

Continuity and change in British liberal internationalism, c. 1900–1930

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Abstract. This article is concerned with the historical trajectory and legacy of British liberal internationalist ideas in the opening three decades of the twentieth century. Despite this body of ideas being a major force behind the establishment of International Relations (IR) in Britain following the Great War, only scant attention is paid to its pre-war configuration. The article attempts to remedy this gap by focusing on internationalist thought prior to and during the war. It is argued that internationalist ideas during the Great War accelerated a drift towards *institutional* arguments, which are herein distinguished from *moral* arguments, and that the concept of anarchy played a major role in this shift in internationalist ideas. While the transformation of liberal internationalist ideas during the war constitutes a central backdrop to the early practices of British IR, it should not overshadow the powerful, underlying continuity in ethico-political convictions entertained by internationalists before and after the Great War.

Nationalism is supposed to be the child of the middle class, but in England internationalism proved to be its twin.¹

Introduction

The academic discipline International Relations (IR) emerged in the immediate aftermath of the First World War (1914–1918) as a result of a widespread internationalist sentiment focused on the prevention of future wars. In Britain, the first professorial chair of IR, at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, took its name from the American President Woodrow Wilson, and pleas for more systematic thinking about international politics during the Great War had also been formulated along the lines of an internationalist agenda. For example, J.A. Hobson argued in his thoroughly internationalist tract *Towards International Government* (1915) that ‘it is of paramount importance to try to get the largest number of thoughtful people to form clear, general ideas of better international relations, and to desire their attainment’.² And in this context – where it became increasingly important to

* I would like to thank Jens Bartelson, Duncan Bell, Martin Ceadel, Peter Clarke, Stefan Collini, Ian Hall, Charles Jones, Zaheer Kazmi, Maria Neophytou, and Vibeke Schou Tjalve for discussing the theme of this article with me and/or for commenting on earlier versions. The article has also benefited from the comments of the participants at the Ph.D workshop, University of Copenhagen, January 2004, and from the suggestions of the anonymous reviewers of *Review of International Studies*. Any remaining deficiencies are entirely the author’s responsibility.

¹ Harold Temperley, *The Victorian Age in Politics, War and Diplomacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928), p. 54.

² J.A. Hobson, *Towards International Government* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1915), p. 8. See also H.N. Brailsford, *The War of Steel and Gold* (London: Routledge, 1998 [1914, 1917]), p. 48.

validate political credos with theoretical arguments – ‘thoughtful’ referred not only to intellectual ability, but also to internationalist political views derived from radicalism, liberalism or a peculiarly British form of socialism.

Despite the central standing of internationalism in the birth of IR, scholarly interest in the specific ideological characteristics of this creed has traditionally been low. This is not least due to the absorption of classical realist caricatures of internationalist ideas as utopian or idealist into a historiographical orthodoxy; a process which unfortunately resulted in some of the sophistication in earlier attempts to carve out a proper realist identity being lost.³ However, recent scholarship has done much to counter the dismissal of internationalism as utopian or idealist.⁴ This revisionist literature on internationalist ideas has certainly been helpful in refuting a central, but distorting, assumption about the trajectory of academic IR, but due to the focus on individual internationalists – and the question of their supposed ‘idealism’ – it has perhaps also blurred the extent to which many of these people shared general political goals and fundamental assumptions about international politics. Thus, except for two recent and very valuable histories of the British peace movement which demonstrate the political force of internationalist ideas and serve as a useful inroad to the composition of and the ideologies prevalent within this movement,⁵ few general analyses of the ideas of leading internationalists in the beginning of the twentieth century exist.⁶ Against this background, this article contributes to the intellectual history of internationalism in the first three decades of the twentieth century by focusing on the writings of a number of political thinkers who were associated, directly or indirectly, with the emergence of IR in Britain. It does so with two specific and closely interrelated aims in mind: firstly, to enhance our understanding of the continuities and transformations in British internationalist thought at the beginning of the twentieth century and, secondly, to supply the discipline of IR in Britain with a more sophisticated understanding of its internationalist legacy.⁷

With these aims and the wealth of available material in mind, the article focuses on the way internationalist thinkers conceptualised the Great War and the consequences that followed for their ideology. The motivation for this time-frame is as follows. For some time now historians have grappled with the problem of the

³ See E.H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939* (London: Macmillan, 1939); Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 2nd edn. (New York: Knopf, 1954 [1948]); Hedley Bull, ‘The Theory of International Politics, 1919–1969’ [1972], reprinted in James Der Derian (ed.), *International Theory: Critical Investigations* (London: Macmillan, 1995), pp. 181–211.

⁴ See, for example, David Long and Peter Wilson (eds.), *Thinkers of the Twenty Years Crisis* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

⁵ Martin Ceadel, *Semi-Detached Idealists: The British Peace Movement and International Relations, 1854–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Paul Laity, *The British Peace Movement, 1870–1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001).

⁶ Three further studies – all dating back more than 25 years – contain some discussion of these themes: A.J.P. Taylor, *The Trouble Makers: Dissent Over Foreign Policy 1792–1939* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1957); F.H. Hinsley, *Power and the Pursuit of Peace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963); Michael Howard, *War and the Liberal Conscience* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1978).

⁷ Arguably, the most recent attempt to narrate the history of international political ideas in Britain gives excessive weight to the so-called English School. Timothy Dunne, ‘A British School of International Relations’ in Jack Hayward, Bryan Barry and Archie Brown (eds.), *The British Study of Politics in the Twentieth Century* (London: The British Academy, 2003 [1999]), pp. 395–424.

Great War in terms of continuity and change. In IR, the tension between two interpretations of the war – ‘a time bomb of total change and . . . a more humble pressure-cooker of gradualist evolution’⁸ – is often, unthinkingly, resolved in favour of the former, as pre-war ideas are regarded as falling outside the scope of the discipline. However, there has also been a different tendency at work, which points in the other direction: ‘idealism’ is regarded as reiterating a number of (naïve) assumptions of nineteenth-century British liberalism, but the details of this intellectual interconnection remain largely unexplored.⁹ Despite the ambiguity, the two tendencies – one pointing towards change, the other towards continuity – work together to obscure the debt of interwar internationalism to earlier forms of liberal internationalism. Concurrently, and perhaps paradoxically, seeing the Great War as a watershed encourages acceptance of the caricatures of liberal thought that have been influential in the historiography of IR. This article places internationalist debates in the decades bracketing the Great War within the wider context of British political and social thought.

The article proceeds in five steps. The first section introduces a distinction between moral and institutional internationalist arguments.¹⁰ The second section argues that internationalist ideas prior to the Great War had begun to drift in an institutional direction, while remaining overwhelmingly moral. The third section analyses how the outbreak of war led internationalists to argue that their earlier beliefs had to be angled in more institutional directions, and scrutinises the role played by the idea of international anarchy in this transformation. It is argued, firstly, that a new awareness and conceptual clarification of ‘anarchy’ provided the background against which institutional ideas gained currency and, secondly, that beneath the apparent transformation of internationalist ideology considerable continuity with its earlier manifestations, including the central mission of this liberal creed, is to be found. The fourth section analyses the most important agreements and disagreements between internationalists during the Great War, and argues that wartime debates anticipate the central internationalist problems and arguments of the interwar period. The final section sums up the findings of the article.

Internationalism – moral and institutional

The *Oxford English Dictionary* records the first use of the term internationalism in English in 1851 – some sixty years after Bentham coined the word international – and until the 1890s it carried a variety of connotations stretching from transnational

⁸ Jose Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994), p. 1.

⁹ See Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, esp. ch. 3; Bull, ‘Theory of International Politics’.

¹⁰ In debates among internationalists, the term mechanical was perhaps the most common term for the latter type of argument. Due to the confusion that this word causes (through its association with automatism) and its sometimes highly value-laden character (as an opposition to the organic, natural), I have decided to term this type of argument institutional. I have adopted and developed the distinction from Peter Clarke’s study of *Liberals and Social Democrats* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp. 4–5, *passim*.

relations of almost any kind to liberal variants of imperialism.¹¹ Mostly, however, the term signified co-operation among individuals, groups and nations as well as the development of international law; policies that did not entail any cosmopolitan hope of transcending the state.¹² In a British context, therefore, the usage of ‘internationalism’ reflects the fact that ideas aiming at the establishment of a world government have enjoyed relatively little success.¹³ The internationalist objective of progressive reform was most obvious in proposals for an international organisation for the prevention of war that surfaced during the Great War, but decades before the war, the reforming sentiment was already widespread. International politics was generally perceived as lawless and devoid of features such as progress and order that were seen to characterise domestic politics in Britain, and internationalist ideology aimed at redressing this situation. As the generality of this ideological goal indicates, ‘internationalism’ was a flexible concept that embraced many (not always compatible) progressive ideas which, of course, only heightened its ideological attraction. However, I will argue that two distinct modes of internationalist arguments are illuminating in a British context. They can be captured in a distinction between moral and institutional internationalist arguments.

Moral internationalist arguments stress the need for a new international consciousness that can act as the agent of a positive transformation of the international domain; this *consciousness* is seen to assure progress, order, and continuity internationally. Moral arguments can, analytically at least, be broken down into two distinct types: normative and cognitive. Yet, the two are often collapsed to the effect that a higher human morality is a consequence of developing rationality or *vice versa*.

¹¹ Here a few etymological remarks are in order. On the coinage of the word ‘international’, see Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, eds. J. H. Burns and H.L.A. Hart (London: Athlone Press, 1970 [1789]), pp. 296 and 296n; Hidemi Suganami, ‘A Note on the Origin of the Word “International”’, *British Journal of International Studies*, 4 (1978), pp. 226–32. The term ‘international relations’ was widely used from (at least) the 1830s and throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with connotations similar to ones the term carries today. To my knowledge, the first systematic call for an academic discipline of International Relations was authored by J.K. Stephen, son of James Fitzjames Stephen, in 1884. However, as the subtitle of Stephen’s book makes clear, International Relations was suggested as a substitute for International Law, which Stephen (and his father), following John Austin, considered as law ‘improperly so-called’. See J.K. Stephen, *International Law and International Relations: An Attempt to Ascertain the Best Method for Discussing the Topics of International Law* (London: Macmillan, 1884). The academic discipline IR that emerged after the Great War bore no resemblance to Stephen’s idiosyncratic definition of the subject and was most often defined as the scientific study of international politics with an explicit orientation towards the promotion of peace. See for example, James Bryce [Viscount Bryce], *International Relations: Eight Lectures Delivered in the United States in August, 1921* (London: Macmillan, 1922), p. 3; Alfred Zimmern, *The Study of International Relations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931).

¹² The literature on internationalism contains numerous other distinctions, some of which bear resemblance to this difference between internationalism and cosmopolitanism: Kjell Goldmann, *The Logic of Internationalism* (London: Routledge, 1994); Fred Halliday, ‘Three Concepts of Internationalism’, *International Affairs*, 64 (1988), pp. 187–98; John H. Herz, ‘Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma’, *World Politics*, 2 (1950), pp. 157–80.

¹³ The idea that a larger federation or a world state was a ‘natural’ outcome of history was, in different shapes, common among progressives, but few internationalists argued explicitly for the establishment of such institutions. The paramount exceptions in the period that concerns us here are W.T. Stead, H.G. Wells, and (possibly) Bertrand Russell. See W.T. Stead, *The United States of Europe on the Eve of the Parliament of Peace* (London: ‘Review of Reviews’ Office, 1899); Edward Mead Earle, ‘H.G. Wells, British Patriot in Search of a World State’, *World Politics*, 2 (1950), pp. 181–208; C. Delisle Burns, Bertrand Russell and G.D.H. Cole, ‘Symposium: The Nature of the State in View of its External Relations’, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, n.s. 16 (1915–1916), pp. 290–325.

Logically, this perspective embodies a positive view of human potential: improvement through either ethics or enhanced rationality is possible. Where this process has not yet been manifested it is often projected into the future. The speeches and writings of many Victorian liberals embody this type of moral internationalist argument. Victorian liberalism certainly defies easy categorisation, but the ambiguity of the idea of liberalism cannot be seen in isolation from its success. As one scholar has argued, in the nineteenth century the ‘confused, vague, contradictory’ idea of liberalism was ‘more a motto than a word.’¹⁴ Yet in this intricacy moral internationalist arguments were one of the more consistent and deep-seated elements. Figures as diverse as Richard Cobden, John Bright, W.E. Gladstone, and John Stuart Mill – all of whom became icons for early-twentieth century internationalism – emphasised progress in the international sphere through the development of rationality and/or morality. Despite their important differences, Ernest Barker’s comment that Cobden and Bright’s internationalist ideals ‘were backed by a moral appeal to the conscience as well as by a pecuniary appeal to the pocket’ is apt.¹⁵ The most rational course was also the most moral. Later in the century the emphasis in this equation shifted slightly from distant rationality to the more passionately engaged ethical dimension. Although both Mill and Gladstone are impossible to pigeon-hole, their speeches and writings demonstrate how a highly moralistic concept of righteousness that extended to international politics became the most important drive for reform.¹⁶ Attempts to reform international politics were often based on a notion of ethical, civilisational, and potentially universal progress that appealed to the ‘conscience of civilisation’ whether the specific question under scrutiny was the reduction of armaments, the Eastern question in British foreign policy, or counter-intervention on behalf of martyred nations. Foreign policy could not be excluded from the ongoing quest to moralise British society.¹⁷ Although Gladstone never encapsulated Victorian liberalism, he appealed to a widely shared sentiment when he argued that ‘[w]e want to place ourselves in harmony with the general sentiment of mankind, instead of being any longer, as we seem to be, the Evil Genius which dogs, and mars, and baffles it.’¹⁸ For

¹⁴ Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 21.

¹⁵ Ernest Barker, *Political Thought in England 1848 to 1914*, 2nd edn. (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1928 [1915]), p. 237. For an analysis of the ‘brutal simplicity’ of Cobdenite arguments with regard to international relations, see Peter Cain, ‘Capitalism, War and Internationalism in the Thought of Richard Cobden’, *British Journal of International Studies*, 5 (1979), pp. 229–47.

¹⁶ Stefan Collini, ‘Political Theory and the “Science of Society” in Victorian Britain’, *The Historical Journal*, 23 (1980), pp. 203–31; Christopher Harvie, *The Lights of Liberalism* (London: Allen Lane, 1976). For the complexity of Gladstone’s ideas, see H.C.G. Matthew, *Gladstone 1875–1898* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); H.C.G. Matthew, *Gladstone 1809–1874* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); E.F. Biagini, ‘Gladstone’s Midlothian Campaign of 1879: The Realpolitik of Christian Humanitarianism’, *Liberal History*, 42 (Spring 2004), pp. 6–12. Mill’s place in Victorian intellectual life is discussed in Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

¹⁷ For an analysis of the ways in which a ‘civilisational perspective’, which emphasised civilisation as ‘a universal human potential’, dominated most British political thought in the mid-Victorian years, see Peter Mandler, ‘“Race” and “nation” in mid-Victorian thought’, in Stefan Collini, Richard Whatmore and Brian Young (eds.), *History, Religion, and Culture 1750–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 224–44.

¹⁸ W.E. Gladstone, *Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East* (London: John Murray, 1876), pp. 57–8. Cf. John Stuart Mill, ‘A Few Words on Non-intervention’ [1859], reprinted in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill [CW]*, ed. John M. Robson, 33 vols. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963–1991), vol. XXI, pp. 109–24; John Stuart Mill, ‘Inaugural Address Delivered at the University of St. Andrews’ [1867], in *CW*, vol. XXI, pp. 215–57, esp. 244–7.

internationalists in the beginning of the twentieth century this flexible moralistic vocabulary was crucial; indeed, it was what made their political convictions coherent.

Institutional internationalist arguments represent a more pessimistic (but not fatalistic) view of human nature. Progress in the international domain cannot be left to ethics alone. Therefore, a lack of moral progress must be substituted with institutional mechanisms, understood as politically devised systems of authority that are seen as essential for the achievement of a political goal. As a result, these arguments often appeal to morality and rationality, but they do so by acknowledging that the two are not necessarily identical and even if they were this might not be enough. Thus, institutional arguments aim at devising political institutions that can induce or, in the last instance, force people to act in ways deemed morally defensible. It is not the workings of an institution or the demands an institution places on the rationality of political agents that define institutional arguments, but rather the attempt to devise and construct such institutions (although the former is sometimes assumed to unproblematically follow from the latter). As we shall see below, the way internationalists conceptualised the Great War, emphasising anarchy and the fallibility of human nature, paved the way for institutional arguments.

When this distinction between moral and institutional arguments is invoked in the following, two caveats should be kept in mind. Firstly, the distinction is far from absolute and its primary value is heuristic and illustrative. Few if any internationalist arguments are purely moral or purely institutional; mostly, they reflect a particular mix that gives priority to the moral or the institutional. For example, Gladstone's moral arguments of the 1870s were often, if only vaguely, formulated with reference to institutions like the Concert of Europe or a sisterhood of nations. The distinction should not, therefore, be understood too rigidly. As interpreters we cannot avoid moulding and compartmentalising our object of study, but we know that distinctions of this kind can neither solve mysteries nor rid the world of complexity.¹⁹ Secondly, it is important to point out that the distinction is partly a product of intellectual fluctuations in the nineteenth century. Although a full investigation of the conditions of possibility of the distinction is beyond the purpose of this essay, some preliminary remarks are in order.

At one and the same time the concept of progress was innate to Victorian Britain, but it was also, and increasingly became, a source of contention and frustration: how did progress come about and to what extent was it necessary to further it by deliberate (constructed) action? This is a very complex theme which can be approached from a number of perspectives. On the one hand, it was a salient theme in political debate that saw new social liberals (and other progressive, 'collectivist' forces) attack what they perceived to be an outmoded individualistic, *laissez faire* liberalism.²⁰ On the other hand, more philosophical debates about science and ethics, materialism and idealism, or any other related distinction, are relevant to the distinction between moral and institutional internationalist arguments employed

¹⁹ A further implication of this argument is that the distinction should not be read teleologically. For a discussion, see David Kennedy, 'The Move to Institutions', *Cardozo Law Review*, 8 (1987), pp. 841–988.

²⁰ These debates are analysed in their intellectual, social, and political context in Michael Freedman, *The New Liberalism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978); Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats*; Stefan Collini, *Liberalism and Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

here.²¹ In particular, it is worth noting how key Victorian concepts like ‘progress’ or ‘character’ embodied ambivalences that in a slow and uneven fashion brought the role of conscious human action to centre stage.

What one scholar has termed the ‘inclination to conduct political argument by reference to a supposedly inevitable direction in history’ (often pointing to democracy, enlightenment or civilisation) was a deep-seated notion in Victorian Britain. But the hold of this conviction was accompanied by uneasiness about the meagre room this left for human action. Thus, political action was often reduced to adjusting or correcting this development, which in turn ‘could justify radicalism – because the contemplated changes were already implicit – or passivity; they could seem alarming or stifling.’²² Especially in the late nineteenth century many scholars, predominantly liberal, revolted against the spectator-role that this view of history accorded them. This development can be exemplified by what Stefan Collini has termed the ‘politics of character’. Victorian Britain was marked by a strong sense of moral duty which manifested itself in the notion of character, a central characteristic of which is its connection to progress. Thus, character referred to the constant development of qualities and habits in the individual as well as in the people as a whole.²³ Initially, this idea of development was antithetical to artificial or legal intervention but, as has been pointed out by H.S. Jones, the politics of character came to highlight ‘the importance of social circumstances for the promotion of moral qualities,’²⁴ which in turn raised issues about how these could be moulded in a fashion that would secure continuous progress. In an intellectual climate wavering between hope and despair, debates about state intervention from the 1880s onwards were both a cause and a product of such underlying intellectual changes. Not only was the intimate, short-term connection between what was rational and what was moral under stress in these years, the distinction between argumentative forms that were primarily moral or institutional became more widespread as the importance of social circumstance moved to the forefront. For some, turning to institutional solutions to political and ethical problems was an obvious outcome, while for others Tennyson continued to offer a glimpse of hope in the midst of despair: ‘And out of darkness came the hands, That reach thro’ nature, moulding men.’²⁵

Internationalist thought prior to 1914

Applying the distinction between moral and institutional arguments to internationalist ideas prevalent before the outbreak of war in 1914, this section argues

²¹ See, for example, J. W. Burrow, *The Crisis of Reason* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 52–67; Ian Hacking, ‘Nineteenth Century Cracks in the Concept of Determinism’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 44 (1983), pp. 455–75.

²² John Burrow, *Whigs and Liberals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 22–3.

²³ Progress was, therefore, a complex concept. It referred to material and economic progress as well as spiritual or moral (and later social) progress, and to some extent these dimensions were inseparable. See Collini, *Public Moralists*, pp. 107–9.

²⁴ H.S. Jones, *Victorian Political Thought* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 31–2.

²⁵ Alfred Tennyson, *In Memoriam* (London: The Folio Society, 1975 [1850]), section CXXIV, p. 132.

that these ideas drifted in an institutional direction. The reasons for this reorientation of internationalism are twofold: firstly, the Hague Conferences stimulated interest in international law, arbitration, and other institutions in international politics. Secondly, the attack on 'old' liberalism by Fabians, new liberals and other collectivists from the 1880s gave many domestic liberal arguments a distinct institutional, as opposed to moral, flavour. However, while this turn in internationalist ideas was detectable, we should be wary of exaggerating the extent of the institutional orientation. As I will argue in this section, despite the slight shift of idiom, the exact configuration of political institutions or the authority behind international law often remained ghostly. Most internationalists continued to identify the safeguards of international order and progress as the development of the 'conscience of civilised mankind' rather than institutional solutions. This can be illustrated by the writings of the 'new liberal' L.T. Hobhouse.²⁶

The central point of Hobhouse's book *Democracy and Reaction* (1904) was to indict the intellectual mood that had legitimated a reaction against democracy, of which the South African War (1899–1902) was just one example. The primary sinners in this respect were the popular philosophies of the day: evolutionary social theory and philosophical idealism. Like evolutionary arguments, which at the time could be used to justify almost any ideological position in British political discourse (as the writings of Sidney Webb and Herbert Spencer testify), idealism could be taken in different directions. For example, T.H. Green's concept of the higher self, which was based on German idealist (especially Kantian) philosophy, had since the mid-1870s reaffirmed an important moral conviction of public discourse by underlining the altruistic duty of Victorian individuals. Citizens had an obligation to improve society as a whole by striving after the common good. Notwithstanding Green's Kantian individualism, which denied personality to groups, these ideas could justify social intervention by the state even if Green himself had a limited view of the legitimate sphere of state action.²⁷ Despite the obvious disagreements on means, collectivists like Hobhouse found themselves able to utilise Green's philosophy as happily synthesising state intervention, Kantian moral freedom and British liberalism, because they shared an ethico-political sentiment, reflected in domestic as well as international politics.²⁸

²⁶ The general argument that internationalist ideas remained moral is also supported by the writings of scholars of international law in this period, for example, John Westlake and Lassa Oppenheim. Hidemi Suganami, 'The "Peace through Law" Approach: A Critical Examination of its Ideas', in Trevor Taylor (ed.), *Approaches and Theory in International Relations* (London: Longman, 1978), pp. 100–21, contains a brief discussion of Lassa Oppenheim in terms roughly similar to mine. See also John Westlake, *The Collected Papers of John Westlake on Public International Law*, ed. L. Oppenheim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914). Moreover, with regard to the Peace Movement it has been argued that there was a 'slight shift of attention from arbitration to supranationalism . . .' after the Peace Conferences. Martin Ceadel, 'Supranationalism in the British Peace Movement during the Early Twentieth Century', in Andrea Bosco (ed.), *The Federal Idea* (London: Lothian Foundation Press, 1991), pp. 169–91, at p. 175. For a more detailed analysis, see Ceadel, *Semi-Detached Idealists*, chs. 6 and 7.

²⁷ Burrow, *The Crisis of Reason*, p. 129; see also Melvin Richter, *The Politics of Conscience* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1964).

²⁸ To Green, Idealism and Manchesterism were ultimately compatible, and in terms of international politics this led him to argue that because the moral purpose of states was similar, there was 'no such thing as an inevitable conflict between states'. T. H. Green, *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation* (London: Longmans, 1966 [1886]), p. 227.

However, idealism could be taken in another (Hegelian) direction that departed more radically from the British political tradition.²⁹ Prominent internationalists later attacked this strand of idealism for embodying an inclination towards *Realpolitik*, not dissimilar to the arguments advanced by German nationalists like Treitschke.³⁰ For example, J.A. Hobson argued that the idealist conception of the state as an absolute morally self-contained being carried with it the ‘domination over individual lives, and that dispensation from all external duties or obligations, which we are discovering to be the inspiring genius of the German “Real-Politik”’.³¹ Thus, philosophical idealists met resistance from liberal intellectuals for arguing that the state constituted the most important political community; the highest good of political life. However this kind of criticism was never free from ambivalence. For Hobhouse it was important to criticise the extreme versions of both idealism and ‘Darwinism’ for arguing that whatever wins is right, which, consequently, led to a celebration of physical force and notions of dominance.³² On the other hand, he tried to exploit the popularity of these vocabularies by phrasing his own project in their terms.³³

Discussing the (potential) existence of international law, Hobhouse started out by questioning the arbitrary divide between national and international politics. The purpose was to counter the argument – derived from John Austin – that ‘in the absence of a sovereign law can only be said to exist by a kind of fiction, and that if we are in earnest in desiring to see law among nations we must look forward to the formation of a single world State with a central power to enforce its behests’.³⁴ This way of phrasing the problem is surely consistent with a drift towards institutional arguments. Yet according to Hobhouse this argument was based on a flawed analogy resting upon ‘an imperfect reading of history and an inadequate analysis of law. Law does not necessarily imply a sovereign to enforce it.’³⁵ Instead, Hobhouse argued, in primitive societies law was upheld without the aid of a sovereign, and as the European system of international relations resembled a primitive society – by

²⁹ See for example Bernard Bosanquet, *The Philosophical Theory of the State*, 4th edn. (London: Macmillan, 1923 [1899]); F.H. Bradley, ‘The Limits of Individual and National Self-Sacrifice’, *International Journal of Ethics*, 5 (1894), pp. 17–28.

³⁰ It is questionable whether this internationalist interpretation of Hegel and philosophical idealism is fair. For recent analyses of the international implications of Hegel’s philosophy, see Hans-Martin Jaeger, ‘Hegel’s Reluctant Realism and the Transnationalisation of Civil Society’, *Review of International Studies*, 28 (2002), pp. 497–517; Thom Brooks, ‘Hegel’s Theory of International Politics: A Reply to Jaeger’, *Review of International Studies*, 30 (2004), pp. 149–52. On British idealism, see David Boucher, ‘British Idealism, the State, and International Relations’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 55 (1994), pp. 671–94.

³¹ Hobson, *Towards International Government*, p. 178. See also L.T. Hobhouse, *The Metaphysical Theory of the State* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1918).

³² L.T. Hobhouse, ‘Introduction’ to the 2nd edn. of *Democracy and Reaction* [1909] in Hobhouse, *Democracy and Reaction*, ed. P.F. Clarke (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1973 [1904]), p. 273.

³³ ‘The application of ethical principles to the social structure, to national and international politics, is merely the effort to carry one step further that guidance of life by rational principles which constitutes ... the essence of orthogenic evolution.’ Hobhouse, *Democracy and Reaction*, p. 116; see also L.T. Hobhouse, *Liberalism and Other Writings*, ed. J. Meadowcroft (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). Whether new liberals derived their ideology from evolutionary ideas or merely exploited them in order to legitimise this ideology in contextual terms is a matter of dispute. For opposing interpretations see Freedren, *The New Liberalism*; Collini, ‘Political Theory’.

³⁴ Hobhouse, *Democracy and Reaction*, p. 194.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

sharing moral and religious conventions but lacking a common sovereign – there was no reason why international law could not function. Therefore, by leaving aside the question of political authority, Hobhouse also demonstrated the limited extent to which internationalist arguments at this time were institutional:

Universal and permanent peace may . . . be a vision only, but the gradual change whereby war, as a normal state of international relations, has given place to peace as the normal state, is no vision but an actual process of history palpably forwarded in our own day by the development of the international law and morals, and the voluntary arbitration based thereon, which the party of physical force deride. Even if it be true that law cannot exist without a sovereign to enforce it, the argument would not affect morals. Moral rights and duties are founded on relations between man and man, and therefore applicable to all humanity. To deny this applicability is merely to throw back civilised ethics to the savage state.³⁶

Thus the disappointments of the South African War on balance fuelled the moralistic, rather than the institutional, tone of liberal internationalist arguments, and this ethical approach to international politics was, as Hobhouse acknowledged, heavily inspired by Gladstonian internationalism.³⁷ Despite the more institutional orientation of some parts of the peace movement, this line of internationalist argument remained dominant.³⁸

Above all, it was the conscience of civilised humankind that should unmask myths and reveal the truth to militarist decision-makers in order to safeguard the internationalist objective of order and progress, and the most important myth that needed debunking was that of the absolutely sovereign state. Utilising a familiar rhetorical trick that underlines the novelty of *our* world compared to that of earlier generations, internationalists often pointed out how their modern predicament was one of interdependence;³⁹ a concept captured in terms of increasing trade among the world's leading nations and a revolution in means of communication. This situation required a new political vocabulary. According to this train of thought, it was diplomats and statesmen, and their traditional notions of international politics, who hampered the possibility of international political progress. As these 'dark forces' relied upon a vision of international politics entirely run by states, liberal internationalist ideology naturally encompassed a critique of the state. In particular, liberal internationalists stressed that the real divisions of humankind (insofar as they existed) could not be captured in the narrow vision provided by the telescope of absolute sovereignty. This criticism also returned to the idea of unity inspired by philosophical idealism and a particular 'Darwinist' notion of struggle which at the turn of the century became associated with the writings of Benjamin Kidd and Karl Pearson.⁴⁰ Like Hobhouse, liberal figures such as Norman Angell and G. Lowes Dickinson attacked these doctrines for their belief that war was inevitable: arguments for war were not only morally wrong but also irrational; they broke down on

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 199–200.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 207–8.

³⁸ See also Ceadel, *Semi-Detached Idealists*, p. 166.

³⁹ See for example, L.T. Hobhouse, *Liberalism*, in Hobhouse, *Liberalism and Other Writings*, pp. 114–16.

⁴⁰ On Kidd and Pearson, see Bernard Semmel, *Imperialism and Social Reform* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1960), ch. 2. But cf. also Paul Crook, *Darwinism, War and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

‘the moral as on the material side.’⁴¹ Moreover, this moralistic language continually condemned the warlike forces in British society, whether these were identified as the aristocracy, the (not much better and also aristocratic) diplomatists, or the unscrupulous capitalist imperialists of the early twentieth century.⁴²

The ‘demonstration’ of the irrationality of war and the ideas of the warlike forces in British society supplied internationalism with a moral privilege that prior to the Great War was seen as its strongest weapon in the battle to create international progress. Consequently, the drift towards institutional arguments was mostly limited to discussions of arbitration and international law, which to a large extent glossed over the difficult issue about the binding force of these measures. These were seen as important, though not decisive, elements in the internationalist project.⁴³ Thus, the institutional turn of British domestic politics – at least partly caused by the pervasive debate over state intervention in the 1880s and 1890s and reflected in the more state-centred domestic policies of Liberals from 1906 onwards – were only vaguely reflected in ideas about international politics: there was no direct correlation between arguments employed in the domestic and in the international sphere. This is interesting as internationalists are accused of employing the so-called domestic analogy in order to safeguard order in the international domain.⁴⁴ Of course, some arguments – the prime example being Hobson’s interventionist remedies for halting imperialism – could have international implications, and to that extent institutional arguments transgressed the border between domestic and international politics,⁴⁵ but institutional arguments did not carry the same weight internationally as they did in domestic politics. The creation of authority on an international scale was not perceived as the most pressing problem of the day. It was often envisaged as the direction of modern politics,⁴⁶ but on

⁴¹ G.L. Dickinson, ‘War and Peace’, *Independent Review*, 10 (1906), pp. 113–20, at p. 119; Norman Angell, ‘Man v. The Statesman’, *War and Peace*, 1 (1913), pp. 14–17; G.L. Dickinson, ‘The Illusion of War’, *The Nation*, 11 (1912), p. 702; G.L. Dickinson, ‘Is War Inevitable? I’ and ‘Is War Inevitable? II’, *War and Peace*, 1 (1914), pp. 221–3 and *War and Peace*, 1 (1914), pp. 252–3.

⁴² The reasons for imperialism and war were thus located in flawed perceptions of the honorific or economic advantages that states could gain. Two aspects of this line of argument are worth noting. Firstly, arguments against armaments came to be connected with a domestic political purpose: expenditure on unnecessary armaments could be spent better on the social problem, or (for classical liberals preferably) not spent at all. Secondly, the identification of warlike tendencies in capitalism was partly a reaction against earlier liberal ideas about the peaceful tendencies of commerce, which was associated with the rising middle class *vis à vis* the traditional, belligerent aristocracy. Cain, ‘Capitalism, War and Internationalism’.

⁴³ A striking example is Norman Angell’s *Foundations of International Polity* (London: William Heinemann, 1914) – a book that epitomised liberal internationalist arguments at the time: published a few months prior to the outbreak of war it contained all the usual refrains against militarism, sovereignty and reliance on force. Despite the institutional choice of words for the title, in Angell’s terms *polity* did not amount to more than a shared, almost ghostly, moral and intellectual sentiment among civilised nations.

⁴⁴ Hidemi Suganami, *The Domestic Analogy and World Order Proposals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

⁴⁵ J.A. Hobson, *Imperialism* (London: James Nisbet, 1902). On the importance of the domestic political context in critiques of imperialism, see Miles Taylor, ‘Imperium et Libertas? Rethinking the Radical Critique of Imperialism during the Nineteenth Century’, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 19 (1991), pp. 1–23.

⁴⁶ See, for example, Hobhouse, *Liberalism*, pp. 114–16; The Fabian Society, *Fabianism and the Empire*, ed. G. Bernard Shaw (London: Grant Richard, 1900), pp. 23–4. See also P. J. Cain, *Hobson and Imperialism: Radicalism, New Liberalism and Finance 1887–1938* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 151.

its establishment internationalists mostly remained silent. For now, order on an international scale was above all to be created through the moral development of civilised humankind.

Anarchy and the fragility of ethics

In the great and tragic history of Europe there is a turning-point that marks the defeat of the ideal of a world-order and the definite acceptance of international anarchy. That turning-point is the emergence of the sovereign State at the end of the fifteenth century. . . . From that date onwards international policy has meant Machiavellianism. Sometimes the masters of the craft . . . have avowed it; sometimes . . . they have disclaimed it. But always they have practised it. They could not, indeed, practise anything else. For it is as true of an aggregation of states as of an aggregation of individuals that, whatever moral sentiments may prevail, if there is no common law and no common force the best intentions will be defeated by lack of confidence and security.⁴⁷

The outbreak of the Great War in 1914 was a cataclysm for internationalism. Responses to the war were many and complex, and as the extremity of the situation forced a choice, internationalists split into various groups of conscientious objectors, neutrals, peace planners, and more or less ardent supporters of the war. However, in the context of calamitous war internationalists grappled with their failure and, slowly but surely, the logic of progress, now phrased in a more institutional idiom, reasserted itself. One crucial precondition of this development was the internationalist rediscovery of anarchy as a defining component in international relations. The idea that the structure of the international system was a cause of war had since the mid-nineteenth century been an element, if not a particularly prominent one, of internationalist arguments.⁴⁸ But in the early years of the war it was accorded a new significance.

‘No, we have not been “successful”. We have merely been right’, Norman Angell argued less than a month after the outbreak of war.⁴⁹ Beneath the veil of despair and intellectual self-confidence, Angell engaged in soul-searching on behalf of the peace movement as a whole. Thus, he looked forward to the immediate future, when ‘our efforts will have to be more direct, more combative even’.⁵⁰ That Angell’s diagnosis was widely shared is reflected in the number of organisations preoccupied with ‘the international problem’ that were established during the war.⁵¹ These organisations were characteristically polemical towards familiar targets such as the

⁴⁷ G. Lowes Dickinson, *The European Anarchy* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1916), pp. 9–10.

⁴⁸ See Laity, *The British Peace Movement*, p. 9. That this was a rediscovery, rather than a discovery, of anarchy is important in one further respect: the distinctively modern notion of international anarchy that can be dated back to the eighteenth century is, arguably, a precondition of any form of internationalism as it is understood here. See the analysis in Jens Bartelson, *A Genealogy of Sovereignty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁴⁹ Norman Angell, ‘Yesterday and To-morrow’, *War and Peace*, 1 (1914), pp. 347–50, at p. 347.

⁵⁰ Angell, ‘Yesterday and To-morrow’, p. 350.

⁵¹ See Henry R. Winkler, ‘The Development of the League of Nations Idea in Great Britain, 1914–1919’, *The Journal of Modern History*, 20 (1948), pp. 95–112; Ceadel, *Semi-Detached Idealists*; Leonard Woolf (ed.), *The Framework of a Lasting Peace* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1917).

Balance of Power and the diplomats directing this dangerous game. Yet out of despair and disillusion, determination and a limited optimism slowly emerged: the horror of war prepared the world for more ambitious cooperation for the maintenance of peace. Angell's fellow internationalists Hobhouse and Hobson agreed that the starting point was the fragility of earlier moral internationalist arguments: 'The older internationalism, based on belief in humanitarian ethics on the one hand, and in the peaceful tendencies of commerce on the other, is dead', Hobhouse argued.⁵² Similarly, in *Towards International Government* (1915) J.A. Hobson maintained that '[p]ublic opinion and a common sense of justice are found inadequate safeguards. There must be an executive power enabled to apply an economic boycott, or in the last resort an international force.'⁵³ The tragic circumstances and the evident failure of moral arguments underpinned the transition to a more heavily institutional discourse.

This conceptualisation of the crisis also placed the explanation of war at the top of the intellectual agenda. Thus, along with disillusion on behalf of moral internationalism went a realisation that the earlier, and rather crude, explanation of war as caused by the actions of wicked, aristocratic and war-like statesmen and diplomatists was inadequate.⁵⁴ While the balance of power policy might be the immediate cause of conflicts and wars, the focus of internationalists was reoriented towards the underlying or fundamental causes of wars. One example of this tentative search for the fundamental causes of war is found in Brailsford's 'Trade as a Cause of War' (1915). The Gladstonian Brailsford sought to extend the logic of Hobson's analysis of imperialism to European diplomacy.⁵⁵ Thus, conflict was primarily created by 'competition to secure concessions, monopolies and spheres of influence' on a global scale.⁵⁶ Yet when Hobson and G.L. Dickinson during 1915 directed attention to the motives of statesmen and diplomatists that led states into conflict, the economic explanation was, for a time, superseded.⁵⁷ To Hobson, the 'preservation and progress of civilization' now demanded that the peoples went forward and established a 'public right' to bring about a reduction of armaments by agreement. This development was only feasible if it could reverse

the motives which have led them in the past to arm. . . . These motives are either a desire to be stronger than some other Power, in order to take something from him by force – the aggressive motive; or a desire to be strong enough to prevent some other Power from acting this way to us – the defensive motive.⁵⁸

To Dickinson these motives – which were foreign to the peacefully inclined citizens of the world's nations – amounted to a theory establishing states as abstract beings in

⁵² L.T. Hobhouse, *Questions of War and Peace* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1916), p. 189.

⁵³ Hobson, *Towards International Government*, p. 6.

⁵⁴ Stuart Wallace, *War and the Image of Germany* (Edinburgh: Donald, 1988), pp. 11–12.

⁵⁵ Fred M. Leventhal, 'H. N. Brailsford and the Search for a New International Order' in A. J. A. Morris (ed.), *Edwardian Radicalism 1900–1914* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), pp. 202–17.

⁵⁶ Henry Noel Brailsford, 'Trade as a Cause of War' [1915], reprinted in R.S. Bourne (ed.), *Towards an Enduring Peace* (New York: Vail-Ballou Company, 1916), pp. 9–14, at p. 11.

⁵⁷ The question about capitalism as a cause of war never died out but continued throughout the interwar years to be a major source of contention. See for example the contributions of Angell and Harold Laski in Leonard Woolf (ed.), *The Intelligent Man's Way to Prevent War* (London: Victor Gollanz, 1933).

⁵⁸ Hobson, *Towards International Government*, pp. 5–6. See also p. 180.

'perpetual and inevitable antagonism'.⁵⁹ This 'governmental theory', which concealed the fact that states are unreal abstractions, was the prime cause of war and could only be countered by the sound ideas of real people. However, Dickinson soon lost faith in the elusive peacefulness of public opinion.⁶⁰ More importantly, Dickinson shifted his emphasis from the critique of the more or less conscious motives of statesmen and diplomatists to the subtle logic of a system of sovereign states. Now the institutional, impersonal conditions of international politics were seen to shape the motives of its constituent parts, states and their political and diplomatic leaders.

While . . . anarchy continues, the struggle between States will tend to assume a certain stereotyped form. One will endeavour to acquire supremacy over the others for motives at once of security and of domination, the others will combine to defeat it, and history will turn upon the two poles of empire and the balance of power. So it has been in Europe, and so it will continue to be, until either empire is achieved at once as it was achieved by Rome, or a common law and a common authority is established by agreement.⁶¹

Instead of criticising perceptions of the state as an abstract entity, Dickinson began his analysis from a more historical and disinterested perspective: since the emergence of the sovereign state international politics had been ruled by power rather than reason. While the explanation stressing the conscious motives of statesmen invited the obvious solution that a new international mind had to be created, Dickinson's systemic explanation of war also paved the way for institutional internationalist solutions. This understanding of anarchy bore little resemblance to a pre-social, anthropological understanding of anarchy as a state of nature; rather this understanding emphasised social structure and in this sense it anticipated what has since been termed the security dilemma within IR-theory.⁶² As Dickinson now said of the statesmen 'they could not, indeed, practise anything else.' By this time Dickinson enjoyed a central standing in the British peace movement, and he played a vital role in directing the attention of internationalists towards international anarchy as a vital, independent cause of war.⁶³

The conclusion that followed from this concept of anarchy reinforced the lesson that ethics *alone* could not bring progress to the international – other means were needed. Following the first truly modern depiction of international anarchy in the eighteenth century, Rousseau had – reluctantly, perhaps – drawn a despairing conclusion. The logic of the system was too pervasive to be changed, 'because it is a sort of folly to remain wise in the midst of those who are mad.'⁶⁴ British liberal

⁵⁹ G. Lowes Dickinson, 'The Governmental Theory' [1915], reprinted in Bourne, *Towards an Enduring Peace*, pp. 70–75, at p. 70.

⁶⁰ The jingoistic tendencies of the British public, which was fuelled by pugnacious reporting in the popular press, had a wide impact in the liberal internationalist milieu. Both prior to the war and especially after the war, Norman Angell, himself a journalist, was preoccupied with this aspect of international politics. See J.D.B. Miller, *Norman Angell and the Futility of War* (London: Macmillan, 1986).

⁶¹ Dickinson, *The European Anarchy*, pp. 10–11; Brian C. Schmidt, *The Political Discourse of Anarchy* (New York: SUNY Press, 1998), ch. 5.

⁶² See Herz, 'Idealist Internationalism'.

⁶³ Norman Angell was among those who during and after the war took over Dickinson's analysis. See for example the memorandum Angell contributed to the Labour Party's Advisory Committee on International Questions (ACIQ) after the war. ACIQ, *The Peace Terms*, no. 61 (May 1919), by Norman Angell, Labour History and Archive Centre (LHA).

⁶⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Summary of the Abbé de Saint-Pierre's Project for Perpetual Peace* [1761], reprinted in Grace G. Roosevelt, *Reading Rousseau in the Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia, PN: Temple University Press, 1990), pp. 199–220, at p. 220.

internationalists acquired a similar understanding of anarchy yet they refused to accept the conclusion. As Leonard Woolf argued in 1916 ‘though the sane man who finds himself in a world of madmen may be wise to act like a lunatic, there is no call upon him to think like one’.⁶⁵ Thus, for these thinkers the concept of anarchy did not lead to despair; rather it stimulated attempts to overthrow the logic. Anarchy became a precondition of the arguments for an international organisation for the prevention of war – a league of nations – which soon became a cornerstone of liberal internationalism.

To what extent did this development represent continuity with earlier internationalist ideas? As recent decades have witnessed a debate among cultural historians over the impact of the Great War on European and British consciousness, we can illustrate the subtle blend of continuity and change in their terms. To some historians – the ‘modernists’ – the war represents a significant break while to others – the ‘traditionalists’ – the experience of war was largely dealt with within existing cultural traditions.⁶⁶ As with all distinctions we find that the contingency and contradictions of praxis escape its simplicity. However, if some anachronism is permitted and we are to locate liberal internationalists in one of these groups, they would have to be considered traditionalists, although there are clear ‘modernist’ elements in their political ideas. The ‘impact of war’ was mainly detectable in their re-evaluation of the means needed in pursuit of internationalism’s ideological goal. The future league was intended to safeguard the values of an internationalist doctrine, which was a central element in liberal political thought from the mid-nineteenth century onwards.

Like many other internationalists during the Great War, J.A. Hobson turned to the origins of internationalism. In 1918, he closed his study of Cobden with a verdict that demonstrates both the state of internationalism at the end of the war and the journey internationalism had travelled in Victorian and Edwardian Britain: ‘Modern internationalists are no longer mere non-interventionists [*sic*] for the same reason that modern Radicals are no longer philosophic individualists.’⁶⁷ Of course, Hobson’s sweeping statement conceals the fact that the war introduced complex divisions among progressives over what collectivism should mean, for example, in terms of the role of the state.⁶⁸ There continued to be no direct connection between institutional arguments in domestic and international politics. Nevertheless, Hobson was right that the old internationalism – particularly the individualist *laissez faire* version, but perhaps less its more substantially ethical successor – was generally considered ill-suited to modern conditions. The war represented a lapse of rationality, which led to the conviction that rationality, even if it was (ideally) attainable, could no longer be taken for granted. As Hobhouse argued in 1915, ‘[h]istory forbids the cheap optimism that everything will always go forward.’⁶⁹ This is one of the reasons why the *defence* of progress, which was seen as

⁶⁵ Leonard Woolf, *International Government* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1916), p. 218.

⁶⁶ For the modernist and traditionalist interpretations, see respectively Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000 [1975]) and Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁶⁷ J.A. Hobson, *Richard Cobden – The International Man* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1918), p. 406.

⁶⁸ See Michael Freedon, *Liberalism Divided* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), esp. ch. 2.

⁶⁹ L.T. Hobhouse, *The World in Conflict* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1915), p. 96.

a cardinal assignment by prewar progressives, now disappeared into the background. Instead, the *creation* of progress moved to the forefront. Yet the liberal, humanitarian sentiment so salient among intellectual liberals in the age of Victoria took the journey well into the twentieth century – it was simply held, argued, and defended in a different manner.

The necessity of institutions

Agitation for the League came during the Great War to define liberal internationalism to the extent that the classic internationalist policy objectives – disarmament, international law, and peace – were subsumed under this general agenda. The radical spirit and critique of traditional international politics, which pointed towards continuity with earlier forms of liberal internationalism, was still a common denominator, but during the course of the war the emphasis shifted: the overriding internationalist objective was to get the peace right. In advancing these arguments, internationalist rhetoric took on the shape so characteristic of the interwar years, where optimism with regard to the future relied on the pessimism of the present. Yet the rhetorical position from which internationalists argued was not the only aspect foreshadowing interwar debates.

In many ways Leonard Woolf's *International Government* (1916) – a report conceived under the spell of Fabian gradualism with the aim of devising 'means to avoid war in a world containing unrighteous persons and perhaps even unrighteous nations'⁷⁰ – epitomised internationalist ideas during the war: it was the tragedy of war which provided the impetus for change.⁷¹ Arguing that the world had grown increasingly interdependent during the previous hundred years – which had resulted in more rational, democratic control of international politics, especially in relation to commerce and communication – Woolf observed how matters related to security had in large part escaped this development. The time was now ripe to remedy this lack of government through the establishment of an international organisation for the prevention of war: international institutions could perform vital coordinating functions in a system of states. In this Woolf's fellow internationalists like Angell, Brailsford, Hobson, Zimmern and Dickinson agreed. Yet two central, and intimately related, questions in relation to a future League of Nations were contentious and in these debates the chimes of interwar debates are already to be heard: firstly, internationalists were divided on the speed and scope of the progress that was needed internationally; secondly, they disagreed on the relationship between moral and institutional elements. It was now beyond doubt in internationalist circles that institutions were needed, but their role was far from clear. Could they *create* an 'international mind' or merely *support* it?

⁷⁰ Sidney Webb to Leonard Woolf, quoted in Duncan Wilson, *Leonard Woolf* (London: Hogarth Press, 1978), p. 63.

⁷¹ Woolf, *International Government*. For a thorough analysis of Woolf's international thought, see Peter Wilson, *The International Theory of Leonard Woolf* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003). See also, Fred M. Leventhal, 'Leonard Woolf (1880–1969): The Conscience of a Bloomsbury Socialist' in Susan Pedersen and Peter Mandler (eds.), *After the Victorians* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 149–68.

Along with Dickinson, who became a close personal friend, Woolf symbolised cautious middle-of-the-road internationalism in wartime Britain.⁷² In *International Government* Woolf stressed that proposals for the establishment of an international authority should avoid utopianism and build on existing political structures.⁷³ Therefore, Woolf did not advocate world government, but discussed how a system of enforceable decisions could evolve over time.⁷⁴ Thus, Woolf took the line that the new institutional element of internationalism was a necessary complement to the creation of the moral progress needed in international affairs. As an illustration of the vitality of the internationalist milieu at this time, a new translation of Kant's *Perpetual Peace* appeared in 1915, and when Woolf reviewed it in the *New Statesman*, he welcomed Kant's practical orientation. But Woolf also issued a warning: '[t]here remains, however, the main problem to haunt the philosopher. Why, if these are the conditions have we made so small progress to their attainment in the 120 years since the Treaty of Basle? Is the answer to be found still in the answer of Leibniz: 'The mightiest among the living have little respect for tribunals'.'⁷⁵ This approach expected no revolutions from the creation of international machinery for the prevention of war.

The most sceptical liberal internationalist on the intersection between academia and the League of Nations movement was Alfred Zimmern. In the early stages of the war Zimmern demonstrated his debt to philosophical idealism and the spirit of a bygone era. Approaching the question of authority from a formalistic angle that excluded 'middle paths or soothing formulae' he argued that '[t]wo States are either Sovereign or they are United or Federated: they cannot be half and half. A man must know of what State he is a citizen and to what authority his duty is due.'⁷⁶ Zimmern clearly saw the distinction between the 'policy directed towards making the world better, and the policy directed towards making the world better organised, irrespective of the fact whether or not that organisation is based on moral principles', but he stuck to moral arguments. In fact, he freely chided the programmes of both Hobson and *The Union of Democratic Control* (UDC) for their illusionary character. Nevertheless, when the war was drawing to a close and President Wilson, a hero of Zimmern's, had entered the world scene, Zimmern drew closer to the cautious gradualism of Woolf and Dickinson. The formalistic criticism was toned down and Zimmern admitted that he would now 'throw the greater emphasis on the

⁷² Initially, Dickinson's position was more radical. He was brought round to a moderate position by the experienced liberal statesman and jurist Lord Bryce, who chaired Dickinson's private internationalist committee that later became known as The Bryce Group. See Ceadel, *Semi-Detached Idealists*, pp. 204–6. Bryce, who had little respect for 'utopian cranks who talk about a "World State" and the immediate and final abolition of all war', worked hard throughout the war to reach a common denominator among internationalists. Bryce quoted in Thomas Kleinknecht, *Imperiale und Internationale Ordnung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985), p. 216.

⁷³ Woolf, *International Government*, p. 8. Alfred Zimmern, who found International Government 'masterly', noted that it was 'characteristically Fabian both in its apparent moderation and in its resourcefulness. It attempted to apply the principle of the Inevitability of Gradualness to international politics.' Alfred Zimmern, *The League of Nations and the Rule of Law* (London: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 170–1.

⁷⁴ Woolf, *International Government*, pp. 68–9, 253–4.

⁷⁵ Leonard Woolf, 'Perpetual Peace', *New Statesman* (31 July 1915), pp. 398–9, at p. 399.

⁷⁶ Alfred Zimmern, 'Nationality and Government' [1915], reprinted in Zimmern, *Nationality and Government and other War-time Essays* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1918), pp. 32–60, at 43–44.

constructive side of the argument. We cannot aim at more, it is true, even under the present conditions, than at substituting co-ordination for anarchy, co-operation for competition, in interstate relations, and it remains as important as ever to remember that co-operation between independent authorities is a poor and ineffective makeshift for federal institutions.⁷⁷ This turn in Zimmern's thought was sparked by the idea that the old internationalism was overdue: while it was still necessary to nurture the moral basis of a truly international society, the days when moral and economic internationalism spelled the negation of official action were 'gone past recall'. Thus, '[i]f the world wishes to organise its life on a peaceful basis, it must habituate itself to the ideas of international governmental organisation'.⁷⁸

The two personal friends and former colleagues in journalism, Hobson and Brailsford, started from the proposition that it was necessary to endow a representative institution with legislative as well as executive powers along with systems of arbitration, conciliation, and (economic as well as military) sanctions. Hobson realised that this scheme was ambitious, but he argued that the 'immensity of the need' would evoke the will, faith and courage necessary for the experiment to succeed.⁷⁹ At the same time it was conceded that the workings of newly created international institutions would initially be 'somewhat inchoate and mechanical' rather than representative of 'a positively international mind'. While Hobson constantly reverted to how democracy (potentially) possessed this international mind if it was allowed to work in the international domain, he also argued the case the other way round: only by facilitating the work of democracy – *viz.* creating institutions – could the 'sentiment and attitude of genuine internationalism . . . be acquired and confirmed . . .'⁸⁰

When Woolf, immersed in his own work for the Fabian Society, reviewed *Towards International Government* in *The Nation* in 1915, their differences came to a head. According to Woolf, Hobson's internationalist spirit was sound, but the proposals for international machinery reversed the logic of internationalism. Although machinery and mind were both important, they were not equally important. 'Machinery cannot create mind. It can only translate into action. The only way to build is from the bottom, whether you are building a house or a democracy. And so it is no good in international affairs beginning with your supreme International Council.'⁸¹ Not surprisingly, Hobson was unhappy with the review. His reply, saturated in biological language, argued that the:

⁷⁷ Alfred Zimmern, 'Preface' [1918] in Zimmern, *Nationality and Government*, pp. ix–xxiv, at xii.

⁷⁸ Alfred Zimmern, 'Capitalism and International Relations' [1917], reprinted in Zimmern, *Nationality and Government*, pp. 278–97, at p. 297.

⁷⁹ Hobson, *Towards International Government*, p. 153. This may have been an indirect reply to Dickinson – thanked in the preface – who found Hobson's scheme too ambitious as well as tactically clumsy: not only would the project fail, but Hobson (and Brailsford) might 'easily help to prevent our getting what we ask for'. Dickinson quoted in Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats*, p. 179. In theory Hobhouse agreed with his friend Hobson's institutional measures, but he still advocated a more gradual approach. See Hobhouse, *The World in Conflict*, esp. p. 95; Hobhouse, *Questions of War and Peace*, esp. pp. 191, 199, 220, 223.

⁸⁰ Hobson, *Towards International Government*, p. 64.

⁸¹ Leonard Woolf, 'The International Mind', *The Nation* (7 August 1915), p. 614. Especially in the early parts of the war Bernard Bosanquet voiced a similar criticism against the idea that institutions could prevent future war. Bernard Bosanquet, 'Patriotism in the Perfect State' [1915], reprinted in Chris Brown, Terry Nardin and Nicholas Rengger (eds.), *International Relations in Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 506–17.

important changes in human conduct . . . do not normally proceed by slow insensible movements; there is an element in them of the catastrophic. This, as biologists now recognize, is no violation of the law of continuity . . . I hold that large, rapid organic changes will be necessary . . . Nothing short of a representative international government, involving a definite diminution of sovereign rights of the separate states will suffice.⁸²

Thus, to Hobson the international mind was of no use if it could not catch up with the establishment of true international government. During the Great War, Brailsford was broadly in agreement with Hobson. Demonstrating the longstanding internationalist scepticism towards governments, Brailsford argued in *A League of Nations* (1917) that a future League had to be a League of peoples rather than of states. Brailsford's scheme was built on a conception of institutions as potentially catalytic of an internationalist sentiment. 'By mechanism alone we shall never unite the world, yet without mechanism its best impulses, its instincts of fraternity, and its craving for peace may be squandered and frustrated'. Thus, in Brailsford's equation institutions had some creative power: if the league had a proper capital and a representative Parliament 'then and only then will simple men begin to think an international thought'.⁸³

What are we to make of these disagreements among internationalists during the war? Firstly, it should be stressed that consensus was widespread and that the speed and scope of the internationalist transformation was virtually the only point of contention. Thus, the necessity of institutional internationalism was not doubted. Secondly, we see the contours of differences in central underlying assumptions about politics (for example, human nature and progress) that ultimately revolved around the *relationship* between the moral and the institutional. To Woolf and Dickinson, their moderation during the war was based on their incremental understanding of the possibility of progress and development of 'government' in human affairs. Institutions were of little use without an internationalist mind, and insofar as Dickinson and Woolf still believed this possible, their view of human potential was relatively positive. Many of these assumptions were, of course, later reworked, but at the time the internationalist ethos was conceptualised as a potential of modern democracy that needed time to gradually mature. Consequently, their inclination to hurry this historical process was limited but not absent. It was through the interplay and mutual support of moral and institutional internationalism that 'the international' could have order, justice, and reason conferred upon it.

Hobson also possessed a concept of the inherent internationalist attitude of the ordinary democratic citizen, yet to him human nature encompassed some quite negative aspects. While acknowledging that there 'undoubtedly exists a sub-current of pugnacity in every people which, when it is duly stimulated, makes for war' and that the 'survival of this instinct will always be of danger to the public peace', Hobson also argued that it was not 'self-acting'; circumstances, the popular press or jingoistic statesmen, could bring this aggression to the surface.⁸⁴ Without definite action society would continue to be dominated by a small caste of wicked men. The potentiality of international morality was in need of a helping hand, which the

⁸² J.A. Hobson, 'The International Mind', *The Nation* (14 August 1915), p. 639.

⁸³ Henry Noel Brailsford, *A League of Nations* (London: Headley Bros., 1917), pp. 311, 316.

⁸⁴ Hobson, *Towards International Government*, p. 205.

institutional structures of international government could supply. Yet Hobson's notion of the fallibility of human beings extended beyond aristocrats. He later argued that the war was 'the first of a series of shocks to my belief that the world was inhabited by a reasonable animal'.⁸⁵ Therefore, it was idle to imagine that a League to preserve peace 'starting with so little inner unity of status and purpose can dispense entirely with the backing of physical force with which the most highly evolved of national societies had been unable to dispense'.⁸⁶ Although Hobson found humans potentially rational, he had no illusions about their perfectibility. To have international affairs governed by reason and institutions constituted an immense step forward, but to Hobson that did not mean the end of politics.

While these differences should not be overstated, they point towards some of the questions that became central for internationalism in the interwar period, when the League of Nations became reality. Was it possible to constrain and improve international relations at the same time? Under what conditions could international progress come about, and what role, if any, did military force play in that respect? To safeguard the internationalist project embodied in the League, a delicate balance between moral and institutional arguments had to be struck, and it was to this project that the internationalists, who today are considered pioneers in the systematic study of international relations, devoted considerable energy during the interwar years.⁸⁷

Conclusion

Whether 'discipline' is interpreted as an institutional entity – comprising university departments, professors, and syllabi – or whether it is seen more loosely as self-conscious, 'scientific' thinking on international political problems, the emergence of British IR is inextricably linked to internationalist ideas in vogue in the decades bracketing the Great War.⁸⁸ By investigating these ideas in their wider intellectual, historical context, it appears that there is considerable continuity between postwar thought and British internationalist ideas promulgated prior to the war. The conceptualisation of war continued and accelerated an earlier drift from moral towards institutional arguments. This development was premised on two mutually reinforcing developments. On the one hand, internationalists were disillusioned with the limited effect of 'old' internationalism and its appeal to rationality and the conscience of humankind, which in turn made them re-examine some of the assumptions underlying the internationalist project. On the other hand, internationalists acquired a new, more systemic explanation of war as caused by anarchy in inter-

⁸⁵ Hobson quoted in Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats*, p. 170.

⁸⁶ Hobson, *Towards International Government*, p. 96.

⁸⁷ I have explored some of these issues in Casper Sylvest, 'Interwar Internationalism, The British Labour Party, and the Historiography of International Relations', *International Studies Quarterly*, 48 (2004), pp. 409–32.

⁸⁸ This internationalist sentiment was also an important aspect of British notions of the evolution of international law. See Casper Sylvest, 'International Law in Nineteenth-century Britain', *British Yearbook of International Law 2004* (forthcoming).

national politics. This understanding of the consequences of absolute sovereignty and the lack of an arbiter between states led internationalists to emphasise the virtue of institutions in their attempt to order international relations. Although internationalists disagreed on the scope of these new systems of authority, they shared the belief that defeat in today's world was to be compensated for in an institutionally reformed world of tomorrow. Moreover the central mission of British internationalism, bringing order and progress to bear on international politics, was never abandoned.

It is, I suggest, in this internationalist predicament – never entirely resolved, about the role of the moral and the institutional in the pursuit of international order – that the emergence of IR in Britain should be located. Lecturing as the first Professor of IR in the University of Oxford in 1931, Alfred Zimmern captured this nicely:

Our main duty . . . is to teach men to observe, to see the world as it is, and to realize for themselves how new conditions have created new problems, involving, as we think, a need for institutions of a type unfamiliar to the constitutional theorist. But even as we teach we hear the blast of the tempest outside the classroom, and we seem to feel its chill upon our cheek. Will the peoples be true to their Covenant, so that in a generation the thought of war will have vanished from their minds and Nationality can flower unafraid in a free unembarrassed society of states and peoples? Or will the study of international relations continue to be a record of fear and jealousy and revenge in which the conflicts of states absorb and obscure the finer and more distinctive qualities of nations? The answer to these questions waits upon the event and the wisest of statesmen would not venture to anticipate it. For ourselves failing an answer, the lesson is unmistakeable, *Let us work while there is time*.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Zimmern, *Study of International Relations*, p. 27.

