

The English school of international relations: a case for closure*

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THERE now exists a substantial body of publications on international relations which may be fairly described as the output of a distinct school. Though its seminal thinkers, Charles Manning and Martin Wight, are no longer with us, the core of its extant membership (Hedley Bull, Michael Donelan, F. S. Northedge, Robert Purnell and others) is still in its prime and young recruits are constantly coming forward. Though delighted by this human prospect, its literary possibilities find me something less than enthusiastic. For it seems to me that repetition has set in and is likely to get worse as the years pass.

The writers I refer to comprise a school in a number of elementary senses. They appear to share a broad commitment to international relations conceived as a distinct, even autonomous, subject. Their principal professional task they perceive to be that of examining and describing such measure of order as the world *as a whole* may, in their view, be expected to maintain on the basis of the structure of relations between what they habitually call 'sovereign nation-states'. Their style is easily recognizable, if only for what it leaves out: few statistics, no geometry and less algebra; and no vulgar agonizing over so-called world problems of poverty, commodity prices, monetary reform and such. Though often given to philosophical allusion, their own philosophical position is not distinguished by its scope and completeness. Rarely do they even show a taste for close critical analysis of the language of international politics and their work, it will be argued, is consequently marred by imprecision. For the most part they also share a common academic provenance in the department of international relations at the London School of Economics and Political Science.

The group thus to be identified is apt to describe itself, directly or by implication, as belonging (a) to a classical or traditional school and (b) to a British school of international relations. There must be some uncertainty as to whether each of these descriptions is meant to imply the other; however, I propose to simplify matters by rejecting both. The classical title will not do because these authors seem for the most part to have cut themselves off from the fundamental concern of the political classics (Plato, Aristotle and the rest, perhaps Machiavelli too) which is to form a view of the best relationship which should exist between individual men in terms of the common authority among them. The state, for the classics, is far from given. For international relations of the English persuasion the reverse is so. Martin Wight did, of course, concede this in the well-known paper¹ in which he concludes that there can indeed be no theory of international relations. He is correct. But his view would be more accurately stated if it were

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expressed thus: in the English school there can be no theory of international relations because the English school has cut itself off from the classical theme of political thought. The second sobriquet, British, must be rejected because there is little evidence in this school's work of any commitment to the truly British liberal tradition of economic and political studies, founded largely in the eighteenth century, to which numbers of outstanding Scotsmen and even one or two prominent Welshmen made significant contributions. So I settle on the epithet 'English' not out of anglophobia but because the alternatives preferred by the English school itself are misleading.

A 'debutante discipline'

It is no secret that international relations found a place in the universities as a result of the carnage of the first world war and of the beneficence of a small number of businessmen. Academics were appointed to devote themselves to what seemed a self-evidently serious and disturbing problem. This problem and its study were then transformed into a distinct subject of university instruction. Unfortunately, such alchemy has become all too familiar in our universities. A problem, industrial disturbances say, attracts widespread attention; important authorities deem it worthy of, and amenable to, disinterested study; academics are appointed for this purpose; almost instantly the problem becomes a subject which soon begins to fill large tracts of the teaching timetable; and, inevitably, students so deluded as to devote themselves exclusively to industrial relations, or some such horror, are duly proclaimed to have obtained a university education thereby. The fallacy is obvious. Problems, however pressing, do not as such make university subjects. Professor Manning seems to have succumbed completely to the fallacy in question in his attempt to create, *ab initio*, an autonomous new subject, which he variously designated 'meta-diplomatics' and 'social cosmology'. For his new subject Manning claimed the standing of a 'debutante discipline'.² As an example of this discipline I offer an almost random Manning quotation:

In the eyes of formal diplomatic theory what occurs internationally happens as among the members of a 'social' category, the category of sovereign states. And, for seeing what so happens as happening simply so, a certain sort of lenses may be worn. In the sight on the other hand of the social analysis which looks behind the formulas in force to the forces in operation, the picture is less clear-cut. And, for seeing just how other than clear-cut, the need is for another sort of lens. Or, to revert to the earlier metaphor, another shape of thinking-cap. With our study of diplomatic theory we cannot think to dispense. For that theory provides the formal framework within which the world-wide play and cross-play and counter-play of social energies works itself out. But, for the sources of these energies, it is necessary to look, and this through different lenses, elsewhere.³

It cannot be suggested that this passage is meaningless. But what reasonable reader would claim to detect in it the application of the disciplined technique of a coherent subject? Professor Manning claims to see before him a unique subject-matter and he attempts, by almost poetic means, to convey the great depths of meaning he finds in it. He seems philosophically inspired in his approach

by some species of idealism: here are discrete phenomena within which lurks an inner reality (perhaps a dialectic of some kind) whose nature may be grasped by those who use the right kind of intellectual 'lens'. Though Manning, to the outsider, is highly idiosyncratic, the English school claims and acclaims him a principal source of its inspiration. What he really seems to be about is a kind of idealist jurisprudence of international law and practice on the basis of the theory that law is a manifestation of the deep structure of the society within which it exists. A society must therefore, by definition, exist if there is any law at all. In portraying the nature of this international society, Manning may have been moved by an idealist holism which he could have picked up in his youth at Oxford at a period when the tide of idealism had not quite turned there. His method, or style, seems also to owe something to phenomenology, which I take to be the superior kind of introspection whereby Husserl claimed to be able to describe the essence of conscious data. That is, the external is understood by purely inner means. 'The phenomenologist (an authority says) does not have to do with objects themselves; he is interested in their essential meaning, as it is constituted by the activities of our mind.'⁴ The influence of this attitude on the English school remains strong. Donelan's recent dictum that 'The data of the human sciences are the product of thought'⁵ could pass as a quotation from a nineteenth century idealist.

The most obvious characteristic of idealism, whether phenomenological or otherwise, is its propensity to use a special vocabulary of portentous terms (*eidōs*, spirit, cosmos) by means of which initiates claim to penetrate realms of reality unknown to ordinary mortals and which defy analysis in non-idealist terms. That is, to understand spirit and such, one must join the idealist discourse. If one does not join one cannot expect to know. ('What's an intimation?' 'If you don't know we can't tell you.') The idealist propensity to commune with the Whole seems pronounced in Manning. What exactly, from the outside, can he mean by the social cosmos and by social cosmology? What are these deep energies at world-wide 'cross-play and counter-play' in, and on, diplomatic theory? What is diplomatic theory if it is the 'framework' of world energies? Why do all these profoundly significant things have to be described with such a mixture of images? Manning senses the existence of a large Whole and he reconstructs it in a private manner. This commitment to holism remains fundamental to the approach of the English school, as the titles of many of its works clearly signal: *The Nature of International Society* (Manning), *Society of States* (Purnell), *The Reason of States* (Donelan *et al.*), *Anarchical Society* (Bull).

The authorities of the English school thus seem broadly united in taking the whole society of states to be the peculiar matter of the study of international relations. And they are prone to insulate this study from disrespectful prying by maintaining that extraneous understandings of the term 'society' have little or nothing to contribute to the illumination of the nature of their society of sovereign states. In combining in one expression the terms 'sovereign' and 'society' the English school is indeed denoting some very special entity. It certainly requires its members to echo Manning in claiming sovereignty to have a meaning peculiar to their subject of international relations. Yet if sovereignty is taken to be and to mean membership of the international collectivity of states and if this collectivity of states is equated with international society, then an obvious tautology is perpetrated. International society as a whole is affirmed in its existence; it is made

up of states; states are described as sovereign; therefore sovereignty means membership of this society. By such logic, of course, sovereignty means nothing whatever. The convolutions of members of the English school in attempting to avoid this tautology would constitute the material of a separate study. Two examples only will be cited. Professor Manning distinguishes sovereignty meaning 'topness', a qualification for membership of an exclusive 'club', from sovereignty meaning actual membership of this 'club' or 'international society'. The unique characteristic of this 'club' or 'society' is that its members accept international law.⁶ This is not as straightforward as it appears. The 'club' or 'society' of states, by imputing to international law the status of law, also imputes to it a 'binding character' in 'point of doctrine'.⁷ Empirical difficulties with the equation of membership of international society with 'subjection' to this 'binding' law are suavely dismissed: '... to ask for evidence of their subjection, or of its binding character, or indeed of the existence of such a society – if this means asking for evidence of *fact* – is, as it happens, a category mistake'.⁸

Manning almost invariably illustrates his points not with examples but with metaphors. Professor Bull is to be congratulated on his neglect of this practice. His effort to avoid the besetting tautology of the English school concentrates on the distinction between a 'system of states' and a 'society of states'. States which merely 'interact' comprise a 'system', whereas states which become conscious of 'certain' common interests and values, and share in common institutions, comprise a 'society'. The 'society of states' thus cooperates in the working of such international institutions as diplomacy and 'the customs and conventions of war'. Though Bull spurns metaphor in making his crucial distinction, his examples turn out to be anachronistic. Thus Turkey in the nineteenth century was part of a system, not a society; and the Greek city-states comprised both a system and a society. In relation to contemporary international society, Bull admits that if 'we ask ... "when did it begin?" or "what were its geographical limits?" we are at once involved in difficult problems of the tracing of boundaries'.⁹ But the major part of this problem is almost immediately solved, for among the international systems which, according to Bull, are also societies is the 'modern states system, which arose in Europe and is now world-wide'.¹⁰

Professor Manning disarms criticism by removing his concepts to metaphysical heights where there can be no possibility of empirical reference; Professor Bull does much the same by cultivating a certain vagueness at important junctures. But empirical questions about international society cannot be wholly suppressed by these means. Nazi Germany and Britain participated jointly in the institution of war; and Nazi Germany throughout observed some of the rules of international law, which, occasionally, Britain transgressed. Were they both members or non-members of international society? Or is membership of this 'club' a variable, some member-states visiting it more frequently than others? Does a government which condones mob assaults on one embassy, while properly protecting the immunities of others, take its state wholly or partially out of international society? Do two states which end their formal diplomatic connections remove themselves from international society until such time as they start fighting, when they re-enter the 'club' by virtue of their support for the institution of war? And what, as a matter of fact, does *full* membership of international society actually mean? Soviet Russia is not a full member of the IMF or the OECD; thus she is obviously no more a member of all the world's institutions than is any other state. So what is

Soviet Russia a full member of? The collectivity of states? But in this case the collectivity of states is the collectivity of states and not a mysterious society of some kind.

The term 'society' in all ordinary usages refers to the norms, communities, associations and such through which individual lives are expressed and, to a greater or lesser degree, regulated. It is a term which is rendered even more meaningless than it already is when it is used to describe the collectivity of states. What does its use add to the understanding of states? It is as if one were to turn away from, say, difficult discussions of markets, commercial law, costs, cash flows, accounting procedures and the like in trying to understand the working of firms and to refer instead simply to the 'society' of firms. But this would add absolutely nothing to these other forms of analysis, and it would be positively harmful if it led to prolonged and distracting attempts to give this almost meaningless expression some deep substances of its own.

A society is what individual men and women inhabit. There are good grounds for perceiving the historical origins of some states in persons, in powerful rulers able and anxious to achieve and to legitimate dominance over other sorts of rulers. But whatever states now are, as a whole they are nothing so determinate as individual persons. All states do not conform to one model of statehood: neither to one theory of the state nor to one kind of community (whether religious, ethnic or national) nor to one form of government nor to one structure of political expression. Many states differ from one another fundamentally. To speak of a society of a variety of structures or movements or theories would seem to be meaningless, except in some semi-private essentialist sense.

The English school clearly reposes the greatest significance in its peculiar concept of sovereignty, yet it entirely fails to make clear what this distinctive meaning is. Hobbes, in my reading, arrives at his conception of the sovereign from an understanding of the nature of individual men and of their mutual relations. Relations among Hobbesian sovereigns thus derive from the relations of men.¹¹ The English school appears to turn this procedure around: the meaning of sovereignty derives from the relations of states since it denotes membership of the society of states. States are thus, with only metaphysical qualification, invariably sovereign states. In which case the sovereign is the sovereign tautologically, because its existence derives from the existence of the plurality of sovereigns. By starting with individual men Hobbes gives the sovereign a distinctive meaning in a line of non-tautological reasoning.

In attempting to fill up the generally neglected inside of their notion of the state, the English school regularly equates sovereignty with the property, unique to the state, of constitutional self-containment.¹² Sovereignty is still redundant in this formulation of course. But this is a minor point. More importantly, the concept of constitutional self-containment still fails to stand up to commonsense examination. In what way is, say, Hungary constitutionally self-contained? If it is not constitutionally self-contained is it therefore not a state? Or is it only partly a state? Does the English school comprehend half-states and quarter-states? Another practical difficulty: most people in most countries have no understanding or experience of constitutional rule. How can a country devoid of the practice of constitutionalism be described as constitutionally self-contained, unless the word constitution is also deprived of any distinctive meaning? Constitutional countries, in any exact sense, are *not* of course self-contained. The constitution of Canada is

not the unique invention or possession of the state of Canada, any more than is the constitution of the state of the German Federal Republic. These constitutions derive from, and contribute to, a long tradition of constitutionalism which is in no way national. And Canadian society is obviously open: individuals come and go according to their means and inclinations, read foreign books and newspapers, listen to foreign broadcasts, eat foreign foods if they feel like it. Constitutional states are far from being self-contained. It is non-constitutional states which as a rule are, or attempt to be, self-contained. Further to this essential point, the understanding of political relations which the English school's usage propagates, disregards the liberal tradition of political thought wherein individuality is of paramount importance. An achievement of the liberal tradition is to have constructed a notion, and structure, of statehood which is the antithesis of sovereignty. The liberal state was inspired by a passion to regulate, even do away with, sovereigns. Yet English international relations claims to be about sovereign states. For the liberal the state and the sovereign are different things.

Distinction between state and society

Its absorption in the study of its society of sovereign states leads the English school to concentrate exclusively on impersonally large entities. In this holistic sense international relations of the English variety becomes an inhumane study. Human beings discover and express their individuality (as scientists, artists, sportsmen, film-makers, film-goers, academics, animal-lovers) in communities and associations and practices which for the most part are not strictly contained within any specific state. There is a traditional distinction of the first importance which is currently shamefully ignored in political studies generally as well as in the English school's version of international relations. I mean of course the distinction between state and society, of which the term 'society of states' is an exceptionally explicit negation. The development of liberal political thought and action can be interpreted as a long and continuing effort to set statehood against sovereignty and to secure individuality by providing a lasting foundation of a various and open society in civil statehood. If one accepts this notion of constitutionalism then the true state – the state without a sovereign in which political action is regulated by constitutional relations – is never an enclosed entity. When a sovereign (a totalitarian party for example) seizes a state and puts it unreservedly to its own purposes, *then* the state becomes self-contained because it is nothing more than its sovereign's instrument. But in this case statehood, a restraining principle, is obliterated. Statehood and the sovereign are not the same; on the contrary they are in direct opposition. All the cross-national communities and associations, including associations of students of international relations, that we as individuals inhabit depend for their stable continuance on civil statehood. If all states were sovereign states (that is, states possessed by sovereigns, in the manner of Soviet Russia or Romania) there could be no open society, no associations of any worth, and our individuality would be severely truncated. This is why the distinctions between society and state, and state and sovereign, are of such fundamental importance and this is why liberal political thought is humane, its commitment to human individuality being intrinsic to these basic classifications.

Taking the world of sovereign states to be their peculiar subject provides the members of the English school with a position from which to select some easy targets when in one of their belligerent moods. It is invariably a simple matter to dismiss world-scale reformism. The creation of a world state (in English usage, a world sovereign) is impossible; if not impossible, such a project would require the application of violence of an immeasurably harmful order; and if it were neither impossible nor immeasurably harmful to create, such a world state would surely be immeasurably tyrannical. Similarly, the submission of all the harmful tendencies inherent in the world of states as it now is to a more rigorous form of international law would require an impossible consensus or, again, a world sovereign. The transnational functionalist transformation of the world of states can also be easily dismissed because (a) functionalism depends on states, it does not supplant them, and because (b) the more important, and possibly more dangerous, states are virtually untouched by transnational organizations anyway. And so on. All this is easy. But the real challenges to the English school are not utopian in character but concentrate on its obsessive holism and on its consequent disregard for individual experience. The collectivist frame of reference of the English school, its world of sovereign states, inevitably places it in the same general category as the utopians it criticizes. In this class it may be relatively sensible. But the class as a whole is not distinguished by the depth of its theoretical or empirical underpinning.

Another familiar target selected by the English school is of course certain elements of the so-called American School of Scientific Politics. This antipathy I interpret as little more than a family squabble. Manning is as abstract as Easton, though a deal less rigorous. And to the outsider the similarities between Kaplan's definitionalism in *System and Process in International Politics* and Wight's definitionalism in *Power Politics* are more striking than their obvious differences of idiom. As Wight has shown, it is not possible to *do* traditional political theory on the English school's premisses. It follows that one of the few kinds of disciplined speculation available to those accepting these premisses (as, say, Kaplan and Schelling broadly do) is along so-called scientific lines. Such authorities have constructed models which, for the most part, do no severe injury to the English position. They then meditate abstractly, though fairly accurately, about the possibilities of these models. The sometimes extreme reactions of members of the English school to these exercises is partly dislike of unfamiliar and strenuous activity. More fundamentally, it is to be equated with Caliban's howl of horror and rage on being confronted by his own reflection. When Professor Northedge says that not much can be added to political understanding by these scientists he is of course quite right.¹³ But he should be more specific. Not much can be added in this way to the understanding of the English school, for the simple reason that in many cases these two understandings are much alike.

A similarity in attitude between the American school and the English school is explicitly acknowledged by Northedge when he describes his own understanding of international relations as 'scientific'.¹⁴ Donelan writes emphatically of 'our science'.¹⁵ Manning is of course oblique but much the same point comes across:

Social Cosmology ... is ... not in a category either with applied economics or with policy-science politics or with any other species of applied or policy-science. In fact it is not, limitatively, a science at all; but a branch,

rather, of humanistic-cum-scientific study. In so far of course as it is *indeed in principle* scientific, it is a form of 'fundamental' science, the analogue of elementary physics. Its most obvious cousin perhaps is cosmology proper if we understand this as scientific and philosophical, not theological, in its viewpoint. Ecology and oceanography are other near relations. But these are still none of them quite so closely akin to it as is that sort of Social Anthropology for which we ... (thank) ... Malinowski.¹⁶

The scientific emphasis of Malinowski had, of course, revolutionary effects on social anthropology.

Now science proceeds analytically. It splits things up. It does not flounder about in the cosmos. It makes a careful study of minute things as well as of immense things, and it relates the two. The most stunning achievement of modern physics lies in the connections it makes between the behaviour of matter at sub-atomic levels and the behaviour of matter at the universal level. In contrast, the English school of international relations deals exclusively in big things. It cannot relate its social cosmos to individual human experience. The essence of scientific method is the formulation of precise questions to which exact and falsifiable answers are possible. The question 'what is the nature of the society of sovereign states?' is not scientific. It is essentially a rhetorical metaphysical declaration. It cannot produce an answer which could be falsified because its own indefinite terms make what is said about it true. Having split things up, science is forever crossing its own interior frontiers. Practitioners in one field are able to borrow freely from the results and techniques of other fields. And novel problems are rapidly tackled by appropriate new combinations from the existing pool of scientific endeavour. Members of the English school of international relations ignore scientific procedure in two ways. Their basic standpoint is metaphysical. And, second, they are indifferent for the most part, as my second quotation from Manning shows, to the experience of the other social studies. They are apt to ignore international economics, which has after all developed a highly sophisticated body of what might reasonably be designated a species of international relations theory. Even their regard for social anthropology seems mainly metaphorical. I can see nothing of Malinowski's emphasis on detailed and methodical observation in Manning. And Bull's discussion of the 'functions' of war¹⁷ (Malinowski via Manning perhaps?) seems insensitive to the strengths and weaknesses of functionalist method as they have revealed themselves in the other social studies, notably sociology. Contempt for the culture of the social studies as a whole is not only narrow in itself, it also hinders the English school in its own efforts. Professor Bull's problems with boundaries might be resolved were he to adopt an action frame of reference.

By scientific I take the English school really to mean nothing more than objective, clinical, cool: terms which describe an attitude, not a subject or a method. Let us accept this usage. Now an objective science of society in the English sense is only possible in certain conditions. For example, the scientific enquirer must believe, and those in a position to regulate his activities must also believe, that a society exists which does not determine what is thought about it. There must also exist conditions in which any question about social relations may be asked. And it must be possible for conclusions about the nature of social relations to be placed in individually chosen systematic form, published, and then

freely examined, criticized and argued about. These three essential conditions are far from universally available. So the 'science' of international society actually depends on the existence of a particular kind of society which individuals, not states, actually experience. The 'science' of international relations is thus inextricably linked to the maintenance of a certain kind of society. And this society in turn depends for its continued existence on the maintenance of a certain kind of statehood.

The English school broadly insists, as explicitly laid down by Manning, on the separation of the study of international relations from issues of policy. This is logically impossible as I have just shown. Additionally it suggests a poor historical appreciation of the evolution of the social sciences. The British classical economists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries devoted themselves to the development of a rigorous scheme of analytical thinking. But this did not hinder their broad commitment to constitutional statehood, nor did they perceive it to be something other than a contribution to human betterment. Though for the most part inclined to caution in policy matters they certainly did not divorce their analyses from policy questions. The greatest of the neo-classical economists, Alfred Marshall, categorically declared himself to be a student of the 'causes of the degradation of a large part of mankind'.¹⁸ An emphatic distinction such as that made by the English school of international relations between systematic analysis and policy is thus based on a mistaken notion of what the social sciences are or need to be. It also reduces the study of international relations to a wholly second order activity, utterly dependent on what politicians do for its material. Traditional political theory, whatever its defects, has the inestimable merit of not being scientific in this sense.

Odd combination

Let us turn now briefly to the other progenitor of the English study of international relations. To the outsider there may seem to be no more vividly contrasted a pair of writers than Manning and Wight: Manning allegorical, elusive, eclectic; Wight sober, detailed, historical; Manning darting about in lofty philosophical-anthropological-jurisprudential regions known best only to himself; Wight deploying vast historical scholarship with accomplished concision. Yet the members of the English school revere both these teachers. Nor, I think, are they wrong to make this apparently odd combination, for Manning and Wight have far more in common than their stylistic differences would suggest.

It is clear that Professor Wight, no less than Manning, accepts the coherence of the subject-matter of English international relations. He is aware of a discrete entity, the collectivity of (mostly European) states, and this appreciation runs through his work as strongly as it does through Manning's. This leaves Wight with the same difficulty that acutely manifests itself in Manning. An apparently discrete subject-matter does not in itself solve the problem of method. On the basis of his writing, I am at a loss to see how a student of international relations could practise Manning's method without sacrificing his personality to Manning's. A not dissimilar conclusion is suggested by much of Wight's work. How could an undergraduate student of international relations deploy Wight's historical learning? This is what an erudite historian of strongly Toynbeean persuasion

might join Wight in doing, but what he would be doing would be this very peculiar sort of history. A social studies undergraduate does not learn a method from Wight, he copies classifications and definitions. Wight's *Power Politics* is really a kind of historical dictionary of the epoch of the collectivity of European states. In this work the terms of traditional international politics (great power, dominant power, diplomacy and such) are defined and the definitions substantiated by means of juxtapositions among large quantities of abstracted historical material. In proceeding thus Wight explains the nature of international relations through categories which he seems to believe inhere in the historical 'society' of states itself. There seems a transcendental quality in Wight's historical thinking, to which time and change are a troublesome irrelevance. His categories seem to claim a status in the history of states conceived as an entity and are thus removed from argument. As a metaphysician Wight outdoes Manning. There is certainly more than a hint of dogma in his intellectual make-up.

Yet it is at least arguable that Wight makes many category mistakes. He seems to believe that all states at given levels of power are internationally much the same. If this is so, then the international interests of states are also much the same and must thus differ fundamentally from domestic interests. Yet interests are invariably created in and by specific environments. Again, crudely empirical points come to mind. The environment of interests comprising Romania, Hungary and Soviet Russia is very different from the environment, if such indeed it may be called, of interests comprising Britain, Holland and Denmark. So great in fact is the difference that I cannot see that they have anything in common at all. The degree to which the environment of the entire collectivity of states is, in any precise sense, *one* environment is minute. It certainly does not provide the substance of a university subject.

Slightly different kinds of problems are created by Wight's categorization of International Theory. Here we come of course to the three R's (realism, revolutionism and rationalism) which duly metamorphosed into Machiavellism, Grotianism and Kantianism. I am obviously unable to tell from personal experience how Wight interpreted and deployed these influential categories. He may simply have used them as a pedagogical device, a way of sorting out in a rough-and-ready fashion an otherwise confusing variety of sayings on the relations of states for the benefit of undergraduates. But, from the outside, it would seem otherwise. Wight himself, it seems, referred to his classes as paradigms¹⁹ or traditions. In other words, they were conceived to be modes of perceiving the relations of states and of acting in and upon them. If this is a correct interpretation, if the three R's do denote modes of perception, comprehension and action, from what, or where, do they spring? If they issue from the mind of Martin Wight are they not open to radical revision? There was more than one side to Machiavelli after all. Could it be that Wight's scheme had some metaphysical significance? Let us return for a moment to the distinction between recounting or classifying political theory and *doing* political theory. To do political theory is a first order activity, it is not simply classifying and commenting on the actions and dicta of statesmen and others. Anyone attempting to do political theory about the relations of states would be severely hampered if he had to start and end with so indigent an entity as the collectivity of states as his sole material and if he had to see this entity through one of the modes or traditions suggested by Wight. These are stopping points, not starting points. But consider

further Wight's terminology. To describe his exposition of his three traditions he apparently used the curious term International Theory. One may reasonably conclude that he settled on this puzzling title having considered and rejected more obvious alternatives such as theories of international relations. His choice, it seems to me, provides a possible clue to what he may have been about. Two of Wight's modes, Machiavellism and Kantianism, are strongly opposed. The third, Grotianism, as expounded by Wight in his celebrated essay on 'Western Values in International Relations'²⁰ incorporates elements of the other two. Here, it is just possible, we have a dialectic. Moreover, the idea (Idea perhaps?) of Grotianism appears to manifest itself in the workings of the international society of European states. If I am right, this really is International Theory. It is theory which is inside international society and it incorporates other, partial and harmful, theories or modes which are just about states on the one side or about ideas on the other. Wight turns out to be an eclectic of a kind after all: not quite Toynbee and not quite Hegel either.

Professor Manning, as we have seen, is given to making sweeping references to large numbers of other subjects. This is done in an admirably generous spirit. In practice, however, he does not incorporate the methods and results of other subjects into an exposition of his social cosmos; though quite how even Manning could actually utilize oceanography is beyond the grasp of my probably literal habit of mind. Martin Wight, of course, straightforwardly ignores other subjects. He appears convinced that only his brand of historicism is the authentic way of understanding relations among states. The general effect of this disposition on the kinds of data he can comprehend is sufficiently obvious to require no comment. But even in its own terms, as metaphysical history, the Wightian system is particularly cold and lifeless. Some time ago, while walking to school (as children then did) I found myself disturbed and delayed by a dark plane which dropped a bomb in my path. I turn to *Power Politics* for a lively insight into this international episode and my eye falls on this:

In 1922 Britain refused to guarantee the French frontiers; in 1925 she gave the desired guarantee, but refused to guarantee the frontiers of Eastern Europe. In 1939 she gave a guarantee to Poland and Romania, and went to war in fulfilment of it. If she had given the guarantee to France in 1922, and had extended her guarantee to Eastern Europe at Locarno, the war would not have occurred. Britain pursued a false balance of power...²¹

One hardly needs draw attention to the determinism of this passage: if the guarantees had been given earlier there would have been no war. Nor need one emphasize the reification involved in the distinction between a false balance of power and, presumably, the true or historically real balance of power. More immediately striking is the absence of any reference to the rise of totalitarianism. I turn anxiously to the chapter on 'International Revolutions' for illumination on this point. Here I discover that powers exhibit not merely quantitative but also qualitative variations resulting from differences of beliefs and opinions within them. From time to time violent upsurges of belief occur that spill over into the relations of states and sometimes a transformation of these relations is attempted, though so far international society has just about managed to survive these recurrent convulsions. The National Socialist Revolution was 'marginal'²² in the sense that its foreign appeal was limited by its essentially nationalist base.

Woodrow Wilson's creed of open diplomacy was more truly revolutionary in Wight's system because it struck more lastingly at the form of traditional diplomatic relations.²³ The Nazi movement, on the other hand, was 'inseparable from German imperialism'.²⁴ And so on. A mild preference for international society is suggested and by this criterion Wilson would seem a rather more dangerous figure than Hitler. The difficulty here is that I cannot rid myself of the contrary feeling that Hitler was nastier than Wilson in every possible way. In Wight's system my childish impression disappears without trace into the impersonally turning cogs of history. No passion sings Wight's pages. Indeed the commitment to international society is so mild (which is not to be wondered at, it being so slight a fabric) that the unmistakable impression is conveyed that what happens to us sinners here below matters very little. To be alive is to be mildly depressed.

No reader of *Power Politics* can fail to be struck by its static quality. It is a book to take up and put down, it does not beckon the reader through its pages. The Wightian epoch of the collectivity of states is full of activity but nothing much happens. This is not the occasion to mount a general attack on this species of historicism, but its effects on English international relations have been dire. Just as Manning reduces international relations to a kind of meta-jurisprudence so Wight reduces it to meta-history. And one of the most obvious defects of meta-schools is that they are but one step removed from becoming meta-meta-schools. Pupils caught in this sterile regime move inevitably from scholarship to scholasticism, their isolation from external stimulus becoming progressively more complete. At the beginning of *The Reason of States* Michael Donelan sounds a timely warning to his colleagues about the work of their immediate teachers: 'It will enslave us if we do not take care'.²⁵ Alas, the bonds of Manning and Wight are proving much too strong.

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