiated without considering what goes on in people's minds, and especially in the minds of statesmen.

The idealism of English School writers is tempered by the belief that notions which become prevalent in the minds of men acquire an autonomous existence in the real world. For Wilson, where Bull differs from Manning is not in acknowledging the ideational nature of international society but in refusing to identify it with world politics *in toto*. For Bull, the Grotian tradition of thought to which the idea of international society belong is an important aspect of modern international relations, but it should not monopolise the interest of statesmen since it has to compete with other elements in the international scene. In any case, the significance that the members of the English School attach to the idea of the international society differentiates them from other schools of thought such as structuralists, pluralists and realists. As far as it concerns the membership of the English School, Wilson widened the list offered by Suganami to include not only Manning, Bull, Northedge and Alan James, but also Wight, R. J. Vincent and James Mayall. He also consciously placed it within the LSE Department of International Relations and drew attention to the element of personal relationships and connections out of which a common outlook eventually emerged despite various minor disagreements.

Although internally coherent, Wilson's presentation of the idea of international society as a master signifier does not fully explain why one should keep talking about an "English School" and not about an "international society approach" or even about certain "institutionalists". By identifying the English School with the ahistorical exploration of the conditions of international order, the writers of the 1980s devalued its intellectual strength and potential, and failed to realise that international society cannot be effectively conceptualised outside particular

historical frameworks. Despite its important limitations, the 1980s understanding of the English School proved much more resilient than one might imagine, and continued to influence the School's academic representations even during the 1990s. As we shall see next, the writers of the next decade amended the list of the members of the English School, and transferred its institutional basis from LSE to the University of Cambridge, without, however, challenging the core assumptions of the writers of the 1980s and the primacy of the idea of international society.

### **The 1990s: Tim Dunne and the British Committee**

The 1990s understanding of the English School found its most clear expression in Tim Dunne's *Inventing International Society: A History of the English School* (1998). As Linklater and Suganami mention, the book did not come out of nowhere but it reflected an interpretation which had already emerged in some quarters, and had led Richard Little (1995) to identify the English School with the British Committee on the Theory of International Politics. Contrary to the writers of the 1980s, Dunne put forward the interesting idea that the English School's institutional base should be sought at Peterhouse, Cambridge, where the members of the British Committee on the Theory of International Politics met between 1958 and 1968. Its father was not Charles Manning but Martin Wight, who put ethical concerns at the centre of intellectual inquiry and developed an interpretive approach to international theory. Although the writers of the 1980s had related the English School's interpretive approach to the attempt to analyse the values that inform the actions of statesmen, Dunne also drew attention to the need to recognise the link that exists between the subject (scholar) and the object (world). He also discerned the debt that English School thinkers have to European history in the sense of ideas and institutions that are immanent in the European diplomatic community. As Dunne succinctly put it, the "Committee's view of theory was one that was driven *and* constrained by practice" (Dunne, emphasis in the original, 1998: 106).

Although *Inventing International Society* offered to the English School a more plausible institutional basis than the LSE Department of International Relations and contained some intriguing remarks regarding the importance of history for English School theorising, Dunne's attempt to launch a new interpretation without in essence rejecting the old one generated a picture that is arguably less coherent than either Wilson's robust defence of the idea of international society, or Suganami's early account of the work of the British institutionalists led by Charles Manning. Despite the fact that Dunne has been criticised for the radicalism of his approach, and in particular for his inclusion of Carr and exclusion of Manning, what he essentially did in his reconstruction of the English School was to put old wine into new bottles. The book's title does not leave many doubts regarding the



centrality that the author attributes to the idea of international society, which is also explored by the writers of the 1980s. For Dunne, the English School's exploration into the nature of international society is widely and rightly seen as its most important contribution to the study of international affairs. As his critics pointed out, this effort to retain the general ideological framework offered by the writers of the 1980s, while modifying their assumptions regarding the School's membership and institutional affiliation, led to a rather confused interpretation of the past and future of the English School.

For Tonny Knudsen (2000), Dunne's identification of the English School with the British Committee on the Theory of International Politics prevents him from offering a convincing account of its origins. According to Knudsen, the exclusion of Manning came at a heavy price since his legal philosophy is an important intellectual source for English School theorising. Samuel M. Makinda (2000) also made the point that Dunne should have found a way to accommodate Manning. Like the writers of the 1980s, Makinda offers a defence of what he defines as the "International Society tradition", but he claims that as an inherently pluralistic enterprise the English School can also accommodate history and morality. However, the most devastating response to Dunne's reconstruction of the history of the English School came from Hidemi Suganami (2000).

For Suganami, the way in which Dunne reinvented the English School in order to include Carr and give a central role to Wight is fraught with difficulties. These difficulties primarily arise from the fact that what Dunne depicts as a "School" is in reality a cluster of thinkers who share certain family resemblances. Echoing Makinda's call to respect pluralism and diversity, Suganami argues that the English School consists of three overlapping groupings united by a common commitment to Rationalism. The first group is primarily concerned to identify the institutional prerequisites of international order. The second takes a more critical approach, and wants to debate the merits of the existing institutional order. Finally, a third group of English School scholars adopts a historical point of view and wants to investigate how the institutional framework of international relations developed—and changed—over time. Although Carr cannot be placed in any of the three groups and his commitment to Rationalism is dubious, Manning played an important role in the process which Dunne himself describes as the "invention of international society".

Apart from excluding Manning, while at the same time continuing to depict international society as the master signifier in the discourse of the English School, the biggest problem with Dunne's understanding of the School is the degree to which he consciously or unconsciously projected a number of ideas derived from

Hedley Bull and R. J. Vincent onto Butterfield, Carr and Wight<sup>xv</sup>. With regard to Butterfield, Dunne does not hide his belief that what qualifies him as a member of the English School is primarily the role he played in creating and directing the British Committee during its first years. Contrary to what Dunne argues, Butterfield's engagement with the problem of prudential statecraft does not necessarily make him a Rationalist, since historians and political theorists from Thucydides onwards have engaged with the same issue. The fact that Wight was something more than a supporter of Rationalism can be seen from his complex intellectual journey and, more importantly, from his understanding of Realism, Rationalism and Revolutionism as different aspects of the same complex international reality. By contrast to the methodologically convenient international society approach, Wight was not a monist and his personal sympathy for Rationalism did not make him forget that Realism and Revolutionism are equally important for understanding international relations. Finally, saying that Carr was influential upon founding members of the English School, such as Wight, or even later thinkers, such as Bull and Vincent, is not tantamount to saying that he was a member of the School.

Carr's actual relationship to the English School cannot be inferred with certainty from Dunne's account, since sometimes he is depicted as an insider, sometimes as an outsider, and sometimes as belonging to a vague middle space between insiders and outsiders. In a nutshell, Dunne's insistence to interpret the intellectual oeuvre of his chosen thinkers through the lens of international society does not really illuminate the origins of the English School. Including Butterfield for mainly institutional and not theoretical reasons, reducing the complexity that characterises Wight's thinking to an unqualified defence of Rationalism, and evaluating Carr according to a standard to which he did not believe, leads to highly contradictory account of the origins and development of the English School. The fact that in later publications Dunne (1999; 2008) either downplayed the importance of Carr's intellectual contribution to the English School or excluded him entirely from it, is not so much a concession to the justified concerns raised by his critics, but it basically represents the logical consequence of his own defence of the idea of international society.

Dunne's ambivalence towards Carr is echoed by Barry Buzan. In an influential 1993 article, Buzan included Carr in the English School along with Manning, Wight, Bull, Watson, Vincent, James and Gerrit Gong. However, in later publications Buzan (2001; 2004) decided to pay less attention to Carr, who in his 2014 book appears simply as critic who denies the importance of international society on both methodological and normative grounds. The rather uncertain status that Buzan and Dunne attributed to Carr within the English School is the logical consequence

of their identification of the School with the so-called societal approach. As we shall see next, the link between the international society and the English School was critically re-examined only by writers who understood the ending of the Cold War as a turning point in both international relations and International Relations (IR).

Among the writers of the 1990s, Little (1995) came closer than anybody else to depicting the English School as a methodologically pluralistic and historically informed theoretical enterprise. For Little, the celebrated distinction between international system, international society, and world society, makes sense only on methodological grounds and does not involve giving ontological priority to any of those elements. Little does not deny that there are members of the School that view the idea of international society with more sympathy than others, but makes the important observation that the choice between Realism, Rationalism, and Revolutionism expresses a policy preference and should not divert attention away from trying to comprehend and analyse the international arena in its entirety. The way in which policy preferences influence not only the choice between Realism, Rationalism and Revolutionism but also the content of Rationalism itself, was only appreciated and analysed by the writers examined in the next section. For them, Rationalism does not stand above the international reality it purports to describe since it changes along with that reality. In a nutshell, the 1990s were a transitional period in the understanding of the English School with many fundamental issues to remain unresolved or to be the object of significant controversy among English School scholars. Although the existence of the School was now taken for granted, its relationship to the societal approach was not extensively debated and the concepts of “history” and “morality” were simply added to what remained essentially a state-centric way of examining international relations.

### **International Society after the Cold War**

As we saw in the previous section, the writers that succeeded the ahistorical structuralism of the 1980s owe more to their predecessors than it is often acknowledged. Their depiction of the English School as a broader church than the LSE Department of International Relations did not challenge the hegemony of the idea of international society within English School thinking. Although the attention given to this idea cannot be attributed in any one-dimensional way to external reality, it is a fact that the end of the Cold War made possible a more critical examination of the idea of international society and its relationship to the English School. Although Buzan (1993), Little (1995) and Dunne (1998) were all writing after the end of the Cold War in 1991, they did not attribute any particular theoretical importance to it. Little noted that he was too close to the actual

historical events to appreciate their significance. For Buzan, the real historical change had occurred after World War II with the emergence of a universal international society. As regards Dunne, his open rejection of contextualism and declared intention to trace the footsteps of academics who were carrying a theoretical conversation independent of real-world developments, did not enable him to grasp the ways in which history has shaped developments within IR and also been present in its very creation<sup>xvi</sup>. Although there is no doubt that contextualism can lead to simplifications, it is implausible to suggest that cataclysmic political events, such as the beginning or ending of major international conflicts, have no consequences for IR. Pace Dunne and Brian Schmidt, the development of the social sciences in general cannot be easily separated from what is happening in the real or non-reflective world (Halliday, 1994).

Contrary to those who treated the notion of international society as an ahistorical construct, the post-Cold War writers discussed in this section placed the idea of international society within the historical context of the Cold War. What emerges from their contextually informed examination of international society is not the imperative to abandon this concept, but rather the need to realise the ways in which its actual content is at any particular moment determined by possibilities created by actual historical development combined, of course, with the policy preferences of scholars studying those developments. Far from being an alternative to the history/theory dialectic, international society can only be understood as a product of this dialectic. As such, it can provide neither the basis for a disinterested study of international affairs, nor an alternative to the particularistic commitments and loyalties which I see as essential to English School thinking.

For Rick Fawn and Jeremy Larkins (1996), the state-centric version of international society defended by Bull and others is clearly an intellectual and political product of the Cold War. Its particular policy implications mean that it cannot be identified with international affairs in general or with the so-called international community. As a result of the extensive political changes brought about by the end of the Cold War, institutions such as the balance of power lose their primacy in international society. The same applies to international law whose importance is open to question in a world no longer regulated by the balance of power. The novel forms of economic and technological cooperation developed among North America, Western Europe and East Asia encourage us to rethink the notion of a great power. In the aftermath of the Cold War, power itself is no longer depended so much on military capacity but on the possession of attributes which are not fully taken into account by the traditional English School understanding of the international society. The aim of Fawn and Larkins is not to challenge the

validity of the notion of international society per se, but to show how its content and institutions should be redefined as a consequence of developments taking place outside the walls of the academy. They also note that from a purely intellectual point of view Bull's formulation of that notion can be considered to be outdated since it does not fully utilise the insights of theoretical currents such as neorealism, normative theory and post-positivism.

This historical determination of the content of the notion of international society is also illuminated by Martin Shaw (1996). For Shaw, the concepts used by social scientists are always part of the social or international reality they purport to describe. Their fundamentally ideological character does not mean that they are to be compared to forms of supposedly objective knowledge, but it rather means that they can be considered to be true or false only within a particular social or international context. For example, despite the fact that the idea of international society performed a useful political function during the Cold War by emphasising the element of international cooperation instead that of conflict, its end has revealed its serious weaknesses. According to Shaw, international society in its traditional English School form is characterised by an unjustified state-centrism which takes for granted that relations among states are more important than and analytically distinct from relations within states. To the extent that in the post-Cold War era what happens within states, in the sense of human rights abuses, determines what happens between states, in the form of humanitarian interventions, the primacy of foreign policy is seriously challenged taking with it the analytical value of the notion of international society. Shaw is also sensitive to some of the inherent conceptual limitations of the idea international society, which make IR specialists forget that for all other social sciences a "society" can only be comprised by real persons and not state entities<sup>xvii</sup>.

It is important to note that these criticisms of the notion of international society in its traditional English School form do not emanate from writers inimical to the English School or to the idea of international society per se. What Fawn, Larkins and Shaw help us realise is that the way in which English School writers from Manning to Bull used the notion of international society was a historically contingent one. The ongoing debate between pluralists and solidarists within the English School also serves to show how amorphous the notion of international society is, and how it can be organised around the most diverse institutions which range from state sovereignty to the promotion of human rights and the protection of the environment. Buzan's (2014) assumption that there is a real historical trend towards solidarism, and that this historical trend determines which institutions will play a dominant role in the future, also serves to show how international society and its definition are influenced by developments taking place in the non-

theoretical sphere. Far from representing an alternative to history, international society is a product of history. Its alternative definitions by pre- and post-Cold War writers are not the expression of different intellectual allegiances but of distinct policy preferences and changing international relations. In terms similar to those that Wilson (1995) has used to dissect the category of inter-war “idealism” or “utopianism”, international society is a powerful concept which performs a number of political functions, but it obfuscates rather than illuminates what it purports to describe. To that extent, it belongs to the world of rhetoric and politics and not to the world of academia.

Freed from the need to treat international society as an answer to a problem, namely the problem of delineating the contours of the English School, Fred Halliday (1994) was able to show the different meanings that international society can assume within different research programs and also to highlight its inherent conceptual limitations. Far from being the monopoly of the English School, the term “international society” is also employed by those working within a transnationalist paradigm to refer to cultural and economic exchanges that take place independent of the state. The ways that societies interact independent of the state have been further explored in globalisation literature, which also employs the term “international society”. Despite its frequent use by IR scholars, the term “international society” can create confusion between what sociologists define as a “society” in order to distinguish it from a “community” and also between what they define as a “society” in order to distinguish it from the state. As we saw, the excessively idiosyncratic way that the term “society” is employed by IR theorists has also concerned Jones (1981) and Shaw (1996).

Despite these conceptual ambiguities, Halliday does not call for the total abandonment of the term “international society” but rather for understanding the contemporary international society as homogeneity. The intellectual resources for doing so should not be sought in the thought of the supposed father of the international society approach, Hugo Grotius, but rather in Burke, Marx and Fukuyama. In accordance with the contextualist point of view adopted by the post-Cold War critics examined in this section, Halliday consciously rejects the attempt to separate academic disciplines from their social environment and to define academic concepts without considering history in the form of real-world happenings and developments. His preferred version of international society as homogeneity is based on the ontological assumption that in order to compete effectively with one another different states end up adopting the same societal models. It is also interesting to note that whereas conventional English School understandings of international society ascribe to this term a descriptive and normative meaning, Halliday uses international society as homogeneity as an

explanatory device in order to account for the end of the Cold War and subsequent historical developments<sup>xviii</sup>.

Perhaps the most fundamental and far-reaching critique of traditional English School conceptualisations of the international society was formulated by Edward Keene (2002). Although Fawn, Larkins, Shaw and Halliday challenge the state-centric understanding of this notion from the point of view of present and future historical developments, Keene appeals to history in the sense of the past, as well as the present and the future. For Keene, the tension between national sovereignty and human rights, between a state-based form of international order and the promotion of civilisation and good government, is not something that suddenly appeared after the end of the Cold War but it rather is an essential element of modern international order as such. The kind of international society defended by Hedley Bull is very different from that delineated by the supposed father of the international society approach, Hugo Grotius. Indeed, Grotius' belief in the divisibility of sovereignty and the importance of individual rights separate him not only from many English School figures but also from the understanding of the state that can be found in Hobbes, Bodin and other representatives of political modernity.

According to Keene, what separates our international order from that of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is that the goals of toleration and the promotion of civilization are pursued within the same social and geographical space. Although between the seventeenth century and the outbreak of World War I the promotion of civilisation and of what was understood as good government took place in the extra-European world only, from 1914 onwards both Europeans and non-Europeans are being subjected to the same civilising process which frequently challenges sovereignty in the name of other ideals and principles. Although in the thought of Fawn, Larkins, and Shaw, and of course in the views expressed by many English School solidarists in the post-Cold War period, there is a tendency to welcome the advent of a human rights-based form of international order, Keene recommends more modesty and restraint. The follies of imperialism and colonialism do not automatically cancel the achievements of modern West or the promotion of human rights, but they ought to make us think very carefully about how our ideals can be implemented in a diverse world. Keene's critique of Bull and those who adopt a similar point of view reveals not only the bifurcated and contradictory nature of modern international order, but also that there can never be a value-free definition of international order which would command the assent of Europeans and non-Europeans, aliens, citizens and barbarians. For Keene it is not international order which determines our ideals, but conflicting ideals

which determine the course that the pursuance of international order should take under modern circumstances.

Contrary to what applies to my discussion of the writers of the 1980s and the 1990s, I do not claim that the authors examined in this section present the same argument, or versions of the same argument. Certainly, Fawn and Larkins, Shaw, Halliday, and Keene, have different points of departure and different destinations; they also find themselves in different positions with regard to the English School. For example, although Keene is usually associated with the English School, Halliday is not. His understanding of international society as homogeneity refers to more general processes of competition and convergence among societies than most versions of English School solidarism, which do not really deny the importance of the state in international society (Buzan, 2014). Shaw's Marxist background influences his understanding of the role of the social sciences, but it does not stop him from arriving at policy recommendations which make international society seem more like a global angel than a global gangster and bring him close to English School solidarism. To the extent that they contribute to a common discussion, the figures discussed in this section are united by the realisation that the notion of international society is not an answer to a problem but rather a problem in itself. This realisation does not make them abandon entirely this notion, but rather to emphasise the ways in which it is affected by history, and cannot be defined independent of history in the sense of past, present and future developments in the non-contemplative sphere. Apart from their critical examination of the content and the validity of the notion of international society, it is this engagement with history that separates them from the authors of the 1980s and the 1990s.

To the extent that international society is not an independent variable, which can be used to define the contours of the English School, but rather a dependent variable that is determined by social and international developments, defining the English School would require recourse to something more fundamental and general than a historically contingent idea. The notion of human rights employed by English School solidarists in order to question the moral credentials of the ahistorical structuralism of the 1980s, cannot perform the role that international society once performed for the English School, since it is widely used by others and it is also determined by history. As Linklater and Suganami (2006) point out, since the degree of solidarity among states varies considerably from one group of states to another, and from one historical period to another, neither solidarism nor pluralism can be considered to express a timeless truth about international relations. Indeed, the same criticisms levelled at the ahistorical structuralists of the 1980s could also levelled at the so-called solidarists, who tend to abstract the notion of human rights from its Western political and constitutional framework,



and use it as a criterion for evaluating the behaviour of states in general. Although defending ideas derived from the Western political theory and practice might be perfectly legitimate as a normative position, it cannot be seen as the politically neutral expression of a social-scientific interest in the conditions of international order. To the degree that, as Buzan (2014) notes, the position of English School pluralists is no less normative in essence than that of the solidarists, both pluralism and solidarism should be examined from a historical perspective and be understood as an expression of contingent and not absolute ideals and principles. Such a historicist examination of pluralism and solidarism might lead to the conclusion that, as Buzan has argued, their actual differences are less pronounced than ordinarily assumed. In any case, since both structuralists and functionalists have serious issues with history—which is widely recognised as one important dimension of English School thinking—it could be assumed that what is currently described as the School’s historical orientation should gain further ground.

However, as I showed in the Introduction, historically informed English School scholars have not so far been able to arrive at a constructive definition of the relationship between history and theory. Even the more advanced and methodologically conscious among them continue to describe history and theory as separate domains, which can be combined in a rather superficial and external way. Also, the kind of historical knowledge required for the writing of books such as Buzan’s and Little’s *International Systems in World History*, or Watson’s *The Evolution of International Society*, means that this type of work will always be confined to an academic elite able to use multiple research assistants or having benefited from many years of personal research. Finally yet importantly, the historically inspired scholars, who are associated with the School’s historical orientation, are still working within the confines of a positivist epistemology that assumes that the study of the past can help us realise certain “truths” about international affairs.

What this positivist epistemology disregards is that our interpretations of the past are necessarily distinct from the past itself, and that the concepts we introduce in order to study the past are derived from our own historically determined vocabulary. To the extent that both the functionalists and the “historicists” among English School scholars remain engaged to methodological assumptions that bring them close to mainstream international theorists, I believe that any understanding of the English School as an intellectual challenge to established theoretical paradigms should start from the acknowledgement of the importance of the history/theory dialectic. This dialectic could help place the concepts of international society and human rights within their proper historical contexts, and could potentially give rise to novel forms of philosophical

historiography. It is also well-attuned to an academic scene where “history” is no longer a term which can be used unproblematically and where different houses of history not only exist but also proliferate<sup>xix</sup>.

### **Carr and the Origins of the History/Theory Dialectic**

The origins of the history/theory dialectic should be sought in E. H. Carr’s conscious and systematic exploration of the relationship between history and theory. This exploration creates a link between his two most important books: *The Twenty Years’ Crisis* (1939/2001) and *What is History?* (1961/1987). Although more than twenty years separate the two books, it could be argued that the second is a corrective to the first. The harsh cynicism of *The Twenty Years’ Crisis* is mitigated in *What is History?* by a largely benevolent understanding of the historical process. Despite their differences and imperfections, these books are the natural place to start for anyone interested in the ways in which history and theory meet with one another in International Relations and beyond.

As far as it regards *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*, one could distinguish among five different senses in which the history/theory dialectic inspires and animates its pages. To begin with, contrary to the discursive approaches which seek to rewrite the history of IR in order to isolate it from social and international developments, Carr saw that both the emergence and the direction of the discipline of IR were influenced by developments taking place outside the walls of the academy. So long as international affairs were considered to be of interest only to professional soldiers and diplomats, no systematic and public inquiry into international politics was possible. The whole discipline’s idealist origins had to do with the fact that it was created after the war in order to stop a similar catastrophe from taking place again. In this IR was no exception since in the same way that political science had been created to solve domestic political issues, IR was given birth in order to address and mitigate international problems and tensions. Indeed, what separated Carr from his so-called idealist opponents was not an interest in the real world per se, but rather that his realism had a passive dimension which took the world as it is. In their desire to avoid a new world war, the idealists had brought it closer by not paying enough attention to the real causes of the problems they were addressing. What separated “realism” from “idealism” was not the desire to influence political developments but the search for a solution and not a utopia, which tries to mould reality without being anchored in it. For Carr, moreover, the problems facing IR were similar to those confronting all other sciences, whether natural or social. In the most different disciplines, from medicine to social and political theory, intellectual developments are influenced by social ones.

Secondly, Carr made the point that his utopian opponents harboured a fundamentally flawed understanding of international theory which can never aspire to describe the common interest. Adopting a quasi-Mannheimian sociology of knowledge which emphasises the importance of the position of the observer without excluding intellectuals from its purview, Carr claimed that the interwar international theorists were not only writing from English-speaking countries but they were also writing for English-speaking countries. Their support for peace, free trade and international law, was not equally advantageous to everybody but reflected the interests of those in possession, especially Britain and France. By portraying the determination of thought as a largely subconscious process, Carr avoided criticizing his opponents from an abstract ethical point of view and called them to consider how their historically determined position influenced their ideals. As we shall see in Chapter 8, Carr did not ultimately deny the possibility that the interests of different actors can be combined, but he claimed that this cannot happen so long as the satisfied nations identify their own interests with the common good.

Thirdly, despite drawing attention to the international crisis of the years 1919-1939 in the title and the subtitle of his book, Carr had the ambition to delineate the contours of a more general and all-encompassing historical crisis which put into question many aspects of pre-World War I political and moral thinking. The dividing line that he draws between, on the one hand, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and, on the other hand, the twentieth century means that social and international issues can never be discussed in the abstract and that different historical periods require different modes of thinking and acting. To be more specific, Carr argued that the doctrine of the harmony of interests in the form developed by Adam Smith and others reflected eighteenth-century social conditions, and required the existence of a pre-capitalist social structure dominated by small producers. During the nineteenth century, this doctrine survived only because economic growth temporarily obfuscated the unequal distribution of wealth, and colonialism provided chances and opportunities to those not reaping the benefits of progress at home. During the eighteenth century the doctrine of the harmony of interests was close to the truth, but it later assumed the form of a myth with a distant connection to reality and was completely transformed during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and especially after 1914. What had originally been a truthful idea and later a plausible ideology became a pure utopia with no links to social or international reality. As a result of the cataclysmic social and international changes that World War I triggered, Carr's generation had to do their own thinking for themselves and not to rely on the utilitarianism and liberalism of their fathers and forefathers. The essence of historical crises ultimately lies in the fact that old institutions and ideas

become obsolete before suitable replacement can be found. As Chapter 8 argues, Carr himself had a significant debt to the liberal tradition criticised in his work since, while dismissing the possibility of a natural harmony of interests, he firmly believed in the possibility of an artificial identification of interests through mutual concessions and the display of goodwill.

Fourthly, far from pretending to be above the social or international structure, Carr admitted that his own ideas were also the product of a particular situation and therefore their validity was only relative and not universal. The differences between the first and the second editions of the book, as well the author's changing views on nationalism, mean that for Carr international theory always tries to assess a particular situation and that the theorist is primarily writing for his contemporaries. As Chapter 8 shows, Carr believed that nationalism is not good or bad in itself but rather that it has different consequences in different historical periods and a different relationship with internationalism. Ultimately, the reason why the theorist cannot provide a suprahistorical definition of phenomena such as nationalism is that no such definition exists.

Finally, in discussing the forms that the history/theory dialectic assumes in the pages of *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, one should mention Carr's belief that all solutions to political problems are temporary and ultimately unsatisfying. The corrupting influence of political reality upon ideals and institutions means that new ideas should regularly be put forward and that their institutionalisation represents only a partial victory. Old ideas and institutions should frequently be replaced by new ones in a vision of the world which, without being tragic in any deep sense of the term, certainly defies easy solutions and prescriptions. The ways in which the historicity of theory is analysed in *The Twenty Years' Crisis* would make it not only a point of intellectual departure but also a point of intellectual arrival, if the author had managed to offer a positive program of international change. As I claim in Chapter 8, Carr's vision of peaceful change is not without its merits but is too liberal to be applied in world inhabited by rational, less rational, and also irrational actors.

If *The Twenty Years' Crisis* is the first conscious and detailed investigation of the history/theory dialectic from the point of view of international theory, then *What is History?* is the most well-argued exploration of the same dialectic from the point of view of a practising English historian. As I show in Chapter 5, Carr was very much interested in the links that exist between history and the social sciences and he believed that historiography is an inherently theoretical enterprise. The theoretical presuppositions of historical writing are revealed in his critique of nineteenth-century historians, who took progress for granted. This belief in progress, without

being explicitly stated, provided the ideological background necessary for their discussion of more particular topics, and enabled them to focus on historical details assuming that a hidden hand takes care of the historical process as a whole. The belief that history is no less theoretical than, for example, sociology, as far as it regards its ideological presuppositions, and interest not in the unique but in what is general in the unique, enabled Carr to defend it from those – like Isaiah Berlin and Karl Popper—who viewed it with condescension and portrayed it as a *sui generis* discipline. Wilson (2001) is certainly justified in seeing *What is History?* as Carr's second attack against the liberal academic establishment of his day, the first attack being *The Twenty Years' Crisis*. However, what separates the two books is a faith in the future and a search for objectivity that owe much to the writer's liberal past<sup>xx</sup>. Taken together, *The Twenty Years' Crisis* and *What is History?* represent a systematic exploration of the reasons why theory cannot escape history, and history cannot escape theory. Using this insight as our point of departure, we will now try to offer a positive definition of the history/theory dialectic in the form developed by Butterfield, Wight and Carr.

In the same way that Howard William's (1989) investigation of the role of dialectic in the philosophical systems of Heraclitus, Hegel and Marx does not assume that they were identical thinkers, my reconstruction of the history/theory dialectic in Butterfield, Wight and Carr does not presuppose that there are no differences among them. Certainly, Butterfield's and Wight's Christian background and Carr's Marxist inspiration explain why so far they have been read and understood independently from one another. One of the advantages of the history/theory dialectic in the form reconstructed here is that it offers a more pluralistic framework than Marxism, and does not exclude the possibility that the impersonal forces shaping human history might be of celestial nature and origin. The interesting thing about Butterfield's and Wight's Christianity, and Carr's Marxism, is that they enable them to see human history as something more than the result of the conscious actions of individual human beings, but they do not make them fatalists or determinists. Despite their religious and other differences, Butterfield, Wight and Carr do not stop to draw attention to the interpenetration of history and theory, and the need to employ a synthetic approach when analysing a multidimensional and subject to change world.

### **English School and the History/Theory Dialectic**

In order to make evident the interpenetration of history and theory, Butterfield, Carr and Wight emphasised the generality of the first and the particularity of the latter. The belief that historiography is an inherently theoretical enterprise in the sense that it both presupposes and produces theory—understood as

methodological and substantive assumptions of general value—distances Wight and Butterfield from other participants in the British Committee, and brings them close to Carr who saw history as an embryonic social science. Although the differences between the authors discussed in my thesis and traditional narrative historians such as Michael Howard and Geoffrey Hudson are relatively easy to see, the case of Donald Mackinnon is a more complex one. Despite the fact that his engagement with moral philosophy and declared interest in the philosophy of history seem at first glance to earn Mackinnon a place in my thesis, his methodological and philosophical views are very far from those espoused by Butterfield, Carr and Wight. Despite his interest in the philosophy of history, Mackinnon never rejected the British empiricist tradition, which played an important role in his intellectual upbringing. At the same time, his commitment to the absolute moral standards embodied in natural law, and belief that the task of the philosopher is to search for the “truth” as such, separate him sharply from the historicists discussed in my thesis<sup>xxi</sup>. Although Mackinnon struggled with methodological and philosophical problems similar to those concerning Butterfield, Wight and Carr, his answers to those problems were distinctively different. For the writers examined in my thesis, engaging with problems that fall within the theoretical jurisdiction of the philosophy of history is not something optional but rather something necessary in the sense that there can be no historiography without a theory of historiography, and that historians arrive at conclusions which are not essentially different from those reached by social, political and international theorists. Both historians and international theorists are searching for the causes of events and are not interested in the unique but what is general in the unique. Among contemporary historians, Toynbee certainly provides an interesting case but, as I show in Chapter 4, his understanding of history as theory was not accompanied by an understanding of theory as history. In other words, despite his support for a philosophically informed form of historiography, Toynbee eventually distanced himself from the values of the European civilisation, and adopted a point of view which brought him close to religious syncretism and political cosmopolitanism. Mackinnon’s empiricist epistemology, and Mackinnon’s and Toynbee’s moral universalism and negation of historicism explain why they cannot be placed alongside Butterfield, Wight and Carr. For the founding English School thinkers examined in my thesis, subjectivity is important in both methodological and substantive grounds.

Butterfield’s, Wight’s and Carr’s attempt to show the theoretical presuppositions and significance of historiography, would be incomplete without their equally important and consistent effort to make evident the historicity of international theory, and to provide support for the thesis that theory is always for someone and some purpose. Apart from challenging current understandings of the English

School as an apolitical enterprise, Butterfield's, Wight's and Carr's historicist conceptualisation of international change shows that international theory can never be neutral in its assessment of international developments, since it is heavily influenced by the theorist's standpoint and location in space and time. The clear political implications of Butterfield's, Wight's and Carr's analysis of international politics and understanding of theory as history differentiate their point of view from that of American behaviourists and game theorists, and reconnect twentieth-century international thought with the concern for practical results that, as Morgenthau (1967) mentions, dominated reflections on international relations between the end of the Napoleonic Wars and World War II. Echoing the Marxian belief that the mission of theory is not to understand the world but to change it, the English School writers discussed in my thesis are not primarily interested to describe the various changes taking place around them, or to offer something resembling a general model of international change, but to advocate particular changes and international reforms. Their support for non-ideological diplomacy and the establishment of a global balance of power within which America, the Soviet Union, and a strong Western Europe would play an equal role, though not completely utopian, corresponded to a rather marginal historical possibility<sup>xxii</sup>. The fact that, as the case of Carr makes particularly clear, they ultimately abandoned the hope that Europe could continue to play the role it played in the past, shows that normative considerations should always be combined with structural ones in order to avoid the trap of utopianism and/or political irrelevance.

Butterfield's, Wight's and Carr's theoretically informed understanding of the past and historically informed understanding of the present are underpinned by a pluralistic methodology which refuses to separate international politics from moral, social and ideological considerations. The kind of changes they describe as international theorists are not limited to one particular sphere of social action, but show how interlinked are the domains that conventional international theorists separate from one another. Especially with regard to the past, they offer a canon of historical interpretation, which states that the action of identifiable individuals cannot be separated from the influence of the deep impersonal forces criticised by Berlin in *Historical Inevitability* (1954). Contrary to the nineteenth-century liberal historians criticised by Carr, they refuse to make a choice between the freedom of human beings and the workings of what Friedrich Carl von Savigny described as "silently operating forces"<sup>xxiii</sup>. In the same way that they abstain from portraying historical development as the result of conscious decisions taken by individual human beings, they also hesitate to adopt the type of structuralism that would render meaningless any notion of human freedom and responsibility, and, as Berlin correctly points out, would end up depicting the universe as a vast prison. To the extent that as Halliday (1994) observes, structuralism involves a form of

determinism that denies freedom of action to the elements in the structure, the writers discussed in my thesis were not structuralists. Their attempt to explain historical events by taking into account both the personal and impersonal forces shaping human history has important consequences for contemporary English School thinking.

Ultimately, it is Butterfield's, Carr's and Wight's rejection of monism and commitment to pluralism that stops them from offering any "philosophy of history" or "international theory" in the conventional meanings of these terms<sup>xxiv</sup>. In the same way that they abstain from interpreting the whole of human history through the prism of a single concept, they also refuse to offer the kind of theoretical prediction or explanation, which is based on the erroneous separation of one particular element of reality from the rest, and the subsequent interpretation of a complex reality through its prism<sup>xxv</sup>. In the form developed by Butterfield, Wight and Carr, the history/theory dialectic puts into question many of the dichotomies that are taken for granted by mainstream historians and international theorists, who tend to see history and theory, agency and structure, freedom and necessity, as mutually opposing concepts and not as aspects of the same evolving dialectical unity<sup>xxvi</sup>. Their use of history as theory and theory as history has far-reaching implications for historiography and international theory and offers a particularly promising way to reconceptualise the English School of International Relations.



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Herbert Butterfield on History as Theory**

Herbert Butterfield retained an interest in history, theory, and their mutual interaction, throughout his life. He was a historian suspicious of theory and yet very much interested in the hidden methodological assumptions and philosophical presuppositions of the historical profession. Contrary to most historians, he did not take the rules of historical study for granted and was extremely cautious of the different approaches that one can adopt in his study of the past. One of the paradoxes of his work is that, despite his praise for cool and scientific history, he remained first and foremost a philosopher of history. His much celebrated but also criticised *The Whig Interpretation of History*, originally published in 1931, can be considered to be the first major twentieth-century contribution to the philosophy of history in England.

As Kenneth Thompson (1980) points out, the term “philosophy of history” can refer to the methodology of history, the metaphysics of history, or the logic of history. In this examination of the history/theory dialectic, I am interested in philosophy of history in the two distinct senses of the methodology of history and the philosophical inquiry into the logic or meaning of the historical process. In the *Whig Interpretation of History* and elsewhere Butterfield not only discusses the problems raised by philosophy of history in these two different senses, but also shows how difficult it is to separate them in practice. In criticising moral judgements in history from a methodological point of view Butterfield ultimately invokes a particular philosophical understanding of the historical process. It is Butterfield’s belief that history is a dialectical process where different social and political forces strive for supremacy that makes him to doubt the ability of the historian to condemn political or religious leaders on moral grounds. Although the methodological inquiry into the role of the historian and the philosophical inquiry into the meaning of history constitute separate fields, they often meet in the actual practice of historical writing.

As a critic of the Whig theory of history, Butterfield argued in favour of understanding the past in its particularity and against applying to it ideas and assumptions derived from the present. As a constitutional historian, he argued against the Namierite understanding of eighteenth-century political controversies and underlined the significance of moral ideals in politics. This emphasis on moral factors and the ways in which they intersect with practical considerations is an expression of the methodological pluralism, which I associate with the

history/theory dialectic. As a religiously inspired thinker, Butterfield claimed that secular history couldn't be understood without taking into account the role of God and Providence in history. To these important methodological and religious insights, one should add Butterfield's direct appeal to the European past which offers a very clear example of how in his thinking history assumes the form of theory. The political experience of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are used by Butterfield in order to criticise the present and to show that there are certain historical lessons which one can disregard only at his own expense.

Finally, as a historian of historiography, he explored the merits of a comparative approach which aims to show how different countries and civilizations end up caring about their past. Although he did not manage to provide final answers to the set of methodological problems he discussed or even to fully reconcile the various different aspects of his thinking, Butterfield proved that recording the events of the past does not exhaust the mission of the historian who necessarily brings his own philosophical and theological beliefs in the understanding of the human drama. The active role that the writers discussed in my thesis attributed to the historian is the natural consequence of their theoretical understanding of historiography. Like theorists, historians search for the immediate and more general causes of the events they describe, and organise their narratives around particular themes. In this process, the use of judgement and imagination are unavoidable.

## I) THE WHIG INTERPRETATION OF HISTORY AND BEYOND

Despite its brevity, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (1931/1965) is a complex book which represents the first major twentieth-century English contribution to the philosophy of history. E. H. Carr's *What is History?* was published much later and Collingwood's lectures on the subject were published almost twenty years after they were originally given. The various differences that exist between *The Whig Interpretation of History* and *What is History?* should not hide the fact that both books belong to the same genre since they are essays on historical criticism. In the same way that Carr criticises his nineteenth-century predecessors for implicitly incorporating their belief in progress in their historical narratives, Butterfield is concerned with the general tendency of English historians to praise politically successful revolutions after they have taken place, to project certain principles of progress into the past, and ultimately to "produce a story which is the

ratification if not the glorification of the present” (Butterfield, 1931/1965: v). Despite the fact that Butterfield’s book can only be understood within the framework of debates peculiar to English historiography, his intervention does not have exclusively local significance. As he understood well, the problems created by the Whig interpretation are not of local significance to the extent that they concern the historians of every generation. It should be emphasised that both Butterfield and Carr do not condemn the expression of opinion as such, but they are rather concerned with the ways in which ideological assumptions and presuppositions can be hidden into ostensibly objective historical narratives.

### **Against the Whig Interpretation of History**

Despite appearances, Butterfield’s critique of the Whig theory of history is not so much an attack against a particular political tradition, which he himself appreciated to a considerable degree, but rather a demonstration of the weaknesses of a particular form of organisation of the historical material. The main problem with the Whig theory of history has to do with viewing the past through the eyes of the present, and thus denying its relative autonomy. As Butterfield argued later in *The Englishman and his History* (1944), bad history can easily go hand in hand with good politics, and showing the problems inherent in the first does not involve denying the positive consequences of the second. What is more, in *Man on His Past* (1955) Butterfield reiterates the belief that the methodological fallacies of the Whig interpretation are to be distinguished from its beneficial consequences upon British politics and society.

For Butterfield, the Whig interpretation could be described as the historian’s original sin. All historiography tends to acquire Whig characteristics and to adopt the point of view of the present when the historian is called upon to analyse and evaluate complex historical developments within a relatively short space. For this reason, it could be argued that “Clio herself is on the side of the Whigs” (Butterfield, 1931/1965: 8). In other words, there is a tendency for all history to succumb to presentism and read the past on the basis of values and criteria derived from the present. However, it should be noted that, for Butterfield, the Whig interpretation is not equivalent to presentism as such but rather to a particular approach that is “the ratification if not the glorification of the present” (Butterfield, 1931/1965: v). Whig historiography is invariably on the side of the status quo and its support for the revolutions of the past does not necessarily extend to those of the present. By subjugating the past to the present and its requirements, those adopting a Whig perspective do not do proper historiography, and make historical inquiry dependent upon extra-scientific considerations.

Although Butterfield's positive historical vision is not clearly elaborated in *The Whig Interpretation of History*, what underlines his critique of Whig history is a demand for an unmediated access to the past. The past should not be studied for the sake of the present, or be treated as a source of moral and political lessons. To the extent that Butterfield claims that the past should be studied for the sake of the past and that historical knowledge is not instrumental, he seems to make an argument in favour of the autonomy of history. Contrary to Carr, he does not try to establish any kind of relationship between history and the social sciences, and seems eager to exclude all current concerns and preoccupations from the study of the past. Despite the fact that this argument in favour of treating history as an autonomous field of study and respecting the past undoubtedly adds to the rhetorical force of Butterfield's intervention, it is doubtful whether it can be easily harmonised with his own emphasis on historical imagination and the role of the historian examined next. The only way to reconcile the first chapters of *The Whig Interpretation of History* with the later ones is to take into account the fact that they criticise distinct attitudes to historiography. The presentism of the Whig approach which Butterfield severely criticises is very different from a kind of presentism which he not only accepts but also endorses as necessary to the fruitful study of the past. It is precisely because his rejection of positivism and search for the deep causes of events that Butterfield deserves a place in my thesis.

### **Historical Imagination**

Butterfield's critique of his predecessors assumes the twin forms of an emphasis on the importance of historical imagination for understanding the past and a well-founded scepticism towards the importance of moral judgements in history. For Butterfield, the appropriation of the past involves a creative act of the historical imagination. The historian does not stand as a neutral arbiter between the past and the present but uses his imagination to translate alien circumstances and ways of life into something that would be intelligible to his contemporaries. Indeed, using the imagination is crucial not only for understanding the past but also for understanding the present. As Butterfield goes on to argue, imagination is necessary to understand even the behaviour of our present day neighbour.

This acceptance of the role of historical imagination leads the major critic of the Whig theory of history to praise it for enabling historians to introduce their political and philosophical assumptions into the study of the past. The problem with the Whig approach is not that it permits to historians to use their imagination but that it does not enable them to use it enough. In other words, Butterfield blames Whig historians not for their act of imaginative identification with the political actors of the past but for using their imagination in a restricted way to understand only the

one part of the conflicts they describe. Their sympathy is reserved for political liberals and religious Protestants and is explicitly denied to political conservatives and religious Catholics. For Butterfield, this makes the work of the Whigs especially easy since it is exactly when the historian approaches unpopular political causes and personalities that he must use extensively his imagination.

Although the Whig tendency to be emotionally involved in the historical narrative is preferable to the supposedly scientific approach of the common-sense historians, it remains one-sided and incomplete. The ideal for Butterfield is to use historical imagination to understand all the participants in a political or religious conflict and in this way to arrive at a new form of objectivity. This demand for the combination of objectivity with subjectivity is also expressed in his statement that the art of the historian lies in a particular form of historical abridgement. All history is selective and the historian can never include all the events of the past in his work, but his functions of selection and organisation of the historical material must be carried out in a spirit of faithfulness to the past.

### **Moral Judgements in History**

Butterfield's dialectical understanding of the historical process makes him to doubt the validity of the individualistic moral judgements which were popular among the historians of the past and many of his contemporaries. His opposition to moral judgements involves more than one claim and deserves systematic consideration. First, Butterfield argues that by assuming the role of the judge instead that of the detective, the historian cannot develop the imaginative sympathy which is necessary to understand the actors of the past. Secondly, the moral indignation that it is easy for the historian to express *ex post facto* does not always take into account the importance of the conditioning circumstances of human action. For example, accusing a ruler for engaging in religious persecution ignores the possibility that such persecutions were a commonplace during his time, and were considered to be necessary for the protection of the state or of what was then understood as the one true faith. Of course, Butterfield goes on to argue, this does not mean that religious persecution in itself can ever be accepted or justified, but it rather means that the persons of the past had different views regarding this issue and were acting under the influence of a different set of political and religious assumptions. Although one should condemn the sin, he must also show understanding towards the sinner.

Thirdly, Butterfield suggests that moral judgements are rather redundant and do not add something to the whole historical picture. By providing evidence that one ruler lied and another persecuted, the historian enables the reader to form his or her own opinion regarding the historical figures involved in these acts and probably

to condemn them on moral grounds. If the reader does not feel indignation after having read about the actions, he is not going to feel it because the historian expresses his own personal disapproval. Ultimately, Butterfield feels obliged to reject moral judgements as applied to individuals because of his dialectical conceptualisation of the historical process. To the extent that both Protestants and Catholics were necessary to lead to religious freedom in the world, and both Whigs and Tories were needed to create the British constitution, the historian cannot absolve the first and condemn the second. For Butterfield, different political and religious forces are required in order to create a tolerant and harmonious world.

As is the case with Carr, Butterfield's opposition to moral judgements in history applies primarily to the kind of moral judgements employed by historians against political leaders for not respecting the moral code. In the same way that Carr argues that the actual policies employed by rulers can be evaluated according to the degree to which they were historically progressive, Butterfield notes that political principles themselves can be an object of criticism. What concerns Butterfield is not if political and religious freedom is desirable or not, but if evaluating political actors according to a universal standard can contribute to genuine historical understanding. It is his negative answer to that methodological and philosophical question which makes him to reject the belief of Lord Acton and others that the historian has the right and the obligation to be the judge of historical personalities far removed from him in time. Morality itself is embedded in history. To conclude, Butterfield's rejection of Whig tendency to idolise the present at the expense of the past and to search for the present in the past has diverted attention away from his critique of positivism and the empiricist fallacies of his predecessors. By drawing attention to the role of the historian in the creation of the historical narrative and basing his rejection of simplistic moral judgements upon a dialectical understanding of the historical process Butterfield manages to show that proper historiography is based on a number of methodological and philosophical assumptions that are far from self-evident. History presupposes theory.

## II) BUTTERFIELD AND NAMIER

As Michael Bentley (2005) points out, the debate between Herbert Butterfield and Lewis Namier deserves careful consideration not only because of their alternative understandings of the eighteenth century but also because of the more general questions they posed regarding the nature of the historical enterprise. By offering contrasting readings of eighteenth-century British politics Butterfield and Namier proved that the kind of objectivity to which the average historian aspires is an illusion, and that the way one approaches the events of the past is influenced by

his whole personality and ideological beliefs. Partly as a consequence of his own experimentation with psychoanalysis in Vienna, Namier refused to take political ideas at face value and argued that they must be understood as the expression of deeper psychological operations that sometimes elude the actors themselves (Hall, 2009). In particular, Namier was anxious to dissociate the appearance of eighteenth-century politics from its essence, and to show that the reasons why men enter into politics have very little to do with the promotion of the common good. As he characteristically argued, the parliamentarians of the eighteenth century “no more dreamt of a seat in the House in order to benefit humanity than a child dreams a birthday cake that others may eat it” (Namier, 1929: 4). British political life was more or less a reflection of its economic foundations and the changes that occurred in the composition of the Parliament had to do with processes such as “the rise and fall of various branches of commerce, the development of modern finance, and the advance of capitalist organisation in industry” (Namier, 1930/1961: 5). Contrary to the Whig historians, Namier did not idealise the Parliament or any other centre of power and, as his critics suggested, tended to present a rather grim picture of political life in general and ultimately to take the mind out of politics.

Butterfield’s critique of Namier was motivated by a variety of considerations which were not only intellectual in nature but included professional and even personal reasons as well. Even his most sympathetic biographer does not hide the fact that Butterfield felt somewhat uncomfortable with Namier’s widespread success and recognition, and saw in him his most important competitor in the field of eighteenth-century English constitutional history (McIntire, 2004). However, whatever his ulterior motives might have been, Butterfield raised a number of intriguing questions which do not have to do exclusively with Namier, but concern the definition of the relationship between ethics and politics. For Butterfield, political actors are more free and responsible than Namier wants us to believe, and their actions cannot be fully explained in terms of economic or other constraints. Although Butterfield did not deny that material self-interest and party discipline to a certain extent influenced the actions of eighteenth-century statesmen, he painted a more complicated and ultimately a more realistic picture than Namier.

### **George III, Lord North, and the People**

Butterfield’s views on eighteenth-century political struggles in England can be found in *George III, Lord North, and the People, 1779-80*. For Butterfield, moral principles not only matter in politics but they are horizontally distributed across the political spectrum. Despite his limited practical success, George III was motivated by a desire to unite the nation and fight corruption, while his critics also had “their

egotisms, their vested interests, their pettinesses and their wilful ways” (Butterfield, 1949a: viii). Contrary to Namier, Butterfield pays attention to the political debates which were taking place at the House of Commons, and makes the point that the value of Lord North as a prime minister lied primarily in his ability to respond effectively to the various criticisms of the opposition. North admitted the general validity of the ideals promoted by his political opponents, but argued that they were actually irrelevant to the particular cases he was dealing with, or that he had already taken them into account when designing his policy. Butterfield shows that the House was not indifferent to the force of the better argument, and notes that many of its members determined their attitude to the government according to the course of the discussion. Therefore, for Butterfield ideas clearly matter in politics and political men are not indifferent to the way in which the adoption of certain policies is justified.

This emphasis on the ideational aspect of politics does not lead Butterfield to adopt a reductionist form of historical explanation as Namier does. The attention that Butterfield devotes to economic and population figures in *George III, Lord North, and the People* exceeds anything he had done in the past. In order to explain the increase in corruption during the reign of George III, Butterfield appeals to economic and political factors, such as the development of commerce and industry, and the spread of empire. In order to show the reasons behind the unrest in Ireland, he emphasises the problems caused to Irish trade by the War of American Independence. The emergence of an oppositional public sphere outside London is related to the more general development of the countryside expressed in the creation of large urban centres such as Bristol, Norwich, and Manchester. Although this interest in socio-economic issues and demographic developments is not enough to turn Butterfield into a social historian, it represents an attempt to combine the traditional interests of the constitutional historian with the new historiographical trends that emerged after the Great War. In his effort to refute the kind of economic reductionism employed by Namier Butterfield does not deny the importance of economic factors in general but rather shows how complex political reality actually is.

Probably the book’s most interesting dimension has to do with Butterfield’s appreciation of the importance of the role of the popular factor in politics. Contrary to Namier, Butterfield does not limit his historical account to the actions and omissions of professional politicians, but is especially interested in the role of various organisations of the civil society. Indeed, the popular factor and its involvement in politics determine the book’s chronological limits and underlie Butterfield’s overall argument. For him, the last months of 1779 and the early part of 1880 are especially interesting to the historian because of the development of



novel forms of political conflict which lead to the emergence of a quasi-revolutionary situation in England and Ireland. It is during this period that England came close to something resembling the French Revolution. Butterfield's appreciation of the importance of the popular factor in politics does not lead him to embrace political extremism. Organisations of the civil society such as the Yorkshire movement are praised for their moderation while Butterfield makes clear his fear of violence and revolution in his discussion of among other things the Irish movement and the Gordon Riots.

Independent of his evaluation of particular figures, it is important to note that Butterfield's overall attitude towards extra-parliamentary political activity is positive and he does not see any fundamental gap between official and oppositional politics. Especially in times of crisis, the Members of Parliament listen to public opinion since they do not want to estrange themselves from their voters. The different spheres of political action that Butterfield depicts are therefore in regular contact with one another. The modernisation of state and society emerges as the result of the osmosis between social movements and professional politicians and is not to be attributed exclusively to the one or the other. Therefore, *George III, Lord North, and the People* shows how political history can assimilate certain insights of social or economic history without becoming reductionist and denying the relative autonomy of politics or other spheres of social action. For Butterfield, the task of the constitutional historian is not to present political men acting in a social vacuum but rather to portray the ways in which political actors manage to gradually modify the external conditions of their action. Political action does not aim only to the reproduction of existing hierarchies but also to social change and is by no means the privilege of professional politicians. As Butterfield help us to realise, the problem with Namier was not that he showed the various considerations influencing politicians, but that he tried to interpret politics through something else.

### **George III and the Historians**

Butterfield's various disagreements with Namier are also discussed in *George III and the Historians* (1957). Although he sees in Namier a pioneer whose work is something more than a reflection of twentieth-century cultural developments, Butterfield expresses dissatisfaction with a number of omissions that characterise Namier's approach. First of all, Butterfield accuses him for ignoring parliamentary debates and for paying too much attention to social structure and vested interests. In *George III, Lord North, and the People*, Butterfield had already shown how the Members of Parliament were influenced by the course of debate in the House, and frequently acted under the pressure of popular feeling or a sense of national

emergency. Secondly, Butterfield argues that Namier has very little to say about the work that ministers carried out in their departments and the ways in which they arrived at important decisions. Finally, he castigates Namier for not properly assessing human beings in their double dimension as repositories of interests and carriers of ideas. The ways in which men conceptualise a particular situation and their feeling of right or wrong are among the factors which determine the human behaviour and make it something not susceptible to easy scientific prediction.

Although Butterfield does not fully abandon the hope that something like an impartial approach to the past is possible, or at least that certain historical interpretations are preferable to others, he admits that the relationship between the historian and his evidence is a rather complex one and that “knowledge in itself is never enough to save us from sin” (Butterfield, 1957: 9). The most interesting point made in the book is that historians are clearly influenced by the environment in which they work and therefore “in different periods new historical outlooks are liable to emerge” (Butterfield, 1957: 39). Namier is not the only historian who misapplied certain contemporary ideas to the interpretation of the past. Nineteenth-century historians like Erskine May made a similar mistake when evaluating George III and his system of government according to the political ideas of their own age.

Despite their important differences discussed in this section, Butterfield and Namier also had a number of interesting similarities. Both historians chose as their preferred field of study eighteenth-century British constitutional history and tried to apply to political history the insights of social and economic history. The fact that Namier went down that road further than Butterfield ever did is undeniable, but he did so at significant cost. Showing the social and economic foundations of political life is very different from reducing political life to those foundations. As Keene (2008) has noted, Butterfield’s opposition to Namier and his followers had ultimately to do with the way in which they portrayed the individual as a mere appendage of familial and economic structures and denied his relative autonomy. The emphasis on different spheres of social and political action that underlies Butterfield’s critique of Namier is supplemented by the recognition of the existence of different levels of interpretation for historical events, which is analysed next. As a theorist of history, Butterfield managed to show that the kind of individual actor concerning mainstream historians, economists, and international theorists is only part of a multidimensional historical reality.

### III) GOD AND PROVIDENCE IN HISTORY

Butterfield's belief in Providence is an important aspect of his opposition to methodological individualism and provides the clearest example of how his Christianity—and especially his Methodism—influences his understanding of historical events. As we shall see in Chapter 6, despite his frequent public appeals to Christianity, Butterfield was particularly reserved when elaborating on its political implications. For him, Christianity primarily taught humility and abstaining from the harsh judgement of others. However, in searching for Providence and God in history, Butterfield shows how a Christian intellectual can express optimism and faith in the future without losing sight of the limitations and imperfections of human nature. Indeed, in his own version of the Christian dialectic, good and bad are not mutually exclusive concepts, since many times in history good arises out of events that might be bad in themselves. The link that he tries to establish between certain political institutions – such as the balance of power—and the existence of a Providential order might be a questionable one, but provides a clear case of using history as theory, of trying to derive practical lessons from the experience of past generations.

#### God in History

For McIntire (1979), the best place to start in order to understand Butterfield's religious ideas and the way in which they intersect with his work as a historian, is the essay *God in History* which was originally published in 1952. There Butterfield argues in favour of the existence of three different levels of explanation for historical events. These levels do not contradict one another, but rather aim to do justice to the complicated nature of the historical process itself. After criticising the fundamental fallacy to put God outside history and to assume that He is not able to influence the course of things, Butterfield argues that history unfolds at three different levels. In the first place, history is a realm of freedom where the actions and decisions of individual human beings make a huge difference. As Butterfield puts it, men have free will and they are responsible for the kind of history they create and the world in which they live in.

The type of freedom they enjoy in the world, however, is made possible only because nature and history represent a realm characterised by regularities that make human action relatively predictable in its development and consequences. After the events have taken place, Butterfield says, the historian is able to describe the economic or cultural processes that finally led to the Industrial Revolution or the French Revolution. Although Butterfield's suggestion in this essay that history and nature are structurally similar domains is somewhat at odds with his more

general views on the subject, he emphasizes the fact that freedom and law are mutually interlinked. Freedom is made possible only within a framework of natural laws and one could not imagine even God acting out of sheer caprice in a world where everything and nothing could be possible at the same time. The existence of certain laws and regularities in history accounts for the existence of the second level of explanation for historical events, which depicts human freedom as bounded by those causal processes and natural laws that make it possible in the first place.

The most interesting argument put forward by Butterfield in this essay is that the Providence of God represents a third and more general level of explanation which includes the other two. Divine Providence does not operate against human freedom and natural laws but through them. The existence of this third level of historical explanation means that God is present and influences secular history in ways that are generally compatible with the individual freedom of will or certain laws of causation. God works through the good and bad aspects of individuals and within the framework of natural laws in order to realize His purposes in history. Contrary to those theologians or political scientists who seek God's presence in history in the miracle as a retreat from the existing natural or social order, in his essay Butterfield adumbrates a distinctively liberal theology, where God's action in history is not incompatible with human freedom and the normal operation of the natural laws. The conclusion which Butterfield reaches is that Providence uses human beings and natural laws in order to achieve its own purposes, but it does not deny their autonomy.

### **Christianity and History**

The aims and direction of Divine Providence are more analytically explored in the lectures included in *Christianity and History* (1949c). This book inaugurates Butterfield's career as a public intellectual who uses his historical and religious education in order to address crucial social and international issues. Contrary to the ideas expressed in *The Whig Interpretation of History* and *God in History*, Butterfield recognises that not all unintended consequences of human action in history are positive ones, and therefore that the historical process in its independence from human will and design is not necessarily benevolent. For example, according to Butterfield, secular liberalism, despite its intentions, has actually strengthened the executive part of the government and paved the way for the modern war between peoples. The national state has been formed not according to the dictates of secular ideologies, but according to the requirements of modern war and its successful conduct. The very scientific achievements which gave birth to the modern world are also responsible for the creation of the atomic

bomb. Therefore, what Butterfield suggests here is that, although history frequently develops in forms not consciously designed by men, the result is not always a positive one. Independent of even benevolent human intentions, what actually decides the course of events is a certain unfortunate aspect of human nature which “draws the highest things downwards, mixes them with earth, and taints them with human cupidity” (Butterfield, 1949c: 39).

It should be noted that Butterfield’s account of human nature in *Christianity and History* is characterised by a fundamental tension between a historicist and an essentialist understanding. On the one hand, writing a few years after the end of World War II, he presents the problem of modern barbarism as a historical problem which is not susceptible to an easy moral or legal interpretation. During the war, he notes, the usual material from which human nature is made found itself under extraordinary pressure, and responded in ways which would be unthinkable under normal conditions. Describing certain acts as crimes or moral errors is not going to help us understand what actually caused them under such extreme historical circumstances. The civilized type of human character which we take for granted in the West is in reality the product of systematic education and discipline which produced their positive results in the course of centuries. Through arguments such as these, Butterfield leads the reader to the conclusion that good and evil in human behaviour can be attributed to the power of the circumstances, and not to an unchanging human nature.

On the other hand, however, Butterfield treats human nature as an independent variable which poses severe limits on what can be realistically achieved in politics and society. Human beings are characterised not only by acquisitiveness and an unjustified pride, but also by the tendency to promote their own conception of the good without consideration for the views and sensibilities of other people. This is evident in the sin of self-righteousness which is the most politically relevant sin and the most clearly responsible for the religious and political conflicts that determined the development of the modern world. As a result of self-righteousness, cupidity, and various form of egotism, ambitious political projects, such as that of the League of Nations, are condemned to fail. Because of human nature as we know it, Butterfield claims, it is unrealistic to believe that violence can be permanently eliminated from human relations. Even the best human inventions and institutions are sooner or later being corrupted by the dark underside of human psyche. Interestingly enough, although Butterfield at various points urges his readers to recognise the futility of creating an organisation such as the League of Nations, he nowhere mentions in detail the diplomatic and institutional problems that led the League to failure. His prescriptions are based on anthropological and not on sociological premises and therefore acquire a dogmatic

and abstract dimension which is essentially alien to his more general methodological outlook.

The tension between these two different understandings of human nature and their respective consequences for international history is apparently resolved by Butterfield's recognition of the role of Providence. For Butterfield, the existence of a providential order is something that must be taken for granted by the Christian and the non-Christian alike and represents the best way to find meaning in mundane history. Providence's main function is to create good out of evil in history, and to enable one to come to terms with disastrous or painful experiences. For example, The Fire of London enabled the people to rebuild the city according to a better plan, and therefore not only to continue their everyday life in the same way as before but also to improve it. In a similar fashion, the loss of the American colonies during the reign of George III made the British to realise the faults of their own ways and to produce a more inclusive ideal of Empire. The role of Providence is not to substitute human actors for the almighty but to enable human beings to reconcile themselves with their own history and to make the best possible use of it. The belief in a superintending intellect does not cancel human freedom in the world but only makes it more meaningful. Indeed, Butterfield's belief that good comes frequently out of evil in the world puts into question the very existence of evil, at least as it is conventionally understood. It could be claimed that, for Butterfield, as for Augustine, the most unpleasant side of human nature and history is "like the shadows in a painting, with the contrast enhancing the beauty of the whole, though we who are entangled in life are not in a position to see it" (Butterfield, 1981: 183-184).

From the point of view of international history, *Christianity and History's* most important characteristic is the link that Butterfield tries to establish between Providence and particular institutional mechanisms, such as the balance of power. The political legacy of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is presented by him as consonant with certain essential aspects of human nature and God's plan for the world. According to Butterfield, although eighteenth-century writers drew attention to the perfectibility of human beings, their contemporary statesmen were rather unwilling to base their diplomacy on such precarious assumptions. For them, placing a great power in a position in which the pursuance of hegemony appeared to be meaningful, created a great temptation, and even a hitherto righteous nation could not be trusted not to take advantage of such a position of strength. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the limits between a righteous and an unrighteous nation were understood to be historically determined by the balance of power. Only the existence of a balance of power discouraged the appearance of immature statesmen willing to take unreasonable

risks in order to pursue hegemony at the expense of other powers. What is more, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, wars were not fought for the dissemination of political principles or religious ideas, but rather for the achievement of practical goals such as conquering a particular piece of land. As a result, the wars of the past were limited in their objectives and their character. The statesmen knew very well that when your war aims are too ambitious or undefined, it becomes especially difficult to give an end to the conflict. Disguising a territorial conflict as an ideological or religious one makes the participants to fight with more ferocity and therefore increases the number of the victims on both sides.

Therefore, Butterfield concludes, fighting for a province, such as Alsace, is preferable to fighting for a grand ideological end, such as those which defined the wars of the twentieth century. Wars of righteousness are rarely susceptible to compromise because they have already triggered the moral indignation of the citizens who require a decisive victory against the enemy. Instead of trying to change radically the international environment, the statesmen of the past were inclined to co-operate with Providence in order to promote certain limited interests in a way compatible with international order. This idealisation of the political legacy of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries provides a further example of how Butterfield uses history as theory. Apart from underlying the methodological presuppositions of historical writing, and introducing the idea of Providence as a device through which we can explain the past and think about the future, Butterfield uses the European past in an explicitly normative way in order to derive lessons that can be applied to the present. The political implications – and limitations— of this idealisation of the European past will be further explored in Chapter 6.

#### **IV) TOWARDS A HISTORY OF HISTORIOGRAPHY**

Like Carr, Butterfield believed that the modern Western civilisation has a unique relationship with history. Although other civilisations, for example the Ancient Greek one, showed an interest in history and produced distinguished historians, it is only in the West during the eighteenth and especially the nineteenth century that history becomes institutionalised as a distinct field of scientific inquiry. The twin questions how exactly history emerged as an autonomous field of study and which is the relationship between modern historiography and its non-Western antecedents apparently concerned Butterfield for a long time. The first question is addressed in *Man on His Past* where Butterfield discusses a number of German developments and focuses especially on the role of the University of Gottingen in the decades immediately before and after 1800. The second question preoccupied

Butterfield during the last quarter of his life and is partially answered in the writings which Adam Watson included in *The Origins of History*, named after Butterfield's *The Origins of Modern Science*. Despite that Butterfield's engagement with the history of historiography in different cultures and civilisations never led to the *magnum opus* he had intended to produce on the subject, it is interesting because it shows how different he was from the average historian. After castigating the Whig interpretation of history, engaging in a debate with Namier, and examining the role of Providence in history, Butterfield devoted himself to the study of how long-forgotten civilisations had approached their past. His examination of that problem was not exhaustive, but shows how Butterfield remained an intellectually anxious and theoretically engaged historian throughout his life. It also shows that like theory, history has its own history.

### **The Pre-Classical Empires and Ancient Israel**

As McIntire (2004) points out, Butterfield's choice to begin with Mesopotamia is important because it differentiates him from the average British scholar who would normally begin his account of the development of historiography from Greece. In Mesopotamia, history took the form of lists which described the succession of kings. Butterfield says that military successes were vital to the development of historiography in the region, and that religion had a generally limited role in both politics and culture because of the absence of a belief in after-life. In Egypt, on the other hand, the importance of religion in both historiography and the running of the state could hardly be overemphasized. The search for immortality was not confined to the king, and made the members of the ruling elite in general to try to keep their memory alive after death. A lot of things were dependent on the attitude of the children towards the parents, and the extent to which the living mentioned and celebrated the names of the deceased.

Butterfield draws special attention to the Hittite success in historiography, which had to do with their attempt to depict the true nature of military conflicts without exaggerating their military feats or obfuscating their responsibilities for the outbreak of hostilities in the first place. When a war broke out with one of their vassal-states, the Hittites recognised the right of the other party to introduce its own account of the events in the new treaty that replaced the old one after the war. Contrary to what happened to Germany after the First World War, Butterfield claims, the Hittites never asked from the losers to sign a war-guilt clause in order to make them assume full responsibility for what had happened. It is through statements such as that that Butterfield continues to use history as theory in the sense of appealing to the past in order to criticise developments that are more recent.



Despite their interest in history, both the Egyptians and the Hittites limited themselves to a form of contemporary history which did not have any special philosophical significance. The first to see history as something more than the repetition of the same cycle were the ancient Jews, who organised their national memories around the event of the Exodus from Egypt. Contrary to many ancient and modern civilisations, the Jews did not see history as a futile repetition of the same events but as a linear and irreversible process. In spite of the difficulties they had to face as a small nation located among empires, the people of Israel stayed true to their belief that Judgment does not cancel the Promise, and attributed their hardships to their own sins and God's intention to use them for a higher religious purpose. Although according to Butterfield their understanding of history did not include the modern notion of progress which took shape in the seventeenth century under the influence of a variety of scientific and social developments, it provided the general outlook out of which such a notion of progress could later emerge.

### **Ancient Greece and China**

Butterfield's careful discussion of the development of historiography in ancient Greece and China helps us appreciate a number of important differences between the two civilisations. Like theory, history is not the same thing for everybody but can assume different forms in different cultures and historical periods. In Greece, historiography developed mainly in opposition to philosophy, which was concerned with the eternal and the unchanging. Contrary to the philosophers whose aim was to describe the ideal life within the city, historians were mostly interested in war and foreign policy. As Butterfield notes, in Greece there was no historical writing before the fifth century B.C., and when it appeared it sought inspiration in cataclysmic political events such as the abortive rising of the Ionian cities against the Persian rule, and the later invasion of Greece by the Persians under the leadership of Xerxes.

This invasion was successfully confronted by the Greek city-states and especially Athens, which due to its actions during the attack rose to a position of supremacy among the other Greek cities. The unsuccessful rebellion of the Ionian city-states against the Persians provided the object of the work of the historian Hecateus who was a contemporary of the events. Herodotus sought to describe the Greek defensive war against the Persians and he wrote a few decades after the event had taken place. Thucydides described the Peloponnesian war and tried harder than any of his successors to offer a secular and based on evidence historical narrative. Although philosophers were primarily interested in political theory and historians

in international events and military conflicts, they both accepted the same cyclical view of time from which the notion of progress was virtually absent.

The generally different routes that historians and philosophers followed in Greece were very much at odds with the complementary relationship that existed between philosophy and history in ancient China. In almost all of the civilisations discussed so far, historiography is older than the recording of events by clearly identifiable authors. Greece is a typical case of that, since the epic provided the legendary history of the Greeks, and was organised around generally accepted conventions. In China, however, history and the historians had always kept a privileged position in the nation's collective conscience and political life. As Butterfield notes, historians were amongst the most important functionaries of the state, and were supposed to offer an impartial account of political events without hesitating to criticize the emperor when they considered it necessary. The popular belief that dynasties lose their power and collapse because of moral failures assigned to the historian the difficult mission to judge and criticise the rulers even at his own personal risk. In general, however, both historians and philosophers were tied to certain influential families, which exercised political power at either the national or the local level. Philosophy did not have the abstract and deductive character, which it acquired in Greece, but was mostly concerned with the requirements of social and political reform, and in many cases derived examples from history in order to make its arguments more persuasive.

The close relationship that existed between philosophy and history in China is evident in the case of Confucius whose work can be placed at the intersection between the two disciplines. Confucius used an idealised version of the country's past in order to buttress his political arguments which were conservative and aristocratic in nature. His defence of the autonomy of certain principalities within the country and opposition to central government, Butterfield notes, was ill-suited to the realities of his own age, during which a transition had already started to take place from feudal to modern forms of social organisation. His aristocratic sympathies gave to his preoccupation with history a distinctively political dimension, and his exhortation to study and learn from the country's past made his teaching dangerous for the political dynasty which in 221 B.C. managed to unify China.

Their decision to order the Burning of the Books made China's relationship with its past especially difficult, and probably even more so than in the West after the fall of the Roman Empire, since many important books were irretrievably lost. Ironically enough, the rehabilitation of the Confucian philosophy was carried out by another political dynasty, that of Han, which was *de facto* opposed to feudalism

and managed to conquer power in 206 B.C. From that point onwards, the study of Confucianism and ancient history became an established intellectual orthodoxy with decisive consequences for the country's overall intellectual development. China's troubled political history gave rise to a number of techniques of documentary criticism, which aimed to assess the authenticity of historical documents, and to ascertain the proper meaning of words and phrases used in old texts. Despite his engagement with Chinese history and interest in the alternative forms that historiography assumed in different civilisations, Butterfield is not particularly interested in identifying ways in which modern historians could benefit from ancient ones. Even though his history of historiography is to a certain extent limited by a Whiggish evaluation of the past through the eyes of the present, it exercised significant influence on the later work of English School authors like Adam Watson<sup>xxvii</sup>.

## V) CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I put particular emphasis on the ways in which Butterfield's methodologically and philosophically informed vision of historiography earns him a place among the English School dialecticians examined in my thesis. Like Wight and Carr, Butterfield made the point that no history is possible without a theory of history and devoted a large part of his intellectual energy to debates with other historians. As regards *The Whig Interpretation of History*, I argued that its importance lies primarily in addressing questions not relevant to a particular country or political tradition, but rather relevant to historical study as such. Although Butterfield condemns and criticises the kind of conservative presentism that accepts and glorifies the political present, he is much more open to a different form of presentism, which draws attention to the role of the historian in the creation of history. The exploration of the consequences of this second form of presentism makes the critic of the Whig theory of history to argue that every generation produces its own history, which is different from that of past or future generations.

Butterfield's examination of the role of God and Providence in history also has considerable methodological value, since it rejects unsophisticated forms of methodological individualism, and argues that human freedom is necessarily exercised within the framework of given laws and is also tempered by Providence. Although relating particular institutional and political arrangements directly to a Providential order might be not only a use but also an abuse of history as theory, Butterfield's depiction of the European past certainly deserves serious consideration. The era of peace and prosperity that he describes depended on

conditions which cannot be considered as natural, but should be studied—or even actively recreated—by all those interested in the creation of a more humane world.

Finally yet importantly, Butterfield's engagement with the history of historiography proves that what one understands and describes as historiography is relevant to his culture and intellectual environment. Like theory, history has a history in the sense that it is subject to change, and that it should not be identified with any particular paradigm. Butterfield's admiration for a particular—Western—approach to historical writing did not enable him to fully appreciate the contributions of other civilisations, but his work as a whole provides a promising point of departure for thinking about history as theory. Even putting aside the tentative answers he gave to difficult problems, the very issues with which he grappled are beyond the scope of those who believe that history is just one thing taking place after another thing. The way in which he tried to explain historical events by drawing attention to the most different levels of interpretation and the most divergent sources of individual motivation is one of his most important methodological achievements and makes the tension between agency and structure, subjectivity and objectivity, which McIntire has observed in his thought, a fruitful one. Like Wight and Carr, Butterfield was unwilling to see human history as the expression of a single force or essence and remain firm in his defence of pluralism.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Martin Wight on History as Theory**

The inclusion of Martin Wight in my study of the history/theory dialectic and its relationship to the English School is something that ought to be explained. Contrary to Butterfield and Carr, Wight never produced a systematic treatise on the philosophy of history, which would resemble either Butterfield's *The Whig Interpretation of History* or Carr's *What is History?*. His philosophy of history was very closely related to his Christianity, and it is only by considering the second that we can start to understand the first. Although—at least in principle—Butterfield was keen to make a distinction between his religion and his history, and Carr was able to hide his policy preferences under the guise of realism, no such road was open to Wight. Despite the fact that the political implications of his religion are more obvious in his early writings than in his mature ones, his intellectual oeuvre as a whole cannot be understood independent of his Christianity, which is analytically explored in this chapter.

To the extent that Wight's support for Christian pacifism during World War II, his engagement with the thought of Arnold Toynbee, and his critique of totalitarianism as an extreme form of secularism constitute an expression of the same idea, this idea is no other than his understanding of Christianity as a historical religion. This understanding is analysed within the framework of his critique of Arnold Toynbee and calls for the recognition of the historical basis and uniqueness of Christianity. As a historically based religion, Christianity imposes unique duties upon Christians, who ought to lead a particular way of life. This Christian philosophy of history helps to explain Wight's pacifism during the World War II and the disagreements he had with Toynbee. It also conditions his conceptualisation of political totalitarianism, which, far from celebrating liberalism and political modernity, involves a critical attitude towards all modern societies. As regards his views on history in the sense of historiography, his admiration for Toynbee and systematic engagement with his work are a very good point of departure for understanding what he wanted and what he expected from it. The tension between objectivity and subjectivity, which is present in both Butterfield and Carr, is resolved in Wight's case in favour of subjectivity. If Carr wanted to place history among the social sciences, and Butterfield to use it for criticising the present and identifying the deep causes of events, then Wight saw it as a form of art. Historians, like other artists, derive their first materials from the real world but they use them for their own purposes and according to their own vision. What stops Wight from drifting into relativism is

precisely his Christian faith, which provides the key for understanding his complex thought.

For Wight, the limit to what a Christian intellectual should accept, lies in the recognition of the fact that the political sphere should not be idolised and the sacred should not be subjugated to the secular. Although particular statements that he makes within the framework of his defence of Christian pacifism have a determinist dimension and show the limits of politics, his Christian philosophy of history seen as a whole provides grounds for struggling for a better world. Without conceptualising Providence in exactly the same way that Butterfield does, Wight also emphasises that the secular should always be interpreted through the prism of the sacred and vice versa. The results of conscious human action might not be unlimited, but they are certainly important and show that individuals are largely responsible for their own history.

## I) CHRISTIANITY AND WAR

The most direct statement of Wight's pacifism can be found in an article published in July 1936 in the journal *Theology*. Writing a few months before him in the same journal, Otto Piper (1936) had put into question the existence of any Christian political principles, and claimed that all political decisions are a matter of practical expediency. Piper's scepticism towards political ideologies concerns not only liberalism and socialism but includes pacifism as well. In his view, reconciliation between different nations and social classes is a worthwhile goal, but should not divert Christians from focusing their energies within the Church to create an organisation characterised by mutual love and understanding among its members. The problem with Christian politics is that no Christian principles can be applied to the political field without the necessary compromises, and that, since the spirit of love and sacrifice is missing from most men, "no real change can happen in the political sphere" (Piper, 1936: 136).

For Wight (1936), however, pacifism is not just a secular political ideology, but constitutes the only choice available to Christians as Christians in times of war. Wight is careful to point out that Christianity does not condemn force as such, since even Jesus resorted to violence in order to expel the money-changers from the Temple, but emphasises that taking a human life is incompatible with Christian ethics. Since only God can give life, only He can take it away, and to assume the opposite is tantamount to giving the state powers which it should not possess. Wight's clear condemnation of lethal force leads him to put in the same category war, abortion, and euthanasia, and to claim that they are all incompatible with Christian principles.

He is also particularly critical towards the doctrine of the Just War which was originally formulated by St. Augustine, and further elaborated by St. Thomas and Grotius. According to this doctrine, legitimate war is not different from police-work, and the public and the private spheres can – in principle—be separated. In his public capacity, the Christian political leader can take decisions, which would be unacceptable if he had taken them as a private individual. For Wight, however, no such distinction between public and private morality exists, and taking a human life is equally unacceptable in both realms. Indeed, the doctrine of the Just War represents nothing more than the essence of hypocrisy, “the legalization of the second-best, the low morality that becomes a cloak for the sins that it condemns” (Wight, 1936: 17).

In his article, Wight’s rejection of the principles espoused by St. Augustine and other Christian realists is complete. He says not only that the state has no right to take a human life in order to defend itself, but also declares that the aim of all Christians should be the sanctification of what Augustine described as the City of Man and distinguished it sharply from the City of God. For Wight, abolishing war should go hand in hand with action that promotes social justice and helps disadvantaged individuals and areas within national borders. He puts the misery of unemployment and the British prisons in India in the same category as Germany’s ghettos and concentration camps in Russia. Although Wight is initially careful to distinguish between lethal violence and other forms of violence which do not have the same irreversible effects, in the end he broadens his definition of violence to include various forms of oppression and deprivation which, in the final analysis, are inextricably linked to the “dynamic of bourgeois society” (Wight, 1936: 20).

According to Ian Hall (2006), Wight’s pacifism at this point was heavily influenced by that of the leading Christian pacifist of the day and father of the Peace Pledge Union, the Reverend Dick Sheppard. In his famous 1934 letter to the press, Sheppard described war as an outright denial of Christianity and a crime against humanity, and had asked from all those agreeing with him to write a letter stating “We renounce war and never again, directly or indirectly, will we support or sanction another” (Morrison, 1962: 100). As Hall notes, by 1940 Wight was a member of both the Roman Catholic Group Pax and the Peace Pledge Union. For both Wight and Sheppard, Britain’s unilateral disarmament was necessary to set a new example in international relations and finally put an end to war as such. As Wight boldly argued, no real change in international affairs was possible “until one nation at least has offered itself as a voluntary sacrifice in the cause of peace” (Wight, 1936: 21).

## The Church, Russia and the West

Wight's preoccupation with the issue of war and the dilemmas it poses to Christians is also evident in an address given at a conference of Christian politicians at the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey, on June 1948. Wight is concerned with the cultural origins of the Cold War, and what he saw as the inevitability of World War III. The speed with which former allies found themselves confronting each other makes Wight to trace the origins of the Cold War in the apostasy of Christendom. According to Wight (1948), Russia and the West are ex-Christian civilizations and the conflict between them is due to the decline, or, as he puts it, death of Christendom. Christendom is defined as a form of society where the majority of citizens are practising Christians and the Church is the most influential institution.

However, the social influence of Christianity in Russia and the West was reduced as a result of the Russian and the French Revolutions. The result of the apostasy of Christendom is that in these two different civilizations Christians are a dwindling minority and they are called to adapt themselves to a form of society which is either non-Christian or anti-Christian. Marxism came to occupy in the East the intellectual gap left by the suppression of Orthodox Christianity, and secular liberalism came to fill in the West the gap left by the withering away of other forms of Christianity.

As Butterfield also points out, the organisation of society along non-Christian lines in both the East and the West gave rise to the all-powerful state and the emancipation of political power from ethical restraints. For Wight, "Leviathan is a simple beast: his law is self-preservation, his appetite is for power" (Wight, 1948: 30). Russia and the West are nothing more than neo-pagan concentrations of power, which effectively divided the globe between them leaving outside their political control only China and certain parts of the Islamic world. Under such adverse circumstances, there is virtually "no part of the earth that lies beyond the range either of the American business man or of the Communist Party organiser" (Wight, 1948: 28). Contrary to those religious and political men who believed that a modus vivendi could be reached between the East and the West, Wight argues that World War III is, humanly speaking, unavoidable. Russia's population growth and prospect of acquiring nuclear weapons give to it a considerable advantage over the U.S., and, even if a balance of power were established, it could not last more than a generation. The inescapable World War III would be fought with the most lethal weapons and with the smallest moral restraints on the part of the belligerents.

From an ecclesiological point of view, it is interesting to note Wight's distinction between the mystical Church and historical churches. The first consists of all



Christians that have ever lived with Christ as its head. The historical churches, on the other hand, are mostly human creations, and have various institutional flaws and contingent hierarchies. The Roman Catholic assumption that the empirical church can be identified with the mystical Church is nothing more than a heresy since these “two aspects of the Church can never coincide, and in the course of history the emphasis between them swings and shifts” (Wight, 1948: 34). The more the church becomes a part of this world and participates in secular history, the less it is able to influence social developments and provide the necessary bases for a Christian society. By submitting to the state or acquiring state-like characteristics, the church becomes a part of the problem rather than a part of the solution. The promise of a final victory, Wight notes, was given to the mystical and not to the historical church.

These conceptual distinctions and clarifications are necessary to understand the meaning of Wight’s declaration that hope is a theological and not a political virtue. Hope is to be distinguished from optimism, which is the result of the concrete analysis of a given situation. The fact that a world conflict appears to be inevitable, does not cancel the possibility that God’s grace might lead in a different direction. Therefore, independent of the various initiatives undertaken by the institutional church in the West, it is only the mystical Church which “abolishes the Iron Curtain” (Wight, 1948: 34).

To the extent that there is a thread connecting Wight’s declaration of pacifist principles in “Christian Pacifism” and the more realist analysis of world politics in “The Church, Russia and the West”, this has to do with his abiding belief that Christians and institutional Christianity can do relatively little to mould secular developments. The most one can do is to safeguard personal integrity and not abandon hope in God’s grace and benevolence. In the final analysis, hope is not related to God’s actions and omissions within the framework of secular history, but to his very existence. Even God’s non-intervention in secular affairs does not eliminate hope, since “the object of hope is not particular things God may allow in history, but God himself” (Wight, 1948: 33). Although Wight’s exploration of Christian eschatology and the doctrine of the Antichrist are not particularly relevant to this study, it is important to note his theological scepticism towards the world state. Far from offering a solution to human problems, the world state would come only after the ultimate conflict between Russia and the West, and would represent nothing more than the “final concentration of Satanic evil within history” (Wight, 1948: 41).

### **Thoughts on Violence**

As various published and unpublished writings show, Wight kept thinking about Christianity and war throughout his academic career. In “Development of Christian Thought on Violence” (1971), he argues that the term “violence” should be used to signify only the arbitrary use of force, and consequently it is not applicable to the cases of war and revolution. War is an act of adjudication to which opposed political communities resort when there is no other reliable way to solve their differences. In the absence of a global political order, war enables particular states to discover God’s will and it is this ideal that historically inspired the practice of trial by battle. Like war, revolution cannot be *a priori* dismissed because its aims are the liberation of the oppressed and the overthrow of tyrants. Far from repudiating war, in this unpublished paper Wight comes close to presenting it as a matter of practical expediency for which no general and binding judgements can be made. His conclusion is that war is justified when the harm it causes is more limited than the harm which it averts, and this was clearly the case in World War II which stopped the Nazis from conquering Europe. Contrary to his wartime declarations of pacifism, Wight adopts a utilitarian perspective and suggests that the employment of force in particular cases should be judged by its consequences.

The break with the views Wight expressed as a conscientious objector to World War II can also be discerned in the undated paper “Christian Politics”. In this, he argues that no Christian politics really exists, and that Christianity does not contain any specific political theory. Empire and national particularism, communism and free enterprise, are equally valid from a Christian point of view, since historically they have all been presented as the expression of Christian principles. The crux of Christian politics should be sought not in any particular political doctrine, but in the understanding politics as subordinate to religion and as a means towards a particular end.

Christian charity is applicable only to personal relations, and cannot decide questions of public policy. The difference between charity and justice is not only that the first is bilateral and the second multilateral, but also that charity has to do with self-sacrifice, whereas justice often imposes duties and sacrifices on others. The fact that Wight chose not to make public these thoughts is important, but their existence suggests that he was fully aware of the objections that could be raised to the absolute and unconditional Christian pacifism that he espoused as a conscientious objector to World War II.

What is more, in “On the Abolition of War: Observations on a Memorandum by Walter Millis”, Wight (1959/2003) argues that any attempt to abolish war as an institution of international society must take into account its valuable functions. Despite the fact that war has always triggered the reaction of sensitive and

reasonable men on both moral and political grounds, it has also performed certain indispensable task related to the promotion of desirable change in international affairs, the establishment of political independence of hitherto subjugated nations, and the protection of a benign balance of power within Europe. The real alternative to war is not the disarmament of otherwise sovereign and independent nations, but the creation of an international authority possessing the monopoly on nuclear weapons. In other words, Wight presents the eradication of war not as a simple choice made by otherwise sovereign states, but as something that requires the radical transformation of international politics.

Wight's engagement with pacifism can also be seen in his international theory lectures. Pacifists such as Tolstoy and Gandhi are presented as bearers of a perfectionist ethic that denies the distinction between love and justice. Love is not to be restricted to the private sphere of interpersonal relations, but should infuse the public sphere as well and therefore transform justice into the realisation of love. Despite his generally positive presentation of pacifists and other "inverted" revolutionists, Wight is fully cognisant of the contradictions and problems inherent in their attitude to politics. First, as the representatives of a perfectionist ethic, pacifists often assume the role of an enlightened minority and distance themselves from the majority of the people, whom they intend to lead and guide according to their own ideals. Secondly, eventually, pacifists are called to choose between quietism and revolution. Between withdrawing from the political sphere and keeping their own personal integrity or promoting ultimately unrealisable ideals and losing contact with political reality. Although for Wight both attitudes are problematic, he shows greater sympathy towards the first choice. Relinquishing politics altogether and adopting a passive attitude towards life is understandable to the extent that:

The political sphere obviously offers nothing but insoluble predicaments; there is inevitably going to be a third world war which will destroy civilization; for political incompetence and buffoonery there is nothing to choose between the political parties so there is no point in exercising one's vote; all one can do is to retire within the sphere of private life and personal relationships and cultivate one's garden (Wight, 1991: 257).

This Augustinian distrust of politics helps to explain how Wight ended up seeing the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) as "one of the heads of the many-headed beast" (Wight, 1966: 123). For him, as for Butterfield, pacifism does not make sense as part of politics but rather as an alternative to it. Although if and to what extent Wight remained a pacifist after the end of World War II is a moot question, it is beyond doubt that he continued thinking about the relationship between Christianity and war, and that he considered pacifism as a legitimate part of the study of international affairs and international history. The fact that the

practical results that it produces might be limited does not mean that it should not be considered as an option. Christians should do what their conscience dictates to them, and hope for the best. Perhaps the reason why Wight did not manage to provide a very satisfying definition of pacifism and its political importance has to do with the fact that politics remains undertheorized in his thought. By drawing a dividing line between politics and religion, Wight fails to see how the notion of the Christian statesman could be used to provide a normative horizon for politics under modern circumstances<sup>xxviii</sup>.

## II) MARTIN WIGHT AND ARNOLD TOYNBEE

Despite the fact that Wight never produced a great work of narrative history or historical reflection, he had strong views on the subject. Ian Hall (2006) analyses his scattered thoughts on the role of the historian and presents Wight as a critic of the assumption that there can be a history without a theory of history. It is this emphasis on the theoretical background and consequences of historiography that makes Wight to portray history as theory, and places him in the same group of thinkers with Butterfield and Carr. For Wight, the accomplished historian is like the great artist who brings his own imagination and moral purpose in the handling of the material. As Hall mentions, one of the very few contemporary historians who met Wight's exacting criteria regarding historical study was Arnold Toynbee. Wight cooperated extensively with him at Chatham House where Toynbee was Director of Studies between 1929 and 1956 and in the production of volume VII of *A Study of History*, where he contributed an Annex and numerous notes.

Although as it will be shown in this section Wight was not uncritical towards Toynbee whose religious views changed considerably over time, he was impressed by the philosophical depth of Toynbee's work and the revolution in historical perspective that it brought about. Wight's study of modern history at Oxford had left him with the feeling that conventional constitutional history does not touch several important issues, and that adopting a strictly national point of view when narrating historical events is clearly inadequate. Toynbee's decision to start not with nation states but with discrete civilisations, and to search for similarities in the development of ancient and modern civilisations, triggered Wight's interest, whose later critique of Toynbee was prompted more by religious than by strictly historiographical considerations. The question if Wight's portrayal of Christianity as a historical religion is inherently superior to Toynbee's defence of religious syncretism cannot of course be answered within the framework of my study of the history/theory dialectic, and of how Wight used history as theory. It should, however, be mentioned that Wight's defence of the uniqueness of the Christian Revelation fits well with his historicist conceptualisation of international change,

and explains why Toynbee could not be included in this study. Although historically conditioned by a variety of personal and social experiences, Toynbee's thought, especially in its post-World War II manifestations, is intrinsically anti-historicist. It is for this reason that, despite his philosophically informed version of historiography, Toynbee cannot be placed in the same group of thinkers with Butterfield, Carr and Wight.

### **The Study of Civilisations and the Obsolescence of the Nation State**

In the first three volumes of the *Study*, which were published in 1934, Toynbee makes a case in favour of the obsolescence of the nation state and the relativity of historical thought. He describes nationalism and industrialism as the harbingers of the modern age, but claims that from the last quarter of the nineteenth century onward industrialism had begun to undermine nationalism and to organise its operations on a global scale. For Toynbee, the economic and political parochialism of the nation state had become acutely obvious after the end of World War I and the creation of the League of Nations. The progress of international organisation, along with the renunciation of war as an instrument of foreign policy, meant that economic interdependence had been finally supplemented by political and military co-operation among states. Under the impact of such tremendous political changes, Toynbee claimed, it was time for historians to abandon their nationalistic outlook, to stop depicting great powers as self-sufficient entities, and to adopt an alternative point of view which would be concerned with societies or civilisations in their entirety.

Despite the fact that the terms "society" and "civilisation" are not exhaustively defined, Toynbee appeals primarily to geography and religion to substantiate the existence of these multinational entities. Western civilisation coexists in space with the Islamic civilisation, the Orthodox Christian civilisation, the Hindu civilisation, and the Far Eastern civilisation. Historically, Toynbee distinguishes between twenty-one successful civilisations which from the historian's point of view are virtually equivalent. For Toynbee, it cannot be said that Western civilisation is superior to those civilisations that came before or the civilisations that might develop after its probable future disintegration. Despite the complacent attitude that most westerners tend to adopt towards their own culture, no particular civilisation can be legitimately identified with civilisation per se. Toynbee appears especially critical towards the West for disregarding ancient civilisations, such as the Hellenic and the Chinese.

Wight and the majority of contemporary critics provided a warm reception to the first three volumes of the *Study*, which substituted nation states for civilisations and explained how the latter emerged as successful responses to

challenges posed by the natural environment. However, the second and third instalments of Toynbee's work were not received with equal enthusiasm. As Elie Kedourie (1979) notes, Wight was especially critical towards volumes VII-X for a variety of reasons. Despite the fact that he was not troubled by what critics such as A. J. P. Taylor (1956) presented as Toynbee's supposed repudiation of rationalism, Wight felt uneasy with Toynbee's political cosmopolitanism and religious syncretism. Although he followed Toynbee in treating great powers as parts of a wider whole, and was fascinated by the investigation of Western civilisation, he did not believe that the value of Christianity should be relativized in order to hasten the advent of the world state.

### **Religious Syncretism and the World State**

Despite the fact that Wight's religious critique is particularly applicable to volumes VII-X of the *Study*, it is worth emphasising that the political tendencies which worried him were already present in volumes IV-VI. In these intermediate volumes, the sovereign state is no longer depicted as the constituent and necessary part of larger civilizational units, but rather as the arch-enemy of human security and freedom. Ecumenical law and order cannot be guaranteed by a conventional international organisation, such as the League of Nations, but only by a new comprehensive world order which would resemble either the British Commonwealth of Nations or the Soviet Union. What is more, in these volumes democracy is no longer portrayed by Toynbee as simply impotent to resist the horrors generated by industrialism and nationalism, but as a destructive force, one which has been absorbed into nationalist politics and finally given birth to a more potent and dangerous form of nationalism.

In volume V Toynbee makes clear that he no longer sees the notion of distinct civilisations as positive and adequate in itself. Rather, he uses the notion of separate civilisations only as a convenient and temporary alternative to the national histories written by other historians. According to Toynbee, trapped into the political and intellectual prison of the single state, the best that a historian can do is to "peer over the battlements and extend our field of vision...as far as the eye could reach" (Toynbee, 1939: 374). Ever before the publication of the final four volumes of the *Study* which primarily concern Wight, Toynbee had started to search for a more comprehensive point of view. The Communion of Saints, which he now advocated, required the creation of a universal political framework that would transform war from a material activity to a spiritual one, from one taking place among individuals to one taking place within individual souls struggling for salvation.

Toynbee's ecumenical anxieties and explorations become particularly evident in volume VII of the *Study* (1954), where he argues that the worldwide expansion of the West makes the political unification of the world extremely likely on either a voluntary or a non-voluntary basis. The real question is not if, but how, the world state would emerge. His general abhorrence of force leads him to argue that creating a world state on a consensual basis would be preferable to seeing one imposed upon reluctant parties. Indeed, the creation first of the League of Nations, and then the United Nations, offers for the first time the possibility of creating a Universal State without violence and catastrophe. In any case, independent of the way in which the world state would be created, "the spiritual atmosphere of a politically unified world would be likely to have much the same effect on higher religions exposed to it" (Toynbee, 1954: 436).

Abandoning his pre-World War II sympathies for Roman Catholicism, Toynbee presents the four higher religions of his day as variations on a single theme and as different routes to the same spiritual destination. Far from being exclusive in their insights, Hinduism, Christianity, Islam and Buddhism complement one another since they appeal to different psychological types. His evaluation of the world's higher religions is based on the degree to which they are tolerant towards their religious competitors, and on his own philosophical assumption that God is Love. These two different criteria make him particularly ambivalent towards Christianity. On the one hand, Christianity is at the top of Toynbee's list, because in Christianity feeling is the predominant faculty and God is, more than in any other religion, portrayed as Love. On the other hand, Toynbee is particularly critical of Christianity's historical intolerance towards alternative religious viewpoints, and, along with Islam, he castigates it for assuming the existence of a jealous God.

### **The Crux for a Christian Historian**

The fullest exposition of the arguments that Wight employs against Toynbee's scepticism towards Christianity can be found in an essay that is included as an Annex in volume VII of Toynbee's *Study*. For Wight (1954), Toynbee is wrong regarding both his overall methodological approach and the particular conclusions to which he arrives regarding Christianity. Wight argues that Toynbee adopts a philosophical point of view, which is primarily concerned with discovering the true character of God instead of seeing and recognising His action in history. According to Wight's historical-theological point of view, the main truth about God is not so much that He is something but that He "*has done* something in history; He has acted *in history* to show the meaning of history" (Wight, emphasis in the original, 1954: 737). Therefore, the quest for discovering the nature of God is rather

subordinate to acknowledging his historical incarnation in the second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ.

Wight does not deny that Love is an essential aspect of Christianity, but claims that the kind of Love with which God should be identified is something more than mere benevolence. Holiness and Justice are also essential parts of God's Love, and the notion of the Wrath of God is not missing from the New Testament. With regard to Toynbee's belief in the possibility of peaceful coexistence among the world's higher religions, Wight underscores the fact that, even in Christianity, God makes exclusive claims. Despite the historical disagreements among Christians between seeing other religions as a preparation for Christianity or as its antagonists, the fact remains that the Christian Revelation is both universal and unique, and therefore Christianity cannot share its place in the world on an equal footing with other religions.

Furthermore, even if a *modus vivendi* among different religions could be established, it is difficult to see why this should be limited to the four higher religions identified by Toynbee. His philosophical approach to religion stops him from assessing the prospects of the various religions *sub specie aeternitatis*, and makes him attribute to existing religions a finality that does not help one to anticipate future developments. Without denying the importance of a comparative approach to religion, Wight draws attention to the fundamental differences between the prophetic and world-affirming religions of Christianity and Islam, and the non-historical and world-denying beliefs of Hinduism and Buddhism. His most serious charge against Toynbee is therefore not that he does not take into account the uniqueness of the Christian revelation, but that he never really attempts a comparative exploration of the world's higher religions because of his tendency to draw attention to their similarities at the expense of their fundamental differences.

Although in the essay Wight does not directly address political issues, his dissatisfaction with Toynbee's cosmopolitanism can be inferred from both published and unpublished material. In an evaluation of Toynbee's work, Wight notes that Toynbee's natural optimism leads him to combine acute political insight with various instances of political unsophistication. His moral directness does not always do justice to the complex dilemmas facing political leaders, and gives his moral judgements "copy-book simplicity" (Wight, 1976: 12). The general rationale behind Wight's post-World War II disagreement with Toynbee is expressed with exceptional clarity in an address written for a German radio station in 1969. For Wight, Toynbee's *Study* represents a curious case where the whole is less valuable than its parts, and the promises given at the beginning are not fulfilled. Despite the apparent similarities between the work of Toynbee and that of Oswald Spengler,



the real counterpart to Toynbee's *A Study of History* is not Spengler's *The Decline of the West*, but Hegel's *The Philosophy of History*. As Wight (1969: 9) claims:

Hegel's system, like Toynbee's, embodies a dialectical principle. The movement of Hegel's Spirit from east to west corresponds to the sequence of Toynbee's civilizations. Hegel, like Toynbee, believed that his philosophy made articulate the spiritual content of Christianity, hitherto confined within corrupted forms. Hegel provided a historical justification for the national state; Toynbee does the same for the coming world state. Each is uncritical of his end-product, and gives the impression that history will dissolve in some trans-historical sunshine-the realisation of freedom for Hegel, the saintly society for Toynbee.

It is worth emphasising that Wight felt dissatisfied not only by the particular political positions espoused by Toynbee in the post-war years, but also by his decision to complete the *Study* and give to his intellectual categories a finality that they should not ordinarily possess. As he mentions in an undated draft entitled "Obituary", Toynbee's reputation would probably stand higher if he had limited himself to the first six volumes of his magnum opus, and avoided becoming a captive of his own theoretical system. Although Wight's belief that Toynbee should not have completed his *Study* is somewhat paradoxical, it shows how wrong Croce (1966) is to identify philosophy of history with the search for a single idea or principle. Engaging in philosophizing about history might be more useful than trying to present and interpret history through the prism of a single ahistorical principle. Moreover, the very development of Toynbee's views, shows how misplaced is the attempt to identify history with a particular philosophy of history. To the extent that the myriad events comprising human history can give rise to the most diverse interpretations, Wight is correct to see the historian as an artist who recreates the past according to his own subjective vision of the past, the present, and the future. In any case, the disagreements between Wight and Toynbee did not concern only the past and the future, but they also extended to the present. Wight's understanding of totalitarianism is no less influenced by his Christianity than his pacifism or his criticism of Toynbee. Although a less systematic thinker than Butterfield or Carr, Wight emerges as one of the most important Christian intellectuals of his generation.

### III) TOTALITARIANISM

The differences between Wight and Toynbee did not concern only the past but covered the field of international politics as well. One of the most important consequences of Toynbee's eventual estrangement from any form of particularistic commitment was his refusal to recognise the moral superiority of the West in its struggle against first German fascism and then Soviet communism. As noted by William H. McNeill (1989), at some point before the outbreak of World War II

Toynbee considered the possibility that even the violent unification of Europe by Germany might be preferable to a new general war. In volume VII of the *Study* Toynbee (1954) castigates the hypocrisy of the ordinary Westerner who believes that his own allegiance to the state is qualitatively different from that of a German or Soviet subject. For Toynbee, liberal nationalism and submission to the totalitarian state are just two different forms, one Apollonian and the other Dionysian, of the same reproachful idolisation of the parochial political community. In *Hellenism* (1959) Toynbee projects his reading of twentieth-century totalitarianism in classical antiquity, and accuses the ancient Greeks of seeing in man the measure of all things, and worshipping their city states instead of the One True God. Their man-worship contaminated the modern West, which, from the Renaissance onwards, chose to idolise parochial states and disregard the fundamental message of Christianity and other higher religions. Referring to this unacceptable idolisation of the local political community, Toynbee notes in the closing lines of *Hellenism* that “the Modern World must exorcise this demon resolutely if it is to save itself from meeting with its Hellenic predecessor’s fate” (Toynbee, 1959: 253).

Contrary to Toynbee, who relates political totalitarianism to the idolisation of the local political community and to the absence of any reliable distinction between Church and State, Wight emphasises the historical novelty and particularity of the totalitarian phenomenon. For Wight (1954), totalitarianism cannot be understood outside the framework of modernity, and any links between the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century and ancient Greece are far-fetched. As he argues in one of the numerous footnotes he contributed to Toynbee’s volume VII of the *Study*, the ancient Greeks never succumbed to the lethal combination of political fanaticism and intellectual coercion which is the essence of modern totalitarianism. For Wight, the totalitarian political movements of the twentieth century can be explained only within a post-Christian framework, where the exclusive claims of religion have been transferred to a debased secular doctrine. What is more, he questions the extent to which Christianity and individual liberty are identical to one another, and therefore could be opposed to the supposed political absolutism of the Hellenic city-state. For Wight, the differences between Western and Eastern Christendom show that Christianity is compatible with different political regimes, and that the kind of individual freedom prevalent in the West after the Reformation cannot be attributed exclusively to its religious heritage.

### **Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia**

Wight's most analytical discussion of the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century can be found in the special volume of the *Survey of International Affairs* entitled "The World in March 1939". This volume was published after World War II and its aim was to present the world through the eyes of the main protagonists, especially the so-called "aggressor Powers". In his examination of the social and political situation in Germany before the outbreak of World War II, Wight (1952a) argues that fascism represents a historical innovation the origins of which should be sought in the Industrial Revolution, and the severe social dislocations it produced. These phenomena of social dislocation where large sections of the population lose their traditional place in society without acquiring a new one became particularly acute in the first half of the twentieth century as a result of the Great Depression.

According to Wight, despite the fact that the Nazi Party in Germany never obtained a clear electoral majority, and established a system of government by terror after its ascension to power, it satisfied many wishes of the population under the guidance of a messianic leader. Contrary to revolutionaries like Cromwell in England and Lenin in Russia, Hitler is a typical example of the uprooted and alienated individual which the Industrial Revolution, along with the twentieth-century economic crisis, had created. Having no public or private existence outside the movement, Hitler is simply a symbol of the mass man, and his unrelenting pursuance of power offers psychological compensation for all those commitments and loyalties that are alien to him. According to Wight, Hitler managed to utilise several techniques used by communist parties for his own purposes, and cooperated with German supporters of communism to destroy the feeble political foundations of the Weimar Republic.

If German fascism with its emphasis upon a chosen people is a perversion of the Old Testament, then communism with its promise of the establishment of the Kingdom of God on Earth is a perversion of the New Testament. Wight does not examine in any length the problems that the construction of socialism was inevitably facing in an industrially backward country such as Russia, but adopts Michael Polanyi's idea that, despite their differences, fascism and communism "might be represented as gradations in a single phenomenon of militant national Bolshevism" (Wight, 1952a: 304). For Polanyi (1940), the difference between Russia's quest for justice and Germany's search for national power is one of degree and not one of kind, since in both cases the result is a political regime controlling social life in its entirety. Although Wight is right in underlining the reasons which made countries such as Russia and Germany vulnerable to the totalitarian threat because of their ambivalent relationship with Western civilisation and important military defeats, his suggestion that German Nazism and Soviet Communism are

two different versions of the same societal model is seemingly contradicted by his own presentation of the subjective truth of the time as essentially triangular in “The Balance of Power” (1952b).

### **The Balance of Power**

In the imaginary dialogue that Wight creates among the great powers in “The Balance of Power” (1952b) he shows that each of the three groupings of nations that take part in World War II has its own set of political beliefs and material interests. As a result of their different ideological constitution, any alliance could only be temporary, and could not offer any reliable and long-term solution to the problem of peace. Each of the three main protagonists, the Western powers, the Axis powers, and the Soviet Union, understands reality in its own way, and presents its values as universally relevant. What Wight makes evident in his imaginary dialogue is that the tendency of the Western powers to denounce totalitarianism in its different guises finds its natural equivalent in the Soviet rejection of capitalism in all its forms, and the Nazi assumption that liberalism and Marxism are symptoms of the decline of Western culture.

Although from the point of view of England, France, and the United States, absence of political democracy and rule of law make Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia seem similar despite their different social foundations, the Soviet Union presents itself as an ideological alternative to both the Western and the Axis powers. Especially after the 1938 Munich agreement, Wight emphasises, the Soviet Union makes the point that England and France abandoned their policy of collective security in favour of non-intervention. The various concessions of Western powers to the Axis do not damage their own national interests but those of small nations, such as Abyssinia, and Czechoslovakia, that are sacrificed to the Axis. In the final analysis, argues the Soviet Union, the weak resistance offered by Western powers against the Axis is an indication that Western governments represent the same social forces that in Italy and Germany found their political expression in fascism. For the Soviet Union, Western powers and Axis powers are part of the same capitalist bloc and their internal antagonism is due to the severe crisis of the capitalist mode of production. Therefore, war cannot be averted without social revolution and the radical transformation of established social relationships.

From another viewpoint, Axis powers have their own political reasons to feel inimical towards both Western powers and the Soviet Union. Justice is not to be obtained through peaceful change and the use of established diplomatic channels but through naked force. The various ideological pretexts used by the Western powers and Soviet Union are not enough to hide the timeless truth that the strong

rule where they can and the weak have no choice but to obey. Despite their various disagreements, Western liberalism and Soviet Marxism are two aspects of the same ideological coin, and, especially under contemporary circumstances, the first tends to adopt many of the egalitarian features of the latter. As a result of their anti-humanistic and anti-egalitarian ideology, the Axis powers see their political opponents as belonging to the same decadent group of nations which refuses to recognise certain important truths regarding human nature and society and will therefore inevitably perish.

For Western powers, the privileged position they enjoy within the international system is justified by their plans for the future and, in particular, their intention to replace international anarchy by rule of law. Although the military means by which they acquired their overseas possessions and their spheres of influence can no longer be justified, the League of Nations promises to establish a reasonable measure of justice and to transform international affairs. Wight's own conclusion here is that any alliance between the Western powers and the Axis powers is extremely unlikely, and that therefore in this particular historical context Russia is the holder of the balance of power.

Reading Wight's thoughtful presentation of the thinking of each of the three main protagonists along with his earlier rejection of totalitarian government shows that his own conscious adoption of the Western point of view in discussing international problems does not render him impervious or indifferent to alternative conceptualisations of the social world. His approach to the totalitarian phenomenon is guided by the belief that the concepts we use constitute rather than reflect social reality, and that the more we enrich our understanding of the past, the more we realize our potential as agents in the present and the future (Kratochwil, 2006). Far from neutrally depicting a given reality, the notion of totalitarianism makes sense only within a particular political tradition, which emphasises constitutional government and individual freedom. In his discussion of international politics, as in his examination of theological problems, Wight does not adopt the view from nowhere – which represents Toynbee's ideal—but assumes the role of the spokesperson for particular traditions. This historicism does not however render his political thinking an uncritical one. Apart from the denunciation of capitalism and imperialism which we discussed in the first section of this Chapter, Wight's presentation of both America and the Soviet Union as post-Christian societies in "The Church, Russia and the West" urges us to think very carefully about what we define as "totalitarianism". Although depicting the United States as a totalitarian country would be far-fetched, still Wight draws attention to the fact that economic power might be equally oppressive with political power. Therefore, for Wight, the fight against different expressions of totalitarianism does

not have to do with the defence of the status quo but rather with the struggle for a more humane society<sup>xxix</sup>. Butterfield's emphasis on the need to avoid the sin of self-righteousness certainly influences Wight's understanding of totalitarianism.

#### IV) CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this Chapter was to present Wight's Christian philosophy of history. As I argued, Wight's understanding of Christianity as a historical religion, which is based on actual historical events and involves particular historical duties and obligations, provides the key to understanding his whole thinking. For Wight, the Christian is embedded in history and must act within history. As a conscientious objector, critic of historiography and political thinker, Wight used history as theory in the sense of appealing to a historical-theological point of view in order to criticise contemporary ideas and institutions. The kind of Christianity that concerns Wight is not a philosophical construction or an expression of timeless generalities, such as that God is Love. On the contrary, the Christianity that Wight defends is organised around particular historical events and its content can be derived from particular historical texts, especially the Old and the New Testament. In order to apprehend the content of this Christianity, we must not engage in logical and philosophical exercises, but we should rather study the particular in order to arrive at the universal. The dialectical character of the Christian religion as both unique and universal means that the Christian does not have obligations only towards a particular state, but also towards a wider whole.

Although during his pacifist phase Wight seemed to identify this wider whole with humankind in general, in his mature thinking, and especially in his critique of Toynbee, he accepts the view that the idea of distinct civilisations should be used when thinking about the past or the present. This historicism does not make him a proponent of the status quo, since he understands that European countries have various problems to face and alternative conceptualisations of the political scene are possible. Finally, the tension between agency and structure is an important aspect of Wight's historical thinking and, as is also the case with Butterfield, it is acknowledged without being fully resolved. Presenting Wight as a supporter of either personal or impersonal theories of history would be equally misleading. In the final analysis, for Wight, humans pay for their own sins. His harsh evaluation of the superpowers of his age, and his dissatisfaction with the European past of colonialism and imperialism, mean that the catastrophes of the twentieth century were not the result of any ineluctable logic of history but of human errors of omission and commission. The wider forces present in the historical drama do not render Christians and others irresponsible for their own history.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **E. H. Carr on History as Theory**

According to Wilson (2001), the complexity of E. H. Carr's thought and contribution to different debates during his long academic career have with some justification generated the impression that there is not only one but there are two or even three distinct E.H. Carrs. Recognising the different intellectual personas that Carr assumed in the distinct capacities of the IR theorist, the Soviet historian, and the social critic, is according to Wilson a positive development, since it corrects the initial simplistic interpretation of his work as that of a pure realist. Although as I intend to show in Chapter 8 Carr's international thought is influenced by a certain form of liberalism, and the ideas he expressed as a social critic are primarily inspired by socialism, his work on history discussed in this Chapter could be best interpreted through a Marxist lens.

Since the appropriation of Marx's legacy is a complex process, it would be useful to see what one means by "Marxism" in this context. As Anna Green and Kathleen Troup (1999) mention in their discussion of Marxist approaches in historiography, in *The German Ideology* Marx offered a vision of historical materialism which is dangerously close to a materialist conception of history. By presenting the satisfaction of material and psychological needs as the driving force of history, and adopting the metaphor of base and superstructure, Marx presented human values and ideas as dependent variables which are determined by developments taking place in the field of production. A more humanistic and complex portrayal of the historical process can be distilled from Marx's works of narrative history. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, for example, Marx acknowledged that men make their own history, though under given conditions.

The tension between Marx the philosopher of history, who superimposes a particular concept upon the whole of human history, and Marx the historian, who sees that in practice historical events are influenced by a variety of factors, has been analytically explored by the Marxist historians Eric Hobsbawm, Christopher Hill and E. P. Thompson, who in their work struggled with the problem of defining the relationship between human consciousness and social being. Although Carr did not participate in the proceedings of the Group of the Historians belonging to the Communist Party of Britain, he also tried to clarify the relationship between social

being and consciousness in a dialectical way that ultimately does not attribute priority to the one or the other.

As a biographer, Carr came close to applying the Marxian principle, expressed in the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, that it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but rather their social being that determines their consciousness. However, although Marx understood social being in a rather crude way as the reflection of relations of production, Carr portrays social being in more complex way drawing attention to traditions of thought that develop within particular national contexts. Herzen, Bakunin, even Marx himself, are placed by Carr within different national traditions of thought and action, and their thoughtful biographies provide interesting insights into their historical environment.

As a historian of the Soviet Union, Carr emphasised the importance of the impersonal forces influencing the development of Russian communism towards a particular direction. As I argue in the relevant section, Carr's greatest contribution as a Soviet Historian was to show that Stalinism was the diseased product of a diseased situation, and not something that can be abstracted from the more general material and cultural environment in which it grew. Although it is true that at times Carr gives the impression that what happened in Russia had to happen and things could not have turned out differently, it is also a fact that he kept thinking about what could have happened if Lenin had not died so abruptly and a different person occupied the position that Stalin did. It also worth emphasising that, as Haslam mentions, Carr's monumental reconstruction of the history of the Soviet Union arose out of an early fascination with the personality of Lenin and the idea of writing his biography. The fact that a book frequently criticised for its determinism arose out of the desire to write the biography of a statesman, illustrates how personal and impersonal understandings of history are inextricably interlinked in Carr's thinking.

Finally, *What is History?* contains the conclusions at which Carr arrived as a biographer and practicing historian. These conclusions depict historiography as an inherently theoretical enterprise which belongs with the social sciences, or at least a particular version of them. Carr's view that historiography should not be interested in the unique but in what is general in the unique, provides the ideal starting point for thinking about history as theory, and brings him close to the ideas expressed by Butterfield and Wight. Although Butterfield's and Wight's Christian background and Carr's Marxist one make them emphasise different factors when discussing historical events, what interests me here is the ways in which they relativize the opposition between personal and impersonal understandings of



history, and therefore open a promising way of thinking about the past and the present<sup>xxx</sup>. It is in this in this combination of personal and impersonal accounts of history that the theoretical importance of their engagement with the past mainly lies.

## I) POLITICAL BIOGRAPHY

At the heart of Carr's engagement with biography lies a consistent attempt to treat individuals as products of their historical environment. The influences that primarily interest him are not material in nature but they rather refer to traditions of thought organically linked to particular nations. For example, Carr's understanding of Marx's theoretical system as the combination of British economics, French political ideas, and German philosophy, shows how Marx's thought was shaped in and by the countries where he lived for long periods of time. Although this interpretation of the thought of Herzen, Bakunin and Marx, contains seeds of determinism, Carr's outlook is complicated by the fact that his subjects are all revolutionaries. In other words, individuals shaped by society are also trying to change society. This complex dialectical relationship between society and the individual means that – pace Haslam (1999) and Halliday (2000)—Carr's biographical work cannot be seen as a mere expression of his utopianism or romanticism, and it is not essentially different from his *History of Soviet Russia*. The biographer of Herzen and Bakunin is closer to the historian of the Soviet Union than it is frequently assumed, since in both cases he tries to examine the role of individuals in conjunction with that of wider social forces without losing sight of the one or the other. This is fully compatible with the differences of emphasis existing between Carr's historical and biographical work.

### The Romantic Exiles

In *The Romantic Exiles* (1933) Carr portrays Alexander Herzen and his circle as representatives of a generation which drew its political inspiration from the teachings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and its understanding of what is permissible and what not in personal relationships from George Sand. Although as Haslam notes the book is different from anything else Carr wrote in the sense that it can be read as a novel, Carr's exploration of the virtues and foibles of his protagonists does not make him lose sight of the wider ideological and political picture. Herzen and his circle belong to a generation of disgruntled Russian intellectuals who did not see the European or Russian revolution they expected to see and therefore ended their lives "in tragedy tinged with futility" (Carr, 1933: 421). Carr is especially interested in the particular historical experiences and conditions, which determined Herzen's political development and led to his ultimate failure as a political reformer.

Herzen's transformation from a sentimental political idealist into an unrelenting opponent of Russian autocracy is attributed to his personal confrontation with the regime of Nicholas I. The years of Herzen's greatest influence coincide with the early reign of Alexander II and the liberal impulses of the new regime in Russia. Herzen's advocacy of a number of moderate liberal reforms, such as the abolition of serfdom and the ending of the censorship of the press were very well attuned to the character of the times and the aspirations of the new Russian ruler. Finally, Herzen's failure as a political reformer is not explained by reference to any special personal characteristics but is rather attributed to the political environment within which he acted. As representative of the liberal centre in Russian political life, Herzen suffered the fate of moderate men in times of crisis and extreme political conflict. The cause of constitutional democracy, which he advocated, was very much at odds with the desires of the Russian people and the polarisation of Russian political life along conservative and radical lines. The same political programme which made him popular during the early reign of Alexander II rendered him politically irrelevant a few years later, when his political ideas were too advanced for the rulers and too moderate for the opposition. After the initial reformist tendencies of the regime of Alexander II were exhausted, and the opposition adopted an extreme political agenda, Herzen found himself in the position of a man to whom only one road is open and that road "leads to almost certain destruction" (Carr, 1933: 264).

The figures of Bakunin and Marx appear only fleetingly in the pages of *The Romantic Exiles*. With regard to Bakunin, Carr notes in the Introduction that he discusses his activities only where they intersect with those of Herzen and his circle. However, he makes the interesting observation that Bakunin's revolutionary anarchism was much closer to Russian temperament than Herzen's support for the cause of constitutional democracy. Marx is mentioned only in the last pages of the book and is not presented in a particularly favourable light. The monotony and respectability of Marx's personal life offers a contrast to the "many-hued, incalculable diversity of the lives of the Romantic Exiles" (Carr, 1933: 423).

Contrary to Herzen, who was influenced by the form that the Romantic Movement assumed in Russia during his youth, and Bakunin, whose denunciation of all states and all governments was the logical conclusion of his political romanticism, Darwin and Marx chose to subordinate human nature to the workings of certain impersonal and scientific principles. Although Carr does not hide the fact that he feels extremely uncomfortable with certain aspects of the Marxist doctrine, he also recognises that the cause of revolution can no longer be the same after Marx. The conflict between Marx and Bakunin is further explored in their respective biographies where Carr continues to put his protagonists within

particular ideological and national contexts. Although in his comparison of Michael Bakunin with Karl Marx Carr displays certain sympathy for the first at the expense of the latter, this sympathy should not be taken for political support. Berlin (1951) is correct that in his biographical work Carr adopts an attitude of ironical detachment towards his subjects. Even when they appear to be remarkable or fascinating as human beings, they still are somewhat comical from the point of view of the average Englishman.

### **Karl Marx and Michael Bakunin**

In *Karl Marx: A Study in Fanaticism* (1934) Carr tries to see the intellectual influences exercised upon Marx, and the way in which he managed to absorb and harmonise these influences in order to serve the cause of revolution in Europe. For Carr, Marxism is not just the personal creation of Karl Marx but a composite intellectual system comprised of German philosophy, English economics and French politics. Therefore, it cannot be understood without taking into account Marx's political experiences in Germany, France and England. The charge of fanaticism which Carr formulates against Marx is related to the latter's supposedly blind faith in things which do not exist. Carr makes the point that class consciousness is actually limited to a small part of the working class, and that it is artificially created by bourgeois intellectuals. As typical products of the Industrial Revolution, Marx and Engels overrated the role of the workers and gave very little consideration to the peasantry and the importance of agriculture. For both Marx and Engels, the countryside scarcely exists and peasants do not even constitute a proper social class. Although Carr approaches his subject with a critical attitude, he recognises that both the merits and the demerits of the Marxist system are intimately linked to a particular period.

Despite his criticism of Marx as a social scientist, Carr clearly draws attention to his brilliance as an ideologue, and argues that Marxism is an indispensable part of the twentieth-century intellectual revolution. This revolution is not content to examine the role of isolated individuals in history, but rather searches for the influence of wider social forces. For Carr, the Marxist belief in social progress through conflict and revolution does not necessarily involve determinism, to the extent that every interpretation of human history as something more than the result of individual choices would be equally open to same accusation. In a nutshell, the various problems that Marxism faces as a sociological description of existing reality do not mean that it cannot be useful as a moral critique of the existing society. For Carr, recognising the true value of Marxism involves acknowledging its debt to the so-called utopian socialists, who antedate it, and

who virtually share the same assumptions regarding the egalitarian and liberating dimensions of human history.

The differences between Marx and Bakunin are analytically explored in *Michael Bakunin* (1937/1975). As Carr argues, both Marx and Bakunin derived their initial political inspiration from Hegel, but interpreted his teaching in different ways. Under the influence of the Young Hegelians, Marx became a thorough materialist and came to see class conflict and the collision of economic interests as the motors of history. Bakunin, despite his long and varied career in radical politics, remained an idealist who combined anarchism with revolutionary pan-Slavism, and saw with distrust Marx's belief in ideological homogeneity and the importance of the state. National feelings and antipathies were also a factor behind their mutual distrust, and their conflict for the control of the First International had an important national dimension, since Marx drew his support from England and Germany while Bakunin mainly enjoyed support in Spain and France. Although Carr mentions that Bakunin was the first to draw attention to Marx's authoritarian tendencies, he by no means accepts Bakunin's arguments at face value and claims that his critique of every kind of political hierarchy was hardly compatible with the unconditional loyalty he demanded from his own personal followers. For Carr (1950b), the conflict between Marx and Bakunin ultimately reflects the tension between Western and Eastern conceptions of revolution: Marx was influenced by the Jacobin belief of revolution through the state whereas Bakunin demanded its immediate destruction and its replacement by something completely different. Therefore, apart from political ideologies, even the phenomenon of revolution assumes different forms in different social and cultural contexts.

To conclude, as a biographer Carr places his subjects within ideological traditions that develop within particular national contexts. The kind of social being that he uses as a determinant of consciousness is not primarily economic, but rather political and ideological in nature. The fact that his subjects –apart from being formed by society—also tried to change society with varying degrees of success, means that the relationship between society and the individual is a mutual one. Indeed, Carr's interest in actually changing society and not only explaining the behaviour of individual actors, subsequently led him to focus his attention not on social revolutionaries, like Herzen and Marx, but on revolutionary political leaders, such as Lenin. Despite the fact that Carr's engagement with biography did not always produce the distinguished results that his study of Soviet history did<sup>xxxii</sup>, it was based on the important methodological insight that the role of particular individuals should always be examined in conjunction with that of wider social forces. It was this insight that enabled Carr to place Stalin and Stalinism within their

appropriate historical framework and to challenge simplistic interpretations of Soviet communism.

## II) SOVIET HISTORY

In *A History of Soviet Russia* Carr continues to place individuals, and especially political leaders, within wider national and economic frameworks. Although social being continues to determine the consciousness of actors, this time social being is defined in more orthodox Marxist terms as a set of material relationships that influence the views and actions of individuals. As mentioned, Carr's magnum opus began as a biography of Lenin. Charismatic political leaders do not entirely disappear from the scene, but their actions are interpreted against a background of material necessity. Leninism and Stalinism are not the mere expression of the personalities involved but they correspond to different epochs. As I will try to show, the main problem with Carr's approach is not the emphasis attributed to contextual factors in explaining Leninism and Stalinism; the main limitation in his reading of Soviet communism is that the appreciation of Lenin as a political leader, and the contextualisation of Stalinism, take place within an ideological framework that broadly accepts Marxism as a way of understanding society, but questions Marxism as a way of changing society. In other words, as Isaac Deutscher argued, Carr's reading of the Soviet experiment is influenced by the belief that some of the most essential promises of Marxism—promises accepted by Lenin—were unrealisable in the first place. By rejecting in principle the ideals of the classless society and the abolition of the state, Carr offers a very pragmatic interpretation of what happened in Russia under Lenin and Stalin, but deprives himself of the intellectual sources necessary for criticising the most unsavoury aspects of Leninism, and especially Stalinism.

### **The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923**

The first three volumes of *A History of Soviet Russia* examine political, economic, and international developments in Russia under Lenin. Carr's decision to begin with constitutional issues and after that to examine economic policies and the foreign relations of the Bolshevik regime reflects his priorities and beliefs at the time about what is important for understanding Russia. However, a careful reading of the volumes reveals that what really dictates the decisions of Bolshevik leaders after the Revolution is the need to cultivate the toleration – if not the support—of the peasants. In the period under discussion, the peasant element represents the eighty per cent of the economically active population, and political decisions such

as the toleration of capitalism in the countryside reflect the need of the new regime to reach a modus vivendi with the peasants.

Lenin is portrayed by Carr not as a rootless intellectual or a revolutionary leader but as a Russian statesman with a deep understanding of the needs of his country and his people. The discussion of general theoretical questions within the Marxist tradition is clearly separated from the main body of the text, which assumes the form of detailed historical narrative. Carr's discussion of the Marxist conception of the state or the attitude of the founders of scientific socialism towards the peasants provide a general intellectual background for understanding the decisions of Lenin, but they do not explain these decisions and certainly do not aim to provide general philosophical criteria for evaluating political action. As Carr claims, although Marx and Engels were writing under the illusion that the maturation of capitalism leads to its inevitable replacement by socialism and the subsequent abolition of the state, Lenin was soon obliged to reach an understanding with various Russian bureaucratic functionaries and to abandon the hope of the dying away of the state.

The economic corollary of Lenin's various political concessions to necessity and non-ideological thinking is the adoption of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in March 1921. By that time, the policies described as War Communism had clearly reached their limits and led to a series of peasant uprisings. According to Carr, the primary goal of NEP was to grant greater liberties to the peasants, who were until then barred from leasing their land or selling their surplus product in the open economic market. Although successful in the short term, NEP had many negative political consequences, and Carr makes clear the fact that the strengthening of party discipline within the Bolsheviks was related to the need to promote economic measures which empowered the peasants at the expense of the industrial workers, who theoretically represented the basis of the Bolshevik party.

Apart from the requirements of NEP, the transformation of the Bolshevik party to a monolithic political organism was the result of the operation of those widespread social tendencies which had already affected the German Social Democrats and the Italian Socialists. It should be noted that for Carr the identification of the Bolshevik party with its leadership and the identification of the Soviet state with the Bolshevik party is not a serious political pathology, since "the evolution of a revolutionary party into a governmental party has been a feature of all victorious revolutions" (Carr, 1950a: 185). Therefore, for Carr, already before the death of Lenin, the Bolshevik party had managed to monopolise political life in Russia, and to transform every social and political struggle to a competition for influence within the confines of the party. Although Carr shows that the

transformation of the Bolsheviks from a revolutionary organism into a monolithic political organisation had already taken place before Lenin's withdrawal, he suggests that under Lenin the Bolshevik party still expressed the different views and forces that could be found in the Soviet society. Despite the fact that the leaders had the last word, discussion was tolerated and the dissidents within the party were not automatically treated as enemies of the Soviet state. In the case of both the domestic and the international affairs, Carr does not argue in favour of the identity of the policies pursued by Lenin and Stalin, but rather in favour of a broad continuity in their policies, which is compatible with certain differences between them.

The third volume of *The Bolshevik Revolution* analyses the external relationships of Soviet Russia and the uneasy balance achieved between the two main pillars of Soviet policy: national interest and the promotion of the world revolution. Although Carr claims that in general there is no fundamental tension between these two different dimensions of Soviet foreign policy, the Brest-Litovsk treaty of March 1918 is presented as an important turning point for the Bolsheviks who were obliged to accept the conventional rules of the diplomatic game and to make serious concessions to Germany. The status quo tendencies in Soviet foreign policy were further strengthened by the establishment of NEP, which among else aimed to offer concessions to foreign capital and cultivate commercial relationships between Soviet Russia and a number of capitalist countries. Carr shows that as a result of the Anglo-Soviet trade agreement which was signed just a week after the announcement of NEP, and the Soviet treaties with Persia, Afghanistan and Turkey, Russia was transformed from an economic pariah into an almost normal commercial partner of the capitalist world.

What emerges from the examination of political, economic and international events between 1917 and 1923 is Soviet Russia's gradual incorporation into the international economic and diplomatic system, and its empowerment as a state in a world of states. During that period, the Bolshevik party lost many of the elements of a revolutionary organisation and was transformed in ways which enabled it to support successfully the policies of the Soviet state. The Marxist belief in the possibility of a stateless society and the redundancy of foreign policy is not used by Carr as a criterion for evaluating Soviet policies under Lenin. Carr also minimises the tension between different aspects of Soviet foreign policy and is generally positive towards NEP. For him, the dilemmas confronting Soviet policymakers between 1917 and 1923 can be comfortably reconceptualised as differences between short-term and long-term objectives. The Bolsheviks under Lenin do not forget the domestic goal of socialism or the international goal of world revolution, but they come to accept that the realisation of these ideological aspirations is a

long-term objective, which ultimately depends on the successes or failures of socialist movements in other parts of the world. The substitution of the Leninist combination of domestic and international revolution for the Stalinist preoccupation with domestic concerns is examined in *Socialism in One Country*, which provides the key for considering Carr's *History* as a whole.

### **Socialism in One Country**

After examining the period between the last months of Lenin's illness and the first weeks after his death in *The Interregnum 1923-1924*, Carr comes to the heart of his topic in the three volumes of *Socialism in One Country 1924-1926*. The first volume contains some impressive thoughts regarding the relationship between continuity and change in the case of revolutions. Although the announcement of NEP had already signalled a turn to realism on the part of the Bolsheviks, it is during the period 1924-1926 that the Russian past enters the picture in a decisive way and comes to occupy a central place in the building of socialism. For Carr, one of the main features of great revolutions is that they demonstrate but do not resolve in any permanent way the tension between continuity and change, which had already been underlined by Tocqueville in his discussion of the French revolution.

Carr's masterful analysis of the legacy of the past in the case of the October revolution draws attention to the external limitations under which political action takes place. The role of language and ideology in politics is not totally neglected, since Carr shows how the Stalinist doctrine of socialism in one country managed to make virtue out of necessity in a difficult situation, and to transform Russia's imposed international isolation to a political choice and ideology. Carr's reflections on the relationship between continuity and change in the case of the Russian revolution help one understand the problems facing most revolutions, and indeed all attempts to radically transform the social and political present. As in the case of biography, he locates his subjects within national contexts and traditions of thought, but there is a strong emphasis on material factors and determinations as well. In a nutshell, the greatest methodological contribution of this third instalment of volumes is to show that the historian does not examine the action of free individuals, but of socially situated actors whose material and ideological environment poses severe limits on what they can realistically expect to achieve.

In particular, Carr analyses the influence of material, political, and international factors, in order to prove that the core of what came to be known as "Stalinism" is not something that explains Russian developments but rather something that ought to be explained. This attempt to place a political phenomenon within its ideological and material context shows how much Carr was influenced by the twentieth-century intellectual revolution which challenged the utility of examining



individuals outside and independent of wider ideological and material structures. Carr's interpretative approach is not devoid of problems but it proves beyond doubt how futile it is to interpret a primarily political phenomenon in exclusively political terms. For Carr, any understanding of Stalinism as a political system must start from the analysis of the legacy of the past in its social, political, and international dimensions. To begin with, as he points out, revolutions are made by men moulded in a specific material and intellectual environment and in a specific national tradition. Although the October revolution was carried out by Marxists, these Marxists were also Russians and their form of Marxism was clearly influenced by the material backwardness of Russia.

Secondly, all successful revolutions must create a government which is necessarily based on the important distinction between rulers and ruled. The members of a government always seem distant to the common man who feels no affinity with them. Thirdly, all governments must engage themselves in the conduct of foreign affairs and represent their country abroad. The national interests of a country do not change because of a social revolution, and there is always certain continuity between the foreign policies pursued before and after it. For Carr, all these forces of historical continuity exercise a combined influence upon a successful revolution, and oblige it to disappoint those who most fervently believe in immediate social and international change. The freedom of revolutionaries is necessarily circumscribed by the legacy of the past in its various dimensions. Indeed, what Carr suggests is that the revolutionaries accept many of the domestic and international goals of their predecessors, and they employ different – and more effective—means for the achievement of these goals.

In the Russian context, all these considerations regarding the legacy of the past in the case of revolutions aim to provide support for the thesis that Stalinism and Stalin's doctrine of socialism in one country do not constitute problems in themselves but they rather reflect a particular social, political, and international situation. As Carr persuasively argues, Stalin proves more than any other great man in history the view that what makes certain individuals great is not their character but rather their unique relationship with their historical environment. For Carr, what distinguishes Stalin from the other Bolshevik leaders is not his particular ideological positions but rather an ability to associate himself with those policies that are destined to succeed anyway. Stalin's adaptability to his material and ideological environment is sharply contrasted with Trotsky's individualism and unwillingness to comply with the requirements of the current stage of the revolutionary process in Russia. Their international differences notwithstanding, Stalin managed to adopt many aspects of Trotsky's social proposals and to make the rapid industrialisation of Russia a goal of primary importance.

Indeed, Stalin's support for industrialisation cannot be really separated from the doctrine of socialism in one country, since making Russia independent from other countries presupposes the ability to produce the means of production and not import them from abroad. By gradually abandoning his initial support for the peasants, and accepting those aspects of Trotsky's agenda that were more relevant to the Russian situation, Stalin displayed a unique adaptability to his environment and established himself as a representative of the political centre within the Bolshevik party. His political campaign against first left and then right deviations made him appear something like the voice of reason within the party, while his doctrine of socialism in one country made him relatively popular abroad. To sum up, the gist of the argument in *Socialism in One Country* is that the essence of Stalinism and Bolshevik policy in general does not lie in the application of a preconceived ideological doctrine but in a series of successful adaptations to the social and international conditions prevailing at the time in Russia and abroad.

Carr admits that there is a certain tension between Lenin's belief in a worldwide proletarian revolution and Stalin's rather conservative international policies, but argues that the attempt to create socialism in one country was destined to succeed from the moment it became clear that no revolution was forthcoming in Germany and Europe in general. From that moment onwards, to insist in the view that the socialist transformation of Russia without help from abroad was impossible, was to admit that the October revolution itself had been a mistake. To conclude, in *Socialism in One Country* Carr aims to illustrate the domestic and international conditions which made Stalinism not only possible but in certain sense historically necessary. As Haslam observes, for Carr the form that the rivalry between Stalin as a representative of the centre and Trotsky as a representative of the left assumed within the Bolshevik party was dependent upon fundamental economic and international issues. The arduous progress of industrialization in Russia combined with the revolution that did not happen in Europe explain the outcome of the political struggle between Stalin and Trotsky. This contextualisation of the personalities engaged in the struggle for power is undoubtedly one of Carr's main contributions to the understanding of the period, and provides an alternative to the tendency of individualist historians to treat great men as standing above history. Carr's analysis of the circumstances that rendered politically influential – or even historically necessary—the doctrine of socialism in one country makes the third instalment of his *History* the most important from a methodological point of view and offers a vantage point for considering the work as a whole.

## Foundations of a Planned Economy

The fourth and final instalment of *A History of Soviet Russia* deals with the period 1926-1929. Carr underlines the importance of the adoption of the first five-year plan by the Soviet Union in May 1929 and the collectivisation of agriculture a few months later. His analysis of the events which led to these dramatic decisions is apparently based on the distinction between two different definitions of socialism. To the extent that socialism involves the direction of economy according to the collective and long-term interests of society, the policies promoted by Stalin were definitely compatible with it. To the extent, however, that socialism means the eradication of social exploitation and the liquidation of the political distinction between rulers and ruled, the decisions of the Soviet bureaucracy signal a departure from it. In reality Carr does not feel obliged to make a choice between these two divergent definitions of socialism, since his main argument is that every important historical process has a dialectical character, which makes it positive and negative at the same time. This ambiguity of important historical events is expressed in the contradictory character of Stalinism, which as a social and political system is revolutionary in some respects and counter-revolutionary in other respects. Following Engel's dictum that a revolution always accomplishes its real as opposed to its illusory tasks, Carr shows how between 1926 and 1929 the Bolsheviks began to transform Russia into an important industrial power without necessarily implementing some idealised form of socialism.

Despite the emphasis on the economic dimension of the problems under discussion, the main contribution of this fourth instalment of Carr's *History* is to make evident that the priority finally assigned to industry over agriculture is not the consequence of strictly economic calculations, but is rather the result of a conscious political decision serving the long-term national interests of Russia. Although in the first stages of his conflict with Trotsky Stalin frequently appeared as the defender of the peasants, making Russia an industrial power is in the final analysis the necessary consequence of the doctrine of socialism in one country. What is more, the competition between industry and agriculture as different sectors of the national economy is not to be identified with the conflict between empirically defined social classes, but has mainly to do with the clash between different sections of the Bolshevik party. The political rationale behind the decision to rapidly industrialise Russia is also revealed by Carr's observation that the worsening of the international situation after 1927 played an important role in supporting the cause of the advocates of industrialisation.

Although during previous periods the leadership of the Bolshevik party had to face challenges emanating from the left, what dominates the period leading to the

first five-year plan is a clash with the right opposition within the party. According to Carr, after meeting successfully the challenge posed by Trotsky and the super-industrialists, Stalin has now to face Bukharin and those who not only stress the importance of agriculture but also believe that private profit should be the norm guiding agricultural production. Although Carr overemphasises the degree to which Bukharin as the representative of the right opposition actually threatened Stalin, the exploration of this new political conflict serves to justify his more general description of Stalin as a man of the centre within the Bolshevik party.

The decision to confine the *History* to the period 1917-1929 has to do with the fact that after 1929 Stalin's control of the party and the Soviet state is complete and the opposition in its left and right incarnations largely disappears from the picture. Apart from the scarcity of documents describing the activities of the Soviet leadership and the declining opposition within the Bolshevik party, one can assume that Carr also wanted to avoid discussing in any length the worst excesses of Stalinism as a social and political system which became painfully evident after 1929. The human costs of the forced collectivisation of agriculture promoted by Stalin can hardly be overstated, while Carr's argument that after 1929 Stalin faced no organised opposition is apparently at odds with what came to be known as the Great Purge. The persecution of hundreds of thousands for alleged crimes committed against the regime does not disprove Carr's thesis that after 1929 Stalin faced no organised opposition, but proves how inadequate it is to identify Stalinism with certain useful historical functions.

As Isaac Deutscher (1955) has persuasively argued, Carr is mainly a historian of the Soviet state and not a historian of the Soviet society. What really matters from his point of view is not the conflict of ideas or the competition between distinct social classes but rather the conflict between different sections of the Bolshevik party. Carr's decision to pay more and more attention to economic factors in the course of writing his *History*, does not change the fact that he is primarily interested in Soviet Russia as a form of state and not as a form of society. His depiction of Lenin as a better – socialist—version of Bismarck also misses certain important aspects of Lenin's past and political legacy.

The answer to the question if Carr or Deutscher remain more faithful to the spirit of Marx and Marxism depends on how one sees this spirit. Carr (1968) was convinced that Marxism was the product of a bygone age; an age when objective economic laws were assumed to determine the course of history. Lenin substituted these laws for the action of the consciously organised political party, which expresses the interests of the working class. Stalin moved a step further towards this direction by stopping to rely on the active or passive consent of the workers, as

Lenin did. For Stalin, the role of the political party is not to express the real interests of the working class but to define those interests at will. Conditioning the behaviour of proletarians is no different from conditioning the behaviour of consumers through advertising in a capitalist society. What Carr suggests, is that in the same way that Leninism is the Marxism of its age, Stalinism is the Leninism of its own age.

However, one cannot help but feeling that something is missing from this equation of Marx with Lenin, and of Lenin with Stalin. Although as mentioned above Carr continued to think about Lenin and Stalin even after completing his *History*, his belief that Lenin was more willing to use persuasion and was also able to inspire the devotion of the masses, does not go deep enough. What really differentiates Lenin from Stalin is the fact that he genuinely believed in the Marxian ideas neglected by Stalin but also largely put aside by Carr himself. Carr's identification of the most inspiring aspects of the Marxian doctrine with a nineteenth-century utopia, does not stop him from explaining what happened in Russia, but it leads him to minimise the differences between what happened and what could have happened, if different political leaders had prevailed and the international situation was slightly more favourable. Although the elements of agency and conscious human agency are by no means absent from Carr's *History*, they appear to play a secondary role. The more agent-based approach inspiring Carr as a biographer and the more structure-based approach influencing him as a historian, are to some extent reconciled in what could be considered as the first lengthy English School investigation into problems of agency and structure, objectivity and subjectivity.

### III) WHAT IS HISTORY?

In *What is History?* (1961/1987) Carr criticises both the nineteenth-century conventional wisdom regarding the historical profession and certain contemporary philosophers of history who try to insulate history from the social sciences and deprive it from any practical and philosophical value. Although Carr's emphasis on the relationship between the historian and his facts, and the presentation of the historian as a representative of the age to which he belongs, indicate a certain degree of relativism, the belief in the importance of objectivity in history and the optimism regarding the future of society and history create interesting similarities between Carr and the nineteenth-century historians who provide the necessary background to his thinking. In the same way that in *The Twenty Years' Crisis* Carr shows that history is an integral part of theory, in *What is History?* he makes the point that there can be no historiography without a theory of historiography.

According to Carr, nineteenth-century historians were wrong to ignore the close relationship between the historian and the historical facts. Historical facts constitute a minority compared to the countless facts of the past, and what distinguishes the first from the second is the important decision of the historians to attribute special value and significance to them. To the extent that only some of the events of the past acquire the status of historical facts, the element of personal interpretation is already present even before the historian starts to consciously interpret his facts. What is more, the arrangement and classification of historical facts are also decisions of the historian who is something more than a neutral arbiter between the past and the present. The most revolutionary proposition put forward by Carr is that the answer which the historian provides to certain basic historical questions, such as when a particular battle took place, is not what really qualifies him as a historian. Historical accuracy is necessary for the historian, but it does not constitute his essential function. The ascertainment of certain basic historical facts is the mission of sciences such as archaeology and numismatics and by no means exhausts the role of the historian. To sum up, for Carr the facts themselves do not constitute history but only the first material out of which history is made by the historians on the basis of interpretation.

Like all individuals, the historian is a product of his historical period and his reading of the past reflects the needs of the present. Contrary to an overstretched sociology of knowledge which sees in the historian and the intellectual in general a mouthpiece for particular interests, Carr is not primarily interested to present the historian as a member of a closely knit group. What primarily determines the historian's approach to the past are the age and the wider political environment in which he works. For example, as he argues, in nineteenth-century England almost all historians were inclined to see history as a manifestation of the principle of progress. This attitude changed dramatically after World War I when discerning no general pattern in history became the rule among historians. Historians, therefore, like the subjects of the biographer and the historical personas debated in *History of Soviet Russia*, should always be placed within their historical period.

However, as the case of authors such as Grote and Mommsen proves, more particular social determinations are not totally absent from the work of the historians. According to Carr, Grote failed to analyse the problem of slavery in ancient Greece as a result of the disregard of his social class for industrial workers in England, and Mommsen projected the political impasse of German liberalism in his reading of Roman history. Likewise, G.M. Trevelyan and Namier interpreted English constitutional history under the influence of their Whig and Conservative political beliefs respectively. Therefore, although Carr's advice to study the historian before studying his work is certainly useful, there is a certain ambiguity

regarding what really determines the historian's outlook. Sometimes Carr suggests that the historian ought to be interpreted as the representative of a social class, at other points he argues that what matters is his political commitments, and ultimately he makes the point that what actually determines the content of a book is the date of its publication. The ambiguity that characterises Carr's discussion of the influences that are exercised upon the historian by his environment, show that determining the precise content and character of the wider social forces that shape the behaviour of individuals is a complicated process. In particular, it could be argued that no exhaustive sociology of knowledge can be provided because the kind of influences that matter differ from individual to individual and from case to case.

### **Karl Popper and Isaiah Berlin**

Carr's conceptualisation of historiography as an inherently theoretical enterprise, which is based on methodological assumptions implicitly or explicitly accepted by the historian, placed him in opposition not only to nineteenth-century empiricism but also to contemporary philosophers who defended an inherently atheoretical understanding of both historiography and human history. Despite their differences, Isaiah Berlin and Karl Popper present historiography as a mere compilation of facts, and deny that it could be included in the social sciences. They also challenge the idea that human history itself could be seen as a directional process within which patterns can be discerned and analysed. What is at stake in this debate is whether history should be included in the social sciences, and, if yes, what this inclusion means for morality and human freedom. Carr's argument in favour of seeing history as a social science emphasises the broad similarities that exist between the natural and the social sciences, and presents human behaviour as causally determined. Although Carr argues that forging a link between history and the social sciences does not exclude moral judgement properly defined, Popper and Berlin claim that there is something fundamentally wrong in treating history as a social science. Their arguments are very much at odds with the actual development of historiography in the twentieth century, but they deserve examination because of the wider questions they pose regarding causation and the exercise of human freedom.

In *The Poverty of Historicism* (1957), Popper argues that there is no unalterable historical destiny towards which mankind is moving independent of its will, and that any attempt to predict the future is methodologically misguided. Popper offers a broad definition of the concept of historicism, which includes a wide range of political phenomena ranging from Plato to Marx and from Fascism to Communism. Historicists of different sorts are castigated for their preoccupation

with the problem of historical change and for their attempt to predict the future. For Popper, the ambition to predict the future of man and society is wrong because of the way in which human knowledge develops over time. Since human knowledge grows in a non-predictable way, “*we cannot anticipate today what we shall know only tomorrow*” (Popper, emphasis in the original, 1957: xii). For Popper, sociology and history should be kept apart, since the first’s search for laws and regularities is unsuited to the second. Indeed, what Popper calls “historicism” refers to a problematic combination of history and sociology, which in its search for immutable historical laws is supposed to defy human freedom and ingenuity.

Although Popper rejects the search for regularities in history on primarily methodological grounds, in *Historical Inevitability* (1954) Berlin problematizes the existence of what he calls vast impersonal historical forces mainly on moral grounds. For Berlin, to assume that collective entities, such as social classes, nations and civilisations, are more important than the individuals who constitute them, is tantamount to denying human freedom and presenting the universe as a prison. Believing in the existence of historical laws is morally wrong because it deprives one of the ability to judge “Charlemagne or Napoleon, or Genghis Khan or Hitler or Stalin for their massacres” (Berlin, 1954: 76). Berlin’s interest in the moral dimension of the problem makes him state that the arguments in favour of collectivism and determinism are not necessarily wrong, but they have disastrous moral consequences and therefore cannot be accepted in principle. The most startling idea he puts forward is that the problems generated by the belief in the causal determination of human action need not concern the historian. Contrary to what applies to theologians and philosophers, “for historians determinism is not a serious issue” (Berlin, 1954: 34).

According to Berlin, history is not a social science, since historians do not utilise a specialised technical vocabulary and the average person can easily read their work in most cases. In one of the most clear and absolute defences of empiricism in historiography, he argues that “there is no historical thought, properly speaking, save where facts are distinct not merely from fiction, but from theory and interpretation in a lesser or greater degree” (Berlin, 1954: 70). It is important to note that Berlin’s arguments are not directed only against the kind of sociological history advocated by Carr, but against every attempt to present human history as something more complex than the result of the actions of isolated individuals.

Toynbee’s belief in the importance of different civilisations and Butterfield’s belief in Providence are also interpreted by Berlin as indications of collectivism and determinism respectively. By not limiting his critique only to what Popper describes as historicism, Berlin leaves space only for the most elemental form of



historiography, which narrates the isolated actions of isolated individuals. The aversion that many past historians had for theory and for any conscious and systematic enquiry into the methodological presuppositions of history, is transformed by Berlin into a methodological ideal which all historians ought to follow. From his point of view, what defines scientific communities is not the issues they consciously discuss and debate, but what they take for granted and do not discuss at all. As he points out, what constitutes a fact or a piece of evidence should not be debated among historians, since issues like that are usually taken for granted within a given profession. In different ways, Popper and Berlin present history as a sui generis discipline isolated from philosophy, theology, and the social sciences. Berlin, in particular, presents theoretical unsophistication as an ideal for historians and explicitly repudiates every attempt to forge links between history and other branches of learning.

Carr's response to the ideas of Popper and Berlin assumes the form of an argument in favour of including history in the social sciences and not viewing it as a sui generis form of discourse distant from philosophy and sociology. Carr is no supporter of historicism in the sense described by Popper, but argues that the belief in the existence of immutable laws has been effectively abandoned by both the natural and the social scientists. Marx, in particular, did not aspire to some ahistorical theory and was especially interested in the different results that similar events produce in different contexts. For him, the essence of a phenomenon could not be revealed by recourse to pure reasoning but only by comparing its manifestations in discrete historical contexts. As regards the issue of prediction, Carr admits that social scientists cannot realistically hope to achieve the precision that natural scientists have attained. However, he notes that the methods used by the social and the natural scientists are broadly similar, and that even social scientists cannot completely abandon the hope to predict the future. To the extent that social scientists are not interested in the particular for its own sake but rather in what is general in the particular, their study of the past necessarily leads to certain tentative conclusions regarding the shape of the future. As Carr point out, people do not ordinarily expect from a social scientist to predict with precision the outbreak of a revolution but rather to delineate the conditions which will make such an event likely in the future. Contrary to not only Popper but also philosophers of science such as Roy Bhaskar (1978), Carr views explanation and prediction as different aspects of the same process, and is by no means willing to abandon prediction as a legitimate part of the work of the historian and the social scientist more generally.

As regards the issue of moral judgements in history that concerns Berlin, Carr claims that explanation and the attribution of moral responsibility take place at

different levels and the one does not cancel the other. For example, searching for the social causes of crime does not deprive the penal system of the ability to convict particular criminals for committing particular crimes. The disagreement between Carr and Berlin does not have to do with moral judgement per se, but rather with the proper object of moral judgements in history. Berlin wants to see specific individuals, especially political leaders, condemned for their actions in the past. Carr, on the other hand, argues that moral judgement should primarily be applied to particular social institutions, social policies, and even whole countries. More generally, for Carr, interest in causation in history does not mean seeing the universe as a vast prison. Assuming that the actions of individuals have their causes is the only way of making sense of the world, and history has to do with the systematic search for the causes of historical events. This search is not limited to discovering causes, but also aspires to establish hierarchical relationships among them, since not all causes are equally important within a given historical framework. By arguing that there is no incompatibility between causation and human freedom, Carr puts into question the false distinction between society and the individual.

Although some of the disagreements between Carr and Berlin or Popper can be attributed to misunderstandings, and their different use of terms such as “prediction” and “historicism”, it is still true that they are inspired by very different visions of history. Carr’s search for the deeper causes of events and belief that history has not primarily to do with the study of what happened but with the examination of why it happened, make him a pioneer of the analytical approach to history adopted by the historiographical revolution of the late 1960s (Keene, 2008). On the contrary, Berlin, and to a lesser extent Popper, continued to view with nostalgia the approach of the nineteenth-century school of historiography, which focused on isolated events without paying enough attention to their causes or consequences. Carr’s double move of first including history in the social sciences, and then minimising the differences between the social and the natural sciences, has its own problems, but is still preferable to isolating history from all other branches of learning as Popper and Berlin are inclined to do.

### **History and the Future**

Any discussion of the views that Carr expressed in *What is History?* would be incomplete without examining the bond that he tried to establish between history and the future. Despite his disagreement with influential philosophers such as Berlin and Popper, Carr’s understanding of history as a social science was far from eccentric. Writing in the 1980s, historians such as Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie argued that the attempt to exclude history from the social sciences had ultimately failed

since everyone had recognised the obvious. As Ladurie argued, building a comprehensive human science without taking account of the past is no more possible than studying astrophysics without knowing the ages of stars and galaxies (Lloyd, 1986: xiii). Other aspects of Carr's philosophy of history, such as the role of the historian in the selection and interpretation of historical facts and the presentist concerns and determinations that inevitably infiltrate the historical narrative, might be radical by the standards of the Anglo-Saxon world, but would not have triggered much reaction in Italy or Germany. In Italy, Croce had presented all history as contemporary history before Carr raised similar concerns in England, and in Germany, during the nineteenth century there was a long discussion regarding the relationship between history and other forms of learning, such as philosophy and art (Collingwood, 1946/1993).

The most radical and therefore essentially contested aspect of Carr's contribution to the philosophy of history lies in the relationship he tries to establish between history and the future. Although orthodox historians present history as having to do primarily with the past and alternative voices within the historical profession have frequently raised presentist concerns, Carr is among the very few historians who argue that not only the time dimension of the future should concern the historian, but also that it is crucial for distinguishing between more and less objective accounts of the past. For Carr, belief in some form of historical progress is a necessary alternative to the twin dangers of mysticism and nihilism, which deprive history of its proper meaning. Religious mysticism searches for the meaning of human history outside human history itself, and cynicism assumes that history has no discernible meaning. For Carr, both mysticism and nihilism are incompatible with modern historiography, since only societies which believe in their future cultivate and encourage a systematic interest in the past.

What Carr calls a constructive outlook over the past starts from a hypothesis of historical progress which, however, is very different from the kind of progress taken for granted by nineteenth-century historians. The kind of progress envisaged by Carr is open-ended, non-linear, and is carried out by different groups throughout history. Contrary to nineteenth-century historians like Acton, Carr does not interpret human history in terms of the expansion of liberty but argues that different generations attribute a different content to the notion of progress. The fact that historical progress is subject to reversions and retrogressions does not affect only its development over time but also has important consequences for the historical forms it assumes and the actors that are responsible for it. According to Carr, when a certain social group stops performing a progressive function in history, it is replaced by another. Although nineteenth-century historians saw progress from the point of view of a particular class within advanced industrial

nations, Carr is especially interested in the role of the non-European world and of social groups which were mostly neglected by nineteenth-century historians. The anthropological foundations of Carr's preferred version of progress should be sought in man's use of language and his ability to take advantage of the experience of past generations. Every generation builds on the material and intellectual achievements of the previous ones, and man as a social being has every right to aspire to a future which will be better than the past and the present. Indeed, for Carr, such an open-ended formulation of progress is important not only for writing proper history but also for harmonising divergent social interests and aspirations within a given society. The sacrifices that people frequently make for their society or nation can be persuasively justified only in the name of a better future for them or their children.

Although Carr's arguments in favour of progress in history have their merits, the relationship that he tries to establish between history and the future faces a number of important problems. First, it is not clear whether Carr argues that progress is actually taking place in history or it is just an intellectual device used by the historian to make sense of historical events. For example, Carr mentions that the people who fight to reduce social inequalities or to reform the penal code are working for the realisation of these particular goals and not for the promotion of the abstract ideal of progress. This could lead one to argue that progress is not something arising naturally out of history but something that the philosopher of history superimposes upon history when interpreting it according to his own preferences and presuppositions. Secondly, Carr's sceptical attitude towards religion and religious interpretations of human history do not enable him to recognise that his own belief in progress also has a metaphysical element to it. Although he certainly employs rational arguments in order to justify his belief in progress, these arguments do not exhaust everything that can be said about human history, and Geoffrey Elton (1967) might be right when arguing that the advocates of secular progress are in reality trying to fill the vacuum generated when God was removed from history.

Finally, the link that Carr establishes between the time dimension of the future and the search for historical objectivity is tenuous at best. For example, one wonders if Carr's observation that the objective evaluation of Bismarck's legacy would be easier for the historian of the year 2000 than for the historian of the 1880s, is relevant to the case of Russia and the eventual demise of socialism in that country. Contrary to what he suggested, the development and progression of human history do not necessarily bring us closer to the truth, since even after many centuries have passed alternative evaluations of the same basic historical events are still possible. Independent of these problems, the bond that Carr

establishes between history and the future is important because it enables one to avoid the parochialism of the present, and reminds us that, as E. P. Thompson has argued, “after all, we are not at the end of social evolution ourselves” (Thompson, 1963: 13). Carr’s exploration of the relationship between history and the future brings him close to Marxist historians such as Eric Hobsbawm who have also analysed this relationship<sup>xxxii</sup>.

#### IV) CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this chapter was to analyse the theoretical importance of Carr’s work as biographer, narrative historian, and a philosopher of history. As it should have become obvious by now, the above labels are only indicative to the extent that all aspects of Carr’s contribution to history have a theoretical dimension. For the historically inspired thinkers examined in my thesis, theoretical considerations on history do not belong exclusively to the domain of the philosophy of history, but are inseparable from the work of narrative historians, and even from that of biographers. In the capacities of the political biographer, the historian of the Soviet regime, and the philosopher of history, Carr aligned himself with the twentieth-century intellectual revolution, which emphasised the link between the individual and wider social forces. Marxism is not identical with that revolution, but certainly is one of the main moving forces behind it. In Carr’s historical work, Marxism performs the same function that Christianity—in its Methodist and Anglican versions—performs for Butterfield and Wight respectively. In other words, it provides a source of inspiration and a general ideological background against which particular historical events can be understood and evaluated.

Carr’s Marxism does not have to do primarily with the emphasis on economic factors, but rather with a consistent attempt to investigate the relationship between, on the one hand, social being, and, on the other hand, individual behaviour and consciousness. This attempt creates similarities between him and historians such as Eric Hobsbawm (1998) who have argued that the elucidation of this relationship is one of the most important tasks facing Marxist historians. Especially in his early biographical work Carr described the relationship between social being and consciousness in a rather idealistic manner drawing attention to ideological frameworks and traditions of thought that develop along national lines. This rejection of economic determinism is not in and by itself a problem for classifying Carr as a Marxist.

As Green and Troup note, among the British Marxist historians of his generation only Hobsbawm comes close to accepting economic determinism in his discussion

of the political attitudes of the British labour aristocracy<sup>xxxiii</sup>. Hill's interpretation of the English Civil War attributes a fundamental role not only to social classes but also to religious and political ideas. Likewise, Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* does not portray social class as a primarily economic phenomenon, but rather as a cultural product shaped by religious, political and other ideas and practices. The main reason why Carr should be described as a historian influenced by Marxism rather than as a Marxist historian, has to do with the importance he attributes to the political factor. In his discussion of the Soviet experiment, his point of view is clearly that of the Bolshevik leadership and not that of the proletariat, the farmer, or the intellectual. How successfully Bolshevik leaders from Lenin to Stalin cope with internal and external challenges is the main question that his *History of Soviet Russia* answers. Even Carr's admiration for Lenin is one-sided and based more on *What is to be done?* than on *State and Revolution*. By problematizing the utopian aspect of Marxism Carr came close to offering a realistic understanding of the past, but he did not fully appreciate how Marxism can be used to change society.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **Herbert Butterfield on Theory as History**

My discussion of Butterfield's presentation of historiography as an inherently theoretical enterprise in Chapter 3, would be incomplete from the point of view of the history/theory dialectic without considering his historicist conceptualisation of the phenomenon of international change. This conceptualisation helps one to understand that international theorists should not try to arrive at the timeless truths that Bull (1965) associates with "theory", but they should rather try to assess and evaluate general international trends and developments from their particular standpoint. This standpoint is not given, but it is a combination of one's particular place in space and time and his more general moral, religious, political and other ideas. In the case of Butterfield, this standpoint is a Western European one. Like Carr and Wight, Butterfield was convinced that he was living in an age of rapid and all-encompassing change. Although at times his writings give the impression that he was preaching some kind of mechanical and unreflective return to the past, Butterfield knew very well that no such return was possible. His age was an age of revolution<sup>xxxiv</sup>, and the trauma of World War I rendered impossible any revival of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. After the changes that this war had brought about, the task facing European intellectuals was not to revive the past but rather to study it in order to reinvent the present.

Like Wight, Butterfield uses the political experiences of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in order to criticise the political exaggerations and follies of the Cold War. As a critic of the Cold War, Butterfield dismisses what he describes as ideological diplomacy and argues in favour of an inclusive international order. The Western attempt to isolate communist states is for Butterfield the result of understanding international politics in terms of black and white, and confusing the problem of evil with the existence of an especially wicked nation, social class, or group of nations. The ideologization of the Cold War is not conducive to the promotion of Western interests and it rather serves the cause of communist states, and especially Russia. The differences between Russia and Britain were not the result of their different social models, but of the growing strength of Russia in the post-World War II period. The examination of these developments according to the standards set by the European past, and the conscious defence of Western European interests in a changing world, did not render Butterfield blind to what he understood as the requirements of international order. The reason why his historicism does not lead to chauvinism, or some form of European nationalism, is

that the *raison de systeme* that is usually associated with the English School is never entirely absent from his thinking. However, as I will try to show in this Chapter, what defines his international theory is a commitment to Western European interests and values. For some, the appeal to such interests and values, and the defence of the ideas of the balance of power and non-ideological diplomacy, might be seen as an expression of political conservatism. However, what one should bear in mind, is that Butterfield's ideals were very far from the political realities of the Cold War. It is because of those appalling realities that conservatives and moderates, like Butterfield and Wight, turn into radicals, and radicals, like Carr, submit proposals for international change that are distinguished by their moderation. In a changing world, political and ideological boundaries are also subject to change. Although in this Chapter I am particularly interested in the historicist connotations of Butterfield's international theory, and especially in his historicist conceptualisation of the phenomenon of international change, I start from his work on the theory of literature and diplomatic history, because it is closely related to the pluralistic methodological approach he employed as a scholar of international affairs. Butterfield's interest in the variety of forces and developments that one should take into account when considering a particular problem, does not concern only the past but is also applicable to the present.

## I) THEORY OF LITERATURE AND DIPLOMATIC HISTORY

In *The Historical Novel* (1924/2011), Butterfield argues that the usefulness of the historical novel as a form of history is not irrelevant to certain important disadvantages and limitations of the traditional academic history. Although historians usually focus their attention on particular historical episodes and protagonists, novelists are required to reconstruct an age in its entirety. Their object is not only the great political and military men of the past but also the common people whose life seldom finds its position in the official archives. While historians speak about the past, novelists enable the past to speak for itself and need to immerse themselves in it before they even start writing.

Probably the most important argument that Butterfield advances in favour of literature as a form of history has to do with its ability to depict human beings in both their private and their public roles. Contrary to historians, novelists are concerned with both the private and the public life of their heroes and tend to see an individual human being behind every great name. Even when they discuss political events and decisions, they do not explain them exclusively in terms of context and ideology, but connect them to the unique experiences and feelings of



particular historical actors. For the novelist, every consequential political decision is, in the final analysis, a private act which was far from inevitable. The ability of the novel to depict human beings in their multiple dimensions and to undermine artificial distinctions between the private and the public, explains why “historical novels are full of life and of people, where history is often bloodless and dead” (Butterfield, 1924/2011: 74). It should be noted that Butterfield’s praise for the historical novel is not unqualified, since he admits that his own point of view is that of the historian and not the novelist. He also says that the historical novel is beneficial to the extent that it leads one to the conventional history book, and that it cannot function as a substitute for history in its more scientific form.

Of special interest is Butterfield’s admission that there are particular historical periods which are especially favourable to the method adopted by the novelist, and others that are probably more amenable to conventional historical investigation. As he points out, a king who rules according to his personal whims and wishes provides a better subject to the novelist than a modern prime minister who must respect several political and institutional principles and conventions. The same applies to a bygone age where war was a game determined by personal valour and not a huge and carefully organised enterprise. Despite the fact that these arguments could lead one to the conclusion that the historical novel is unsuited to the circumstances of the modern industrial society governed by large bureaucratic organisations of various types, Butterfield puts forward the interesting hypothesis that, under modern circumstances, human personality continues to be as relevant as ever. The difference is that, although in traditional societies the influence of the individual personality was direct and easily traceable, today its influence manifests itself “in the last resort, and it does not show itself on the surface of life” (Butterfield, 1924/2011: 75).

McIntire (2004) sees in *The Historical Novel* Butterfield’s first serious public statement about life and history. What mainly interests Butterfield, he argues, is not to present the novel and the history book as mutually incompatible alternatives but rather to reconcile history with literature. To the extent that Butterfield emphasises the merits of the historical novel as a form of history, he is doing so in order to make clear his personal allegiance to a particular ideal of human personality. This ideal of personality as a combination of observable and immaterial elements frequently eludes the academic historian, who confines himself to the study of certain aspects of the behaviour of certain prominent individuals.

## The Peace Tactics of Napoleon

The question how academic history can depict whole personalities and address general situations in the past animated the research that Butterfield conducted in order to produce his first book of diplomatic history. The *The Peace Tactics of Napoleon, 1806-1808* is based on the letters and dispatches of heads of states and diplomats, and focuses on the actions and omissions of particular historical actors, who act under the influence of both rational and irrational factors and considerations. The book begins with the abortive Prussian attempt to placate Napoleon after his victory at Jena, and reaches its climax in the alliance forged between the French Emperor and the Russian Czar at Tilsit. Butterfield sees in the Treaty of Tilsit the most impressive achievement of the peace tactics of Napoleon, and is particularly interested in the ways in which this treaty could be interpreted as the product of the interaction of individual personalities in history. In particular, he argues that Napoleon was able to take advantage of the utopian aspects of Czar Alexander I's thinking and personality, in order to rearrange existing alliances according to French interests and to isolate Britain.

It is important to mention that Butterfield was conscious of the fact that he had selected a particular methodological approach to the exposition of historical events, and that his preferred method was not the only one possible. It is for this reason that he makes it clear in the Introduction of the book that he has selected to tell the story with particular reference "to the personalities engaged in the work of diplomacy" (Butterfield, 1929: vii). This choice is dictated by his desire to show how political outcomes can be influenced by contingent factors such as the "characters and the idiosyncrasies of ambassadors and ministers who were far from home" (Butterfield, 1929: vii). What we could describe as structural factors is not completely missing from the book, since Butterfield emphasises the importance of certain predicaments, such as the particular situation after Jena, and the situation before Tilsit. Although these situations are the result of previous human choices and decisions, they cannot be modified at will. For example, Butterfield makes the point that the erroneous Prussian decision to declare war against France had isolated Prussia and created an extremely complicated situation "which prevents her from turning back when she desires" (Butterfield, 1929: 30). Therefore, for Butterfield, the objective situations in which one finds himself is not something external and given; by their very actions individuals create situations which limit their future choices. In a dialectical fashion, the exercise of human freedom ends up circumscribing future freedom.

## Napoleon

Butterfield's interest in the individual personality and the ways in which it interacts with general history is also evident in his biography of Napoleon Bonaparte. Although Coll's view that in *Napoleon* (1939) Butterfield says surprisingly little regarding the philosophical dimensions of Bonaparte's statecraft and is exclusively interested in him as an individual might be exaggerated, it is still the case that Butterfield shows a remarkable sensitivity towards what defines the object of his study as a unique human being. According to Butterfield, his belief in family, strong work ethic, and interest in ideas, differentiated Bonaparte from many other statesmen and to a certain extent accounted for his political achievements.

In the domestic scene, Napoleon managed to provide solutions to long-standing problems and to address particular issues arising out of the French Revolution. His promotion of a successful educational reform, unification of local legal systems, and rehabilitation of the relationships between the church and state, showed Bonaparte as a shrewd statesman with an acute understanding of the needs of his people. What is more, during his first years in power, his foreign policy seemed to serve the traditional goals of the French state and to move within established diplomatic channels avoiding the danger of hubris. According to Butterfield, Napoleon's imperialism was not something like the execution of carefully prepared plan, but a "curiously supple thing, taking its direction from the accidents of the time, conforming to the mobility of events" (Butterfield, 1939: 81). Indeed, it could be claimed that Butterfield's admiration for Bonaparte makes him to attribute his achievements to what defined him as an individual, and his excesses and failures to the logic and dynamic of the historical situation.

Butterfield's argument that for a time Napoleon conducted his foreign policy according to the diplomatic traditions of the French monarchy is important, and as we shall see, it is not irrelevant to his understanding of the Bolshevik regime in Russia as a more or less conventional and predictable form of state. In any event, Butterfield's early investigation into the relationship between literature and history, consequent attempt to write diplomatic history as literature, and interest in biography, show a commitment to the idea of personality and its decisive impact on international history. This impact, however, cannot be separated from the more general historical circumstances, and is not exactly the same in all historical periods. Although Butterfield is clearly fascinated by the ideal of human personality, his belief, for example, that Napoleonic imperialism arose gradually out of the logic of the situation shows that, in the final analysis, even the more charismatic personality cannot be examined independent of its political environment.

## II) FROM EUROPEAN HISTORY TO THE DILEMMAS OF THE COLD WAR

Butterfield's knowledge of modern European diplomatic history provided him with a number of criteria and ideas which could be used in order to evaluate the age in which he was living. Napoleon Bonaparte's successes were explained by Butterfield by his adherence to an older diplomatic tradition, which characterised the eighteenth century and was only momentarily disrupted by the French Revolution. During his early years in power, Napoleon stayed faithful to this tradition, employing war only for limited ends, and when it was absolutely necessary. His downfall was the result of his very success, and his intoxication by power, which made him disregard diplomacy, and see in war not so much a means to an end but an end in itself. Napoleon's fate could be easily explained by what Butterfield (1951b) describes as a scientific approach to international relations. Such an approach searches for laws or regularities in the affairs of men and states, beginning from general axioms, such as that power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. The opposite approach consistently criticised by Butterfield is the moralistic one, which assumes that certain actors are inherently good, and therefore they can be trusted not to abuse their excessive power under any circumstances. What Butterfield calls "moralism" is not very different from what Carr calls "utopianism" and in both cases a supposedly absolute and universal morality is used as a justification for the promotion of very particular political goals; goals that do not take account of the interest of others.

Butterfield's engagement with diplomatic history provided a good starting point for developing a form of international theory that would be indebted to the past and would try to defend the interests of Europe in a changing world. Building on the methodological insights that Butterfield had gained from his study of the past, this theory would try to relate subjective factors to objective ones, and help his contemporaries to make the best out of a bad situation which had to do with the declining status of Europe in the world. As we previously saw, Butterfield's engagement with international affairs can be traced back to 1948 and a number of important references to international problems can be found in *Christianity and History* which was published in 1949. To the extent that the tensions between East and West were becoming a permanent feature of world politics, and the West tended to examine these problems in moralistic rather than scientific terms, Butterfield decided that it might be useful to focus his attention on contemporary international problems in order to seek a way out of the sterile confrontations of the Cold War. For Butterfield, as for Wight and Carr, Europe should not be part of

the problem but rather part of the solution. In other words, after realising the deeper causes of the Cold War, the Europeans should try to see how they could play a constructive role in international affairs by retaining their own political autonomy and cultural values.

### **The Tragic Element in Modern International Conflict**

According to Butterfield (1951a), the wars and revolutions that determined the physiognomy of the twentieth century are not to be attributed to the criminality of a special nation or social class. The rise of dictatorships, fierce wars among peoples, and the transformation of science from a benevolent force to a servant of war had already been envisaged by those nineteenth-century thinkers who did not take for granted the optimism of their age. The Cold War could be understood as the result of a terrible human predicament, as a form of conflict which is “inherent in the dialectic of events” (Butterfield, 1951a: 14). For Butterfield, the impasse in which political leaders found themselves in both the East and the West was not something unprecedented in human history. Most human conflicts that have taken place in the course of history are not the outcome of deliberate wickedness, but rather of uncertainty and fear that are common to all sides. Although for those immersed in a particular struggle it is difficult to acknowledge their own responsibilities and abdicate their self-righteousness, the mission of the scholar is to teach people to feel “a little more sorry for both parties than they knew how to be for one another” (Butterfield, 1951a: 17).

Independent of the differences in political culture and ideology, what triggered the conflict between the West and Communism was what Butterfield described as a situation of Hobbesian fear. Although both the East and the West were primarily concerned with their own security and did not intend to do any special harm to the other party, they had no way of knowing that the other side reciprocated their benevolent feelings, and shared their apprehensions. Indeed, within the climate of fear and insecurity that was the product of the historical situation itself, one could easily blame the other for the very existence of the predicament common to both.

According to Ken Booth and Nicholas J. Wheeler (2008), Butterfield’s discussion of the Hobbesian fear in international affairs makes him the first British scholar to contribute to the development of the notion of the security dilemma. This dilemma should be understood as an existential condition of uncertainty in international politics. It is a result of the fact that, by striving for his own security, one can make other parties feel insecure and threatened. Although both the dilemma and the ways to overcome it are only briefly delineated in the lecture “The Tragic Element in Modern International Conflict” which Butterfield originally delivered at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, and later included in a revised form in *History*

and Human Relations, they are analytically discussed in *Christianity, Diplomacy and War* and *International Conflict in the Twentieth Century*.

### **Christianity, Diplomacy and War**

*Christianity, Diplomacy and War* (1953) is important for many reasons. To begin with, it is Butterfield's first book explicitly devoted to international affairs and probably contains his fullest statement regarding the wisdom of the statesmen of the past, and the ways in which it could be utilised in order to address the challenges of the present. The book was discussed extensively in the United States, and not all comments were positive. As McIntire (2004) mentions, some of the views expressed in the book placed Butterfield in the left/liberal part of the political spectrum and made him a dissenter during his times. Butterfield's advocacy for a more inclusive international order triggered the reaction of *Life* magazine, which detected in his support for non-ideological diplomacy an element of immorality, and questioned whether Soviet Russia could be a part of a new international order. However, Butterfield's views were not dictated by any special sympathy for Russia, but rather by an understanding of the requirements of international order. The way in which the Cold War was waged, and perhaps its very existence, showed that his contemporaries had forgotten the lessons of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and tended to analyse the international scene in terms of black and white.

Butterfield's account of the Cold War sees in it the continuation of a disastrous period inaugurated by World War I in 1914. Contrary to previous military conflicts, World War I was fought as a war to end all wars, and in theory put organised force at the service of morality. In practice, however, what it did was to make war the master of politics, and deprive diplomacy of its special mission in a world populated by righteous nations and their enemies. What Butterfield argues in the book is that the Central Powers might be more responsible for the outbreak of hostilities in the first place, but the Allies should be blamed for the transformation of a military conflict into a war for righteousness, which by its very nature is not easily susceptible to diplomatic compromise.

What is more, Butterfield's typology of different forms of state and his assessment of the relationship between democracy and violence is not particularly favourable to the Allied cause. His argument is that the monarchies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were not especially violent, since their rulers were the bearers of a common Christian heritage, and in some cases they even belonged to the same family. Democracies, on the other hand, usually need to cultivate the fanaticism of the masses in order to support the war effort, and end up acting as the prisoners of their own rhetoric. Having aroused the passions of the

population and declared war against the wicked, democratic leaders find it increasingly difficult to accept a negotiated end to a conflict.

This unfortunate side of democratic politics is even more pronounced in new democracies, which are always tempted to succumb to nationalism in order to provide solution to various social problems. According to Butterfield, aggressiveness and activism in foreign policy reach their peak in revolutionary states, which behave in a similar way independent of the particular ideology they espouse. Even religious revolutionaries tend to disregard the existing rules of the diplomatic game and treat other political leaders with extreme suspicion. Butterfield contends that a revolution cannot be identified with the atrocities it commits in the domestic front or with the problems it creates in international relations, and admits that there might be circumstances under which it is unavoidable. However, he is very sceptical towards revolutionary states and emphasises the dangers that democracies have to take into account when designing their policy.

For Butterfield, the main problem with World War I is not so much that it took place and interrupted a relatively long period of European peace, but that it was fought to the bitter end and resulted in the collapse of the European international order itself. Britain, by its unwillingness to permit the imperial aggrandisement of Germany, triggered a process which ultimately led to the dissolution of its own empire. According to Butterfield, the way the war was conducted becomes even more inadmissible if we take into account the fact that the belligerents were not yet ideological opponents, and they belonged to the same family of nations. Their competition for colonies or other advantages should never have taken the character of a war of annihilation, which ultimately destroyed international order and led to World War II and the Cold War.

Drawing on the diplomatic and political traditions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Butterfield presents a compelling vision of an international order based on the respect for the existence of all participants and the rights of small states. According to him, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, war was fought only for limited ends and was the servant of diplomacy. Diplomacy had developed its own moral code, which was based on the general pursuance of truth and peace. Since lies are sooner or later discovered, diplomats had acquired a habit for telling the truth, and they also co-operated harmoniously with their colleagues from other countries for the preservation of peace. The very occurrence and continuation of a war was a challenge to their professional ethos, since it tended to strengthen the position of military men at their own expense. Far from interpreting the world in terms of black and white, the diplomats of the past were

convinced that they were dealing with rivals, and that the mission of war was to decide the possession of certain disputed territories. The limited role assigned to war during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries made its appearance less likely, since even the gains expected from it were not too big.

Butterfield recognises the fact that the experience of the past cannot be mechanically applied to the present, and that no historical period can be considered to be inherently superior to others. However, he suggests that the classical European understanding of international order and avoidance of ideological diplomacy, can teach the superpowers of his own period a number of things. The United States and the Soviet Union should not see each other as enemies but rather as rivals, and they should also respect the autonomy of small states. The kind of ideological diplomacy employed by both superpowers during the Cold War threatened to revive the European Wars of Religion in an age when technology had made war far more destructive than it was in the past.

As we shall see later, Butterfield's tendency to search for similarities between different historical periods and describe the Cold War as an aberration from certain established diplomatic norms of the past, was not without its problems. However, he definitely provided a historically grounded form of theory, which aimed to offer tangible and practical solutions to current political problems. In order to limit the role of war in history, Butterfield suggests, one does not need to engage in abstract theorising, but rather to study the most peaceful periods in the history of mankind and derive ideals and practical recommendations from there. Of special interest is Butterfield's belief that the problems raised by the existence of a powerful Soviet Russia should be dissociated from those related to the spread of egalitarian ideas regarding the desirability of a classless society. Although egalitarian ideas can be accepted to the extent that they inform Christianity as well, the problems raised for Europe by the rise of Russian power are not directly related to the particular ideology it espouses. Even if Soviet Russia were a traditional Christian nation, Butterfield concludes, Britain could still not easily accept the increase of its influence in the world. By arguing that egalitarian ideas are not a product of communism but inform Christianity as well, Butterfield provides further grounds for not exaggerating the differences between Soviet Russia and the West.

### **International Conflict in the Twentieth Century**

The necessity of learning from the past in order to handle the dilemmas of the Cold War is also emphasised by Butterfield in *International Conflict in the Twentieth Century: A Christian View* (1960). The aim of a scientific approach in history and international politics should be to establish correlations between events in order to describe the dangers existing for the international order. Knowledge of the past



does not have to do so much with hard information regarding wars and revolutions, but it has rather to do with the ways in which scholars and politicians absorb and utilise this information in order to confront the challenges of their own period. The wisdom to which the study of the past gives birth might survive after one has forgotten all the particular information regarding the events of the past. To deny that there are certain regularities in history is not tantamount to a defence of human freedom, but it rather leads to a distorted understanding of the relationship between freedom and necessity. Although the freedom of individual and collective actors is bigger than we ordinarily assume, it can only be appreciated when the importance of conditioning factors and circumstances is also acknowledged. As we have seen, this investigation of the relationship between freedom and necessity is one of the main themes of Butterfield's work as a dialectically inspired historian and international theorist.

According to Butterfield, the political and diplomatic elites of the twentieth century have lost much of their ability to analyse the past in order to guide their countries in a turbulent world. Although they process a large amount of information, they are unable to grasp the fundamental historical tendencies which give a certain degree of predictability to human action. For Butterfield, in falsely assuming the uniqueness of historical events, political men forget what social scientists, such as sociologists and economists, have to teach. Although social scientists do not completely deny human freedom, they search for regularities and predictability in their special fields of inquiry. For Butterfield, historical laws do not have the meaning of inexorable developments to which one must adapt, but they simply point to tendencies and regularities that should be taken into consideration by every prudent actor. In passages like this, Butterfield shows how closely related history is to sociology and the other social sciences which are not interested in the unique but what is general in the unique.

For example, as Butterfield goes on to explain, in order to explain the outbreak of World War I, one should start from long-term developments and contextual factors, which are related to the political constitution of Germany and the political tensions then existing in Europe. On the other hand, however, Butterfield makes the point that the war could have been averted, if certain important individuals had made different decisions, and if larger groups of people had developed different political attitudes. Therefore, for Butterfield, the existence of influential processes and tendencies does not mean that human beings do not have choice and freedom of action regarding the actual course of historical events.

With regard to the Cold War, Butterfield argues that the lessons of the past show the necessary relationship between the balance of power and the integrity of small

states, and that that exists between domestic and international developments. Historically, the balance of power enabled small nations to retain their autonomous existence and their independence from big ones, without being reduced to the status of satellite states. What is more, for Butterfield, history shows that political events taking place within countries can influence the overall distribution of power at the level of the international system. This applies particularly to the revolutions that largely determined the physiognomy of the twentieth century. Probably the most important argument Butterfield puts forward is that, unless confined to limited objectives, war generally tends to create greater problems than those it solves. Neglecting this general truth made the Allies to reduce Germany to military impotence, and in this way to made possible the rise of Russia. The military annihilation of Germany did nothing to stop the emergence of Soviet Russia as a new threat to the integrity and independence of European states after the end of World War II. As we shall see next, this analysis of the post-World War II international predicament is fully compatible with Butterfield's conceptualisation of the idea of the balance of power and discussion of how France historically replaced Spain as a threat to the autonomy of other European states.

It is important to note that Butterfield's search for connections and similarities between historical events does not only enable him to offer an interesting account of the problems facing the West during the Cold War, but it also puts him into a position to develop certain hypotheses regarding the future. Although he did not believe that the end of the Cold War was to take place anytime soon, he clearly saw that a victory of the United States was destined to give rise to new dilemmas and confrontations. As he notes with remarkable prescience, when a single country achieves a position of predominance, it develops a tendency to act without thinking of others and it imagines that it is more virtuous than it actually is. Because of the combined influence of military might and perceived moral superiority, a decisive victory of the U.S. in the Cold War was likely to "throw to the top the kind of man who will exploit the opportunity for aggression" (Butterfield, 1960: 87). This belief that unchecked American power would generate new problems shows that the kind of wisdom which Butterfield sought from the study of history was not entirely illusory.

Butterfield's analysis of the hot and cold wars of the twentieth century and search for alternatives in the European past have triggered various responses. McIntire (2004) is critical of Butterfield's pro-German attitude and later accommodating stance towards the Soviet Union. For McIntire, Butterfield's historical observations regarding the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and attempt to present the Soviet Union as a potential member of a new inclusive international order are politically motivated. His most penetrating criticism is that

Butterfield inserts his own personal views into the historical record, and that the maxims which he attributes to the eighteenth-century politicians and diplomats can nowhere be found in the systematic and complete form in which he presents them. Tim Dunne (1998) echoes Wight's refusal to draw normative conclusions from eighteenth-century politics, and argues that the loyalty of political leaders to the international system during that period should not be taken for granted. According to Dunne, the resort to diplomacy and negotiation is not necessarily an indication of the existence of a common identity among the members of a system, and the relatively frequent military conflicts make the eighteenth century something less than an ideal model for contemporary international relations. Without having Butterfield in mind, Otto Pflanze (2004) notes that many eighteenth-century philosophers were critical of the ways in which international politics was conducted in their age, since war was considered to be a legitimate instrument of policy and it was far from uncommon. The balance of power as the operating principle of the international system between 1714 and 1792 did not lead to a peaceful world and actually generated many tensions "as rulers calculated, ministers plotted, and generals planned" (Pflanze, 2004: 152). Even if the system conferred certain advantages to the great powers, these were not enough to protect small states, such as Poland.

These criticisms do not mean that Butterfield's belief that one could learn certain things from the past was unfounded, but they rather mean that his understanding of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was more ideologically coloured than he would like to admit. In any case, as a student of contemporary international affairs Butterfield showed how the European past could be used in order to criticise and transform the global present. The ideas of non-ideological diplomacy and the balance of power that inspire his critique of the Western attitude in international affairs may have a conservative dimension, but they acquire a completely different meaning within the historical context of the Cold War. It is no accident that, as we shall see in Chapter 8, Carr made similar political recommendations. Even Wight, despite the fact that he was less inclined than Butterfield to idealise the European past, saw that something was fundamentally wrong with the development of international politics after World War II, and that the ideas of non-ideological diplomacy and the balance of power had not lost their value. The osmosis between Wight and Butterfield was further facilitated by their common participation in the British Committee.

### III) BUTTERFIELD AND THE BRITISH COMMITTEE ON THE THEORY OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

Butterfield's engagement with the British Committee on the Theory of International Politics lasted between 1958 and 1968. Along with Wight, they tried to create an equivalent to the American Committee on the Theory of International Relations which was based in New York and was chaired by Hans Morgenthau and Reinhold Niebuhr. As McIntire (2004) notes, the Rockefeller Foundation, which was already funding the American Committee, originally contacted Butterfield in 1954 impressed by the ideas expressed in *Christianity, Diplomacy and War*. Although Butterfield's views were not identical to those of Niebuhr or Morgenthau, his non-ideological account of the Cold War and appeal to religion and history found an exceptionally warm reception in the United States.

After a short visit there in 1956 and a second invitation by the Rockefeller Foundation, Butterfield finally decided to become the chairman of the British Committee and along with Wight, whom he considered indispensable, to select the remaining members. The emphasis on historians and philosophers and the relative absence of IR specialists, who, in any case, did not abound at the time, was an indication of the kind of approach that Butterfield developed during his time at the Committee. Desmond Williams was a Professor of Modern History at University College Dublin. Michael Howard was a military historian at London. Donald MacKinnon was a philosopher and a theologian, and Geoffrey Hudson was a fellow at Oxford. Adam Watson and William Armstrong represented the world of policy and were drawn from the British Foreign Office and the Treasury respectively. Apart from Wight, who was destined to succeed Butterfield as chair of the Committee in 1962, Hedley Bull was the only representative of academic International Relations (IR).

Despite the careful selection of collaborators, Butterfield's anti-theoretical predisposition made him feel dissatisfied with the Committee only a few years after its creation. According to Michael Bentley (2011), by the spring of 1961, Butterfield had already started feeling annoyed by the reluctance of some participants to address international dilemmas in strictly historical terms and willingness to explore the possibility of a more theoretical approach to them. The essays included in *Diplomatic Investigations* (1966) show what kind of theoretical-historical approach Butterfield had in mind for the Committee, and illustrate his historicist approach to international theory.

## The Balance of Power

According to Dunne, Butterfield's account of the maturation of the theory of the balance of power, takes into account the importance of various scientific, economic, and political developments. The first have to do with the emergence of the Newtonian system of astronomy. The second are related to the notion of the balance of trade, and the latter have to do with the inclusion of the theory of equipoise in the British constitution. Butterfield does not treat the balance of power as an ahistorical principle, but notes that its emergence is inextricably linked to a set of developments peculiar to modern Europe. The balance of power is treated by Butterfield as an essential aspect of the European states-system; an aspect which was wrongly abandoned by idealistic reformers after World War I.

For Butterfield (1966a), the principle is both internal and external to the European states-system. It is internal in the sense that it regulated the system for a large period of its history, and cannot be properly understood outside the general framework of modern European history. However, it is also external to the system, in the sense that, even during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was never completely realised. The cool calculation of state interests, Butterfield notes, had always to overcome religious or other prejudices and the multiple ties that existed among European elites and influenced their actions. The historical experience that most of all enabled the emergence of the theory of the balance of power was the imperialist policy pursued by the French during the reign of Louis XIV. Since France replaced Spain as a threat to the independence of Europe, it was realised that the aggressive policy pursued by Spain during the previous century was not the result of any particular wickedness, but of structural pressures equally applicable to Spain in one age and to France in another.

In particular, as Butterfield notes, it was the French critic Fenelon who first developed what might be called a positive theory of the balance of power. According to Fenelon, the benign behaviour of a nation in the past cannot provide a guarantee for its actions in the future. Rising to a position of predominance, tempts one to embark on a career of conquest and disregard existing moral and legal standards. Even if a particular ruler shows moderation, his successor is extremely unlikely to miss the opportunity to achieve the aggrandizement of his country at the expense of others.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Butterfield points out, the theory of the balance of power transformed the way in which state objectives were conceptualised, and led to the development of a relatively benign understanding of the national interest. Egotism and ambition were part of international politics without, however, being identical with it. Every enlightened ruler or foreign

minister displayed an interest in the overall distribution of power in Europe and not only in the position of his nation. The alliances formed against potential aggressors made the costs of an imperialist policy higher and its chances of success thinner. The notion of the balance of power is for Butterfield indistinguishable from the idea of the *raison de systeme*: it only by covering the international system in its entirety that this notion can provide a long-term and reliable solution to international problems.

According to Butterfield, the eighteenth century witnessed the fullest application of the principle of the balance of power, since no country enjoyed an undisputed military predominance at the time. What is more, the type of international order prevalent in the eighteenth century was ideologically and religiously pluralistic, since it was based on the peaceful co-existence of Catholics and Protestants. Likewise, monarchies and republics met on equal terms, and did not see any reason to transform constitutional differences into an international problem. The type of order established in the eighteenth century was especially favourable to small states, which were able to retain their political independence and unique cultural identity. Under the influence of the theory of the balance of power, eighteenth-century statesmen were able to relinquish the older ideal of the Roman Empire and to accept the diversity of Europe in both cultural and political terms.

Although Butterfield puts forward the argument that the eighteenth century treated the balance of power as a highly regarded theory of international relations with important practical consequences, he also recognises certain ambiguities and difficulties that characterised its workings. First, there was the question of the exact relationship between the balance of power as an overarching principle and the balance of power as an expression of local dynamics. The existence of many local systems of balance of power did not necessarily involve a more general European balance, and that became sadly evident in the case of the partition of Poland. Secondly, there was the question of who was protecting the balance and who not. Although some writers saw in England the guardian of the European balance of power, the French expressed a different point of view and accused England of paying lip service to the principle of the balance of power in Europe while openly violating it in the rest of the world. Maybe the most important reservation that Butterfield expresses with regard to the principle of the balance of power has to do with its implicit support for the status quo. Although in principle the balance of power expresses the common interest, in practice it can end up reflecting and legitimating the existing distribution of power. The ideological function of the principle of the balance of power has to do with the fact that statesmen frequently “tend to identify the balance of power with the existing map

of European forces, disliking any change that would entail a redistribution of current alliance-arrangements” (Butterfield, 1966a: 146).

Butterfield’s reasons for providing a detailed historical account of the emergence of the principle of the balance of power and discussing some of the problems related to its workings are made evident in the last pages of the essay. The theory and practice associated with the idea of the balance of power, he suggests, show that twentieth-century thinkers were wrong in assuming that the European past was marked by a brute form of anarchy, and was tantamount to a state of nature. International order is by no means incompatible with the existence of sovereign states that pursue their own interests within established limits. Instead of investing their hopes in a radical break with the past and a new beginning in international relations, idealistic reformers could have achieved more by trying to improve the tradition of the balance of power and adapt it to the requirements of their own age.

At the same time, within the context of the Cold War, any appeal to the notion of the balance of power meant that force could not be effectively met without force, and that small and medium states should examine seriously all the diplomatic choices available to them without mechanically aligning themselves with this or that superpower. By praising the pluralistic character of the eighteenth-century international order based on the balance of power, Butterfield renews his call for a non-ideological diplomacy as an alternative to the ideological crusades pursued by both superpowers during the Cold War. This emphasis on diplomacy means that the kind of alliances required by the balance of power is far from self-evident, and they change according to the international situation itself.

### **The New Diplomacy and Historical Diplomacy**

Butterfield’s (1966b) choice to discuss diplomacy after examining the notion of the balance of power is far from accidental. Although as we saw above he does not completely reject the resort to force, diplomacy is the moving force behind the balance of power in the way that he describes it. Despite the fact that various adjustments of diplomatic practice to new conditions might be both desirable and unavoidable, Butterfield emphasises that diplomacy in its traditional non-ideological form still has a valuable role to play. Like Carr, Butterfield sees Soviet Russia as a state in a world of states, and by drawing attention to the historical precedent of Napoleon and the Napoleonic Empire he suggests that no fundamental change of the way in which diplomacy is conducted is in sight. The rise to power of new nations and social classes does not make history irrelevant, since they inevitably face dilemmas similar to those of their predecessors.

The most important historical change he mentions—change influencing equally diplomacy and the workings of the balance of power—has to do with the increasing importance of the moral factor in international relations. The existence of several uncommitted nations during the Cold War means that there is an ongoing struggle for ideological influence that exceeds everything that has taken place in the past. Nuclear weapons, despite their annihilating potential, make an actual military conflict unlikely and encourage one to pay more attention to diplomacy and persuasion in international relations. All these factors, Butterfield concludes, make necessary a significant change in diplomatic practice without, however, rendering the past irrelevant in any conceivable sense.

The new diplomacy that Butterfield recommends means adapting traditional diplomacy to new realities and not inventing a radically new form of diplomatic practice. Although in political terms he wants to increase the effectiveness of Western diplomacy, he also warns against treating socialist countries as pariahs excluded from the international order. To the extent that diplomacy serves the positive goal of peace and is not a simple preparation for war, it must undermine and not consolidate the simplistic distinction between civilisation and barbarism in international affairs. In both his discussion of the balance of power and the crisis of diplomacy Butterfield does not try to artificially resuscitate the past but rather to see how past experiences could be utilised in the present. For Butterfield, the aim of international theory is not to explain a static world but to promote changes and reforms sanctioned by the past. What ultimately separated him from the more theoretically inspired members of the Committee—and especially from Bull—was the emphasis on the pragmatic character of knowledge. Butterfield's theoretical interventions do not aim so much to explain things, but rather to take advantage of the experience of the past in order to change the present. Although indebted to the past, his thought is best suited to the present and the needs of his contemporaries.

#### **IV) MORALITY AND INTERNATIONAL ORDER**

Butterfield's interest in change as an essential parameter of the historical process is clearly expressed in his Martin Wight Memorial Lecture *Raison d'Etat: The Relations between Morality and Government* (1975) and the essay "Morality and International Order" (1972). The first does not contain any definite conclusions regarding the relationship between the form of morality associated with the pursuance of the national interest and alternative moral imperatives. What Butterfield wants to show is how the idea of the reason of state emerged in the first place, and what kind of obstacles and particularistic loyalties it had to overcome within particular societies. Although he nowhere glorifies the state or



the accumulation of power for its own sake, Butterfield does not consider any secular alternatives to nationalism or debate the claims of religious morality. Indeed, his suggestion that people do not know how to be sorry enough for statesmen who often have to make difficult decisions, seems to involve the acceptance of the point of view which is frequently associated with the idea of the reason of state without paying enough attention to alternative moral imperatives.

On the other hand, the views expressed in “Morality and International Order” are interesting for various reasons, and maybe have not received adequate attention by Butterfield’s interpreters and biographers. In this essay, Butterfield places morality within history and the actual world of international relations, and shows how different conceptions of international order and the role of the great powers informed the development of the European states-system during its tumultuous development. Contrary to his frequent depiction of the balance of power as a homogeneous and coherent doctrine, Butterfield shows how the relatively egalitarian world of the eighteenth century was replaced in the nineteenth century by a hierarchical international order, in which great powers enjoyed both special privileges and special responsibilities. According to Butterfield, although everybody did not willingly accept the leadership of the great powers, their pronounced role in the international system became evident at the Congress of Vienna in 1814-15, when they sought solutions to problems such as piracy and the African slave trade. Considering the contemporary relevance of these problems, he concludes that the West is guided by a relative egalitarian understanding of the international order, whereas the East tends to adopt a hierarchical conception and deny the autonomy of small states. Butterfield’s unflinching support for an inclusive international order does not therefore make him to relinquish morality and to negate the possibility of making moral distinctions among the participants in this order.

## V) CONCLUSIONS

Butterfield’s historicist conceptualisation of the phenomenon of international change assumes the form of a comparison between the policies adopted by European statesmen during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and those followed by the superpowers during the Cold War. Behind his critique of ideological diplomacy and call for the respect of autonomy of small states lies an interest in the future of Western Europe. Although during the 1950s he saw the expansion of Soviet influence in the world as the main threat facing Britain and other European states, his attitude was by no means uncritical towards the United States. Indeed, as we saw, he believed that some kind of American victory in the Cold War was likely to create new problems for Europe and the world at large.

Butterfield's ability to predict future developments is closely related to the way in which he followed the dictates of what he called a scientific approach to foreign affairs. Such an approach would draw its material from history and would argue that similar international conditions are likely to produce similar forms of behaviour independent of the character of the actors involved. Even in crucial moments, such as during World War II, Butterfield refused to limit his attention to the present and the handling of current difficulties, but he always looked ahead. The belief that neither Germany nor Russia should be permitted to acquire excessive strength at the expense of the other stayed with him all his life and at times made him a severe critic of British diplomacy. The fact that diplomats were not able to follow Butterfield's long-term vision is not surprising and shows how difficult it is for an intellectual to have a direct impact on the policies of his country.

Although Butterfield managed to make some useful recommendations regarding the international politics of his time, and to show how catastrophes such as World War I could probably have been avoided, his conceptualisation of international change is not devoid of problems. Butterfield offered a rather idyllic presentation of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and emphasised certain elements, while flagrantly ignoring others. For example, presenting the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars of 1792-1815 as a mere parenthesis in an era of non-ideological diplomacy is something with which not everybody would agree. What is more, the virtues of the balance of power system, which he did not hesitate to recommend to his contemporaries, have been endlessly debated for centuries and no conclusive answer seems to be possible. Although at certain times it has permitted international stability and contributed to the absence of major international conflicts, it has also created various local conflicts and been held responsible for the outbreak of World War I, which so much troubled Butterfield himself. In brief, to the extent that he was trying to respond to the dilemmas of his age, Butterfield did so with remarkable success. To the extent, however, that he did not see non-ideological diplomacy and the balance of power as answers to a particular problem but as expressions of a timeless wisdom of statecraft, his historicism was not self-critical and deep enough. While not disagreeing with Butterfield's practical recommendations, Wight and Carr adopted a more self-reflective and critical attitude when discussing the problem of international change. Their defence of European interests in a changing world did not make them see certain periods of international history as normal and some others as simple aberrations.

## Chapter 7

### **Martin Wight on Theory as History**

Both supporters and critics of Martin Wight's approach to International Relations (IR) have drawn attention to his supposed preoccupation with historical continuity at the expense of historical change. For Hedley Bull (1977; 1978), Wight shares with realist writers the pessimism regarding the prospects of creating a more harmonious and just international order. As a result of the tendency to interpret international politics according to set patterns, Wight is sceptical of the belief that some particular social or technological innovation, such as the advent of economic globalisation or the spread of nuclear weapons, is going to transform radically the character of the international system. From a different point of view, Roy Jones (1981) criticises what he sees as the static dimension in Wight's thinking and the virtual substitution of history for meta-history. In the world described by Wight, Jones claims, there is a lot of activity but nothing really happens, since international actors and institutions remain basically unchanged during the centuries. However, as I shall try to show here, this reading of Wight is far from neutral.

As Wilson (2003) points out, Bull's interpretation of past thinkers is inextricably linked to the conservative presuppositions of his own methodological approach. What animates Bull's study of international affairs is the belief that the international system consists of certain fundamental institutions, such as war, alliances, and the balance of power, and that the task of the international theorist is to capture the essence of these institutions. Even sympathetic readers of Bull's work, such as Andrew Hurrell (2002), do not deny that he is primarily concerned with historical continuity, but rather seek to justify his views and general pessimism regarding the future prospects of international society. Although Bull clearly has the right to his own personal beliefs, some of these beliefs have been unfairly projected on Wight, who is an underexplored source for conceptualising the phenomenon of change in international relations.

Like Butterfield and Carr, Wight develops a historicist approach to the phenomenon of international change and emphasises the importance of European traditions and interests. As a historian of the British Empire, Wight describes a polity in flux and describes both colonialism and decolonisation from a British point of view. For Wight (1959), British imperialism triggers a debate between absolute

and historically conditioned morality, and his own sympathetic presentation of British activities in Africa places him among the supporters of a historically determined form of international morality. In *Power Politics*, Wight uses the European diplomatic traditions of the nineteenth century in order to criticise the degeneration of key institutions of international society under the influence of the Cold War. His understanding of the balance of power is clearly influenced by the European legal and moral traditions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and aims to protect the autonomy of European states. The approach adopted in *Systems of States* is less comparative and more evolutionary than it is usually assumed to be. As I will argue, Wight's Westphalian assumptions make him identify states-systems with systems composed of independent political entities, and to offer a somewhat biased reading of classical Greece. Comparing Wight's work to that of Watson enables one to see how an alternative approach to the same set of problems is possible.

Finally, in his investigation of Western values in international relations Wight adopts a Western point of view when evaluating the problems raised by the concepts of international society and international morality. Although this point of view is fully compatible with his historicism, it creates methodological and substantive problems that will be taken into account in the relevant section. The views of Mackinnon are mentioned here because they show that defining Western values is not easy. The adoption of a European point of view when assessing international change does not mean that Wight was uncritical of certain aspects of the European past, or that he believed that its lessons could be directly applied to the present. For him, the European experience of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries provides more an intellectual horizon and less a model with easy application to the present. Nevertheless, Wight's tendency to abstract certain political institutions from the course of world history in *Systems of States*, and to abstract certain ideas from a complex and rather contradictory tradition in "Westerns Values in International Relations", show that his historicism is self-reflective but not critical enough.

## I) WIGHT AND THE BRITISH EMPIRE

Wight's engagement with colonial issues lasted between 1941 and 1946 and represents the most "technical" or "academic" aspect of his work. Contrary to what applies to his critique of Toynbee, where Wight assumes the mantle of the Christian intellectual, in his discussion of colonial issues Wight appears as a disinterested observer who tries primarily to understand and/or explain and not so much to criticize. However, what I would like to show in this section is that Wight's historical work on the British Empire is the best place to start in order to

understand his historicist conceptualization of international change. Far from being politically disinterested or objective, Wight approaches his subject from a particular point of view which is no other than that of the colonial powers, like Britain. This is not to say that most of his observations are not historically accurate or that he does not help as understand the complex and multi-layered nature of the British Empire. On the contrary, by showing the degree of autonomy that some of the colonies enjoyed for a period of time, Wight offers grounds for relativizing the distinction between independence, hegemony, and empire that has been also undermined by later English School thinkers such as Adam Watson (1992/2009; 2007).

Wight's books *The Development of the Legislative Council 1606-1945*, *The Gold Coast Legislative Council*, and *British Colonial Constitutions*, aim to analyse the colonial experiment in all its diversity and particularity and to offer a dynamic view of the British Empire. Despite his rhetorical appeal to a supposed continuity in the political development of the colonies, Wight's meticulous historical investigation proves beyond doubt that the degree of self-government enjoyed by the colonies was far from given and that it was determined by the interaction of both socio-political and military factors. The situation in the colonies should be examined in conjunction with the wider needs of British foreign policy and a number of political developments which influence the world at large.

Although my discussion of large-scale political change in the colonies draws primarily from Wight's *The Development of the Legislative Council 1606-1945*, his other works on the subject will also be mentioned and the gradual modification of his political outlook will be made evident by an analysis of the radical views expressed in *Attitude to Africa* (1951). These views do not signal a departure from but rather a modification of his overall historicist outlook on international change which emphasises the aspirations of particular political actors. As narrative historian, Wight tries primarily to understand what was going on in the colonies and which factors actually moulded the relationship between them and the mother country. Although Edward Keene (2008) is right in arguing that the kind of historical approach adopted by Wight and the other members of the English School is primarily narrative and not analytical, it can be argued that Wight shows an interest in the causes and the consequences of the historical transformations he describes. Despite the fact that his historical narrative is focused on political and constitutional developments, what underlies and determines these developments is a number of social and cultural realities unique to the African continent. For Wight, the tribal allegiances of most Africans combined with the slow progress of economic development along Western lines posit severe limits to what can be realistically achieved in Africa by either foreign or local political administrators.

## From the Old to the New Empire

At the heart of Wight's (1946a) account of the development of the Legislative Council as the key organ of colonial administration lies the transition from the so-called old representative system to the model of Crown Colony government. The old representative system covers the first stages of the development of the British Empire and concerns English settlers who carried with them the law of their mother country when moving to the colonies. As British subjects, the first colonisers could be taxed only with the consensus of their representative institutions, and they tried to reproduce in places such as Virginia the English mode and mores of government. On the other hand, the system of Crown Colony government starts to take shape after the American Revolution and the Anglo-French war of 1793-1815. According to Wight, this war transformed the Empire from one that dominated the Atlantic to one that encircled the Indian Ocean and modified its racial composition. The majority of the inhabitants of the British Empire ceased to be British subjects, and various other European nationalities, as well as vast non-European populations, entered the picture. Some of the new populations were not sympathetic towards the British system of government, and the promotion of important humanitarian aims, such as the abolition of the slave trade, necessitated the concentration of political power in London. Since the old representative institutions ceased to be functional, the system of Crown Colony government spread across the Empire.

The system of Crown Colony government was based on the active role of the Governor who, along with certain appointed members and officials, virtually controlled both the Legislative and the Executive Councils of a colony. The Governor's decisions were subject only to the authority of the Colonial Office in London, but gradually the English Parliament managed to acquire a saying in the administration of the colonies. Wight does not openly criticise the abandonment of the representative institutions involved in the transition from the Old to the New Empire, and his main aim is to illuminate the conditions which made this constitutional change necessary. Apart from the fact that his outlook on colonial issues is that of the narrative historian and not that of the political theorist, Wight is not so much interested in political institutions themselves, but rather in the functions they perform within the wider scheme of things. However, it should be noted that at times he comes close to presenting the colonial populations as mere objects of administration, whose legitimate interests can in principle be protected by distant institutions.

Especially with regard to Africa, which is his primary concern, Wight emphasises the backwardness of millions of tribesmen, who sometimes fall within the same administrative unit while speaking different languages and belonging to different cultural groups. Whereas in the white colonies which finally acquired the status of Dominions there was a unified political body able to promote its interests and defend its autonomy from the colonial centre, in Africa colonial authorities had to create an electorate out of many disparate tribes and groups. Wight argues that the paternalism of Crown Colony government subverted the ultimate political aim of the liberation of the colonised but that no reliable political alternative existed under the particular historical circumstances. The political paradox represented by the model of Crown Colony government was addressed in the twentieth century with the emergence of forms of semi-responsible government in several African countries such as Kenya, Nigeria and the Gold Coast. As I will show next, the reason why Wight shows understanding for the slow progress of representative institutions in Africa is the acknowledgement of the complex problems facing plural societies. In these societies, no unified political body exists and it is the state that creates the society than vice versa.

### **Democracy in Plural Societies**

According to Wight, a plural society comprises two or more cultural entities which lead their own distinct lives within the same territorial unit. These different cultural elements or social orders cooperate for certain practical purposes, such as the defence against external aggression, but also vie for social and political influence. A plural society differs from a confederation because the different populations do not occupy distinct geographical areas. Although secession is possible from a confederation, this is not the case in plural societies where the only alternative to peaceful coexistence is civil war. For Wight, the remarkable political progress achieved in the Gold Coast is due to the fact that there racial and linguistic differences are less prominent than elsewhere in Africa. By relating positive political developments to the existence of a common identity, Wight comes close to explaining the phenomena he describes and does not rely exclusively upon a narrative mode of exposition.

It is also interesting to note that in *The Gold Coast Legislative Council (1947)*, Wight does not limit himself to the role of constitutional historian but offers several interesting sociological insights regarding the antagonism of different groups within the Legislative Council. Although the Gold Coast represents a racially homogeneous society by African standards, social divisions are by no means absent. In particular, Wight analyses the conflict between the traditional African chiefs, who command the allegiance of the local population, and a new middle

class of lawyers and doctors, who challenge both the colonial authorities and the traditional domestic political hierarchies. Although his sympathies lie with the chiefs, he makes clear the fact that no social and political stability can be achieved in the colonies without the political participation of the educated middle classes. Despite that his account of the situation in the Gold Coast is by no means a grim one, he puts into question the “unquestioning and sometimes pathetic optimism of the public outlook, the unshaken belief in the old simple creed of progress which saturates the press” (Wight, 1947: 174). The indigenous intellectuals, Wight argues, harbour the illusion that they can succeed where colonial administrators often fail. However, this optimism is not the result of a sober analysis of the situation, but is rather the consequence of a serious misunderstanding of the nature of politics, which is a new game for the Africans “and neither its complexity nor its Western standards are always understood” (Wight, 1947: 178).

The problems of plural societies are also examined in *British Colonial Constitutions 1947* (1952) where Wight notes that the legal distinction among colonies, protectorates and trust territories is less important than the actual form of government of an area belonging to the British Dependent Empire. The mode of government is actually determined by whether a certain society is culturally homogenous or not. Wight reiterates the belief that African cultural pluralism is incompatible with progress along Western constitutional lines, and that democratic institutions require some kind of common identity among the governed. Apart from the material scarcity and the negative attitude of the population towards taxation and representation, the spread of democracy in Africa is hampered by the absence of a unified electorate. Creating such an electorate is necessary in order to achieve the control of the executive by the legislature, the control of the legislature by the people, and the ultimate independence from imperial authority. All things considered, what one should notice is not the failure of the British to transform backward countries into democracies within a relatively short historical period, but the political changes achieved after centuries of backwardness and isolation. Therefore, Wight’s reading of the colonial experiment is a rather positive one to the extent that modernisation and Westernisation are considered desirable, and the distance between Western promise and Western achievement is attributed to the various peculiarities of Africa.

### **Attitude to Africa**

The immediate political emancipation of Africa from colonial control is seriously considered by Wight only in *Attitude to Africa* (1951a). Like Carr (1951), he presents as inevitable some kind of compromise between the West and African nationalism and argues that this compromise should not lead to the increase of



Soviet influence in Africa. In particular, Wight distinguishes sharply between Asia, where local nationalism associated itself successfully with Communism, and Africa, where this can and must be avoided. The main political forces at play in Africa are Western “imperialism”, indigenous nationalism, and communism. Wight argues that the relationship among these different political forces is particularly complex, since the new African leaders are neither Marxists nor communists. The Western-educated lawyers, doctors and teachers that put into question traditional African hierarchies do not hold political views that bring them automatically close to Russia. However, they are opportunists in the sense that they are willing to accept whatever help they can get for the liberation of their countries. For Wight, Britain and the other European powers should reach a compromise with these new social and political forces in order to stop them from aligning themselves with communism.

His attitude towards African nationalism in general is ambivalent. Like every other nationalism, African nationalism has both a positive and a negative dimension. Its positive role is to cultivate a new feeling of solidarity among the Africans, whose traditional tribal allegiances have to some extent been eroded as a result of the Western activity in the region. However, African nationalism also generates negative feelings towards whites because of the real or imagined wrongs committed by them in Africa. Wight’s ultimate acceptance of the historical role of African nationalism is dictated by pragmatic considerations and the more general belief that no society can be regenerated from outsiders. Africans, like all other men, would prefer to govern themselves badly than to be governed by outsiders. The modernisation of Africa can be the work neither of tribal networks nor of Westerners, but it can be based only on indigenous agents of progress. To the extent that the new African leaders do not try to transform their countries into totalitarian regimes, their independence, as well as that of their countries, should be accepted by Britain and the other European nations.

Maybe the most interesting hypothesis put forward by Wight is that every appeal to the moral superiority of the Western model of government should be complemented by a demonstration of the practical advantages of democracy over alternative political regimes. Indeed, taking into consideration the particular situation in most African countries, it could be argued that freedom in Africa should primarily mean “freedom from poverty and disease, from soil erosion and economic underdevelopment” (Wight, 1951a: 36). Any efficient African government should not only release the energies of indigenous political forces and provide for order, but also create the conditions for a “steadily increasing growth of social, economic and political opportunities and rights” (Wight, 1951a: 63). Wight does not underestimate the cultural challenges facing the promotion of

democracy in Africa, and says that the secret ballot and the power-station frequently co-exist with witchcraft and ritual murder. However, what clearly distinguishes *Attitude to Africa* from Wight's other books on colonial issues is the recognition of the fact that no society can be fully regenerated by external forces alone and that, under certain circumstances, even political nationalism has a positive historical role to play. The emphasis on social rights and opportunities also creates an interesting difference between *Attitude to Africa* and Wight's other books on the subject.

To conclude, as a student of colonialism Wight describes and assesses the imperial project and the process of decolonisation from the point of view of Britain and the other European powers. Although he is apparently interested in the political and constitutional developments in the colonies, the social and cultural insights and considerations that Keene sees as one of the main features of the late-twentieth-century historiography, are not completely missing from his work. His interest in international change leads him to distinguish among three turning points in the development of the imperial project. The transition from the Old Empire of the seventeenth century to the New Empire of the nineteenth, after the transitional period of the eighteenth century, is accompanied by the abandonment of the representative institutions of the colonies, and the empowerment of the Governor of a colony who, along with the imperial centre, determined the life of the inhabitants. The nineteenth-century model of Crown Colony government was put into question after World War I, which triggered a process of democratisation based on the assumption that colonial rule is only a temporary measure, and that it should be exercised according to the interests of the governed. World War II and the beginning of the Cold War cause a large-scale process of political and social change which is incompatible with retaining the Empire in its established form, and necessitate principled compromise with local political forces.

Despite the fact that in his discussion of different historical periods Wight adopts a historicist point of view, which is attuned to the self-understanding of British foreign policy, he is conscious of the fundamental tension that characterises British imperial policy. To the extent that the ideal of self-government shared by both the British and the subject populations cannot be altogether abandoned in the name of effective government, the Empire represents not only a dynamic but also a transient political form which cannot be realistically expected to reproduce itself ad infinitum. For Wight, both the Empire and the subsequent historical process of decolonisation constitute mixed blessings, whose effectiveness is ultimately circumscribed by the kind of social and cultural conditions prevailing in the African continent. The combination of material scarcity with exclusive tribal loyalties

creates an explosive problem which cannot be easily solved by either colonial administrators or local intellectuals<sup>xxxv</sup>.

## II) POWER POLITICS AND THE BALANCE OF POWER

*Power Politics* (1978) represents Wight's most systematic attempt to enumerate the basic rules of international politics in a world populated by sovereign states recognising no political superior. Despite his acknowledgement of the important role of power and force under modern circumstances, Wight manages to show the complex nature of political reality, where elements of order and conflict, cooperation and competition, always balance and mitigate one another. The very phrase "power politics" is used in a complex way to describe two different things. On the one hand, the phrase power politics describes the relationship and the interactions that take place among the politically autonomous and sovereign units we call nations or states. On the other, the term power politics refers to something much more problematic: the identification of international politics with force or the threat of force without consideration for the dictates of reason and justice. Wight is primarily concerned with power politics in the first sense, which denotes the relationship between independent states, and does not prima facie have any particular moral connotations. However, what is important to note is that, for him, power politics in the descriptive sense of the term ultimately dissolves into power politics in the evaluative and colloquial sense, which constitutes a translation of the German word *Machtpolitik*. Although he does not reject the influence that considerations of right and justice might exercise on international relations, it asks from the reader to assume that power politics in the academic sense of the term are usually approximating to power politics in the colloquial sense and therefore must be analysed in this light.

Wight's challenge to realism does not only have to do with the recognition of the importance of moral considerations, but is also related to his historicist interest in the phenomenon of change and the consistent refusal to de-historicise his subject. *Power Politics* offers conceptual tools and distinctions that are necessary to take into account the phenomenon of change in international affairs. In particular, Wight provides the seeds of a historicist approach to international change by emphasising the differences between medieval and modern politics, and drawing attention to the pernicious influence of the Cold War upon key institutions of international society. Despite the fact that the modern period in general is characterised by neglect for what is morally right and the consequent prioritisation of power considerations, the Cold War exacerbates this problem by putting into question the fundamental distinction between war and peace and undermining the role of diplomacy. Nineteenth-century conceptions of war and diplomacy are used

by Wight as a criterion for condemning the excesses of the Cold War. Despite his belief that a close cooperation between Western Europe and the United States is necessary to counter Soviet influence in world affairs, Wight defends not only the traditions of Europe but also the interests of small and medium European states through an examination of the notion of the balance of power. This interest in the fate of small states brings him close to Butterfield who also had an interest in the particular topic, and to a certain extent distances him from Carr, who saw the world through the eyes of the great powers.

### **Genealogy of Power Politics**

According to Wight (1978), the sovereign and constantly interacting political units that comprise the modern states-system are a historical innovation which has existed in the modern West from the sixteenth century onwards. The predecessors of the modern sovereign states should be sought in the Greek city states of classical antiquity and the various kingdoms of the Hellenistic period. However, the way that the modern states-system operates varies significantly from the kind of political unity established by the Roman Empire after the end of the Hellenistic period and the form of religious unity promoted by the Church during the medieval period. The advent of the modern sovereign state transformed not only the tangible reality of international affairs but also the attitude of men towards politics. For Wight, the modern state managed to provide a more limited but at the same time a more powerful object of loyalty than medieval Christendom, since modern man is more willing to fight for the state than for any social or religious cause that transcends its boundaries.

The modern period is therefore characterised by a decrease in moral unity and the weakening of international society, which ends up meaning nothing more than the sum of its parts. Following William Stubbs (1887) view that medieval history is the history of rights and wrongs and modern history is the history of forces and powers, Wight expresses his severe disappointment with the role and evaluation of moral and political theory in modern times. Although for the medieval man the gulf between ideals and reality was an indication that something was wrong with political reality, for the modern man the distance between ideals and reality shows that something is wrong with the ideals that are proved to be inapplicable in the real world.

It should be noted that Wight's genealogy of power politics focuses not only on the differences between the medieval and the modern periods but also on the trauma of World War I. Among else, this war led to the replacement of the older and more refined phrase "raison d'état" by the notion of power politics understood as the conduct of foreign policy without regard for moral

considerations. Therefore, Wight's genealogy of power politics helps us to think critically about two major historical transitions. The first is that from the medieval to the modern period. Wight does not offer much detail regarding medieval politics, but adopts the self-understanding of the medieval man and assumes that during the medieval period international society was stronger than in modern times. Although the transition from the medieval to the modern period is responsible for the birth of power politics in the academic sense of the term, World War I generated the dogma of power politics in the popular sense of the term. These conceptual distinctions and clarifications made in the beginning of *Power Politics* make the reader far more critical than he would otherwise be towards the rules and institutions that are presented in the next pages of the book.

### **Anarchy and War**

For Wight, the behaviour of states in modern times is largely explained by the existence of international anarchy understood as the absence of an international government. Because of the absence of a global authority no state can know with certainty that it is not threatened by other states and must assume the worst regarding their intentions. Following conventional realist wisdom, Wight comes close to presenting international anarchy as the cause of war arguing that:

The fundamental cause of war is not historic rivalries, nor unjust peace settlements, nor nationalist grievances, nor competitions in armaments, nor imperialism, nor poverty, nor the economic struggle for markets and raw materials, nor the contradictions of capitalism nor the aggressiveness of Fascism or Communism; though some of these may have occasioned particular wars (Wight, 1978: 101).

Although he does not deny the importance that any of these factors can have in a particular historical context, Wight emphasises that all of them operate within the wider framework of international anarchy and the resulting Hobbesian fear. For Wight, the advent of democracy and socialism did not mitigate the worst consequences of international anarchy but arguably made things worse. The patriotism of ordinary citizens has its ugly side and the democratisation of politics in the twentieth century spread the feeling of national pride among social classes that were in the past excluded from international politics.

Despite his belief in the general inescapability of war under modern conditions, Wight distinguishes between several types of war and claims that one of these types has become particularly prominent from the end of the eighteenth century onwards. Wars of gain, wars of fear, and wars of doctrine, serve different historical functions and characterise different historical periods. The clearest example of a war of gain is the European colonial wars which expanded decisively the frontiers of international society. Leaving colonial wars aside, the motive of financial gain in

international politics is much less important than ordinarily assumed. The most important and ancient type of war is wars of fear which usually start from the rational realisation of a future threat. To the extent that a power is rapidly losing strength comparative to one of its main antagonists, it has valid reasons to fear for its future in an anarchic world, and to resort to aggressive action to forestall an enemy who is getting stronger as time passes. The diachronic presence of wars of fear in the international system is sharply contrasted by Wight with the novelty of wars of doctrine. Although wars of fear occur from the time of Thucydides onwards, wars of doctrine are a relatively recent development, whose origins should be sought in the French Revolution. In wars of doctrine, it is not really a nation fighting another nation but a group of people with common loyalties fighting another group of people with opposing loyalties. In this case, horizontal ideological forces disrupt the vertical structure of international society which, as Wight puts it, finds itself in a condition of *stasis*. Wars of doctrine bring war close to revolution and put into question the distinction between war and peace, which is one of the preconditions of civilised life. As Wight (1978: 141) argues:

Today it requires a mental effort from us to regard as abnormal circumstances in which ships are sunk and aircraft shot down without warning, peaceable citizens are kidnapped and disappear, traitors flee from one side to the other bringing secrets and receiving moral acclaim, prisoners are tortured into apostasy, and diplomacy is replaced by propaganda.

Despite the fact that he is very anxious regarding the consequences of wars of doctrine upon international society, Wight is not willing to identify one particular kind of war with war per se and to present the other types of conflict as simple aberrations. In his discussion of international revolutions, he argues that the history of international society is equally divided between revolutionary and non-revolutionary periods, and therefore there is no reason to assume that making war to promote a doctrine is less normal than waging war for reasons of fear or gain. To the extent that every war in Europe since 1792 had a doctrinal dimension, the international system cannot be adequately understood in terms of the balance of power, and the special weight of a state within international society is frequently related to its ideology. Like Butterfield, Wight argues that revolutionary upheavals taking place within countries have the tendency to lead to wars of righteousness. These wars exceed in ferocity those which are conducted for reasons of state, since they have unlimited aims and aspire to transform international society by promoting new ideological principles. However, one of the paradoxical consequences of ideological wars is to reveal the hidden unity of international society, which is no longer constituted by sovereign states but by politicised individuals. For Wight (1978: 87):

The unity of international society is thrown into sharpest relief when it is riven by an international civil war. Catholics hate Protestants, ultras hate Jacobins, Communists hate the bourgeoisie, with a fiercer passion than Frenchmen hate Germans or Americans hate Japanese.

Therefore, irrespective of the fact that international revolutions have their grim aspects, they play a significant role in international politics under modern circumstances. Although the search for pure economic gain is not as important as it once was in the conduct of war, “the motives of fear and doctrinal conviction continue to be part of our daily experience” (Wight, 1978: 142-143). Despite the fact that Wight’s presentation of international anarchy as the fundamental cause of war brings him close to mainstream realist assumptions regarding the nature of international politics, his distinction between different types of war enables him to paint a more complicated picture than those who assume that war is by definition a relationship between states seeking to augment national power. Wars of doctrine definitely have an unpleasant dimension and can lead to extreme and protracted forms of conflict, but they are not a simple exception or aberration from what is supposedly normal in international relations. Like the other institutions of international society, war does not have a given essence and can perform different functions within the international system.

### **International Institutions**

The complex nature of political reality is also demonstrated by Wight in his discussion of international society and its institutions. Cooperation and conflict are both present in international affairs, since the workings of power politics are tempered by diplomacy, international law, and international organisations. The cornerstone of international society is international law, which ascribes rights and duties to its members. Far from being stable and unchanging, international law follows the political and other developments which take place within the wider framework of international society. As Wight notes, this is especially true for the law of war that has historically undergone various modifications. Until the middle of the seventeenth century, the Christian tradition of the Just War provided the measure for assessing the legitimacy of particular wars. A war was judged not so much according to its conduct but was rather evaluated according to its origins and the aims it served. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, war was recognised as a legitimate activity within the context of international society, and what mattered was not its original cause but its conduct according to certain established rules and conventions.

In the twentieth century, the League of Nations tried to outlaw aggressive war and in a sense revived the Just War tradition of the Christian Middle Ages. Any war

or threat of war was transformed from a private to a public issue affecting all members of the League, which had the right to intervene in order to protect the existing distribution of power. Further significant changes in the law of war were brought about by the United Nations (UN) and the Nuremburg Trials. The UN Charter limited the right to war only to cases of self-defence, which, however, can be interpreted in a number of different ways by the states involved in a particular conflict. With regard to the Nuremburg Trials, Wight claims that they provide the first case in history where the military and political leaders of a sovereign state were condemned for engaging in aggressive war. The decisions made at Nuremburg represent not only a sea change in the law of war but also an important step of moral and political progress.

Apart from international law, institutions of international society such as diplomacy and alliances are also changing forms and functions throughout the centuries. As far as it concerns diplomacy, Wight is troubled regarding its contemporary place in international affairs. He notes that historically there has been an increase in the size of diplomatic missions and an extension of the diplomatic system from Europe to Asia and the rest of the world. On the other hand, the Cold War undermines the distinction between diplomacy and espionage and puts strain on those diplomatic standards that were faithfully observed among the European powers during the nineteenth century. Despite his recognition of the importance of diplomacy in international society, Wight is not particularly sanguine regarding its prospects in an ideologically divided world. The kind of revolutionary diplomacy carried out by the Soviet Union does not represent a renewal of traditional diplomatic customs but a perversion of the basic functions of diplomacy expressed in “espionage in place of information, subversion in place of negotiation, propaganda in place of communication” (Wight, 1978: 117). The relationship between traditional and revolutionary forms of diplomacy is not equal, since the new practices marginalise the old ones in the same way that bad money drives out of the market the good.

Alliances have a dynamic nature which is due to the fact that circumstances in international politics constantly change rendering in this way the idea of natural friends and enemies illusory. Although the belief in natural alliances based on a common culture and the existence of mutual interests is an old one, a natural ally can in reality be understood only as “an ally in the nature of a transient balance of power” (Wight, 1978: 125). At the same time, Wight argues that under the circumstances created by the Cold War alliances must become more creative and comprehensive than they were in the past. He looks favourably on a federal liaison of the Atlantic world which would promote global cooperation and offer a tangible political alternative to the Soviet Union. This support for forms of alliance which



surpass traditional intergovernmental cooperation is one more element which distinguishes Wight's approach from conventional realist readings of international politics. In his discussion of international law, diplomacy, and alliances, Wight is especially critical of the negative influence that the Cold War exercises upon key institutions of the international society. However, instead of calling for a simple return to the European past, he tries to see how international institutions could be reformed in order to meet new challenges. Although his viewpoint is not realist in any conventional meaning of the term, it is realistic in the sense that it tries to offer tangible solutions to contemporary problems. For Wight, international institutions are not to be judged by speculative standards or by the experience of previous epochs but should rather be evaluated by the historically determined requirements and expectations of the practitioners.

### **International Government**

Despite Wight's early personal support for the League and sympathetic reading of its failures in *Power Politics*, it is important to note that for him international organisations in general are phenomena of rather secondary importance in international politics. In accordance with the general insights of the English School of IR, Wight identifies the primary institutions of international society with practices such as alliances and diplomacy and not with formal international organisations such as NATO or the EU (Wilson, 2012). It is for this reason that he says that the League never controlled the politics of the post-World War I period, and that the UN influences the international developments of its own time even less.

With regard to historical change, Wight draws attention to two turning points in the history of the League. The first was its creation in an era when the rational reordering of international relations seemed both desirable and possible. The second was its unwillingness to impose decisive sanctions against Italy for its invasion of Ethiopia in 1935-1936. This political mistake corroborated the impression that the League could not serve the purpose for which it was founded, and ultimately acted as the "generator of a whole series of other failures" (Wight, 1978: 208). Wight does not argue that the idea of collective security was flawed, but points out that under the given historical circumstances the necessary political unity among the great powers was absent. In other words, for Wight, the failure to implement collective security policies in the interwar period was not an intellectual but a moral failure. The League's inability to promote an enlightened form of self-interest among the great powers was not the logical consequence of its institutional architecture, but it rather was an unfortunate result of the way certain political actors chose to frame their interests at the time.

Although the UN is the formal successor of the League, their apparent similarities should not hide their fundamental differences. As Wight claims, in contradistinction to the League, the UN establishes an authoritarian model of international government, which is based upon the prerogatives of the great powers participating in the Security Council. Although the League was dependent upon the explicit consent and cooperation of its members, the UN has in principle the power to override the wishes of individual members and affect their legal rights. For Wight, the main problem lies with the powers granted to the Security Council, which follows the Hobbesian dictum that whoever has the right to pursue a goal has also the right to whatever means he finds necessary for its achievement. The Security Council's mission to protect international peace and security renders the signatories of the UN Charter obliged to provide the appropriate means for that purpose, and even to have their air forces instantly available for the imposition of military sanctions against recalcitrant states.

Wight's observation that the League signalled some form of return to the Just War tradition of the Middle Ages shows that what we consider to be new and unprecedented frequently is not, and that history has a cyclical dimension with periods of idealism and realism frequently following one another. In the same way that the Christian tradition of the Just War was succeeded by the more realistic doctrines of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in the twentieth century the League of Nations was superseded by the UN. His conceptualisation of the League as a Lockean institution and the UN as a Hobbesian one proves that institutional development is not a simple or linear process. Contrary to Carr, Wight shows sympathy for the small states the interests and wishes of which are frequently ignored in the name of effective intergovernmental organisation. Ultimately, his understanding of what an effective and just international organisation should be about is influenced by the historical precedent of the League of Nations.

### **The Arms Race, Disarmament and Arms Control**

Wight's examination of the dynamics of the arms race, disarmament, and arms control, displays his understanding of international society as a heterogeneous entity, where strong and weak nations pursue different agendas, and where the interests of the satisfied powers do not naturally coincide with those of the dissatisfied. According to Wight, the influence of technology and scientific progress on the conduct of war can be traced back to the nineteenth century, but their influence becomes particularly obvious in the twentieth century. As he notes, the rapid technological change observed during the twentieth century favours the nations which challenge the status quo, whereas reductions in armaments are usually sought by states which are content with their situation and have no

territorial claims against others. In the twentieth century, the utopian ideal of disarmament is replaced by that of arms control, which mainly aims to limit the possession of nuclear weapons.

Efforts at disarmament and arms control take place in periods of severe military conflict, such as the French Napoleonic and Revolutionary Wars of 1792. The French Revolution not only led to military confrontation across Europe, but also made pacifism for the first time in history the official ideology of a great power. Consequently, the struggle of the status quo powers against Napoleonic France urged the Concert of Europe to adopt reduction in armaments as one of its main political goals, differentiating in this way the international system of the nineteenth century from that of the eighteenth. World War I triggered the unsuccessful Disarmament Conference of the League of Nations. More importantly, in the second half of the twentieth century, the nuclear arms race generates discussions for the control of nuclear weapons. Therefore, for Wight pacifism is not so much an autonomous ideology but rather a natural reaction to political and military developments taking place within international society. In both its traditional and its modern forms it is not neutral but it is connected with the interests of particular states.

Far from being politically neutral, the attempt to limit the possession of nuclear weapons to certain nations expresses the interests of the nuclear haves at the expense of the have-nots. For Wight, initiatives such as the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty do not coincide with the general interest but express the historical understanding achieved between the superpowers of his time and their condominium over international society. Although he recognises that different forms of competition in armaments can be observed throughout history, Wight makes clear the fact that organised attempts at disarmament can be observed only from the nineteenth century onwards. These endeavours express the collective interest of certain satisfied great powers at the expense of nations which are not satisfied with their position in the world. Wight's sober analysis of the arms race, disarmament, and arms control is fully consistent with his overall conceptualisation of international society as a complex and historically conditioned entity, where no natural harmony of interests exists and it can only be cultivated by artificial means. The call to limit the possession of nuclear weapons is not politically neutral but expresses the interests of certain powerful actors within international society. Likewise, in his discussion of intervention Wight argues that it is clearly a relationship between strong and weak states. Great powers rarely find themselves in the position of the victim of a foreign intervention, and, even in that case, the "intervention" is not really worthy of the name. However, despite this dependence on power, the practice of foreign intervention cannot be altogether repudiated,

since supporters of every political ideology admit that under certain historical circumstances intervention is unavoidable. Therefore, a great power should be judged not by whether or not it is engaging in the practice of intervention, but rather by the way in which it is doing so without being too eager to exercise its power abroad.

### **The Balance of Power**

Any examination of the balance of power as a distinct idea in Wight's thought must take into account the fact he viewed it as the key organising principle of international politics under modern circumstances, and that it therefore provides the necessary background for understanding his analysis of a number of more particular issues. For example, in order to clarify the nature of the problems facing the world during the inter-war period, Wight draws attention to the importance of changes in the balance of power taking place at the time and the glaring failure of Western statesmen to comprehend these changes and act accordingly. For Wight, the hope that war might be abolished was not the expression of a timeless moral demand but was rather the ideological manifestation of a particular configuration of power, which was favourable to some nations and adverse to others. Kenneth Thompson (1980) is right to point out that for Wight the balance of power is the most important regularity that can be empirically observed in modern international politics. However, as I will demonstrate in this section, Wight is keen to distinguish between several different meanings of the concept of the balance of power, and ultimately to incorporate it into his historicist account of international change. By contrast to Butterfield, who in his discussion of the balance of power tries to show how a correct understanding of that notion gradually emerged, Wight is conscious of the fact that no simple or universally accepted definition of the concept of the balance of power exists. Different understandings of the balance of power express the distinct sensibilities of different epochs and the divergent interests of certain states or groups of states.

In the original edition of *Power Politics* (1946b), Wight distinguishes between two basic meanings of the balance of power: the subjective meaning and the objective one. In its subjective sense, the balance of power signifies a policy consciously adopted by a particular state to augment its power in the international scene. As Wight notes, in most cases the subjective aim of a power is not to create a simple equilibrium with other powers, but it rather is to safeguard its superiority over them. On the other hand, in its objective sense the balance of power expresses a law of international politics. This law is distinguishable from the aims of particular states and tends to create equilibrium of power in the international

scene. The subjective and the objective meanings of the balance of power guide the actions and thoughts of politicians and historians respectively.

Despite the fact that statesmen are primarily interested in the balance of power as a subjective policy which promotes the preponderance of their state over others, historians analyse it as an objective law which renders states roughly equal in power. Wight does not adopt the point of view of the politicians, but he is also unwilling to fully side with the historians. His distrust towards the balance of power as an objective tendency concerns not only the cases of vassal-states and jackal-states, which out of fear or greed align themselves to a dominant power, but is also related to the more general political requirements of the balance. For Wight, only popular states with strong representative institutions can offer an effective resistance to hegemony. The fact that weak and corrupt states usually support a potential hegemon means that “the law of the Balance of Power is the more true of states according to their strength, confidence and internal cohesion” (Wight, 1946b: 47). His reservations towards the balance of power as an objective tendency become even more pronounced in the revised edition of *Power Politics* (1978), where he distinguishes among several different meanings of the concept of the balance of power, and claims that it is important to take into consideration the historical and geographical limits within which it operates.

In particular, Wight observes that the conceptualisation of the balance of power as an objective reality is mainly a twentieth-century phenomenon, which should be contrasted to the earlier legal and moral connotations of the balance. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the balance of power was understood more as an ideal and less as a reality. In the eighteenth century, it was a legal concept which was included in important international treaties, such as that of Utrecht, and it generally expressed an aspiration and not a law. In the nineteenth century, the formulation of the principle of the balance of power was influenced by the spread of liberal economics and was understood as a moral principle. In the same way that individuals should be left to their own devices in the economic market, states should be left to their own devices in the international scene in order to promote the general interest. Wight’s scepticism towards the balance of power as a law is demonstrated by his remark that its meaning is more fully comprehended in periods of international crisis and hegemonic struggle. In other words, the balance of power is important not so much as a reality but rather as a normative ideal. Even if the balance of power corresponds to an objective sociological tendency, this tendency is mitigated and circumscribed by its opposite: the principle of the concentration of power and the establishment of international hegemony by the most powerful actor within a given international system. The historical experiences of the ancient Chinese and the Hellenic systems of states prove exactly how fragile

the balance of power is as a political reality and how it is limited by countervailing tendencies within the international system.

The idea that different definitions of the balance of power are adopted in different historical periods inspires Wight's analysis of this concept in *Diplomatic Investigations*, where he distinguishes among nine distinct formulations of the balance of power and prioritises the first definition which has to do with the even distribution of power. Among the nine different definitions mentioned by Wight it is only the last one which assumes that there is "an inherent tendency of international politics to produce an even distribution of power" (Wight, emphasis in the original, 1966c: 165). Wight is sceptical towards this hypothesis, and adopts the first definition of the balance of power, which places the equal distribution of power within certain geographical and historical limits. According to this definition, the balance of power is not a timeless political reality but a phenomenon that can be observed within particular international systems for certain periods of time. A clear example of the balance of power as an equal distribution of power among the members of a particular system is provided by the Italian states-system between 1454 and 1494. The moral connotations of the balance of power are analytically explored by Wight in "The Balance of Power and International Order", where he makes the important observation that "the symbol or metaphor of the balance was originally used in civilized discourse to represent, not international order, but moral order" (Wight, 1973: 85). For him, the power of the balance of power lies in its ability to safeguard international order by combining the interest of individual states to their autonomy with the collective interest.

To conclude, Wight adopts a largely historicist approach in his analysis of the balance of power emphasising the importance of European traditions and showing the different nuances and transformations of the concept across time. In both *Power Politics* and the other publications where he discusses this concept he is interested in its historical and geographical contours. At the same time, Wight exhibits a strong preference for the moral definitions of the balance, which are traced back to the origins of the modern European system of states. Twentieth-century scientific understandings of the balance of power do not necessarily represent a progress with regard to its earlier formulations by legal and moral theorists. Wight does not exactly call for a revival of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century conceptualisations of the concept, but he wants to make evident its moral connotations and overall relationship with international order under modern circumstances. His observations that the idea of the balance of power is always rejected by powers aspiring to global hegemony, and that the primary meaning of the balance is that of an even distribution of power, show that his conceptualisation of the balance of power was certainly critical of the

superpowers of his age. In the final analysis, Wight not only appeals to the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European formulations of the balance of power, but also supports the autonomy and integrity of European states which, having abandoned the quest for hegemony, find themselves in favour of the equal distribution of power in the international scene.

### III) SYSTEMS OF STATES

Wight's historicist conceptualisation of international change becomes particularly evident in his examination of different international systems in *Systems of States* (1977), and in his celebration of Western values in international relations. In both cases, Wight uses the present in order to evaluate the past, and attributes world historical value to the European political experience. The particularity of Wight's vision of the past and the present becomes evident if it is compared with the more critical views expressed by Watson and Mackinnon on the same set of problems. It is for this reason that in this section I will discuss the views expressed by Watson in *The Evolution of International Society* and in the next section I take into account the ideas of Mackinnon.

*Systems of States* consists of a number of papers that Wight wrote for the British Committee. Gramsci's (1971) methodological recommendation that we must be cautious when evaluating books that were not published by the author himself, means that every attempt to assess the book's importance should start from the admission of the fact that the papers it contains were conceived as part of a larger project. Within this project, other Committee members were supposed to play an important role, discussing civilisations that do not receive adequate coverage in *Systems of States*. That said, what I would like to argue is that there is a certain tension between the ambitious theoretical framework presented in the book's first chapter "De systematibus civitatum" and the limited range of systems and historical experiences that are examined in the next chapters. Despite the promises given in "De systematibus civitatum" the book as a whole is permeated by Westphalian ideological assumptions and is based on a rather sharp distinction between states-systems, suzerain state-systems, and empires. By placing the European experience at the centre of his analysis, Wight prioritises structure over history and assigns universal significance to a contingent political arrangement, which was in crisis even when the papers included in the book were originally written.

For Wight (1977), who traces the idea of a states-system back to Pufendorf, what lies at the heart of a states-system is the mutual recognition of sovereignty. This recognition is expressed in institutions such as diplomacy, the balance of power, and international law. The belief that systems comprised of independent political

entities recognising one another's sovereignty should be distinguished from suzerain state-systems, where one state asserts claims to superiority accepted by the rest, makes Wight to list only three examples of states-systems: the ancient Greek, the modern European, and the Chinese of the period of the Warring States. Among these systems, only the first two are analytically discussed and compared with one another. Although, as the papers of the British Committee show, Hudson was to write about China and Williams about the Middle Ages, Wight had reservations about both cases.

As regards China, Wight felt that even during the period of the Warring States (771 B.C. -221 A.D.) the hegemonic claims of the Chou dynasty were not entirely rejected, and therefore the independence of the members of the system was under question. As regards the medieval period, Wight did not believe that anything resembling a states-system existed in Europe at the time. As he notes, to the extent that we can conceptualise medieval political realities all, we should talk about a very complicated double-headed suzerain state-system. However, without arguing that medieval society can be conceptualised as a states-system, Wight shows the negative and positive aspects of the connection that exists between the medieval and the modern Europe. On the negative side, Wight argues that secularism and political modernity occurred as the result of the failure of Latin Christendom to reform itself and to heal its internal divisions. It was precisely this failure that strengthened the secular powers already present in the Council of Constance (1494) and enabled them to gain the upper hand in the Westphalian settlement. On the positive side, taking into account the danger of projecting modern notions into a medieval reality, Wight makes the interesting claim that, to the extent that a "state" existed during the Middle Ages, this state was the Church. Lastly, the notion of secondary states-systems, whose members are empires or suzerain systems, is not analysed in length and the main example provided concerns the Armana age.

Since focusing one's critique on what Wight failed to include in his account of states-systems could trigger the response that other members of the Committee were working on those topics, I would like to analyse Wight's treatment of non-European systems, and especially of the Hellenic one, since it is the only that is extensively discussed and compared directly to the modern European system. Wight's harsh evaluation of that system illustrates the ways in which his thought was heavily influenced—and confined—by the modern European experience. Despite the fact that Wight displays an impressive knowledge of ancient Greece, his method is not a genuinely comparative one, since he uses the present in order to evaluate the past. The Hellenic system is actually defined by lack: by the lack or



at least the limited development of those important institutions that we—moderns—regard as normal.

### **Classical Greece**

For Wight, the ancient Greeks had a very limited comprehension of international law. The Greek city-state was not seen by its inhabitants as a polity possessing rights and obligations towards polities of the same type, but was understood as a natural organism, which exists to guarantee the moral and political development of its own citizens. Although in modern Europe the development of the state is coterminous with the development of the international system, in Greece the part defined as a city state was both chronologically and normatively prior to the whole defined as the international system. As a result, whatever customs of war existed were not codified and the peaceful settlement of disputes did not conform to set rules. As Wight notes, the role of the third party when mediating in a dispute was to arrive at a moral and not so much a legal decision, and to settle the problem following the dictates of equity rather than law in the strict sense of the term. These dictates were encapsulated in the ancient Greek notion of *dike*.

Apart from international law, the diplomatic system was also underdeveloped. The modern network of mutually recognised embassies and ambassadors is an Italian invention, which was unknown to the Greeks. According to Wight, the list of ancient Greek diplomatic agents broadly defined included the herald, the envoy, and the *proxenos*. Heralds carried a particular message from one city state to another and were not entitled to negotiate. Envoys had the jurisdiction to negotiate about a particular issue, but were not permanent diplomatic representatives, because after negotiating they were required to return to their city and had no particular links to other cities. On the other hand, *proxenoi* had special and permanent links to others since they were supposed to leave the city in which they were born to become citizens of another city. Although some of them had considerable influence on commercial matters or even politics, they were not entitled to discuss matters of war and peace and could play no meaningful role in settling international disputes. Despite the fact that Wight is intrigued by the role of *proxenoi*, he treats this institution as a peculiarity and draws attention not so much to what *proxenoi* were doing but rather to what they were not able to do. In general, his examination of forms of diplomatic representation in ancient Greece aims to explain why there were no permanent diplomatic representatives in the modern sense of the term, and not to explain how an international system could work effectively without their aid by making use of different categories of diplomatic agents.

One further attribute of the ancient Greek system was the absence of the idea of the balance of power and the institution of the great powers. A relatively egalitarian conception of international society was accompanied by a hegemonic understanding of the international system, where one particular city was naturally elevated above the rest. Contrary to the moderns, the ancients felt comfortable with the supremacy of a single power, which could in principle express the collective interests of the Hellenic world against foreign aggression, and frequently tried to institutionalise its hegemony through organisations such as the Peloponnesian League. Finally, Wight draws attention to the allegedly limited importance of horizontal loyalties and international public opinion within the Hellenic states-system. Putting into question Edmund Burke's assumption that the ideological division of Europe after the French Revolution has important similarities with the competition between democrats and oligarchs in the Hellenic world, Wight claims that the Hellenic factions were not united by a systematic and genuinely internationalist political doctrine. Despite the fact that ideological sympathies that cut across the frontiers of city-states and made Athens and Sparta the champions of discrete political causes, the struggle for power was more important than the promotion of a universal political ideal.

Public opinion was severely restricted in its ability to influence international developments and primarily assumed the form of *eunoia* towards particular persons or cities without taking into consideration the interests of mankind as a whole. As Wight goes on to argue, it is only in modern times that public opinion ceases to be concerned exclusively with particular objects and acquires the ability to judge an action on moral grounds following impersonal rules. For the modern man, apartheid is wrong not only because of its consequences upon a certain national group but also because it ostensibly violates important norms of human dignity. As a result of the failure of the Greeks to conceptualise the interests of humanity conceived as a moral whole, Immanuel Kant's insistence on publicity and Woodrow Wilson's appeal to the opinion of the world "would have puzzled, but in different ways, Thucydides and Plato, Isocrates and Demosthenes" (Wight, 1977: 72).

Although Wight is generally justified in claiming that several key ideas and institutions of the modern system of states were missing from the ancient Greek one, he does not seriously consider the possibility that the moderns have certain things to learn from the ancients. In particular, he does not fully realise that an institution cannot be identified with the function it performs, since the same function can theoretically be performed by a different institution. For example, the fact that in ancient Greece there were no diplomats does not mean that there was no regular communication among cities, or that developments in one city were not

extensively debated and analysed in other cities. Watson, to whom we now turn, expands the list of relevant historical examples and also presents a more positive reading of the Hellenic system.

### **The Evolution of International Society**

The fact that Wight focuses his attention on a rather limited number of cases and his evaluation of those cases is not altogether satisfying, can be seen when comparing his approach with that that Watson adopts in *The Evolution of International Society* (1992/2009). Watson's magnum opus is based on some of the theoretical insights contained in *Systems of States*, and especially the first chapter "De systematibus civitatum", but it represents a decisive break with the Westphalian assumptions that were broadly accepted by the members of the Committee when Wight was writing<sup>xxxvi</sup>. As Buzan and Little (2009) note, in order to accommodate the different forms of international political systems that have emerged across time, Watson includes in his account the empires that naturally have no place in Wight's systems of independent states. By arguing that international systems operate on a spectrum that extends from empire to the existence of completely independent political communities, but are mainly defined by hegemony understood as an intermediate position, Watson provides a more inclusive theoretical framework than Wight and undermines the anarchy/hierarchy distinction that has dominated the discourse of IR in the post-World War II period. As Jack Donnelly (2015) has pointed out, this fixation with anarchy is a relatively recent disciplinary convention, which has little to do with international reality itself and more to do with the role of certain influential texts. Indeed, although Donnelly mentions Wight's original edition of *Power Politics* as one of the precursors of the Waltzian anarchy, *Systems of States* arguably performs a similar function by emphasising the independence of the members of a states-system.

Despite the fact that Wight suggests that only independent political communities can provide the units necessary for the creation of a states-system, Watson paints a more complicated picture, where independent political communities, suzerain state-systems, and empires, belong to the same political universe and regulate their relationships in similar ways. Watson's discussion of the ancient systems that are virtually ignored by Wight begins in Sumer, where the first written records can be found. Contrary to Egypt, Sumer was not an empire but a conglomerate of independent political communities, whose sovereignty was limited only by the kingship that the ruler of the most prominent city exercised at any given time. Although the Great King did not have the right to intervene in the domestic affairs of Sumerian cities other than his own, he was entrusted with the mission to arbitrate disputes among cities and also to regulate the use of force. Without being

an expression of the principle of empire, as ancient Egypt was, or being organised around the principle of absolute independence, the Sumerian system was mainly a hegemony, where the advantages of relative independence were combined with those provided by the existence of a central authority. For Watson, the degree of independence that the Sumerian cities enjoyed within the framework provided by kingship, brings the Sumerian historical experience close to that of later political forms, such as those developed in classical Greece and modern Europe.

With respect to the secondary states-systems, which are mentioned but not analysed by Wight, Watson provides the example of the relationships between Egypt and the Hittites. These relationships concerned issues similar to those facing the independent Sumerian cities, and were regulated by frequent diplomatic contacts based on the inviolability of heralds. The elaborate conventions and rules that influenced the various exchanges among Egypt and the Hittites lead Watson to talk about the existence of an international society, which included other communities as well. The methods developed in the world of the pre-classical empires to regulate the interaction of units different from those existing in classical Greece or modern Europe, found their fullest elaboration in the case of the Persian Empire. The Persians relied heavily on the use of soft power, and where possible they avoided resorting to coercion. The very size of this Empire meant that subjugate territories enjoyed considerable political autonomy, and this autonomy only increased the more one moved away from the imperial centre. Even when empires did not hesitate to resort to coercion to protect their interests, as the Assyrians frequently did, Watson notes that there were real benefits to be derived from the existence of an imperial authority. These benefits made empires particularly attractive to merchants, but they were also realised by wider sections of the population. Apart from Watson's bold move to include suzerain state-systems and empires in his account of the evolution of modern international society, the differences between him and Wight become particularly evident in their contrasting evaluations of classical Greece.

Although as we saw Wight compares the international experience of the ancients to that of the moderns and finds it wanting in many respects, Watson offers a more sympathetic reading of ancient civilisations, and does not exclude the possibility that the moderns could benefit from studying the political experience of the ancients. Contrary to Wight, Watson tries to show the similarities between the international political experience of the ancients and that of the moderns, and to indicate ways in which modern international society could benefit from practices and institutions developed within the ancient Greek one. For Watson, the cultural affinities existing among ancient Greeks had significant political consequences, which give us the right to talk about a Hellenic international society and not just a

system. For example, the belief that it was improper and in the long term counterproductive to destroy the defeated side provides the example of an important similarity between the ancient Greek and the modern European international practice, and is not irrelevant to the idea of the balance of power. As Butterfield showed, no balance of power can be effectively maintained when the loser is annihilated.

What is more, although Wight admits the existence but tends to minimise the importance of horizontal loyalties in ancient Greece, Watson draws attention to the importance of social cleavages in the Greek society, and emphasises the ways in which these cleavages and divisions were utilised by the great powers of the day, Athens and Sparta. In the same way that the Athenians tended to support the establishment of democratic governments across the ancient Greek world, the Spartans felt more secure and comfortable with the existence of oligarchic regimes. Both Athens and Sparta were willing to intervene in the so-called internal affairs of other cities in order to safeguard their own security, and even the Persians were frequently called upon by competing political factions within Greece. Watson does not deny that Athens and Sparta were primarily motivated by security interests, but points out that the same broadly applied during the Cold War to the actions of Soviet and American leaders.

Perhaps the practice that most fascinates Watson is that of *dike*. Watson agrees with Wight that *dike* is not an expression of international law in the modern sense of the term, but he points out that this has its advantages. Freed from the legalistic assumptions of the moderns, the ancients were able to treat a given issue according to its own peculiar nature, and combine the requirements of justice with those of expediency. As Watson goes on to argue, *dike* underpinned the understanding reached between Athens and Sparta during the period of their joint hegemony in Greece, and also the short but interesting period known as the King's Peace. During that period, the major Greek cities along with the Persians and the lesser Greek cities became fully conscious of the fact that they belonged to the same political universe, and they therefore needed common rules and institutions to regulate their relationships. Ironically, it was under Persian guidance that the Greek cities saw with clarity their common interests and participated in the creation of a functioning international society. Although Wight also recognises the importance of the relationships and interactions that took place between Hellas and Persia, he abstains from describing Hellas and Persia as members of the same states-system. He also provides a somewhat different interpretation of the King's Peace as an achievement of the Persian and Spartan diplomacy, which attributed a secondary role to Athens and the other Greek cities.

As regards the post-Westphalian period of international relations that provides the basis of Wight's conceptualisation of a states-system, Watson accepts that the Westphalian settlement of 1648 was built upon distinctively anti-hegemonic foundations. Especially during the period between the Peace of Westphalia and the Utrecht settlement of 1714, European international politics assumed an almost anarchic form, and were defined by the strong support for the independence of the various states. However, Watson also argues that behind the support for the independence of states and the mutual recognition of sovereignty there could be observed strong hegemonic tendencies, which were partly successful in the cases of Louis XIV and Napoleon. The ultimate defeat of French hegemonic ambitions in Europe did not lead to any absolute form of independence, but it rather led to the establishment of the collective hegemony embodied in the nineteenth-century Concert of Europe.

It is also interesting to note that Watson assigns a more important role to the Ottomans than Wight. Although their support for a European balance of power was not entirely consistent, and in that sense they did not play the role that the Persians played in Greece, the Ottomans should be placed within and not outside the European international society. Cultural and political differences notwithstanding, the Turks contributed to the establishment of the Westphalian settlement, and also generally accepted certain important rules in their relations with the European powers. Although Wight's critique of Alexandrowicz (1967) tends to differentiate the *corpus Christianorum* from the rest of the world, Watson minimises the importance of cultural differences and provides support for a more inclusive and variegated form of international society where common interests matter more than the existence of a common identity.

All things considered, the juxtaposition of Wight's *Systems of States* and Watson's *The Evolution of International Society* reveals that the title of the first is more appropriate to the second and vice versa. As Buzan (2014) points out, despite its title, Watson's book can be best understood as a contribution to a genuinely comparative historical project where notions of development or evolution play a secondary role. On the other hand, the papers included in Wight's book are more about evolution and development than it is ordinarily assumed, and tend to interpret the past through the prism of the present. It is because of that that Vigezzi has argued that for Wight the writing of the papers included in *Systems of States* represents a conclusive but also treacherous moment. The reference to the most different forms of political community in "De systematibus civitatum" is contradicted by the writer's deeply engrained belief that a true system of states can only consist of the sovereign political entities that define European modernity.

Murray Forsyth (1978) was also correct to emphasise the element of progression or development that defines Wight's evaluation of different historical states-systems and, as I shall argue, this element becomes even more obvious in his historicist defence of Western values in international relations. What I am trying to do in comparing Wight's views to those of Watson in this section and to those of Mackinnon in the next section, is not so much to show that they were correct and Wight was wrong. What I would rather like to point out is that historicism can sometimes lead to a selective reading of the past and discourage the search for ideological and institutional alternatives to the present. It can also make us forget that both the past and present can be the object of the most diverse interpretations, and that historical investigations can easily turn into structural ones when one ceases to be critical towards one's own assumptions and beliefs.

#### IV) WESTERN VALUES IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Wight's defence of values and institutions which were first realised in modern Europe becomes explicit in his discussion of Western values in international relations. These values largely coincide with what in his lectures on international theory Wight calls the Rationalist/Grotian tradition and distinguishes it from both Realism/Machiavellianism and Revolutionism/Kantianism. However, one important difference between the views expressed in "Western Values in International Relations" (1966b) and the approach employed in *International Theory: The Three Traditions* (1991) is that in the latter book Wight adopts a contextualist point of view. Although there are passages where Wight reveals his personal sympathy for Grotianism/Rationalism, he also makes the important observation that the three traditions of international theory correspond to different material and political elements in international reality itself. Realism expresses the condition of international anarchy and the resulting fact that international relations are ultimately regulated by war. The practices of diplomacy and commerce provide the material bases of Rationalism. Finally, moral and psychological ties that develop independent of national frontiers provide the rationale behind Revolutionism.

By contrast to the contextually and historically informed approach adopted in *International Theory*, in "Western Values in International Relations" Wight builds his argument on certain unit-ideas, which are artificially abstracted and isolated from their historical and intellectual contexts. What unites these ideas is the fact that they express the middle way between opposed extremes, and they are intimately connected to the Western tradition of constitutional government. Although Wight in principle dissociates "Western values" from their Cold War connotations, he is not entirely consistent. By relating international principles to a particular form of government, he does not fully take into account the fact that

what primarily mattered during the Cold War was not to strengthen the bonds existing within the West, but rather to strengthen the bonds between the West and the rest, and especially Soviet Russia. Even today, after the end of the Cold War, relating international practices and institutions to a particular form of political regime does not seem as a promising strategy.

Wight's belief that the ancients did not have a conception of international morality similar to that of the moderns neglects the fact that in ancient Greece there did not exist a "state" understood as a separate entity from the "society". International morality in the way that Wight defines it presupposes this fundamental –but also morally problematic—distinction between state and society. Although there might be some progress in the field of international ethics, it is not certain that modern democracy is superior to the ancient one. Finally yet importantly, one should keep in mind that, as R. B. J. Walker (1993) has pointed out, an appeal to a middle road might end up legitimising the extremes that it supposedly avoids. Following the middle road that Wight describes – and maybe recommends—might be a wise choice under certain circumstances, but it cannot be seen as a recipe of universal political application. From a historicist point of view, choosing an extreme position might also be acceptable within a particular context. Having raised those concerns, we will now examine how Wight defines Western values in the particular fields of international society, the maintenance of order, intervention and international morality.

### **International Society**

For Wight (1966b), in its Western version the idea of international society represents a *via media* between those who argue that only the state exists and those who claim that only humanity with its individual men and women can be a valid object of moral and political loyalty. For the supporters of the Western conception of international society, such as Suarez, the moral claims of states are valid but do not exhaust everything that can be said about international affairs. States are not self-contained and must always be treated as the basic parts of a wider international whole. Therefore, for its Western proponents, international society is neither a fiction nor a mere aspiration but a tangible reality which should be examined through historical and sociological lens.

Apart from the speculations of intellectuals and statesmen, the existence of international society can be proved by these institutional conventions and political devices that originally emerged in Western Europe and later engulfed the rest of the world. These include among others diplomacy, international law, and the balance of power. Wight does not believe that the Western conceptualisation of international society is devoid of problems, ambiguities, and imprecisions.



However, he sees it as a particularly realistic one in the sense that it corresponds to the peculiarities of international experience. As Robert Jackson reminds us, “the middle way in international affairs is no high road: it is a meandering track through forest and heath where it is easy to lose one’s way, and also one’s grip” (Jackson, 2008: 359).

### **Order and Intervention**

For Wight, the Western view of international order employs certain political attributes of constitutionalism to interpret international relations. At the heart of the Western understanding of international order can be found the depiction of security as a public good, which is beneficial to the majority of the members of international society. The limits of international order in practice coincide with the interests of the most prominent members of international society, which are generally satisfied with the status quo and see the revisionist states as a threat not only to themselves but also to international society more generally. As Wight notes, the hypothesis that there can be a delinquent or aggressor state is part and parcel of the Western comprehension of international order. The Western understanding of international order can therefore be seen as a middle way between the view that security is exclusive and there is no international order, and a fully inclusive conceptualisation of international order, which would apply equally to all members of international society without distinguishing between status quo and revisionist states.

With regard to intervention, Wight argues that it is a particularly contentious practice even from a Western point of view. To the extent that it openly violates the equality and independence of all members of international society, it is a hostile act. On the other hand, it is so frequent and widespread that one can totally reject it only at the cost of losing contact with empirical reality. The argument against intervention underlines the rights of states and considers it a violation of the natural liberty of nations. On the other side, the most important supporters of intervention defend the present or future homogeneity of international society, which must either remain in a particular condition, or be radically transformed towards a certain direction. For Wight, a sober appreciation of intervention should start from the acknowledgement of the moral interdependence of peoples and the dual nature of international society, which has states as its immediate members but individual men and women as its ultimate members. The recognition of the moral interdependence of peoples provides a *via media* between interventionism and non-interventionism, and leaves open the possibility that even great powers could be submitted to the kind of moral and political scrutiny usually reserved for small nations.

## International Morality

Of special interest is Wight's discussion of international morality and belief that the modern West has developed a more positive and nuanced understanding of international ethics than classical civilisations. In ancient Greece and Rome, political ethics took the form of veto on political action. Certain great military or political men refused to sanction decisions which offered short-term military and political gains but were fundamentally incompatible with personal honour. For example, notes Wight, after the Greek victory against Xerxes, the Athenians did not approve of Themistocles' idea to set ablaze the allied fleet and in this way acquire a decisive military advantage over the other Greek city-states. As Wight mentions, the importance of moral veto on political action is also echoed in the refusal of the Roman general Fabricius to poison the Greek general Pyrrhus, who was one of the most important military foes of Rome. In these cases, personal morality is directly applied to international politics, but its application has a rather provisional and exceptional character which does not fundamentally transform the rules of the game.

For Wight, the reason why modern history does not provide such clear examples of moral opposition to practically beneficial courses of action is that Europe has developed a complex form of political morality, which was noticeably absent from earlier civilisations. In the modern world, politics and ethics are no longer conceptualised as separate realms posing limits to one another, but are understood as parts of an integrated whole. Political decisions such as the British grant of independence to India cannot be understood from either a moral or a practical point of view but show the interdependence of morality and *raison d'état* under modern conditions. Therefore, individual conscience does not frequently need to oppose political decisions, because moral factors and considerations normally influence the political process. As with the Western conception of international society, Wight does not hide the fact that international morality in its modern form has certain unpleasant aspects, and that at its worst can give rise to forms of hypocrisy and self-deception, which offer a spurious moral justification to every political decision.

However, he clearly treats the modern invention of international morality as a positive historical phenomenon which transforms individual conscience from a constraining to a creative force. Under modern conditions, individual conscience needs no longer to unconditionally oppose politics because it can aspire to influence its conduct. As with the cases of international society, order, and intervention, the Western conception of international morality represents a *via media* between utopianism and *Realpolitik*. Wight's discussion of the modern

emergence of an advanced moral sensitiveness missing from earlier civilisations provides one more indication of his favourable reading of modern international history, which is superior to the ancient one in both institutional and moral terms. However, although he shows the historical alternatives to Western values in international relations in the form of the views propounded by classical civilisations, he does not make entirely clear which are the contemporary alternatives to Western values and who their supporters are. For example, although Soviet communism does not meet the standards of constitutional government and individual freedom that Wight identifies with Western values, Marx and certain versions of Marxism cannot be easily separated from a tradition interested in the self-realisation of the individual and the establishment of more harmonious relationships among distinct peoples and societies. Indeed, the progressivist and internationalist leanings of many Marxists could bring this ideology to the forefront of Western values.

The selective way in which Wight constructs Western values can be realised by taking into consideration Mackinnon's paper "Western Values", which provides the background for understanding Wight's discussion of the same problem. For Mackinnon (1960), who wrote and presented his paper in the British Committee before Wight, principles of constitutional government certainly account for the important differences between the modern West and societies where the only alternative to arbitrary authority is violent revolt. However, the benign liberalism with which Wight identifies Western values is only part of the picture, and ignores the importance of the political conservatism usually associated with Catholic religious beliefs. What is more, for Mackinnon, the kind of formalism inherent in the idea of the rule of law does not always answer the concerns of people anxious for the satisfaction of their most basic material needs. The material base of the appeal of communism was a problem that interested Mackinnon, Butterfield, and maybe other members of the Committee as well. Mackinnon does not side with those who argue that economic considerations necessarily override political ones, but notes that prioritising political considerations is not always acceptable. Wight's depiction of Western values in international relations is therefore a highly selective one, and does not exhaust a very difficult problem. More importantly, even if one accepts Wight's views and rejects the problems raised by Mackinnon regarding the formalism and potential conservatism of Western values, the problem remaining has to do with finding ways to regulate the relationships between the West and the rest.

## V) CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I have emphasised the historicist element in Wight's approach to international change. As a student of colonialism, Wight adopts a historically conditioned form of international morality, and evaluates the expansion of Britain not according to timeless moral criteria but according to the degree to which it delivered on its promises. Paradoxically, at times, Wight comes close to accusing the Africans for the various British failures in Africa by drawing attention to the social backwardness and the cultural disunity of the continent. The main problem is not that Wight does not judge imperialism from the outside according to the dictates of an absolute international morality, but that he has relative low expectations regarding what the British could have achieved in Africa. Although he might be right in his conclusion that the British are not directly responsible for the poverty in Africa, and that modernisation is a slow and difficult process, he certainly could have focused more on the rationale of the British presence in the continent, and this would have also enabled him to provide a more convincing balance sheet of the British achievements and failures. What is more, Wight's exclusive preoccupation with the problems of British Africa deprives him of the opportunity to consider the implications of what Duncan Bell (2007) has described as the idea of Greater Britain. Taking into account the relationship between the United Kingdom and the settler colonies of Australia, Canada and New Zealand, would certainly have enabled Wight to be more critical of the transition from the Old to the New Empire. The historical possibility of creating some form of federal union between Britain and the so-called settler colonies proves that the relationship between colonies and the imperial centre could have been more reciprocal than Wight imagined.

The historical changes identified by Wight in *Power Politics* show that even under modern conditions the rules and the character of international relations are not given. In particular, the second half of the twentieth century witnessed major departures in the function of institutions such as war, diplomacy and international law. Wight's depiction of the dangerous consequences of wars of doctrine, and the more general negative influence of the Cold War upon the classical European diplomatic tradition, certainly helps one understand what was going on at the time, and accords with Butterfield's presentation of the same problems. What is less clear is what exactly Wight proposed as an alternative to the Cold War and modern power politics in general. As we saw, he was generally critical of the modern idea of the autonomy of politics, and believed that in medieval Europe notions of practical expediency were more closely linked to moral and religious ideals. Despite this positive depiction of the medieval period, nothing in Wight's work suggests that he was an enemy of political modernity or that he wanted to see

religious institutions acquiring political power. A similar problem applies to his critique of the Cold War. Although Wight was certainly justified in his defence of the political autonomy and cultural traditions of European states, it is unlikely that he preached a direct return to the European past, as Butterfield did.

Despite the fact that his general understanding of international institutions was influenced by the European traditions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Wight realised that no institution can remain static because of the various changes taking place in its environment. Even in *Systems of States*, where he adopts a largely Westphalian point of view when defining and evaluating states-systems, Wight displays sensitivity towards the historical contours of the balance of power and the possibility of a world state. The belief that both international institutions and their functions are historically contingent creations stops Wight from offering a simplistic answer to the dilemmas of the Cold War. Indeed, his call for a closer cooperation between Europe and America proves that what primarily interested him was the reform of international institutions according to contemporary needs and circumstances. Adopting the opposite strategy would have left Wight vulnerable to the charge of essentialism, which Wight himself levelled against Bull and his static understanding of international institutions.

Wight's sympathetic presentation of Western values and institutions in "Western Values in International Relations" provides a point of departure for thinking about the particular problem but it should not lead to the simplistic assumption that finding oneself in the middle between opposed extremes is always a valid choice. More importantly, it should not lead us to believe that the tragic dilemmas and choices that characterise international politics can somehow be avoided by following a comfortable middle way. This way can be the best or the worst of all possible worlds depending on the circumstances. Indeed, a more comprehensive and critical presentation of Western values would have enabled Wight to see that some of the most reproachable practices and assumptions associated with the superpowers of his time originated in Europe. Mackinnon's views might be relevant in this context. Relating international principles to domestic political arrangements was a problem in Wight's time, and maybe it remains a problem today. Thinking about theory as history should not make one lose sight of the more general requirements of international order expressed in ideas and institutions that could command the acceptance of both Western and non-Western states. Otherwise, historicism lapses into relativism and/or power politics.

## Chapter 8

### **E. H. Carr on Theory as History**

Like Butterfield and Wight, Carr offers a distinctively historicist conceptualisation of international change which aims to safeguard British and Western European interests in a changing world. As I will show in this chapter, his proposals for international reform are very well-attuned to the interests of the great powers of his day: Britain, America, and the Soviet Union. Despite the fact that he did not in principle reject the ideas of non-ideological diplomacy and the balance of power, Carr believed that these ideas should regulate the relationships of units different from the nation state in its traditional form. In the fourth age of nationalism whose arrival is announced in *Nationalism and After* (1945) the main protagonists of international politics cease to be traditional nation states. Britain, America and the Soviet Union are presented as great multinational units whose relationships in the post-World War II period should ideally the assume the form of a collective hegemony. Although Butterfield and Wight put their defence of British and Western European interests within a pluralistic political framework that was sensitive to the interests and small and big states alike, Carr's views bring him close to a number of ideas and ideological assumptions that were later systematically explored by Adam Watson (1992/2009; 2007).

In particular, what I would like to argue is that the way in which Carr relates his support for British interests to the ideals of international order, justice, and the combination of nationalism with internationalism, creates a very important similarity between him and his nineteenth-century liberal predecessors. Although as Michael Cox (2010) has pointed out the crisis of liberalism provides the background against which Carr's social and international ideas can be understood, his response to that crisis was a dialectical one. Despite the fact that Carr broadly accepted the liberal internationalist goals of encouraging progress, protecting order and promoting justice in international relations, he did not believe that these goals could be served by laissez-faire and the doctrine of the natural harmony of interests<sup>xxxvii</sup>. Following the development of liberalism in general, Carr decided to abandon the natural harmony of interests for the artificial identification of interests<sup>xxxviii</sup>. In the case of Carr's (1939/2001) examination of peaceful change, this identification is carried out in a rather ad hoc way through sacrifices that the strong make in favour of the weak. The model here is the concessions that nineteenth-century capitalists made to the workers without the intervention of the state, and the absence of any constitutional framework means that peaceful

change is substructural rather than superstructural (Wilson, 1996). The wider institutional framework that he considered necessary for the synthesis of nationalism and internationalism is considered in the second section of this chapter. This section shows how Carr managed to dissociate nationalism from its nineteenth-century connotations and to defend a distinctively political form of nationalism, which encourages us to re-examine this concept. Finally, Carr's proposals for domestic social reform are examined in the third section, which argues that his social concerns are linked with his international ones. The question whether Carr's proposals for international change make him a liberal, a socialist, or something different, will be answered in the Conclusions, and is closely related to how one understands the relationship between liberalism and socialism<sup>xxxix</sup>.

## I) PEACEFUL CHANGE

Carr's advocacy for peaceful change in *The Twenty Years' Crisis* is one of the most frequently criticised aspects of his work. According to Wilson (2000), one of the main fears expressed by early critics was that the book, which was published just before the outbreak of World War II, exercised a negative influence on Britain's ability to wage the war against Nazi Germany. However, despite appearances, Carr's understanding of peaceful change is far from unpatriotic and it fits very well within his overall historicist outlook on international change. The fact that he believed that some kind of compromise could be reached between Britain and Germany for the avoidance of a new world conflict does not mean that he did not take seriously British interests. Indeed, as I shall try to show here, the type of change he had in mind was advantageous primarily to Britain and the other status quo powers of the interwar period. For Carr, status quo powers such as Britain and France could retain their privileged position in the international system by making certain limited concessions to revisionist states such as Germany. In other words, the kind of change Carr advocated had a strong conservative element and offered the only way to protect the broad outlines of the interwar balance of power short of war.

In both his domestic and his international examples of successful peaceful change Carr displays a historicist preference for the interests of particular historical actors, and also tries to see how these interests can be reconciled with the the prevalent expressions of international morality, such as the principle of national self-determination. Although morality does concern him, it does not concern him in the form of the abstract and universal moral command but rather in the form of broadly accepted principles which influence the practical conduct and expectations of states. In the original 1939 edition of *The Twenty Years' Crisis* Carr presents the Munich Agreement as the expression of both power and morality, and offers his

support to the policy of appeasement followed by the British Prime Minister Chamberlain towards Hitler in the 1930s. In the second and later editions of the book he distinguishes between more or less successful cases of peaceful change, while clinging to the central idea that peaceful change should satisfy the requirements of both justice and practical expediency.

Among contemporary thinkers, Carr's conceptualisation of peaceful change puts him in the middle between, on the one hand, Manning's (1937) belief that peaceful change is not necessarily change for the better or change in the interests of justice, and, on the other hand, Toynbee's (1937) idealistic search for a form of international change that would be peaceful in the deep sense of the term and lead to a harmonious world. By avoiding the pitfalls of both pure realism and pure idealism Carr shows how necessary it is to establish a working relationship between power and morality in order to solve a particular problem. The domestic and international examples he employs are important as expressions of this abiding belief in the importance of bringing together power and morality, and they also reflect the hope that justice can be realised without undermining the foundations of the existing social and international order. To the extent that his interest in morality concerns primarily practical morality, it is compatible with his historicist outlook. The main problem facing Carr's account of peaceful change is not its supposedly unpatriotic character, or its neglect for justice, but the analogies that he tries to establish between the domestic and the international realms. Although the Western proletariat accepted the material and other benefits bestowed upon it by the democratic welfare state and abandoned social revolution, it is doubtful whether the revisionist states of the interwar period could relinquish war in the name of the limited sacrifices that Carr advocated and the British policymakers implemented. Although his proposals for peaceful change make sense if an international society exists, they do not make sense if such a society is an illusion and only competing national units actually exist. Paradoxically, Carr's proposals for peaceful change are based on what he is seen to undermine, i.e. international society.

### **Capital and Labour**

In the investigation of the phenomenon of peaceful change Carr follows his general strategy of establishing analogies between the domestic and the international realms, and as Michael Joseph Smith (1986) notes, he chooses to present labour-capital relations in nineteenth-century industrializing states as a model for twentieth-century international politics. For Carr, no political order, domestic or international, can survive without accommodating change. Peaceful change in the domestic realm is defined by the absence of revolution, and peaceful change in the



international realm is defined by the absence of war. In both the domestic and the international spheres power and morality have their special role to play in the process of peaceful change but before arriving at a synthesis between them one should distinguish between the one element and the other.

According to Carr (1939/2001), the growth of social legislation reflects the just grievances of the working class, but it would not have been achieved without recourse to strikes and threats of social revolution. Even the campaign against the condemnation of Dreyfus in France would not have been successful without the support of massive political organisations and social movements. Despite the important differences that exist between strikes, revolutions, and peaceful political mobilisation, it is clear that the kind of political change that Carr has in mind can never be entirely peaceful since the threat of force always lurks in the background. The participants in a process of peaceful change do not abandon their right to resort to force but they only choose to suspend it temporarily. Although governments try to appear decisive and frequently declare that they will not yield to threats of force, it is utopian to believe that extensive domestic and international reforms can be enacted without some form of power backing them.

In the same way that no dominant class abandons voluntarily its social privileges, no state makes important sacrifices to another in order to satisfy international public opinion or to comply with the advice of independent experts. According to Carr, the relevance of nineteenth-century social relations for twentieth-century international relations has primarily to do with the fact that workers and capitalists managed to reach a historical compromise without the direct intervention of the state. As a result of this compromise, the working classes ameliorated their material condition and a social revolution was avoided. Therefore, for Carr, what really hinders international change from following the successful route of social change is not the absence of effective international institutions but rather the limited development of that spirit of compromise which enabled the members of the national community to reach a mutually beneficial understanding.

Although he recognises that both capitalists and workers must show goodwill in order to achieve an understanding, and in a similar way both satisfied and dissatisfied nations have their particular responsibilities, the main emphasis of the analysis of peaceful change in the domestic realm is on the responsibilities of the strong towards the weak. It is also interesting to note that Carr tends to downplay the importance of the state and of the political process in general and to present the historical compromise between capitalists and workers as a more or less private matter. This explains his international view that satisfied and dissatisfied nations can reach a compromise in the absence not only of a world state but also

of any institutionalised process of peaceful change. Instead of calling for the establishment of an institutional process of peaceful change and then for the resolution of particular problems, Carr calls for the ad hoc resolution of the pressing problems of his time which could hopefully lead to the institutionalisation of peaceful change in the distant future. Although Carr was not necessarily wrong in believing that peaceful change could take place in the absence of a world state, the limited sacrifices he proposed were unlikely to satisfy Nazi Germany and Mussolini's Italy. Maybe the attitude of the nineteenth-century proletarians he has in mind was dictated by more than simply material considerations, and it was their sense of belonging to a given community that was decisively absent from the minds of the leaders of revisionist states like Germany and Italy.

### **International Examples**

According to Carr, in the same way that during the nineteenth century the capitalists managed to retain their dominant position in the social order by making certain concessions to the workers, the privileged powers of the interwar period could retain their position in the international system by making certain limited concessions to Germany. The main difference between Carr's domestic and international examples of successful peaceful change is that in the domestic context the concessions that the capitalists made to the workers were to their own material detriment. On the other hand, the sacrifices that Carr wanted Britain to make in order to satisfy Germany were not territorially detrimental to Britain but to certain small nations, like Czechoslovakia. In accordance with his historicist approach to international change in general, in his discussion of international peaceful change Carr prioritises the interests of certain nations and virtually ignores the interests of others. Peaceful change for Carr is change conducive to the interests of established great powers, like Britain, and marginalised great powers, like Germany.

The proletarian nations that he had in mind and whose aspirations in the world scene he supported were not the militarily weak ones, such as Manchuria and Abyssinia, but rather dethroned great powers, like Germany, and dissatisfied medium powers, like Italy. As Michael Cox (2001) reminds us, Carr viewed the position of Germany as a have-not state as fundamentally problematic and inevitably subject to change. To the extent that some kind of change was inevitable, "it was better that this occurred through negotiation around an agreed agenda rather than by any other means" (Cox, 2001: lxxiv). The fact that Carr was ready to recognise the advantages of adjusting to changing power relations independent of moral considerations does not mean that he was not interested in the moral dimension of peaceful change. The Munich Agreement was from his

point of view praiseworthy not only because of its recognition of the principle of national self-determination but also because it compensated Germany for its harsh treatment by the Allies after World War I. The Munich Agreement figures prominently in the first edition of *The Twenty Years' Crisis* and is portrayed in two distinct ways as either a function of power or as a function of both power and morality. From the point of view of power, Carr claimed that:

If the power relations of Europe in 1938 made it inevitable that Czecho-Slovakia should lose part of its territory and eventually her independence, it was preferable (quite apart from any question of justice or injustice) that this should come about as the result of discussions round a table in Munich than as the result either of a war between the Great Powers or of a local war between Germany and Czecho-Slovakia (Smith, 1986: 83).

More importantly, from the standpoint of both power and morality, Carr depicted the Munich settlement as a paradigmatic case of peaceful change claiming that:

The negotiations which led up to the Munich Agreement of September 29, 1938, were the nearest approach in recent years to the settlement of a major international issue by a procedure of peaceful change. The element of power was present. The element of morality was also present in the form of the common recognition by the Powers, who effectively decided the issue, of a criterion applicable to the dispute: the principle of self-determination. The injustice of the incorporation in Czecho-Slovakia of three-and-a-quarter million protesting Germans had been attacked in the past by many British critics including the Labour Party and Mr. Lloyd George. Nor had the promises made by M. Benes at the Peace Conference regarding their treatment been fully carried out. The change in itself was one which corresponded both to a change in the European equilibrium of forces and to accepted canons of international morality (Smith, 1986: 84).

In the second and the later editions of *The Twenty Years' Crisis* the Munich Agreement loses its moral dimension as the supposed expression of the principle of national self-determination and is portrayed as a result of yielding to threats of force. However, this does not automatically make it illegitimate, since for Carr violence among nations has necessarily a more pronounced role than violence within nations. Despite the attempt to establish analogies between successful social and international change, he warns the reader that "the parallel should not be pressed too far" (Carr, 1939/2001: 196). This is due not only to existence of international anarchy and the absence of a world state, but is also related to the different moral attitudes that inevitably influence the employment of social and international force.

Although at least in democratic countries all social classes prefer to find non-violent ways to solve their differences, this does not apply to the international sphere where the role of morality is more circumscribed and the role of violence is more significant. The peculiarities of the international realm make Carr to argue

that even as a simple way of avoiding violence peaceful change has its merits. These merits can be clearly observed in cases such as that of nineteenth-century Bulgaria, where the avoidance of war among the great powers was more important than the protection of the territorial integrity of the country itself. As Carr argues in his second example of successful international peaceful change:

If the relations of power between the leading European countries in 1877 made it inevitable that Bulgaria should be deprived of much of the territory allocated to her by the Treaty of San Stefano, then it was preferable that this result should be brought about by discussions round a table in Berlin rather than by a war between Great Britain and Austria-Hungary on the one side and Russia on the other (Carr, 1939/2001: 199).

Therefore, although in the second and later editions of *The Twenty Years' Crisis* Carr stopped portraying the Munich Agreement as the expression of a coincidence between power and morality, he continued to argue that peaceful change at the expense of a small European state is preferable to a war among the great powers. He also continued to emphasise that ideally peaceful change should meet the requirements of both power and morality. As he argues with regard to the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1921:

The settlement could not have been reached, and above all could not have been lasting, solely on a basis of power. The Anglo-Irish Treaty was a flagrant case of 'yielding to threats of force': it was concluded with the authors of a successful rebellion. But it had its necessary moral foundation in the acceptance of a common standard of what was just and reasonable in mutual relations between the two countries, and in the readiness of both (and particularly of the stronger) to make sacrifices in the interest of conciliation; and this made a striking success of an agreement about which the gloomiest prognostications were current at the time of its conclusion (Carr, 1939/2001: 200-1).

Although admissible as a means of avoiding war, peaceful change should be based on a combination between power and morality. The one example of unsuccessful peaceful change mentioned by Carr, of a peaceful change that never took place, is Germany's failure to revise the Versailles Treaty during the interwar period. As a result of its lack of adequate political and military power, Germany failed to revise even those sections of the treaty which were widely recognised as unjust in both Britain and Germany. His distinction between an ideal case of peaceful change provided by the Munich Agreement and the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921, a successful but not ideal form of peaceful change, and an unsuccessful peaceful change that fails to materialise because of the absence of power, indicates a strong normative preference for combining power with morality. In cases where this is not possible, following the dictates of the calculus of power even independent of moral considerations might still be necessary. Combining power and morality, or even relying on power alone, is preferable to having a just cause without the effective means to promote it in the domestic or the international scene.

To conclude, in this section I have endeavoured to show that Carr's conceptualisation of peaceful change is far from unpatriotic, and is fully compatible with his historicist outlook which emphasises the interests and aspirations of particular historical actors. Carr's proposals for change have a strong conservative element in the sense that they aim to preserve an international order organised around the interests of satisfied powers like Britain and France. In the same way that the capitalists managed to retain their privileged position in society by making certain limited concessions to the workers, status quo powers are called to show goodwill and understanding towards the revisionist powers in order to avoid a new world conflict.

The main problem with Carr's approach to peaceful change is not that it fails to take into account British interests, or that it is uninterested in morality defined in historical terms, but rather that it presupposes the existence of an international society whose existence Carr himself doubted. Perhaps Butterfield – and especially Wight—might be better guides here. Admitting that the strong have certain responsibilities towards the weak is only the first step towards delineating those responsibilities. It also does not fully answer the question why the socially or internationally weak should accept the limited sacrifices offered by the strong and repudiate revolution or war. Indeed, Germany – which was the main beneficiary of Carr's proposals for peaceful change—proved to be unwilling to reconcile itself with an ameliorated position within the existing international system, and tried to create a new European order which would accommodate its own hegemonic ambitions. Ultimately, Carr's proposals failed not because they were not realistic but because they were too realistic: prioritising short-term advantage and trying to promote piecemeal international reforms apparently was not good enough for the have-nots of Carr's time. The question of whether his post-World War II proposals for international change fared any better is going to concern us next in the investigation of his historically informed account of nationalism.

## II) NATIONALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

In the same way that Carr's theory of peaceful change is organised around and expresses the interests of the strong actors in the international system at the expense of the weak, his evaluation of nationalism is far from homogeneous. The political form of nationalism that Carr advocated has both theoretical and practical value. Its theoretical value lies in challenging the bond between the nation and the state that even contemporary students of the phenomenon of nationalism seem to accept. Its practical value lies in promoting the interests of the multicultural states that provide the focus of his historicist conceptualisation of international change. The conclusion of his analysis is that some kind of synthesis between nationalism

and internationalism is still possible, but that it requires a new (political) form of nationalism and a new (social) form of internationalism.

### **Historicising Nationalism**

Before going on to examine his distinctively political version of nationalism, it would be interesting to see how Carr managed to effectively historicise this phenomenon and to deny that it has any given essence or character.

Contemporary students of nationalism such as Ernest Gellner (1992) have justifiably praised Carr for showing sensitivity to particular historical situations and contexts and relating nationalism to wider social developments and forces. Carr's distinction among four different periods of nationalism in *Nationalism and After* (1945) is based on the assumption that the character of nations and the forms of their interaction are subject to change. This change does not originate at the level of the international system but has very much to do with developments taking place within the units. Moreover, what Carr is really discussing in his examination of four different periods of nationalism are not just political units but rather the complex entities that Cox (1986) describes as state/society complexes. Different periods of nationalism correspond to different ways of organising social and economic life. These ways have important consequences for nationalism itself. The fact that ultimately priority is attributed to politics over economics does not stop Carr from depicting nationalism in all its historical complexity and multiformity.

The generally positive presentation of the first two periods of nationalism is somewhat unexpected coming from someone interested in the empowerment of the people. Carr (1945) argues that the beginnings of nationalism coincide with the advent of modernity and should be placed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Before being terminated by the French Revolution, this first period of nationalism was closely related to internationalism because of the the generally cordial relationships between kings and princes who understood their citizens and countries as "subjects" and "possessions" respectively. During this period, international law was not an impersonal set of rules but rather a number of treaties made between particular sovereigns. The educated classes of the major European countries were also in regular contact with one another using French as their main medium of communication. Although not entirely absent, wars were relatively limited. Finally, mercantilist policies did not see the economy as something separate from the state but rather as something that should be regulated and controlled according to the interests of the state.

The second period of nationalism succeeded the Napoleonic wars and managed to offer a particularly worthwhile synthesis of nationalism and internationalism. Nations, which were no longer exclusively represented by their leaders, coexisted

harmoniously with one another and the development and freedom of each was seen as a precondition for the development and freedom of all. Carr draws particular attention to the fact that behind the facade of laissez-faire and the supposedly impersonal rules regulating economic life political power was present. British imperial power, and especially the City of London, managed to regulate the world economy while leaving intact the illusory belief in the existence of an international economic mechanism which was separate from states. Although this second period of nationalism, which was interrupted by World War I, has been seen as the most complete expression of the idea of a world economy, Carr talks about a pseudo-international economic order based on British supremacy. The gist of his argument is that the distance between economic ideology and economic reality had during the nineteenth century a beneficial influence upon international relations. Nations, which were now primarily represented by their middle classes, were considered to have the same interests, and military conflicts largely faded into the background.

The marriage of nationalism and internationalism that characterises the first two periods of nationalism was interrupted by the outbreak of World War I, which led to the third period of nationalism. During this period, the character of nations changed once more and the lower classes acquired new social and political rights. In a way similar to the first period, economic policies served particular national goals and this time aimed to serve the material welfare of all the members of the nation. Despite the apparent similarities between the first and third periods of nationalism, Carr rejects the term “neo-mercantilism” since it would imply a return to the past and not the advent of something new. During the period of socialised nations socialism itself ceased to be international since “the mass of workers knew instinctively on which side their bread was buttered” (Carr, 1945: 20). Even the appearance of a single world economy was replaced by a number of national economies, which were obviously competing with one another. The dissociation of nationalism from internationalism led to two world wars which were fought in ways unimaginable in the past. During World War II, any distinction between combatants and civilians disappeared entirely.

Although Carr did not want to prejudge future developments, he saw that some kind of combination of nationalism with internationalism was needed in the post-World War II historical context which coincides with the fourth period of nationalism. This combination could not be found so long as the cultural nation continued to coincide with the political state. Although in *Nationalism and After* Carr comes close to describing the new political units he had in mind as “civilisations” – and also includes China in his analysis—he was primarily interested in the future of Britain, America, and the Soviet Union. As the main actors in the

post-World War II international scene, these multicultural states proved that the association of the “nation” with the “state”, which Gellner (1983) sees as the essence of nationalism, was no longer viable. However, what I would like to argue, focusing mainly on *Conditions of Peace* (1942), is that Carr’s careful distinction between nationality, national self-determination and political nationalism enabled him to free nationalism from its nineteenth-century connotations, and to argue in favour of a multipolar world organised around the collective hegemony of Western Europe, Russia and America. The steps for the creation of such a world are analytically examined in *Conditions of Peace* which, at least in policy terms, is Carr’s most accomplished work.

### **Nationality, National Self-Determination and Political Nationalism**

According to Carr (1942), the principle of nationality establishes a link between the nation as a cultural unit and the state as a political unit and makes the first the measure of second. The ideological assumption that nations ought to form states and states ought to provide political expression to nations was born with the French Revolution, and was fully compatible with the political realities of the age. However, during the twentieth century, it was realised that the application of the principle of nationality outside of its original Western European framework is not easy, since not all people sharing the same language want to be members of the same state. For Carr, the principle of nationality is valid only in a particular geographical context and within a particular historical framework and does not provide an answer to the problems of the twentieth century.

Despite his critique of the principle of nationality, Carr is positive towards self-determination, which is an idea inseparable from democracy and the liberal view that government requires the consent of the governed. As he notes, determining the contours of the political unit is equally important with deciding its constitutional form, and ignoring the principle of self-determination is not a viable option under modern political circumstances. However, political practice in Eastern Europe during the first half of the twentieth century proved that the exercise of the principle of national self-determination does not necessarily lead to the espousal of the principle of nationality. Far from equating the principle of self-determination with the principle of nationality, Carr wants mainly to show the distance between the two principles and to prove that they are logically and historically separable. The fact that defining the cultural nation is not always easy, and that even clearly defined nations do not in all cases want to form a state, undermines the argument that the claims of self-determination coincide with those of nationality.

Having shown that the principle of nationality is the expression of particular historical experiences and that it cannot be easily applied outside of its original



Western European framework, Carr proceeds to question the principle of national self-determination itself. Although important, national self-determination cannot be treated as an ideological mantra, since it is limited by the rights of existing states. Even when a cultural nation speaks with one voice and requires political independence, this does not mean that a multinational political unit such as Great Britain or the Soviet Union is obliged to comply. As Carr notes, the right of Welshmen or the inhabitants of Uzbekistan to determine the contours of the political unit to which they belong is conditioned and outweighed by the right of Great Britain or the Soviet Union to retain their territorial integrity.

Therefore, after employing the idea of national self-determination in order to undermine the principle of nationality, Carr goes on to argue that even self-determination possesses a relative and not an absolute value. His view that there is no absolute right to self-determination in the same way that an individual cannot do whatever he likes within the framework of a democratic state is plausible, but is based upon the conscious prioritisation of the claims of political nationalism. The carriers of this political nationalism are the great multinational units of his time: Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States. As was the case with his investigation of the principle of peaceful change, his evaluation of the principles of nationality and national self-determination is ultimately based on the conscious prioritisation of the interests of certain powerful states. In the same way that successful peaceful change should ideally be based on a combination of power and morality, the rights of states encapsulated in the notion of political nationalism are founded upon both practical and moral considerations.

### **The Military and Economic Limitations of the Nation State**

Carr's support for the large multinational units of his time was dictated by both moral and geopolitical considerations. For him, the answer to the question what constitutes a viable political unit able to retain its independence and protect the interests of its citizens is a historically contingent one and cannot be identical for all ages. The general historical tendency that can be observed when moving from the ancient Greek city state to the European nation state of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and then to the multicultural units of the post-World War II period, is that, as time passes, the size of the effective political unit increases, and the requirements of security and welfare become more difficult to meet.

This historically observed increase in the size of political units means that the principles of nationality and national self-determination belong mainly to the past and not to the present or the future. The principle of nationality is clearly outdated and self-determination remains relevant only in some contexts and for some purposes. Before delineating his vision of the future and Britain's prominent role

within an integrated Western Europe within which the principles of nationality and self-determination are radically transformed, Carr tries to show the bankruptcy of the small and medium nation state in Europe and beyond.

From the standpoint of political and military power, World War I proved that, contrary to what was happening during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, small states are no longer able to maintain their neutrality in times of conflict among the great powers. To the extent that they are virtually drawn into military conflicts independent of their will, the best choice of small and medium powers is to align themselves permanently with a great power. The kind of cooperation that modern warfare demands cannot be developed at short notice, and presupposes the establishment of permanent military bonds among states. Systems of collective security theoretically provide an answer to the problems of small states, but they are not practicable. Therefore, forging permanent military and political links between states is a win-win policy favourable to the interests of big and small states alike.

Although Carr's arguments regarding the military limitations of small states in an age of global conflicts have their merits, his second assumption that they are morally deficient because they cannot provide for the material wellbeing of their citizens is stated but not proven in any convincing way. At least in *Conditions of Peace*, Carr takes for granted rather than explains the fact that small states cannot provide for the material prosperity of their citizens. What he is actually doing is developing an argument against the negative political consequences of economic nationalism, which is assumed to be incompatible with peace, and to threaten the future of civilisation. Even if one recognises the political dangers inherent in the return to mercantilist policies, it could be argued that at least during Carr's time small and medium European states were not irrelevant in economic terms and were still able to contribute to the prosperity of their citizens.

Probably Carr's most convincing moral argument against ordinary nationalism has to do with the belief that retaining the independence of the small and medium nation state in Europe is not conducive to international peace. From his point of view, dividing the industrially developed world into British, Soviet and American spheres of influence was necessary for the avoidance of a new world conflict. In particular, the reconstruction of the war-torn Western European nations under British leadership could thwart the division of the globe into two mutually exclusive political and ideological camps. Although Britain and the Western Europe at large ultimately decided not to play an autonomous role in the post-World War II balance of power, Carr's foreign policy proposals provide the most concrete vision of an independent European role in world affairs and represent a creative synthesis

between nationalism and internationalism. During the historical period which was just emerging when Carr was writing on nationalism, large multicultural states, such as Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union, would attempt to combine nationalism with internationalism by promoting historically novel approaches to regional integration. These approaches would extend the traditional responsibilities of great powers for the promotion of international peace and security to the social domain, and would potentially render them the guarantors of the welfare of ethnically diverse populations.

By arguing that internationalism should have a social dimension Carr showed that no return to the past was possible. The fourth age of nationalism is identified with state/society complexes different from those existing in previous periods, and is very closely related to developments taking place within the units themselves. It is those developments that he analysed in *The New Society* (1951) which we will discuss in the next section. The question of whether historical developments in Europe during the post-World War II period justified Carr's belief that the type of nationalism described by Gellner (1983) belongs to the past cannot be easily answered. For a time at least, European states retained their sovereignty within a framework of interdependence, which is, however, subject to change towards a supranational direction. Although writers such as Mark Corner (2014) seem eager to celebrate the sui generis nature of the EU as a combination of intergovernmental and supranational elements, one cannot help but notice that there are pressures towards a more rigid direction that limits drastically the autonomy of most of the participants in the European project. In any case, the kind of collective hegemony envisaged by Carr in *Conditions of Peace* is internally coherent and is fully compatible with his historicist conceptualisation of international change. It also shows that the fourth and later periods of nationalism cannot be identical with what preceded them and one cannot effectively theorise nationalism in the abstract. Moreover, even if achieved, the synthesis between nationalism and internationalism is always under threat and must be able to adapt to new historical situations.

### III) FROM THE OLD TO THE NEW SOCIETY

So far I have argued that the kind of international changes that Carr advocated were well attuned to the needs of the satisfied powers of the interwar period and the main international actors of the post-World War II period. Of course, his proposals did not simply reflect the existing distribution of power in the international scene and had a strong normative element. The sacrifices that Carr demanded from Britain and France were not self-evident, and his advocacy for the creation of a politically independent Western Europe led by Britain had to

surmount a number of important practical and ideological obstacles. Although his recommendations for a form of peaceful change that would hopefully turn Germany from a dissatisfied power to a satisfied one were published too late, and his support for an autonomous Europe could be considered to be premature given the differences between Britain and the emerging superpowers, the ideas expressed in *The New Society* (1951) certainly express the spirit of the age. Although *The New Society* might not be the classic that *The Twenty Years' Crisis* undoubtedly is, it certainly helps one to understand Carr's historicist approach to international change. As in the books discussed so far, Carr is primarily concerned with the future of Britain and Western Europe in a changing world. The social reforms recommended by Carr clearly serve British interests and aspirations in the world and prove the links that exist between domestic and international politics. The way in which he brings together the supposedly separate fields of social and international relations is one of the reasons why he cannot be seen as a conventional realist in spite of his frank recognition of the importance of power in politics.

The complex relationship that exists between the social and the international component of Carr's overall theory of change has concerned Charles Jones (1998) who makes the valid point that Carr believed in the value of certain social reforms independent of their contribution to British national strength and prestige in the world. Although it is true that Carr's approach to issues pertaining to democracy and the pursuance of social justice was not instrumental, the key to understanding his thinking lies in recognising that the great historical trends which he described were not either domestic or international but they were both domestic and international at the same time. In other words, Carr's main argument is that the same great historical transformations which necessitated changes in British foreign policy and Britain's relationship with Europe also dictated major departures in social policy. Domestic and international relations are not conceptualised as independent realms, but they are examined as different aspects of the same political reality and as relatively autonomous fields where, however, the same great historical forces exercise their determining influence. For the Carr of *The New Society* and the domestic sections of *Conditions of Peace*, great powers do not exist independent of the social policies they pursue, but they rather owe their existence to successful domestic policies, and this was especially true with regard to Britain and Western Europe which were emerging from a disastrous war.

The roots of the new domestic and international society discussed by Carr should be sought in three influential revolutions: the French Revolution, the American Revolution, and the Industrial Revolution. In particular, the old society that found itself under attack in Britain and the other Western European countries after the

war was that of individualist democracy and laissez-faire economic organisation. The international dimension of this old society was the subjugation of the peoples of Asia and Africa to Europe and the negation of their political and social independence. To the extent that the transition from competition to planned economy and from colonialism to independence was inevitable, Carr argued that adapting to those changes was the only way for Britain to retain a leading position in the world. Clinging to the past had nothing to offer to Britain or the other Western European countries and would only make them seem out of place in the post-World War II world. Although Carr's sober investigation of the transition from competition to planned economy indicates the willing acceptance of the social tendencies he describes, his examination of the relationship between Britain and the former colonial world mainly expresses the need to make virtue out of necessity and to benefit from changes that occur virtually independent of one's political will.

### **From Competition to Planned Economy**

In accordance with his more general understanding of historical change, Carr presents the replacement of unrestricted competition by economic planning as the result of various social pressures and not as the consequence of the implementation of any clearly defined economic programme. Although this transition from competition to planned economy was especially evident in post-war Britain, its roots could be traced back in processes and debates which were largely coterminous with the Industrial Revolution. According to Carr, already in the 1840's there existed in Britain a factory legislation aiming at the protection of the most vulnerable part of the workforce: women and children. This legislation was gradually extended to include everyone else as well, and echoed Robert Owen's warnings against the unregulated expansion of industrial organisation. As Carr notes, the victories of Owen and other humanitarian reformers of the nineteenth century were so impressive that already in the 1880's the night-watchman state of classical political economy had been rendered obsolete by social and political developments in England and elsewhere.

In the twentieth century, the establishment of forms of planned economy which were more comprehensive than the welfare state was the result of pressures exercised not only by the workers but by the capitalists as well. The small businesses of the nineteenth century were replaced by large trusts, which managed to either limit or eliminate real economic competition in their fields. Within the framework of this transition from the liberal economy of the nineteenth century to the planned economy of the twentieth century, "the individual business man has been ousted by the company, the company by the cartel and the trust,

the trust by the super-trust” (Carr, 1951: 25). In this account of the decline of free competition Carr emphasises the importance of factors endogenous to the system. Although the establishment of the welfare state is presented as the result of social and political pressures exercised by the workers and various humanitarian reformers, economic planning has primarily to do with the self-defeating character of capitalism itself. After having managed to reduce competition through economic means, the few capitalists left standing were not eager to trust their fate to chance and risk extinction as the consequence of economic crises which in the course of the twentieth century were becoming more and more severe.

Especially after the Great Depression of the 1930s, Carr notes, capitalists and workers found themselves united in the belief that the economy cannot be left to operate according to its own logic, and the state ought to protect the interests of the national economy in its entirety. For Carr, the essence of economic planning is that no sector of the economy is left to operate alone, and all sectors are coordinated by the state in order to augment the interests of the society as a whole. Although economic planning in the sense described by Carr should not be confused with the nationalisation of industry, since both private and public companies can be the objects of planning, at least in *The New Society* he displays a clear preference for extending the direct control of the state over key sectors of the national economy. Planning in the sense of directing the economy according to the interests of society as a whole, and also the nationalisation of major industries, take precedence over enabling workers to control the process of production, or granting material benefits to them. With regard to the control of production by the workers, Carr claims that it offers limited practical results since the democratic principle cannot be easily applied to the industrial sphere. Providing material incentives is also inadequate, because the welfare state has made workers less amenable to material coercion by offering a certain sense of economic security to them.

It is at this point that Carr introduces the hypothesis that the nationalisation of the economy will hopefully create a new feeling of social obligation to the workers. Nationalisation expresses “the conception of industrial democracy on the national plane rather than on that of the particular factory or industry” (Carr, 1951:55). Contrary to the private enterprises, which make only an economic appeal to the worker, nationalised industries will help him realise that the national economy is a single whole, and that his own efforts in the sphere of production contribute to national prosperity and wellbeing. Although the emphasis on nationalising as many industries as possible makes Carr’s appeal to planning also an appeal to socialism, the kind of socialism he advocates is not so much an ideological choice but rather a matter of national survival since, as he puts it, “we have to advance

towards socialism...or perish” (Carr, 1951: 55). Irrespective of the tension that exists between the rather moderate understanding of economic planning expressed in the domestic sections of *Conditions of Peace* and the more radical ideas expressed in *The New Society*, the fact remains that Carr saw his preferred social policy as necessary to British national strength and prosperity.

Although it could be claimed that he simply chose to formulate his social ideals in the language of national interest, the issue goes deeper than the choice of the most adequate rhetorical means. Carr was genuinely convinced that Britain and the other Western European countries had to adapt themselves to a new social environment and that some form of socialism was necessary to their socio-economic development. In a country such as Great Britain, the resistance to the adoption of nationally beneficial social policies was the result of the detrimental influence exercised by vested interests, but also, and perhaps more importantly, of the widespread tendency to look towards the past and to search there for solutions to contemporary problems. If Britain and the other European nations wanted to continue playing a remarkable role in the twentieth century, what was needed was not a return to the past but the exploration of new forms of social organisation. In the same way that a British-led Western Europe could theoretically balance America and the Soviet Union in military and political terms, it could also develop a form of social organisation lying between the extremes of unadulterated capitalism and state socialism. Paradoxically, those aspects of Carr’s thinking which effectively express the spirit of the age in which he was writing, are also those which seem rather distant today.

### **From Colonialism to Independence**

For Carr, the same misguided antithesis to the adoption of policies consonant with the requirements of the new society in its international dimension could be observed in the relations between the West and the former colonial world. Contrary to what happens in *What is History?*, where the emancipation of Asia and Africa is invested with world historical significance and presented in terms of the expansion of reason, in *The New Society* Carr adopts a historicist point of view and tries to see how Britain and the other European countries could benefit from the developments in the former colonial world. Because of its past involvement in Asia and Africa Britain is portrayed as better suited than the United States to understand what is going on there, and to avoid the equally unacceptable extremes of interventionism or indifference towards the fate of its former colonial subjects. In particular, Carr makes a cogent argument in favour of a policy which would be non-interventionist in political terms but which, at the same time, would actively promote the industrialisation of backward countries. Before seeing how he

believed Britain could help the former colonies, it is important to take into account his largely economic interpretation of both the nineteenth-century Western imperialist expansion and the twentieth-century decolonisation movement.

With regard to Western imperialism, Carr adopts Lenin's and J. A. Hobson's economic point of view and emphasises that their economic interpretation of imperialism has been adopted by the leaders of Asia and Africa. As far as it concerns the twentieth-century decolonisation movement, he makes the important point that its essence lies in the rejection of the form of the international division of labour established during the early stages of the Industrial Revolution. Contrary to what was happening in the nineteenth century, in the twentieth century Asia and Africa are no longer willing to import industrial products from the West and in exchange to provide food and raw materials. Although Lenin was primarily interested to show how imperialism leads to conflict between the imperialist countries and the colonial world, and between the imperialist countries themselves, for Carr the economic dimension of imperialism and decolonisation means that a *modus vivendi* can be reached between the West and the former colonial world. The economic rather than political aspirations of the decolonisation movement mean that by showing goodwill and promoting industrialisation Western leaders can bridge the gap between themselves and the nations of Asia and Africa.

The decision of Asian and African leaders to promote the industrialisation of their countries is not something which threatens Western interests, but an aspect of the enlargement of the circle of industrial nations. What African and Asian nations are doing during the twentieth century, has already been done by countries like Germany in the nineteenth century. It is in this context that Carr observes that during the last quarter of the nineteenth century the industrial monopoly of Great Britain was put into question by Germany and the United States, and that by 1900 Japan and Russia were also trying to find a place among the industrial nations of the world. By placing the industrialisation of Asia and Africa in a wider historical perspective, Carr leads the reader to the conclusion that it is the logical outcome of the Industrial Revolution, which promotes the homogenisation of the world along industrial lines. What is wrong and artificial is not the choice of African and Asian leaders to industrialise their countries, but the Western assumption that industrialisation can be limited to particular countries at the expense of others. The analogies that he tries to establish between the industrialisation of Germany and America in the nineteenth century and the industrialisation of Asia and Africa in the twentieth century are not faulty in logical terms, but they neglect the fact that similar actions can produce very different results in different historical contexts. Even if the nineteenth-century international



division of labour was problematic in economic and political terms, it is not certain that all nations can develop along similar industrial lines irrespective of their size, culture, religion and so on.

In any event, after conceptualising both imperialism and decolonisation in economic terms, Carr goes on to argue that in order to prevent the formation of an anti-Western alliance among the former European colonies, Britain and the other European nations should not only respect the decision of their former subjects to follow the industrial path, but also actively assist them. The practical support that he recommends is not limited to the allocation of capital but also includes technical help and advice. By investing their capital and offering technical support, Britain and the other Western European countries can cultivate the friendship of their former subjects, and stop the increase of Soviet influence in Asia and Africa. Contrary to what happens in *Conditions of Peace*, in *The New Society* Carr shows no signs of supporting an independent European role in the world, since America and Europe are portrayed as pursuing similar goals with alternative means. Their common political interest lies in stopping Russia from increasing its global influence by exploiting politically an essentially economic revolution. Because of their diplomatic experience and understanding of local conditions, Britain and the other European powers could help America develop a policy thwarting and not facilitating the spread of Soviet influence by alienating potential allies in Asia and Africa. Although Carr continues to adopt a historicist point of view which assigns priority to European and British interests, these interests are not placed within the framework of a politically independent Western Europe but rather within the context of a Euro-Atlantic political partnership which reflects and does not challenge the realities of the Cold War. As is also the case with many of the examples of successful peaceful change mentioned in the first section of this chapter, in his investigation of decolonisation and the colonial revolution he leads us to the conclusion that making virtue out of necessity is one of the best ways to come to terms with a rapidly changing world.

#### IV) CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this chapter was to draw attention to Carr's historicist conceptualisation of international change and to explore his debt to his nineteenth-century liberal predecessors. Like Butterfield and Wight, Carr discussed and analysed contemporary political developments from a particular point of view, which was no other than that of Britain and the Western Europe at large. Like Butterfield and Wight, he managed to combine his historicism with an interest in the requirements of international order. Although Butterfield's and Wight's support for the interests of small states made them espouse an associational form of balancing where no

state or group of states dominate the international system, Carr's interest in the fate of the world at large made him support a collective hegemony exercised by Britain, Russia and America<sup>xl</sup>. This hegemony could be conducive to the interests of small states, since Carr was particularly interested in the social content of internationalism, and was reluctant to support coercion and the undisguised military domination of small states by the big ones.

The answer to the question of whether Carr's international thought is closer to liberalism or to socialism depends on what precisely one means by those terms. Certainly, Carr was not a supporter of laissez-faire and the doctrine of the natural harmony of interests. However, by the time his major works were published most liberals had also ceased to support the political recipes of their nineteenth-century predecessors. In particular, the League of Nations, which is treated rather harshly by Carr, was a step in the establishment of international government and not an expression of laissez-faire principles. If nations naturally had the same interests and those interests naturally coincided with each another, it would be difficult to discern the rationale behind the creation of such an organisation. Characterising Carr's international thought as socialist would have to overcome a number of important problems. First, as we saw in Chapter 5, Carr did not believe in the Marxist and Leninist goals of the abolition of the state and of the distinct social classes that provide the states' reason of existence. This scepticism towards traditional Marxist goals also applies to the idea of international relations understood as relations among more or less independent units. States and international relations were an integral part of Carr's vision of the world.

Secondly, when discussing internationalism, Carr does not show any special interest in organisations such as the First, and especially the Second International of socialist parties, which, according to Perry Anderson (2002), provided the most interesting example of a form of internationalism that does not logically presuppose nationalism. Carr's "internationalism" is a derivative of "nationalism" since it is based upon it and does not provide a completely different way of viewing the world. It should also be mentioned that Carr employs the term "internationalism" as a positive concept. This is compatible with its mainstream usage and misses the point that a certain form of nationalism might be preferable to a certain form of internationalism. Carr's critique of the notion of international society as an ideological device used by the strong to protect their own interests shows precisely that internationalism should also be the object of critical investigation and not be uncritically accepted under any historical circumstances. Finally, to the extent that the idea of equality lies at the heart of both Marxist and non-Marxist versions of socialism, Carr's international thought cannot be seen as an expression of socialism because of the privileged role he attributed to great

powers like Britain, America and the Soviet Union. For these reasons, I conclude that Carr's international vision of establishing order and promoting justice within a world populated by autonomous or semi-autonomous states creates certain family resemblances between himself and the liberal reformers he so much liked to criticize. His response to the crisis of liberalism was a dialectical one.

Carr's work on nationalism brings him at the forefront of the particular field and sets rather exacting standards for later scholars. His depreciation of nationalism in its traditional form of identifying the cultural nation with the political state brings him close to Hobsbawm (1992) who, even after the break-up of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, continued to insist that identifying the nation with the state offers no solution to the problems of small nations under contemporary circumstances. For Hobsbawm, even religious fundamentalism offers a more coherent and plausible social programme than nationalism. The interest that Eastern European countries showed in joining the EU after the dissolution of the Soviet Union to some extent confirms Carr's and Hobsbawm's view that the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century nationalism is a spent force. With regard to internationalism, Carr correctly insisted that it should have a social character and not be confined to the political sphere. His emphasis on securing social rights within a unified Western Europe puts into question the link that scholars such as David Miller (1995) have tried to establish between the idea of nationality and the pursuance of social justice. To the extent that Carr's account of nationalism suffers from something, this has to do with taking the state and the world of states as given, and in treating internationalism as an extension of nationalism. In the same way that Deutscher (1955) criticised Carr for writing the history of a state in his *History of Soviet Russia*, Gellner (1992) criticised him for trying to see how nationalism influences a system of pre-existing polities instead of asking questions about nationalism itself. The emotional appeal of nationalism, and the tendency of the modern man to prioritise the claims of the state over those of other subnational or supranational entities, was more seriously considered by Wight.

## **CHAPTER 9**

### **Conclusion: Resonances of the History/Theory Dialectic**

This conclusion needs to carry out two tasks. First, it needs to arrive at a positive understanding of the dialectical method in general and the history/theory dialectic in particular. It will do that by supplementing Badiou's dialectic of scission by certain insights derived from the work of Slavoj Zizek, and by applying those insights to Butterfield, Wight and Carr. Zizek's reluctance to offer a straightforward definition of the dialectical method and scattered remarks on the subject mean that he cannot be plausibly used as a point of departure for understanding dialectics; he can, however, add certain nuances to Badiou's interesting but ultimately unsatisfying dialectic of scission. Secondly, this conclusion needs to show how Butterfield's, Wight's and Carr's history/theory dialectic can fertilise the study of International Relations from an English School perspective. It will meet this expectation by presenting Buzan's non-teleological dialectic of societal forms and Wilson's grounded theory of international institutions as the two most promising ways of instrumentalising the history/theory dialectic. Despite their importance, the proposals of Buzan and Wilson do not exhaust the potential of the history/theory dialectic as a basis for reconceptualising the English School.

#### **Butterfield, Wight and Carr on History as Theory and Theory as History**

As we saw in the course of the thesis, what distinguishes Butterfield, Wight and Carr from other thinkers of their generation and justifies their portrayal as the founding members of the English School of International Relations is their understanding of history as theory and theory as history. This understanding differentiates them from a number of participants in the British Committee on the Theory of International Politics and also from ecumenically minded historians such as Toynbee. In their work, the relationship between history and theory is not simply challenged but it is actually reversed. Contrary to what the proponents of the classical approach take for granted, in the thought of Butterfield, Wight and Carr it is history which stands for the universal and theory which stands for the particular. Although Butterfield's, Wight's and Carr's attachment to European traditions and values examined in Chapters 6, 7, and 8, provides a key to understanding their international thinking and explains their choice to treat international theory as history, their contribution to history examined in Chapters 3, 4, and 5, is much more diverse and difficult to evaluate. What I particularly tried to emphasise in the relevant chapters was to show how, when writing as

historians, Butterfield, Wight and Carr struggled with problems that are frequently associated with theoretical work in IR and elsewhere.

The recognition of the tension between agency and structure, necessity and freedom, optimism and pessimism, as well as the search for patterns or even meaning in the apparently unrelated events of the past, make their historical work hardly distinguishable from theory. Although they could be criticised for not finding a proper balance between personal and impersonal accounts of history and for combining them in a rather ad hoc way, what matters is that they admitted the existence of dilemmas which theorists also face when called to analyse the present or predict the future. For Butterfield, Wight and Carr, a historical narrative offers only a contingent perspective to the past, and the process of its creation does not differ essentially from theory building. Certainly, it cannot be arbitrary and it must be based on a painstaking investigation of the facts. However, it is also indistinguishable from the particular point of view of the historian who carries with him all his education, culture, and social and political background. In the end, works of history are no more or less objective than works of theory are.

Butterfield's, Wight's and Carr's historicist conceptualisation of international change can tell us a lot regarding how they viewed the role of theorist in a changing world. To the extent that their world is no longer ours and the Cold War belongs to the past, we are not obliged to accept their proposals for non-ideological diplomacy and a balance of power favourable to European interests and aspirations. Although the realisation of their ideals could have probably averted the Cold War, they were conscious of analysing a particular historical situation in a particular way, and they did not commit the mistake of treating the problems of their age as eternal ones. Indeed, de-contextualising the policy proposals of the writers discussed in the thesis, as some contemporary pluralists and realists do, would be tantamount to remaining faithful to the letter of the history/theory dialectic while departing from its spirit. Having said that, it is my view that Butterfield's, Wight's and Carr's choice to identify themselves with particular historical actors and thus to present theory as history is not totally unfounded and does not deprive their international thinking of theoretical relevance. The reason why I chose to emphasise particularity when discussing their contribution to IR is not only that this particularity accounts for their understanding of theory as history but also that, as mentioned earlier, this dimension of their thought has been neglected by English School scholars.

Butterfield's, Wight's and Carr's understanding of history as theory and theory as history made me use Badiou's dialectic of scission as a suitable point of departure for grasping the workings of the history/theory dialectic. Understanding

history and theory as bifurcated entities is the first step in rejecting Bull's formal logic, which also leads to a number of other problematic distinctions, such as that between order and justice. However, challenging the relationship between history and theory as conventionally understood is not exactly the same with describing it in genuinely dialectical terms. Recognising that history includes theory and theory includes history does not in and by itself show what is the end result of the history/theory dialectic in the form developed by Butterfield, Wight and Carr. What I would like to do is to arrive at a relatively positive understanding of the history/theory dialectic and to explore its potential consequences for the study of IR.

### **Badiou's Negative Dialectics**

Badiou's evolving relationship to dialectics is one of the main issues that concern interpreters of his work. As Bruno Bosteels (2005) notes, the conventional wisdom on the subject is that the dialectician of *Theory of the Subject* had by the late eighties been replaced by a thinker drawing inspiration from different sources, such as mathematics and philosophy defined not only independent of but actually in opposition to dialectics. What I would like to underline is that both the dialectical and the anti-dialectical tendencies of Badiou's thought are the result of a negative understanding of the dialectical method which has not considerably changed from *Theory of the Subject* onwards. This unwillingness to assign any positive function to dialectics explains why Badiou's dialectic of scission should be complemented by a number of ideas derived from Zizek's work. Contrary to Badiou, Zizek does not say one big thing regarding the dialectical method, but he rather makes a number of observations which taken together enable us to arrive at a positive understanding of Butterfield's, Wight's and Carr's intellectual oeuvre.

Although, as Mads Karlsen (2014) mentions, the dialectical pedigree of the approach adopted by Badiou in *Being and Event* is heavily debated among the interpreters of his thought, books such as *Metapolitics* and *Saint Paul* are clearly anti-dialectical. In the first book, Badiou accepts the designation of the dialectic as an outdated form of thinking which, like positivism and historicism, belongs to the nineteenth century. In *Saint Paul* Badiou adopts an explicitly anti-dialectical position by separating the death from the Resurrection of Christ, and failing to acknowledge how the Christ-event provides an interesting example of the Hegelian idea of the negation of the negation. Badiou's attitude towards the dialectic is somewhat more positive in *Logics of Worlds* where, however, he insists that, if it involves a third term, this term does nothing more than emphasising the gap that separates the other two. Badiou's indifference towards the third dialectical moment which is usually associated with Hegel's "negation of negation" means

that ultimately he does not escape from the dichotomous categories and distinctions that define formal logic.

Despite his continuing engagement with Hegel, Badiou continues to understand dialectics in terms of the Maoist formula “one divides into two, two does not merge into one”. This formula is presented in *Theory of the Subject* as a prime example of dialectical thinking, indeed, as the only law of dialectics, and is also defended in Badiou’s discussion of the Cultural Revolution in *The Century* (2005). Badiou’s acceptance of a dialectical schema from which any hope of reconciliation is missing is fully in accordance with Maoist and Stalinist orthodoxy, and provides a cogent example of what Bosteels (2005) has described as Badiou’s lingering debt to Maoism understood not only in political but also in philosophical terms. Badiou’s systematic engagement with Platonic thought in *Plato’s Republic* (2012b) is hardly surprising given the frequently negative use of dialectics in Platonic dialogues. Equally understandable is his neglect of the thought of Heraclitus whose use of dialectics is not positive in the sense of leading to an end of history or to an unproblematic combination of opposites, but is not negative either in the sense of making division an end in itself.

What Badiou does not realise by insisting on a negative definition of dialectics is that his philosophical and political intransigence does nothing more than to reinforce established conceptual and social oppositions without offering a new perspective from which such oppositions can be critically reassessed and ultimately relativized. As Žižek (2008) has pointed out, when dialectical thinking is reduced to the simple opposition of two terms, the only kind of “synthesis” available is the subjugation of the one term to the other. Paradoxically enough, this is exactly what happened in the real world after the dissolution of socialism and the apparent triumph of liberal democracy on a global scale. Žižek’s insistence that the negation of the negation should be understood as the only true negation has precisely to do with the search for a new dialectical context within which the oppositions taken for granted by mainstream thought can be debated and undermined. From a Žižekian point of view, the interpenetration of history and theory does not have to do only with the recognition of their contradictory nature but also with the need to challenge the conceptual framework within which they appear as opposites in the first place. What Žižek proposes as an alternative to Badiou’s negative dialectics is not the utopian belief that we can escape the parameters of formal logic while continuing to move within those parameters, but rather the recognition of the fact that dialectical logic represents an autonomous way of viewing the world.

## Zizek's Critique of Badiou

As Geoff Pfeifer (2015) notes, Zizek's critique of Badiou takes place against the background of a materialist reading of Hegel. Far from being an idealist who assumes that there can be a way out of history and the complications of the dialectic, Zizek's Hegel is the most important philosophical representative of a non-reductionist form of materialism which attributes to immaterial phenomena a certain autonomous and positive dimension. Like Kant and other conventional representatives of German idealism, Hegel assumes that it is the knowing subject that gives shape to the external world by organising information and ascribing meaning to it. However, *pace* Kant, Hegel's subject is not an isolated actor but on the contrary he is organically rooted in particular communities and cultures. As those communities and cultures develop and change, so does individual consciousness which ultimately expresses nothing more than a given moment in the development of humanity. Therefore, for Zizek, Hegel does not need to be salvaged from idealism precisely because he is not an idealist in the sense of placing ideational and material phenomena outside the workings of history and the dialectic.

Of particular interest for my purposes is Zizek's belief that what appears to be negative in politics and dialectics can also be seen as positive. Zizek's examples of transformative political action are often drawn from the world of literature and are employed in the same way that other philosophers employ thought experiments in order to provide support for their ideas. In Zizek's (2004) thoughtful analysis of how the transition is made from the politics of resistance to the expression of a new position, Herman Melville's *Bartleby* uses the words "I would prefer not to" when asked to carry out certain tasks. Although these words could be seen as a mere refusal to execute the orders of his Master, Zizek argues that the fictional hero under discussion actually does more than that. By saying not simply that he does not want to do something, but rather that he *prefers* not to do it, *Bartleby* opens a third way between the existing social order and its sterile rejection, and ultimately creates a new ideological space. As Zizek concludes, the kind of negation encapsulated in *Bartleby's* words does not need to await a new political order to arrive since it already represents such an order, at least in an embryonic form.

Zizek's choice to recognise in negativity a positive dimension also informs his examination of the third dialectical moment of the negation of the negation in *Absolute Recoil: Towards a New Foundation of Dialectical Materialism* (2014). By relating the negation of the negation to the Lacanian Real, Zizek wants to prove that certain values or ideals can be influential, while, at the same time, being also unrealisable. From a Marxist point of view, for example, we have first to reject the



idea of a genuine universality which is supposedly uncontaminated from any particular interest or tradition. However, at the same time, we must also reconcile ourselves with the fact that the search for universality is unavoidable. Although the particular social or cultural ideas that assume the mantle of universality are justifiably subject to scrutiny, universality as an empty form retains its value. This becomes particularly evident in the contemporary case of human rights which, while undoubtedly expressing particular concerns and interests, also enable different groups to make their voice heard. By first rejecting the idea of a pure universality or a neutral account of human rights, and then rejecting this rejection by recognising that as *forms* universality and human rights are important, we see how the negation of the negation works in practice.

As Mads Karlsen (2014) points out, what defines Zizek's engagement with the negation of the negation is the recognition of the fact that, although unity is unattainable, the proper aim of a dialectical approach is to problematise and undermine the context within which supposed opposites appear as natural and necessary. The negation of the negation is the only true negation in the sense that it is the only negation which generates a new perspective from which former opposites cease to be understood as such. When we face the tension between two supposedly contradictory terms, such as history and theory, we must not simply try to find a balance between them, but we should rather try to challenge the very definitions and assumptions that make their separation seem natural and unavoidable. For Zizek, the alternative to Badiou's negative dialectics is not something which formal logic would describe as positive, but rather something which, while *appears* as negative, is in reality positive. What actually brings closer the creation of a new approach is acts of negation that may go unnoticed by the purveyors of the existing intellectual order but frequently include something positive in their negativity. Indeed, to oppose negative dialectics to idealism, or destruction to the false hope of achieving a higher synthesis of opposites, as Badiou does, is to move within the confines of the existing intellectual paradigm. Moving outside those confines would involve seeing something positive in what this paradigm would classify as simply negative.

### **Applying Zizek to Butterfield, Wight and Carr**

The positive dimension that Zizek recognises to dialectics has far-reaching consequences for appreciating the meaning and the theoretical consequences of the history/theory dialectic as developed by Butterfield, Wight and Carr. Their rejection of the prevalent understandings of history and international theory is not just a preparatory move which requires a final synthesis between history and theory in order to be complete. Their active negation of the widespread

assumption that history has to do with the particular whereas theory has to do with the universal, *gives body* to a new intellectual paradigm which has important implications for IR, historiography, and potentially other disciplines as well. Butterfield, Wight and Carr do not simply challenge the conventional definitions of “history” and “theory” understood in separation from one another, but they also undermine the very framework within which the distinction between them makes sense. In their intellectual oeuvre examined in the previous chapters, history ceases to be theory’s other since historians and international theorists struggle with the same problems of generalisation and attention to context. These problems exist independent of whether one is addressing the past, as historians do, or the present and the future, as theorists do. What Butterfield, Wight and Carr ultimately help us realise is that history and theory can be seen as opposites only from the point of view of what Hegel (1977: 122) describes as *contentless* thought. In other words, history and theory can be seen as opposites only when treated as mere forms which do not belong to any particular context and are referring only to themselves. Once they cease to be treated only as notions, and are seen as actual intellectual practices of individuals belonging to particular scientific communities, then the one inevitably infiltrates the other. Their interpenetration is not so much advocated or recommended but is rather being recognised and acknowledged.

It should also be mentioned that Zizek’s acknowledgment of the necessary link that exists between particularity and universality in the case of human rights enables one to see that Butterfield’s, Wight’s and Carr’s support for the European values of the balance of power and non-ideological diplomacy is not necessarily parochial and imperialistic. Despite being genuinely interested in the future of Europe, the writers examined in this thesis also provide the foundations of an inclusive form of international order which can be hospitable to different traditions and civilisations. In their thought, *raison de systeme* is mediated by particularistic commitments and assumptions but is by no means reduced to such commitments and assumptions. The only criticism that can be made is that by advocating a global balance of power favourable to Europe and the two superpowers of their age, they do not pay much attention to the future role of powers and continents that do not constitute even distant offshoots of the European civilisation, most notably China. As Quentin Skinner (2002) has observed, studying intellectual history does not absolve us of the responsibility to do our thinking ourselves in order to address issues that have acquired a special relevance in our own age.

## **Towards a Dialectic of Societal Forms and a Grounded Theory of International Institutions**

Butterfield's, Wight's and Carr's acknowledgement of the co-constitution of history and theory has far-reaching consequences for the English School as a research programme and for the elucidation of the relationship between societal forms that include but are not restricted to the Westphalian society of states. Although for much of its life the English School associated itself and was also associated by others with the analysis of one particular element in international relations, that of international society, from the end of the Cold War onwards there has been a systematic attempt to widen the scope of English School investigations in order to analyse the relationship between the international system, international society, and world society. Although the notion of international system is examined by other theoretical approaches, the clarification of the relationship between international society and world society has acquired special theoretical and practical relevance as a result of the complex processes usually described as "globalisation". From Bull's non-dialectical point of view, the relationship between international society and world society is a mainly negative one; the whole point of his separation of order from justice is to draw a dividing line between, on the one hand, the interstate domain, and, on the other hand, the interhuman domain. Despite the abstract moral priority assigned to the rights of individual men and women, Bull views any systematic attempt to implement those rights as a direct threat to the society of states. This applies both to his magnum opus which was critically discussed and evaluated in the first chapter, and to Bull's (1984) later, supposedly more solidarist work. Despite the title of his 1983-84 lectures and the apparent attempt to offer a companion to his previous study of order, it is very doubtful whether Bull ever managed to escape the narrow confines of the Westphalian order, and to offer a practical outlet to his moral cosmopolitanism.

Although like every important thinker Bull was a product of his age and his prioritisation of order was understandable in a world where very different notions of justice were competing for supremacy, contemporary English School pluralists, such as Robert Jackson (2000), have decontextualized his views, and portrayed every effort to move beyond the confines of the Westphalian order as fundamentally flawed. Jackson's negative evaluation of any attempt to recognise the homogenising potential of ideas and practices we normally associate with the West, and to promote human rights, is echoed by James Mayall (2000) who discusses the dystopia of a homogenised MacWorld, and puts into question the power of democracy to play a positive role in international affairs. Despite that Jackson and Mayall make a number of valid points in the course of their critique of the humanitarian interventions of the 1990s, they adopt an unsatisfying philosophy

of history which sees change as a (misguided) ideal instead of seeing it as a fact which can potentially give rise to new values in domestic and international affairs. The tendency of the liberal wing of the English School to portray human rights as an unhistorical alternative to the society of states has further complicated the issue and unnecessarily politicised the attempt to think about the relationship between international society and other societal forms.

Without being a solidarist in the sense of adopting an explicitly normative agenda, Buzan (2004; 2005b; 2014) has tried to develop a non-teleological dialectic of societal forms that puts the traditional opposition between international society and world society within a new conceptual framework which, if accepted, could revolutionise the study of international relations from an English School perspective. Buzan builds consciously upon a number of Wightian insights in order to show that the analytically distinct domains which he describes as interstate societies, interhuman societies, and transnational societies, depend closely on one another. Following the main assumptions of the history/theory dialectic as developed by Butterfield, Wight and Carr, Buzan emphasises that the exact relationship between interstate societies, interhuman societies, and transnational societies, cannot be determined in the abstract but only under particular historical circumstances and conditions. This is undoubtedly in accordance with Wilson's (2012; 2016) historically sensitive understanding of international institutions. Although primarily interested in English School theory as a set of ideas that can be found in the minds of statesmen and other actors in the international scene, Wilson's grounded theory of international institutions also possesses a strong sociological and historical dimension. His rejection of what he defines as stipulative or purely theoretical definitions of international institutions poses the issue of the historical context in a particularly acute form. For both Buzan and Wilson, the main challenge facing English School theory today is to find ways to combine the attention to context typical of historians with the conceptual rigour and clarification that is associated with the work of theorists. The fact that their proposals can give rise to either theoretically informed forms of historiography or historically informed forms of theory shows how inadequate is the distinction between history and theory in the form accepted by Bull and others. Keene's (2009; 2014) favourable presentation of Wightian historicism, and support for a neo-Weberian framework which includes a strong element of historical interpretation, also move towards the same direction.

Although Buzan makes particularly clear the fact that, within the framework of a liberal international order, interstate societies, interhuman societies, and transnational societies, can develop in harmony with one another, this is by no means true independent of historical context and circumstances. Totalitarian and

fundamentalist ideologies depict the relationship between states, individuals, and collective transnational actors in a very different way from historical liberalism which portrays solidarity as “a close nexus among the three domains” (Buzan, 2005b: 128). Despite his attempt to accommodate positivism within a methodologically pluralist framework, Buzan, like the founding English School thinkers examined in the thesis, ends up appealing to particular cultural and political traditions. His analytical structural approach is by no means devoid of normative implications, and ends up offering support for a historically contingent combination of order and justice realised within the confines of the contemporary liberal international order. Like David Armstrong (1993), Buzan argues that interstate society is not going to disappear any time soon but the basis of association among states may broaden and acquire new characteristics. His argument has some similarities with Halliday’s (1994) understanding of international society as homogeneity but it leaves more space to non-liberal forms of international order which, after all, are far from unimaginable. The main objection that could be raised to Buzan’s non-teleological dialectic of societal forms is that he portrays Western values in international relations as more homogeneous than they are or can be as a result of the aspiration to promote both toleration and a particular vision of civilisation within the confines of the same international order (Keene, 2002; 2009). His assumption that there is a historical tendency towards solidarity arguably bears the mark of positivism since it tends to disregard the importance of understandings tied to the experience of particular historical actors (Wilson, 2012; 2016). Although certain practices and institutions can be seen as the harbingers of solidarity from the point of view of the advanced Western democracies, they can also be seen as a revival of the worst aspects of the European past by others.

Buzan’s dialectical triad of interstate societies, interhuman societies, and transnational societies, has far-reaching consequences for reimagining and reconfiguring the debate between pluralists and solidarists within the English School. This debate has been problematized by scholars such as John Williams (2005) and Matthew Weinert (2011) and it provides a poor framework for classifying Butterfield’s, Wight’s and Carr’s international thought. For Buzan, pluralism and solidarity should not be seen as synonyms for conservatism and cosmopolitanism respectively, since they are both redefined as centrist positions within a spectrum ranging from asocial anarchy to complete political unification. Despite the choice to place special emphasis on coexistence and cooperation respectively, pluralists and solidarists cannot altogether deny the value of what the other camp proposes since, under modern historical circumstances, even existential threats cannot be effectively handled by a nation acting alone. In the same way that pluralists are obliged to recognise the value of cooperation in areas

such as arms control and the environment, solidarists cannot ignore the obvious fact that convergence cannot occur without extensive prior interaction based on coexistence. By removing cosmopolitanism from the picture, Buzan helps us understand that the debate between pluralists and solidarists has more to do with answering the questions what type of interstate society we want and how this society should be related to other societal forms and less to do with the possibility of transcending the states-system. Such a possibility does not really concern the majority of English School solidarists, and is also alien to Buzan's conceptualisation of world society as a field populated exclusively by non-state actors.

The way in which Buzan limits world society to the non-political sphere is not above criticism, but it certainly helps to corroborate his more general argument regarding the non-antagonistic and essentially symbiotic relationship between international and world society under contemporary historical circumstances. Although by placing emphasis on the value of co-operation Buzan does not mechanically adopt the policy proposals of the writers examined in this thesis, his attention to historical context brings him very close to the spirit of the history/theory dialectic. Despite his claim that the very category of world society should be ultimately discarded in favour of recognising the distinct ontological foundations of the interhuman and transnational domains, my view is that it could actually be retained as a composite concept aimed at throwing light on the way in which contemporary interstate society is influenced by developments and actions taking place outside of its confines. Indeed, admitting the heterogeneity that characterises world society has the advantage of depicting it as a concept not dissimilar to international society which is also heterogeneous in the sense of accommodating different cultures and belief systems.

In any case, to the extent that interstate society ceases to be seen as an intermediate level of analysis, which finds itself under pressure from a mechanically conceived international system and a cosmopolitan world society, the engagement with societal forms other than the Westphalian society of states becomes easier. By moving the societal approach beyond the rather narrow confines of the Westphalian order, Buzan makes one of the most important attempts so far to explore the anthropological, cultural, economic and other dimensions of interstate society, and to separate English School thinking from those branches of realism with which it is mistakenly associated (Armstrong, 1993; Wilson, 2016). By thinking about history and theory, order and justice, international society and world society, pluralism and solidarism, as concepts that include their dialectical other within themselves, we come closer to understanding the nature of the dilemmas facing us and to escaping the tragic moral universe of realists and others. Although it can be seen as an exercise in conceptual

clarification, the kind of dialectical thinking adumbrated in the thesis arguably does more than that. Despite that Buzan's non-teleological dialectic of societal forms and Wilson's grounded theory of international institutions provide the two most promising ways of operationalising the history/theory dialectic they do not exhaust its meaning and theoretical consequences. The main advantage of reconceptualising the English School along methodological lines is remaining open to new theoretical possibilities which, in the final analysis, cannot be understood independent of the course of history itself.

## Notes

<sup>i</sup> Bull's anti-historicist prejudices become even more evident in his British Committee paper discussing the so-called scientific American contributions to international theory. According to Bull, international theory assumes the form of a body of general propositions which should be distinguished from both the study of history and that of contemporary international affairs. Although historians and those following contemporary international affairs are interested in theory only to the extent that it throws light on particular events, theorists try to arrive at conclusions which are true independent of time and space. It is precisely because of this fundamentally ahistorical understanding of international theory that Bull views with understanding Morton Kaplan's harsh criticism of the historians and their supposed failure to be explicit regarding the theoretical categories they use. See Hedley Bull, "Recent American Contributions to the Theory of International Politics", Papers of the British Committee on the Theory of International Politics, Royal Institute of International Affairs, Chatham House, London, 1965: 1-10.

<sup>ii</sup> Although, as philosophers such as Theodor Adorno have pointed out, no straightforward definition of dialectics is possible or even desirable, the belief in the unity of apparent opposites, along with the doctrine of movement or flux, constitute from Heraclitus onwards the two main pillars of dialectics. For an excellent discussion of the role that dialectic performs in the different philosophical systems of Heraclitus, Hegel and Marx see Howard Williams, *Hegel, Heraclitus and Marx's Dialectic*, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989. Despite his otherwise very illuminating investigation of dialectic, Williams is wrong in advocating a purely methodological understanding of it and in attributing this understanding to Marx. Ontological assumptions regarding the contradictory nature of reality cannot be easily separated from methodological ones regarding the unity of opposites. This is so because the dialectical ontological belief in a natural and social world which are necessarily subject to change is the by-product of the Hegelian methodological insight that "the truth only is as the unity of distinct opposites" (Hegel, 1892: 282). In other words, the ontological belief in movement and change cannot be separated from the methodological assumption that every concrete thing should be understood as a unity of differences, because it is the contradictory nature of things which accounts for the phenomena of movement and change. This is particularly the case for Marx who saw social evolution as arising from the opposition of distinct and irreconcilable social forces. A homogeneous social reality would also be a static one, and this helps one to understand how Marx related communism to the end of history. Probably the problems with Williams' reading of Marx arise from his almost exclusive preoccupation with *Capital* at the expense of works such as *The Poverty of Philosophy* or even *Theses on Feuerbach*. See Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, London: Routledge, 1973; Kahn, C. H., *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979; Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Volume One, London: Kegan Paul, 1892; Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, Clerkenwell Green: The Twentieth Century Press, 1900; and Karl Marx, *The German Ideology including Theses on Feuerbach and Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy*, New York: Prometheus Books, 1998. For a conceptualisation of dialectics as not simply applicable to natural and social reality but as derived directly from Nature, see Frederick Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954: 83-84. Jean-Paul Sartre later defended the ontological status of dialectic when applied to the social world but pointed out that Engel's assumption that Nature is dialectical cannot actually be verified. When applied to the social world, however, dialectic properly conceived concerns both the process of knowledge and the structure of the real. See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Volume One, London: Verso, 1976. For a rather ambitious attempt to present dialectic as the solution to all the problems



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facing IR scholarship and a critique of it, see Christian Heine and Benno Teschke, "Sleeping Beauty and the Dialectical Awakening: On the Potential of Dialectic for International Relations", *Millennium*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 1996: 399-423; and Mathias Albert and Yosef Lapid, "On Dialectic and IR Theory: Hazards of a Proposed Marriage", *Millennium*, Vol. 26, No. 2, 1997: 403-415. Despite their differences, Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek are certainly among the most important contemporary dialecticians, and this is the reason why they have been included in the thesis. The natural place to start in order to apprehend Badiou's identification of dialectical logic with a logic of scission is *Theory of the Subject*, London: Bloombury, 1982/2009. Žižek is a more complex case, since he consciously abstains from offering any straightforward definition of the dialectical method. It is because of that that I use Badiou as a point of departure for understanding dialectics and come to Žižek later in the thesis. Žižek does not so much deny the importance of the logic of scission developed by Badiou, but he rather places it within a wider dialectical context from which the Hegelian "negation of negation" is not completely absent. In *The New Materialism: Althusser, Badiou, and Žižek*, London: Routledge, 2015, Geoff Pfeifer provides a useful presentation of Žižek's ideas, while choosing to place him within an Althusserian framework that is more relevant to Badiou.

<sup>iii</sup> Of course, both theory and history are essentially contested terms. With regard to the first term, Raymond Aron distinguishes among five different senses of it. To begin with, theory can assume the form of contemplative knowledge, i.e., philosophy. The second sense of the term "theory" refers to the natural sciences and their effort to establish a deductive system of empirically verifiable hypotheses. The third sense of theory is connected to the social sciences which, while imitating the natural ones in many respects, want to know primarily in order to be able to predict and in this way influence the course of events. The fourth and fifth meanings of the term "theory" are more relevant to the way that my chosen writers approached the problem of international change. The fourth meaning of theory is related to doctrine, or what Aron calls *praxeology*, a compound word consisted of the words "praxis" and "logos". Finally, the fifth meaning of the term "theory" is related to what it could be described as a conceptualisation; in the sense used in my thesis conceptualisation refers to an analysis of events which predisposes one to think in certain ways about them. Conceptualisation, as Aron mentions, could be seen either as an outline of a theory, or an admission that a general theory of the phenomenon under discussion is impossible. See Raymond Aron, "What is a Theory of International Relations?", in John C. Farrell and Asa P. Smith (eds), *Theory and Reality in International Relations*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1967: 1-22.

<sup>iv</sup> The aloofness and distance of the founding figures of the English School from contemporary international affairs has been accepted as a fact by all those writing about the subject. Tim Dunne understands this supposed distance as one of the reasons behind the School's resilience as a research programme, and Buzan mentions that the School never showed any particular interest in British foreign policy. See Tim Dunne, *Inventing International Society: A History of the English School*, London: Macmillan, 1998: 184; and Barry Buzan, *An Introduction to the English School of International Relations*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014: 5. However, what I intend to show in my discussion of the way that Butterfield, Wight and Carr conceptualised international change, is that the founders of the School assessed and analysed international politics from a particular point of view, and that the policy implications of their analysis are relatively easy to see. That said, the way in which they equated British interests with Western European ones enables their political perspective to escape any nationalistic connotations. Their historicism is not tied to the nation state.

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<sup>v</sup> Since Roy Jones' impressionistic critique of the English School, the preoccupation of its members with continuity at the expense of change has been seen as more or less self-evident. Jones' reference to Wight's meta-history, a history where there is a lot of activity but nothing really changes, is echoed in Iver Neumann's assumption that Butterfield and Wight insisted on the notions of recurrence and repetition occurring in the international field as the consequence of the function of ahistorical laws. Even Vigezzi—despite his acknowledgement of the changes involved in the transition from a European to a global international society studied in Hedley Bull's and Adam Watson's *The Expansion of International Society*—argues that the members of the British Committee not only were interested more in continuity than they were interested in change, but also that they were better equipped to study continuity than to study change. See Roy E. Jones, "The English School of International Relations: A Case for Closure", *Review of International Studies*, 1981: 1-13; Iver B. Neumann, "The English School on Diplomacy: Scholarly Promises Unfulfilled", *International Relations*, 17:3, 2003: 341-369; Brunello Vigezzi, *The British Committee on the Theory of International Politics: The Rediscovery of History*, Milano: Edizioni Unicopli, 2005; and Hedley Bull and Adam Watson (eds), *The Expansion of International Society*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984.

<sup>vi</sup> The biographical contextualisation of ideas has also been recommended by Antonio Gramsci in his discussion of questions of method in the *Prison Notebooks*. See Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971: 382-386.

<sup>vii</sup> See Marci Shore, "Can we see Ideas?: On Evocation, Experience, and Empathy", in Darrin M. McMahon and Samuel Moyn (eds), *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014: 198.

<sup>viii</sup> For Butterfield, the natural place to start is C. T. McIntire's *Herbert Butterfield: Historian as Dissenter*. Ian Hall's *The International Thought of Martin Wight* is not a biography, but it is a book rich in biographical detail and allusion. Jonathan Haslam's *The Vices of Integrity* has been rightly praised for challenging the boundaries between intellectual and non-intellectual biography. See C. T. McIntire, *Herbert Butterfield: Historian as Dissenter*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004; Ian Hall, *The International Thought of Martin Wight*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2006; and Jonathan Haslam, *The Vices of Integrity: E. H. Carr, 1892-1982*, London: Verso, 1999.

<sup>ix</sup> The notion of trajectory has been introduced by Pierre Bourdieu in his critical examination of the biographical illusion that human life can be narrated as a coherent story having a beginning, middle and an end. By using the notion of trajectory, Bourdieu aims to retain the notion of the "subject" without buying into the modernist fallacy that its constancy and essence are never put into question. See Pierre Bourdieu, "The Biographical Illusion", in Paul du Gay, Jessica Evans and Peter Redman (eds), *Identity: A Reader*, London: Sage, 2000: 297-303.

<sup>x</sup> From an English School perspective, the method of the biographical contextualisation of ideas has been recently used by Barry Buzan and Richard Little in their examination of Adam Watson's concept of hegemony. Buzan and Little argue that their subject's approach to international theory was heavily influenced by the professional and political experiences he had as a diplomat in America and elsewhere. Although this approach to the biographical contextualisation of ideas comes very close to establishing the type of causal connections that I generally see as tenuous, it seems to be confirmed by the writings of Watson himself. See Barry Buzan and Richard Little, "Introduction to the 2009 Reissue", in Adam Watson, *The Evolution of International Society: A Comparative Historical Analysis*, London: Routledge, 2009: xi-xxi; and Adam Watson, *Hegemony and History*, London: Routledge, 2007: 107.

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<sup>xi</sup> For Marx, dialectical movement does not consist in choosing among—or combining—existing categories of thought and being, but in seeing “the yes becoming no, the no becoming yes, the yes becoming at once yes and no, the no becoming at once no and yes...”. See Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, 86. In the case of Butterfield, Wight and Carr dialectical movement means that they are not simply historians at one moment, and theorists at another moment, but that they rather try to reinvent both history and theory.

<sup>xii</sup> For both Jones and Suganami, the natural home of the English School is no other than the LSE Department of International Relations. All the academics mentioned by the writers of the 1980s had some relationship with this particular department. The identification of a school of thought with an academic department is of course highly problematic and, even if it were true, it would still belittle the importance and arguably reduce the appeal of the English School.

<sup>xiii</sup> The overall agreement between Jones and Suganami regarding the School’s main characteristics can be realised by taking into consideration Suganami’s conclusion that British “institutionalism” found its paradigmatic expression in the writings of the authors under discussion, and it therefore belongs to the past. Jones’ criticisms regarding the supposed indifference of English School authors towards the socio-economic dimension, and the dangers of separating international society from domestic political phenomena, are also echoed in Suganami’s thought.

<sup>xiv</sup> Although Suganami’s exclusion of Butterfield and Carr is understandable given his point of view, his failure to include Wight is puzzling. Bull was certainly justified to criticise this omission. See Andrew Linklater and Hidemi Suganami, *The English School of International Relations: A Contemporary Reassessment*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006: 23. In fact, there is a certain tension between the way that Suganami defined the members of the English School and his proposals for further research. The historically informed investigation of international phenomena, which he recommends, cannot be effectively promoted by a list of authors whose interest in history is very limited. More generally, Suganami commits the mistake of first identifying the English School with something limited—or even parochial—and then calling for its renewal with the use of intellectual sources that are somehow alien to it.

<sup>xv</sup> For the problems that historians of ideas face when they approach their subjects with preconceived paradigms, and the consequent temptation to use of anachronistic concepts, see Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics, Volume 1: Regarding Method*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002: 57-89.

<sup>xvi</sup> As William Olson and Nicholas Onuf note in their thoughtful examination of the development of IR, the discipline in the form that we know it today was born after World War I in order to contribute to the promotion of peace and the study of international organisation. Its five major historical phases of development are all related to external events. The first phase had to do with the study of international law and international history and refers to something very different from what we would describe today as IR. During the second phase, what mattered was the study of the international institutions created by the victors of World War I and the promotion of international peace. The third phase of the discipline of IR emerged as a result of the kind of power politics pursued by Italy and Germany in the aftermath of World War I. The fourth major phase of the discipline was the result of the Cold War, which led to the reaffirmation of the concepts of power and interest temporarily eclipsed by the creation of the United Nations (UN). Finally, the fifth phase that Olson and Onuf describe is directly related to the Vietnam war and the search for peace and world order as an alternative to aggressive foreign policies. During this phase, Marxism, social

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psychology, and ideas about interdependence and the importance of non-state actors were widely employed in order to challenge the primacy of realism. Buzan and Little have also recognised the importance that policy issues had for the birth and direction of IR, but they make the point that the justified preoccupation with the present and near future should not lead one to ignore the past. See William Olson and Nicholas Onuf, "The Growth of a Discipline: Reviewed", in Steve Smith (ed.), *International Relations: British and American Perspectives*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985: 1-28; and Barry Buzan and Richard Little, "Why International Relations has failed as an Intellectual Project and What to do about It", *Millennium*, 30 (1), 2001: 24.

<sup>xvii</sup> Although Shaw's arguments put into question the kind of international society frequently associated with Manning and Bull, it is not certain that they do justice to the complexity that characterises the thought of the first and to the different layers that can be found in the thought of the second. With regard to Manning, Wilson has persuasively argued that he is less state-centric than often assumed; his understanding of international society as a notional entity consisted of other notional (state) entities has far-reaching implications for the study of international relations. For Manning, the personification of the state is unavoidable and it is no different from the personification of other social entities, such as social classes, churches, and trade unions. Misinterpreting a methodological position as an ontological one can have serious implications for appropriating Manning's thought. After all, Manning's aspiration to a "social cosmology" distances him very much from any attempt to separate and abstract international affairs from the wider social cosmos to which they organically belong. Although less consistent than Manning on this point, Bull explicitly recognises that world order is prior to international order because the ultimate members of any type of collective entity are individual human beings. Despite the fact that both Manning and Bull have certain responsibilities for the way in which their thought has been (mis)interpreted, it is interesting to see how every age tends to find in a given set of authors what it is looking for. The historical context of the Cold War maybe explains more adequately than the ideas themselves how Bull and Manning have been interpreted. See Peter Wilson, "Manning's Quasi-Masterpiece: The Nature of International Society Revisited", *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, 93:377, 2004: 755-769; and Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1977/2002.

<sup>xviii</sup> Although plausible as an interpretation of the end of the Cold War, Halliday's model of international society as homogeneity corresponds to a rather particular historical experience. In the course of human history, there are many examples where international competition did not lead to the adoption of the same societal model. Athens and Sparta in ancient Greece provide such an example where the military and political competition among different political units did not produce a convergence of social, ideological and political systems. Even today, North and South Korea retain their ideological and political differences despite being engaged in competition with one another.

<sup>xix</sup> Leaving aside the contested nature of the term "philosophy of history", even historiography is defined in different ways by different houses of history. For a discussion of the main historiographical approaches today, see Anna Green and Kathleen Troup (eds), *The Houses of History: A Critical Reader in Twentieth-Century History and Theory*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999. For a critique of the tendency of international theorists to conveniently forget the contestability of the concept of history in order to use it for their own theoretical designs, see Nick Vaughan-Williams, "International Relations and the 'Problem of History'", *Millennium*, 34:1, 2005: 115-136.

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<sup>xx</sup> In the Preface to the Second Edition of *What is History?* Carr explicitly related his belief in progress to the fact that he grew up in the afterglow of the Victorian age mentioning that the experiences of his youth prevented him from even thinking about the world as being in a state of permanent decay. In his Autobiography, he notes how as a boy he felt a sense of material and physical security in a world that was good and was only getting better. Haslam mentions Carr's early support for the Liberal Party and draws attention to his abiding appreciation of Lloyd George. Even during his time at the Foreign Office, Carr described himself as an "English liberal" and felt annoyed by what he perceived as the failure of the victors in World War I to implement with consistency liberal principles, such as that of national self-determination. Although his attachment to nineteenth-century liberal ideas did not withstand the shock of the Russian Revolution, his commitment to Marxism was more half-hearted than it is often assumed, and was severely complicated by the fact that he did not believe in Marxism as a positive program of social change actively promoted by the Western proletariat. His anti-imperialism is evident in both *What is History?* and in other public utterances and interventions, but it is doubtful whether it qualifies him as a Marxist. As Wilson has pointed out, Carr accepted Marxism as a form of historical analysis but not as teleology. Carr's dissatisfaction with the kind of academic Marxism promoted by the *New Left Review* under the guidance of Perry Anderson might also be relevant in this context. See E. H. Carr, "Preface to the Second Edition", in E. H. Carr, *What is History?*, London: Penguin Books, 1961/1987; E. H. Carr, "An Autobiography", in Michael Cox (ed.), *E. H. Carr: A Critical Appraisal*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan 1980/2000: xiii-xxii; Peter Wilson "Power, Morality, and the Remaking of International Order: E. H. Carr's *The Twenty Years' Crisis*", in Peter Wilson, Casper Sylvest, and Henrik Bliddal (eds), *Classics of International Relations: Essays in Criticism and Appreciation*, London Routledge, 2013: 52; and Jonathan Haslam, *The Vices of Integrity*.

<sup>xxi</sup> For a discussion of Mackinnon's methodological and philosophical views, see Stewart Sutherland, "Donald Mackenzie Mackinnon 1913-1994", *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 97, 1998: 381-389; and Molly Cochran, "The Ethics of the English School", in Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008: 286-297. To the extent that Wight's historicism was less absolute than that of Butterfield and Carr, and residues of the natural law tradition can still be found in his thought, he is closer to Mackinnon than either Butterfield or Carr were.

<sup>xxii</sup> For an evaluation of the prospects of avoiding the Cold War through the creation of a global balance of power organised around the United States, the Soviet Union, Britain, and France, see Anne Deighton, *The Impossible Peace: Britain, the Division of Germany and the Origins of the Cold War*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990.

<sup>xxiii</sup> See Isaiah Berlin, *The Power of Ideas*, London: Chatto and Windus, 2000: 207. Berlin also offers a fascinating discussion of the kind of historicism inspiring Friedrich Meinecke, who tried to see how the claims of the nation could be reconciled with more general human values and aspirations. In common with the writers examined in this thesis, Meinecke was fully conscious of the existence of two different levels of interpretation of historical events: one level focused on human beings enjoying freedom of action, and another level related to the operation of the impersonal forces that influence the direction of a society and the development of its members. Meinecke's inquiry into the origins of historicism has been translated in English as *Historicism: The Rise of a New Historical Outlook*, translated by J. E. Anderson, London: Routledge, 1972.

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<sup>xxiv</sup> For the identification of the philosophy of history with the attempt to interpret the whole of human history through the prism of a single concept, see Benedetto Croce, *Historical Materialism and the Economics of Karl Marx*, London: Frank Cass, 1966.

<sup>xxv</sup> This tendency is common to both the neorealist and neoliberal incarnations of structuralism in contemporary international theory. For a critique of Kenneth Waltz's strategy first to separate the international political system from the multi-sectored international system to which it belongs, and then to privilege it over the other sectors, see Barry Buzan and Richard Little, "Waltz and World History: The Paradox of Parsimony", *International Relations*, 23:3, 2009: 446-463.

<sup>xxvi</sup> The way in which the writers examined in this thesis encourage us to think about history as theory and theory as history bears considerable resemblances to R. B. J. Walker's attempt to destabilise a number of apparently opposed categories by showing how they presuppose one another, and they also tend to dissolve into each other. See R. B. J. Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

<sup>xxvii</sup> The pre-classical Empires discussed by Butterfield in the *Origins of History* play also an important role in Watson's *The Evolution of International Society*. Buzan's and Little's *International Systems in World History* is a slightly different case because their narrative starts from hunter-gatherer bands which play no part in Butterfield's book. See Adam Watson, *The Evolution of International Society: A Comparative Historical Analysis*, London: Routledge, 1992; and Barry Buzan and Richard Little, *International Systems in World History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

<sup>xxviii</sup> The seeds of such a positive understanding of the role of the Christian political leader can be found in Donald Mackinnon's British Committee paper "Some Notes on the Notion of a Christian Statesman". Mackinnon starts from the recognition of the fact that there is indeed uncertainty in the various Christian assessments of the significance of political action. However, to the extent that Christians cannot withdraw entirely from the political sphere, they must recognise that being a statesman means something different from being a politician. The difference between the two lies primarily in the desire to promote the common good. It is also worth emphasising that whereas Wight sees the separation of Church and state as a problem, Mackinnon is much more open to the possibilities that the post-Constantinian age creates. These opportunities concern Christian churches in general and Anglicanism in particular. See Donald Mackinnon, "Some Notes on the Notion of a Christian Statesman", *Papers of the British Committee on the Theory of International Politics*, Royal Institute of International Affairs, London, 1962: 1-9; and Donald Mackinnon, *The Stripping of the Altars*, Suffolk: The Chaucer Press, 1969.

<sup>xxix</sup> Although not explicitly addressing the problem of totalitarianism, Tariq Ali's *The Clash of Fundamentalisms*, provides a good starting point for thinking about totalitarianism under contemporary circumstances. It also functions as a corrective to Wight and Toynbee's tendency to portray religion as a by definition benevolent force. Despite the fact that both economic and political power can be abused, religious power is not exception to this. See Tariq Ali, *The Clash of Fundamentalisms: Crusades, Jihads and Modernity*, London: Verso, 2003.

<sup>xxx</sup> Defining the relationship between Christianity – that inspires Butterfield and Wight—and Marxism – that animates Carr's approach to historiography—is not easy, since both Marxism and Christianity can assume different forms. However, any exploration of their points of contact should start from the recognition of the fact that both systems of thought and action presuppose the rejection of the cyclical theory of history, which was commonly accepted in the Greco-Roman

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world. Christians, such as St. Augustine, repudiated this conception of history much earlier than Marxists, and provided the foundations of the modern idea of progress. The belief in the directionality of history creates a very important link between Christianity and modern political ideologies such as liberalism and Marxism. Especially with regard to Marxism, there is a common interest in seeing human history as something more complex than the result of the actions of identifiable individuals. See Frank E. Manuel, *Shapes of Philosophical History*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965. In *Christian Faith and Communist Faith*, Mackinnon claims that Christianity and Marxism are comparable in the sense that they both constitute an expression of faith. For Mackinnon, the Marxist expresses a faith no less than the Christian does, since he uses one particular political ideal, that of the dictatorship of the proletariat, as an absolute standard in order to evaluate all particular social struggles. By defining as good what brings closer the dictatorship of the proletariat, and as bad what limits the prospects of such a social transformation, the Marxist expresses a metaphysics: a body of doctrine for which he claims absolute validity. The relationship between Marxism and Christianity has also been explored by Alasdair MacIntyre who presents them as different answers to the same set of questions. See D.M. Mackinnon (ed.), *Christian Faith and Communist Faith: A Series of Studies by Members of the Anglican Communion*, London: Macmillan, 1953; and Alasdair MacIntyre, *Marxism and Christianity*, London: Gerald Duckworth, 1969. For a discussion of Marxism as an extremely variegated tradition of thought which, under certain circumstances, can meet with Christianity, see Nicholas Rengger, "The Ethics of Marxism", in Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008: 188-200. Rengger mentions the articulation of Marxism with Christianity in the case of the Latin American liberation theology, but also draws attention to more general problem of the often-neglected moral dimension of Marxism.

<sup>xxxi</sup> Carr was especially critical of his biography of Marx, and according to his own recollections, he developed a genuine interest in Marx and Marxism only after completing this biography. See, Jonathan Haslam, *The Vices of Integrity*.

<sup>xxxii</sup> For Hobsbawm, the relationship between history and the future has primarily to do with the fact that every prediction is necessarily based on inferences derived from the study of the past; therefore, the historian should be able to say something meaningful about the future. The other point that Hobsbawm makes, following Carr, is that past, present, and future constitute a continuum with the present to retain only a notional existence between the past and the future. See E. J. Hobsbawm, "Looking Forward: History and the Future", *New Left Review*, 1/125, January/February 1981: 1-18.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> See E. J. Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968: 272-315. Apart from relating directly political views to material factors, Hobsbawm defines the labour aristocracy in nineteenth-century Britain according to the restrictive criterion of the level and regularity of a worker's earnings. Even other broadly defined material factors, such as the worker's conditions of living and his prospects of joining the upper social strata, are virtually neglected. The only political factor that enters Hobsbawm's analysis is British imperialism, which, however, is also analysed through the prism of the material benefits conferred to the workers.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Butterfield's belief that he was living in an age of revolution is expressed with exceptional clarity in the first paper he wrote for the British Committee. In this paper, he draws particular attention to the revolt against the West, and asks from his audience to consider how they would approach international problems if they were Indians or Arabs. See Herbert Butterfield, "Misgivings about the

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Western Attitude to World Affairs”, Papers of the British Committee on the Theory of International Politics, Royal Institute of International Affairs, London, 1959: 1-29.

<sup>xxxv</sup> Indeed, Wight’s views are not very far from those that Watson expressed in *Emergent Africa*, a book he published in 1965 under the pseudonym Scipio. Watson was far from uncritical towards local political elites, and argued that the Africans were not able to solve their economic and technical problems without external help. However, he also noted that there were grounds for optimism, since the withdrawal of the colonial powers had not led to armed aggression and extensive conflicts among African states. The West had a difficult role to play since it would have to combine sympathy with detachment in its attitude towards Africa. See Scipio (Adam Watson), *Emergent Africa*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1965.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Watson has acknowledged his debt to Wight, but also put under scrutiny the Westphalian principles that were broadly accepted by the members of the British Committee during the 1960s. See Adam Watson, *Hegemony and History*, 18-19.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> For a discussion of the role that these ideas played in nineteenth-century British liberal internationalist thought, see Casper Sylvest, *British Liberal Internationalism, 1880-1930: Making Progress?*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009, especially Introduction and Chapter 2.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> As Norman Angell pointed out, the belief that laissez-faire was no longer enough in international affairs provided the very rationale for the creation of the League of Nations. Contrary to what Carr was suggesting, the League was not an expression of the doctrine of the natural harmony of interests, but it rather represented a move towards collectivism and the establishment of international rules and government. Twentieth-century liberals were no longer content to rely on the doctrine of the natural harmony of interests espoused by their predecessors. See Peter Wilson, “Carr and his Early Critics: Responses to *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*,” in Michael Cox (ed.), *E. H. Carr: A Critical Appraisal*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000: 174-175.

<sup>xxxix</sup> In his discussion of liberalism as the dominant ideology, Michael Freeden notes that the complexity that characterises its study has to do with the fact that liberal themes and ideas are not confined to liberalism but permeate rival ideologies, such as socialism and conservatism. Especially with regard to socialism, Freeden makes the point that in its non-Marxist version is virtually indistinguishable from liberalism, since it consists in the pursuit of liberalism with alternative means. This is particularly the case in Britain, where the appeal of the value of liberty cuts across traditional ideological frontiers. See Michael Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996. In my exploration of Carr’s debt to his liberal predecessors, I am interested in the international goals that inspired him and not so much in the means employed for their achievement. In the same way that illiberal political causes can be promoted by liberal means, such as elections or the use of the freedom of the press, liberal goals can be advanced by illiberal means, such as the intervention of the state in the economy or the promotion of international government. Identifying liberalism with laissez-faire would be to reduce it to libertarianism. For a critical examination of the ambiguities of international liberalism, see Eivind Hovden and Edward Keene (eds), *The Globalization of Liberalism*, New York: Palgrave, 2002.

<sup>xl</sup> The differences between the notion of the balance of power and that of collective hegemony are not as great as one could assume, since, as Watson points out, the latter concept contains within itself an element of balance. The major powers that exercise a joint hegemony must also check and balance one another to retain certain equilibrium in the system. Perhaps Little’s notion of an



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associational balance of power provides a link between crude understandings of the notion of the balance of power – which were by no means espoused by Butterfield and Wight—and the interesting concept of collective hegemony. See Adam Watson, *Hegemony and History*, 106-107; and Richard Little, *The Balance of Power in International Relations: Metaphors, Myths and Models*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

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