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Rereading Early Twentieth-Century IR Theory: Idealism Revisited

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The article presents a "revisionist" synopsis of the thinking of some important early twentieth-century "Idealist" IR writers. I contend that these writers ground their interpretations of international relations on a shared paradigm that has hitherto gone largely unrecognised. Following a critique of certain widely held views of IR Idealism, I draw attention to a number of aspects or themes in this body of writing in an attempt to establish the underlying paradigm. I argue that the authors in question were familiar with the type of thinking that later came to be called Realist, but held that industrial modernisation rendered it increasingly anachronistic and dangerous. The crucial difference between Idealism and Realism is in their respective theories of history. In order to understand Idealist IR thinking, it is essential to realise the extent to which it relies on the notion, not so much of progress (as is usually asserted) as of an inescapable, directional historical process.

The orthodox self-perception of IR as an academic undertaking holds that the discipline had an initial phase in the early part of this century commonly labelled Idealist. This article presents a "revisionist" synopsis of the thinking of some important early twentieth-century IR writers usually included under the Idealist label (Norman Angell, Leonard Woolf, and Alfred Zimmern will be the authors cited most often, but other authors will also be drawn on).[1] My contention is that the Idealist writers discussed in this article ground their interpretations of international politics on a shared paradigm that has hitherto gone largely unrecognised. Indeed, from E. H. Carr onward it has been dramatically misconstrued.

Following a critique of certain widely held views on Idealist IR, the article will draw attention to a number of aspects or themes in this body of writing in an attempt to establish the underlying paradigm. I will argue, first, that the authors in question were familiar with the type of thinking that later came to be called Realist, and that this must be borne in mind if their own thinking is to be understood. I will then deal with their view that the growing economic integration of the international system rendered the widely held Realist paradigm increasingly anachronistic and dangerous. This will lead to a discussion of the importance that early twentieth-century IR authors attached to the notion, not so much of progress (as is usually asserted) as of an inescapable, directional historical *process*.

Author's note: I wish to thank the anonymous reviewers, as well as the editors of the *International Studies Quarterly*, for their help with this article.

[1] The official history of the discipline starts with the endowment of the first dedicated IR professorship at the University of Wales in 1919, soon followed by further chairs elsewhere. However, it makes sense to include in the so-called Idealist phase of the discipline certain writings published before, from about 1910 onwards. The reference in this essay to "early twentieth-century IR literature" should thus be understood to cover the period 1910 to 1940.

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As I see it, this assumption is the central premise of their thinking without which it cannot be understood. At the same time, it is precisely this assumption that subsequent reconstructions of Idealism, beginning with E. H. Carr, have consistently failed to recognise. The most fundamental difference between Idealism and Realism is their respective philosophy of history—directional, as I seek to establish, in the former case, cyclical, as is well known, in the latter.

I will argue that far from Idealism representing a break with long-established tradition both it *and* Realism are a by-product of industrialisation, relatively new ways of thinking triggered by the attempt to come to terms with this phenomenon and its consequences. However much at odds with each other, the two are in fact intellectual twins. With regard to Idealism, the fact that it is an attempt to come to terms with the consequences of industrialisation will become abundantly clear throughout the article, while with regard to Realism I will briefly indicate the connection in the context of discussing what the Idealist authors in question had to say on the problem of perception in IR and the role of the IR analyst.

Having thus established some fundamentals I will discuss two further important aspects of Idealist thinking: the vision of a democratic new world order better suited—for functional reasons—for the industrial age than the traditional one and the specific view of the problem of power politics deriving from the fact that the traditional order could not be displaced in an instant but only in the course of a perhaps long drawn out phase of transition. In both instances I will show that what, on a superficial reading, may appear as naive progressivism presents itself in a very different light against the backdrop of the reconstructed Idealist paradigm.

I will conclude the article with remarks on the manner in which and the reasons why this body of thought has been so dramatically misrepresented, including some recent literature that manifests a certain revival of interest in it. It is perhaps only from a post-1989 historical perspective that its continuing relevance may once more be grasped.

The Problem of IR Idealism

It is still textbook wisdom that the literary output of the so-called Idealist school was based on erroneous premises and therefore of no enduring value. This view was popularised originally by E. H. Carr in his highly influential 1939 polemic, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*.[2] For Carr (1939:11–12 [8]), the "science of international politics" arose as a reaction to the terrible experience of World War I, and the "passionate desire" to prevent such disasters in the future caused the exponents of this new branch of enquiry to privilege wishful thinking over "critical analysis." Carr presents a view of Idealism (or utopianism as he calls it)[3] as a naive, voluntarist progressivism based on overly sanguine and outdated tenets of nineteenth-century liberal doctrine, such as, in particular, the fundamental harmony of interests of all states or the benevolent force of public opinion. In this view, a neglect of the "issue of power" is also characteristic of Idealism.

Similarly well known is Hedley Bull's (1972:35) judgment that the exponents of Idealism "were not remarkable for their intellectual depth or powers of explanation." Following and relaying Carr, Bull (1972:34) emphasises "belief in progress" as a "distinctive characteristic" of this group of authors. According to him, this involved a belief in the perfectibility of the international system in line with

[2] In the references to *The Twenty Years' Crisis* (Carr, 1939), page numbers in brackets refer to the more easily available post-war edition, which is basically the same text with only a few alterations. This edition has been reprinted several times (by the original publisher Macmillan and also, in the United States, by Harper & Row), but in every case the pagination seems to be unchanged from the 1946 edition.

[3] The two terms are synonyms (Wilson, 1995a:3).

democratic ideas and the principles of the League of Nations, to be brought about not least through the efforts of IR scholars. Bull ascribes to them a self-image in which "their responsibility as students of international relations was to assist this march of progress to overcome the ignorance, the prejudices, the ill-will, and the sinister interests that stood in its way." Due to the naivety of this approach, it did not, for Bull, produce any literature whose value has outlasted the period in and for which it was written.

When one seeks to verify the portrayal of the Idealist school in *The Twenty Years' Crisis* by going back to those authors themselves, a problem immediately arises from the fact that Carr rarely attributes the ideas he criticises to specific authors, leaving the reader free to guess their identity. In his review of the book, Alfred Zimmern (1939a) already objected that it was not clear at whom precisely its strictures were aimed, and that the focus of its attack on the "utopians" seemed to be continually shifting. Carr mentions hardly any names of IR authors (there are references to Angell, Toynbee, and Zimmern); Bull (1972) for his part also mentions only a few by way of example.

In a recent effort to analyse systematically the contents of 1920s IR writing, Olsson and Groom (1991:69) arrive at the somewhat startling conclusion that "[i]t is not an exaggeration to say that the new IR literature was designed to overcome some of the dubious assumptions and hopeful expectations of the idealists." In other words, for Olsson and Groom, the authors of academic works on international relations published from 1919 onwards were not necessarily the same people as those customarily thought of as Idealists. Olsson and Groom do not make it clear who, in that case, the "real" Idealists were. Although they occasionally identify some author or other as belonging to that group, they do not give a definition of Idealism. It may be surmised however that it would have been akin to the characterisation proposed by Carr and Bull.

David Long and Peter Wilson have since addressed this problem of identifying the exponents of IR Idealism at some length—again with somewhat confusing results. Discussing the perplexing variety of usage of the term Idealism in IR, Wilson (1995a:12) finds that "[t]o the extent that it can be considered a category of thought 'inter-war idealism' seems to be highly amorphous in character," and that (1995a:8) there is "little, if any, agreement" on its "core characteristics."

While Wilson is mainly concerned with the perception of early twentieth-century IR writers by later authors, Long (1995) stresses the differences between these early twentieth-century writers themselves and suggests a variety of subcategories of Idealism in which they might be placed. Going even further, he questions whether all these subcategories really can be subsumed under a common heading. As Long (1995:302) sees it, "the predominance of something called idealism in inter-war international theory turns out to be an exaggeration of E. H. Carr," an exaggeration reinforced by "less than careful interpretations" of Carr by later authors.

While critical work of this type dents the founding myth of the discipline popularised by authors like Carr and Bull, it has not replaced it with an alternative narrative. Recent contributions (further remarks on which will follow in the final section of the essay, once I have outlined my own re-interpretation of early twentieth-century IR thinking) have not, in my opinion, been entirely successful in this respect. They have not really overcome the Realist perspective of the original narrative—this results in vindications of early twentieth-century IR writers merely on the grounds that they were somewhat less "un-realistic" than is commonly thought, without crediting them with any originality in theoretical terms that would set them apart from the Realist approach. Alternatively, out of the variety of aspects and themes in early twentieth-century IR writers they only focus on a single one, like the emphasis on interdependence.

The narrative typified by Carr and Bull should be amended and reformulated because it effectively serves to suppress an important part of the intellectual heritage of the discipline. In what follows I therefore submit a fresh reconstruction of the approach or paradigm underlying much early twentieth-century IR literature. Some elements of this reconstruction have previously been highlighted by other authors. Other elements, however, have not received the attention that I think is due to them for a proper understanding of this body of thought.

Furthermore, I see the originality of this reconstruction in its attempt at identifying the several (though related) key aspects fundamental to early twentieth-century IR thinking, rather than being monodimensional or simply taxonomic like most contributions so far. This task is rendered more difficult by the fact that in the actual writings on which this reconstruction is based certain centrally important strands are not only interrelated but, often almost inextricably, interwoven—methodological clarity was not a feature of this school. Yet the task is indispensable for an attempt at systematising this body of thought that avoids the distorting simplifications with which the existing literature is replete.

What emerges from this reexamination is a distinct paradigm of international relations which the traditional, oversimplified image of IR Idealism misreads and obfuscates. This shared (albeit implicit) paradigm accounts for the marked family resemblance of much IR writing from the period. David Long is right in pointing out that the specious traditional image of IR Idealism provides no common denominator that would justify speaking of this literature as a unitary school. But his suggestion that, once the traditional image is exploded, no such common denominator might turn out to exist at all goes too far, as the pages that follow should make clear.

Needless to say, the essay format permits only a sketch. In particular, the authors cited have to be treated more or less as if their thinking were monolithic, with little allowance made for the fact that in reality it kept evolving to some extent.[4] Also, it is not possible in the context of this essay to discuss certain eye-catching similarities, as well as the differences, between early twentieth-century IR literature and more recent non-Realist IR theorising. Such a comparison would be very interesting, but presupposes an adequate synthesis of each body of thought to be compared. Providing such a synthesis for early twentieth-century IR theory alone is already a sufficient task for one article.

Realist Thinking in Early Twentieth-Century IR Writing

Conventional summaries of early twentieth-century IR writing tend to conjure up images of authors naively ignoring the realities of power, which only later, when Realism came to dominate the discipline, at last received due attention. In order to understand the paradigm of world politics underlying much early twentieth-century IR writing it is important to realise that this is a myth, and that many so-called Idealists were conversant with, and took seriously, the way of thinking that would later be labelled Realist. It is tempting but wrong to imagine that the Realist critique of Idealism as voiced in particular by Carr and later taken up by others confronted the authors concerned with ideas that they had not already assimilated. This concerns in particular two key aspects of Realism, the emphasis on the anarchical character of the international system on the one hand and the balance of power on the other.

[4] One of the anonymous reviewers of this article has pointed out that it does not take into account any American IR writers of the period, and has suggested that American IR Idealism may have been different from European and perhaps more in line with the traditional perception of this school that I question in this article. This is an interesting hypothesis that deserves further scrutiny; for the time being I can only include it as a caveat.

Curiously, it was a leading figure in the British League of Nations movement, Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, who drew attention to the former of these two aspects and gave it a name that caught on, "the international anarchy." Whether or not he actually coined the term, he contributed greatly to its popularity by making it the central idea of his book *The European Anarchy*. Published in 1916 (a revised version published in 1926 was renamed *The International Anarchy*), this is basically a work of history seeking to explain the outbreak of World War I. However, in providing a brief general analysis of the causes of war at the beginning of the book, Dickinson (1916:9–10) invokes the famous thirteenth chapter of Hobbes's *Leviathan*.

> [I]t 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. . . . [T]here will be, what Hobbes truly asserted to be the essence of such a situation, a chronic state of war, open or veiled. For peace itself will be a latent war. . . . Some one State at any moment may be the immediate offender; but the main and permanent offence is common to all States. It is the anarchy which they are all responsible for perpetuating.

In essence, this is very much a Realist view of international politics. What distinguishes Dickinson from later Realist IR authors are the overtones of moralism and voluntarism implicit in the terminology ("offence," "responsible for perpetuating"). Indeed, at the end of the book, rather than accepting the anarchical states system as inescapable, Dickinson expresses the hope that it might be transcended. If this happened (of which he seems to have been less than certain), it would be the result of the shock and the learning experience induced by the world war, and would lead to international institutions enabling states to settle their disputes through legal procedures and reserving force "for the coercion of the law-breaker" (Dickinson, 1916:151).

David Long (1995:314–15) labels the approach exemplified by Dickinson "Hobbesian idealism." In this view, what distinguishes the Dickinsonian approach from later IR Realism is the "liberal" emphasis on progress. No doubt this is a correct distinction. Yet it does not elevate "Hobbesian idealism" into a distinct theoretical approach. Dickinson is certainly typical of an important current of thought in his time, and whose orientation might well be called idealistic (with a lower-case i). But apart from the notion of "international anarchy," Dickinson does not put forward any IR theory at all. In which case neither is he an IR Idealist if that label is to denote a specific type of IR theory, a specific paradigm, rather than simply a cast of mind or a political creed. In terms of IR theory, Dickinson simply reflects the strong presence of Realist ideas on international affairs at that time.

The frequency with which the term or at any rate the concept of "international anarchy" was taken up in interwar IR literature indicates the wide agreement with Dickinson and his Realist analysis. Thus Leonard Woolf (1928:4) declares that during the previous century or so "[p]ractical statesmen and political theorists regarded nations as being naturally in a state of perpetual war." Here as elsewhere Woolf takes issue with the notion of the "beneficent inevitability" of this state of affairs. As I will show later on, however, unlike Dickinson he does so on empirical and theoretical grounds rather than merely stating what he holds to be desirable. On another occasion, in his introduction to a volume of which he was editor, Woolf (1933:11) approvingly cites the notion of "international anarchy" in the context of discussing an essay with that title which Norman Angell contributed to the book; the essay in turn quotes Dickinson and his mention of Hobbes cited above (Angell,

1933:34). Alfred Zimmern, in his best-known work, *The League of Nations and the Rule of Law*, tellingly treats the expression as the popular shibboleth that by the mid-1930s it had clearly become (Zimmern, 1936b:62).

Angell had started using the term "international anarchy" after World War I and continued to do so in later writings.[5] But it was merely a convenient shorthand for a conception of international politics of which he himself had provided a striking summary as early as 1914, just prior to the outbreak of war. His précis (Angell, 1914:xviii–xx) of what he calls the "tenets of that diplomatic orthodoxy" is worth quoting at some length. In it Angell links the concept of international anarchy with that of the balance of power.

> The fact that each unit in the "Society" of nations is an independent entity of increasing needs and population in a world of limited space and opportunity involves the further fact that each must compete with the rest for sustenance and as that implies, for life itself. There may not be direct preying one upon the other, but the pre-emption of space and opportunity by the strong means the exclusion (which is equivalent to the destruction) of the weak, so that the efficiency of one nation in its occupation or exploitation of the earth involves, with however little intention or desire, the loss and damage, potential or actual, of another. . . . These economic, social, and political phenomena, accepted as inevitable incidents of human struggle, reconcile us to a conception of international society in which the units are, because sovereign and independent, either passively and indirectly, or actively and directly, rival and predatory. The survival of any given unit depends in the last resort upon the relative degree of physical force which it is able to exercise against competitors. . . . Materially and morally [the stronger nations] will deem the risks of competition and struggle to be preferable to the security which would come of a common pooling and distribution by consent. To the weak only would such appeal. The strong will naturally prefer to see as much international law and civilized intercourse as may be between nations maintained, as now, by virtue of an equilibrium of forces sufficiently stable to ensure that it will not be disturbed save on vital issues—always, however, in danger of such disturbance, owing to the fact that a preponderance of force on the part of one unit can be used in relation to the rest to tilt the balance of advantage in its favour, the central fact which necessarily makes the whole system one in which physical force is the ultimate appeal, the one condition of survival economically, socially, and morally.

This passage is clearly influenced by the social darwinism fashionable at the time, and its language is generally very strong. Nevertheless there is much obvious common ground here with mid twentieth-century "classical" Realism as well as contemporary Neorealism (both altogether more static in outlook and more muted in their formulations). This common ground concerns the central core of Realism, the positing of an antagonism between states that in the absence of a central overarching authority can be mitigated—but not overcome—only by means of an

[5] See Miller, 1986:64–5, and the quotation from Angell's 1921 book, *The Fruits of Victory* (Miller, 1986:54); for an example of the term being used in Angell's later writings see, e.g., Angell, 1939:2.

intrinsically precarious equilibrium and which obliges each state to rely on self-help as the final resort.

This passage and many others that could be adduced (see, e.g., the critique of the concept of balance of power in Angell, 1918:170–7) illustrate both familiarity with what was later to become known as Realism and the fact that this paradigm, although it was not to colonise IR as an academic discipline until later, was a widely held one well before World War I.

The same familiarity with Realist thinking will shine through in other quotations from early twentieth-century IR literature in this article. Indeed, the so-called first debate between Idealism and Realism does deserve the name. The work of the early twentieth-century IR authors discussed here *was* an ongoing, explicit or implicit dialogue with the position later labelled Realist. This in itself constitutes an important, though very rarely acknowledged characteristic of their work that is crucial for a proper assessment.

The Obsolescence of Realist Thinking and the Problem of the "Public Mind"

A second important theme in early twentieth-century IR literature is provided by its assumption that growing interdependence between states rendered popular Realist assumptions on international politics increasingly obsolete and harmful. Early twentieth-century IR authors saw a dangerous discrepancy between the new reality of worldwide economic interdependence and existing political structures, between increasing global integration and traditional foreign-political attitudes and modes of behaviour. Ramsay Muir (1933:vii; quoted in de Wilde, 1991:46) puts it succinctly: "We have entered a new era, the era of interdependence; and this interdependent world is threatened with chaos because it has not learnt how to adjust its institutions and its traditions of government to the new conditions."

In his book *International Government* of 1916 Leonard Woolf contends that the growth of economic links between states meant that conflicts could more easily become global than in the past.

> The world is so closely knit together now that it is no longer possible for a nation to run amok on one frontier while her neighbor on the other is hardly aware of it. We are so linked to our neighbors by the gold and silver wires of commerce and finance—not to speak of telegraph wires and steel rails—that . . . every war threatens to become a world war. (Woolf, 1916:128; cf. pp. 154–5, 181–2, 184–5)

To Woolf, it followed from this that the notion (central to Realism) of the state as a self-contained, autonomous entity had become an anachronism, a view that, in *International Government*, he reiterates on numerous occasions. Thus he notes for example (Woolf, 1916:234) that "the inadequacy of the ordinary conception of the isolated independent State is manifest" or (Woolf, 1916:267) that "[t]he organization of human beings to-day in independent sovereign States . . . has . . . already proved to be incompatible with modern society."[6]

The problem, as Woolf stresses in a later essay, was that people failed to realise the extent and significance of the change. They still conceived of states as autonomous units interacting in what was widely seen to be a zero-sum game (he does not of course use that expression). In fact, according to Woolf (1928:28), the Industrial

[6] The same thesis is stated over and over again in other passages in the book (e.g., pp. 99–100, 182, 230, 238–9, 248–51, 258, 260, 268, 311–12, 345-6, 349).

Revolution had altered the nature of international relations in such a way that states now had common rather than competing interests: "Nations and peoples are so intimately knit together, one part of the world is so seriously dependent upon all the other parts, that . . . one nation's loss is practically always every other nation's loss, and one nation's gain every other nation's gain." Yet the world continued to be organised "by a political system applicable to pastoral tribes or walled cities, and by an economic system suitable for a 'self-supporting' village in the Middle Ages."

The description of the international origin of everyday consumer goods that Woolf (1928:14) uses to illustrate the high degree of economic interdependence already reached appears to be modeled on a similar, more extensive passage in a work by Francis Delaisi (1925:132–3), which Woolf (1928) lists in his bibliography. This is a vivid, book-length treatment of the theme under discussion, i.e., the discrepancy between the new economic structure of the world on the one hand and its political structure and attitudes on the other. The title of the English edition, *Political Myths and Economic Realities* (Delaisi, 1925), sums it up.[7]

Norman Angell, too, was fond of using examples from everyday economic life to illustrate the high degree of economic interdependence in the industrial world (a typical example is provided by the relevant remarks in his 1935 Nobel lecture, Angell, 1972:166–8). Two books that Angell had already published before World War I, *The Great Illusion* (Angell, 1913, first published 1910) and *The Foundations of International Polity* (Angell, 1914), are elaborations on the basic idea that the economic interdependence of the modern world made war entirely dysfunctional (modern meaning industrialised), but—and this part of his analysis is often forgotten—that the fact of interdependence and its implications were not understood by either politicians or the public at large.

World War I itself to Angell provided ample empirical confirmation of his ideas. Contrary to a persistent cliché, Angell had of course argued at no time that the growing economic interdependence of industrial states made war impossible, only that it made war both more costly and more destructive. Indeed, Angell later feared that the combination of advanced economies and backward politics actually made war more likely (Angell, 1913:341, 1938:106).

At the end of the 1914 war, Angell (1918:50; cf. pp. 88–9) argued, like Woolf, that contrary to prevailing traditional perceptions it had become outdated to regard "nations" as self-contained units in political, social, or what he calls "moral" terms; equally outdated therefore were "our present methods of handling international affairs," since they were based on the assumption that states were self-contained. Moreover, insufficient attention was paid, according to Angell, to the extent to which, in international politics, economic and social considerations were becoming more important than "political" ones.

Like Woolf, Delaisi, and most other IR authors of that period, Angell was mainly concerned with putting forward ideas and not with providing detailed, "scientific" evidence for them. The evidence seemed so plain and palpable that it was enough to hint at it; what was more important was to overcome the mental inertia that prevented people from seeing it. The emphasis in his writings is therefore on the failure of what he liked to call "the public mind" to grasp the impact of industrialisation on the nature, more precisely the stakes, of interstate relations. "The chief obstacle," Angell (1918:60) explains,

> to the abolition of the old disintegrating policy . . . are . . . moral and intellectual difficulties, the mental habits, opinions, and

[7] The original French edition, also published in 1925, is called *Les contradictions du monde moderne*.

> impulses of men, which have not kept pace with the changes wrought by our progress in mechanical contrivance.[8]

Muir, Woolf, Delaisi, and Angell are typical representatives of the way the theme of the discordant economic and political evolution of the international system was discussed in the earlier part of this century; as can be seen, their positions are very close. The same theme can be identified in the writings of Alfred Zimmern, one of the few IR authors cited (quite frequently even) in *The Twenty Years' Crisis* and still widely regarded as what Olson and Groom (1991:94) have called the "consummate" Idealist. Yet while many of his ideas echo those of other IR writers of the period, Zimmern often, as in this case, gives them an interesting twist.

Like other authors, Zimmern (1931:14–15) stresses the increasing integration of the world and its component states as a result of technological innovation, more specifically the increasing speed and ease and hence volume of global communications. This process of integration was inescapable: "An inexorable law . . . has made us members of the body politic of the world. Interdependence is the rule of modern life."

However, Zimmern also notes the increasing *fragmentation* of the world as a result of the rise of the idea of national self-determination and the virulence of national feeling. It has been argued since (Gellner, 1983: esp. chs. 3 and 4) that this latter phenomenon is in fact also a corollary of industrial modernisation. Zimmern does not point out this link, yet neither does he pass over nationalist particularism as merely another manifestation of intellectual atavism. Instead (Zimmern, 1931:17) he gives it equal status with growing economic interdependence.

> Thus we see that the two movements which have dominated the history of the last hundred and fifty years, the processes of the Industrial Revolution and the ideas of the French Revolution, have contributed the first to multiply a millionfold the contacts between individuals in different countries, and the second to intensify the differences between them. The first has given us a world-wide economic system. . . . The second has given us a rudimentary [global] social system, the individual members of which [what Zimmern calls the "states and communities"] are, for the most part, acutely conscious of their corporate being and of its needs and desires, but as yet inexperienced in the practice of a common international life and untrained in the habits of mind and forms of thinking which would normally precede its successful exercise.

For Zimmern, then, there was a built-in contradiction in the contemporary international system that did not simply result from the persistence of atavistic views on international politics. Rather, there was the additional fact that the industrial age confronted governments with a twofold challenge complicating their foreign policy-making. On the one hand, governments had to heed the often strident and aggressive demands of nationalist domestic opinion on which their legitimacy rested (on this cf. Zimmern, 1936b:291–2)—unlike what Carr implies, Zimmern, like Angell, was very far from seeing public opinion as necessarily a force for peace. On the other hand, governments were forced at the same time to manage their mutual

[8] On Angell and the problem of the "public mind" see Miller, 1986:esp. p. 55 and ch. 3 generally. In the title of a book he published in 1932 Angell called the persistent, unreflected pre-industrial attitudes concerning peace and war *The Unseen Assassins*. People did not wish for war as such, but held assumptions about states and international politics that promoted international tension.

relations against the background of an unprecedented complexity of interconnected interests.

"What is the resulting effect upon international relations?" Zimmern (1931:17) asked. "Not uniformity but multiplicity: not agreement but controversy: not the idylls of brotherhood but the shocks and jars of corporate existence: in a word, not peace but *life in society*." (Emphasis in original.)

The Emphasis on Historical Process

Early twentieth-century IR writers were much impressed by the impact of industrialisation on the conditions of foreign policy-making. It is crucial to note, but rarely acknowledged, that for this reason the philosophy of history to which the so-called Idealists subscribed was fundamentally different from the philosophy of history underlying Realism.

Realism adopts a static or cyclical interpretation of history, for which, in Martin Wight's (1966:26) famous words, interstate politics is the "realm of recurrence and repetition."[9] This view was also widespread in the early part of the twentieth century, but according to many IR writers of that period it was wrong.

As they saw it, not only had industrialisation and its economic and social side effects already changed the international system irreversibly by making it more integrated and hence more vulnerable to upheaval, but in addition this was an ongoing and unstoppable process the dynamics of which any effort to understand international relations had to take into account. Necessarily therefore, any analysis of the contemporary international system had to be aware of its transitory and evolving character.

For Zimmern (1931:26), the present thus was an "age of transition," which meant that (Zimmern, 1936b:278) "[w]e are in fact living through an interregnum in political science. The old books are out of date and the new cannot yet be written." What he, and other writers of the period, did try, more or less explicitly, was to situate the current stage of development on a historical trajectory by comparing it to the known past and the probable future that could be constructed from identifying the most important trends. Francis Delaisi (1925:384) states this clearly:

> Contemporary events should be viewed in the perspective of history. Then only, behind the unexpectedness of anecdote and the apparent confusion of events, will appear the slow curve of the forces that guide the nations and their leaders; and then it may be possible for the mind to foresee the prolongation of the curve into the future.

Almost invariably, the analysis of international relations offered by early twentieth-century authors proceeds by highlighting historical trends, mainly those that make for a more and more integrated international system. Thus, Leonard Woolf in *International Government* (1916) postulates a "natural [!] tendency of the world towards International Government" (1916:143). Woolf (1916:141, 153) uses this latter term in a broad sense that covers all sources of order in international affairs—be they rudiments of what he calls "international authority" (general coordinating mechanisms such as conference diplomacy, international law in general, or institutionalised methods for the peaceful settlement of disputes) or specialised mechanisms of transborder cooperation along functional lines (in such fields

[9] Cf. Waltz, 1979:66: "The enduring anarchic character of international politics accounts for the striking sameness in the quality of international life through the millennia." Instances from other Realist authors are cited by Zacher and Matthew (1995:108).

as postal and telegraphic communications, public health, commerce, maritime legislation, etc.).[10] Woolf seeks to show that in the years before World War I such mechanisms of cooperation were becoming steadily more numerous and important. Although he dates back the beginnings of this development to the sixteenth century, it had been greatly accelerated by the onset of industrial modernity (Woolf, 1916:143, 148–51, 154–78, 268, 345–7, 364).

The point of the exercise was precisely to demonstrate that the Realist conception of international politics as static in their essence, ineluctably conflictual and recurrently violent was wrong. According to Woolf, the international system was, on the contrary, undergoing a long-term cumulative transformation with two main effects. On the one hand, increasing integration, much accelerated by industrialisation, both enhanced the potential for conflict and made it more dangerous. On the other, mechanisms to deal with this development could be shown to have evolved in parallel and spontaneously over the past few centuries, again with an acceleration in recent decades owing to the demands of industrial modernity. It was the relatively unself-conscious character of this process that caused Woolf (1916:143) to describe it as "natural." By the same token, however, it tended to be little noticed and therefore required being pointed out.

It was also insufficient. More in the way of cooperative mechanisms was desirable to deal with the ever greater menace that conflict posed to the international system—as World War I, then in course, showed. *International Government* was written at the request of the Fabian Society to demonstrate both the need and the feasibility of an international organisation of the type represented soon after by the League of Nations (on the genesis of the book see Wilson, 1978:ch. 4). Woolf argued that such an organisation would not be a radical innovation but merely the prolongation of an already longstanding evolutionary process. At the same time he cautioned that if it were to succeed, any such conscious reform of the international system should be consistent with, but should not anticipate too boldly, this natural evolution. Specifically, he insisted (1916:e.g., 125–6) that any attempt at setting up an international organisation to help settle disputes between states peacefully must respect their sovereignty, still jealously guarded.

It is evident that this approach was by no means particularly naive or overly optimistic, and that it was at least as much empiricist and analytical as it was normative. If, in later years, Woolf developed a markedly "idealistic" streak, it lies in the tenacity with which he defended the League even in the 1930s, despite the mounting evidence for its failure. Thus, in his review of Alfred Zimmern's best-known work, *The League of Nations and the Rule of Law*, Woolf (1936) attacked Zimmern virulently for allegedly trying to prove that "the League has been a failure, that it was bound to be so, and that anyone who 'believes in' or 'supports' it is one of a 'discordant congregation' of impossible 'idealists.' "

Zimmern exposed himself to this kind of attack because he rated the possibility of consciously reforming the international system through the kind of organisation represented by the League much lower than did Woolf. Indeed, he could be quite scathing when it came to criticising the naive political correctness of many League lobbyists and of what he called (1939b:63) "this League crusade." As early as 1922 he had rejected the belief that the League would be the solution to international conflict as "little more than a self-righteous soporific" (quoted Rich, 1995:85). On another occasion (Zimmern, 1936a:20) he insisted that suggestions for creating a unified legal system on a global level as a safeguard for peace were "not merely premature but . . . grotesque and ridiculous."

[10] This concept of "international government" is very much akin to what is today increasingly called international governance. Cf. Wilson, 1995b:esp. 126–36, 153; for a discussion of the concept of international governance see Rosenau, 1992.

Woolf's attack on Zimmern was, however, based on a misunderstanding. Zimmern, in fact, also believed in the need for global governance as well as its feasibility. But he thought that not very much more could be done than let the historical process run its course (though it might possibly be helped along by making people see it more clearly). The growth of economic links and hence of interdependence between states he held to be irreversible, since, in the words of an American industrialist quoted by Zimmern ([1929]1968:123), "[Y]ou cannot unscramble eggs." But this process had certain inescapable consequences which would sooner or later force people to adapt to changing circumstances.

More than Angell and Woolf—who as publicists and lobbyists had a greater concern with the here and now—Zimmern, with academic detachment, thus puts particular emphasis on the historical process (and greater hope in it, relative to attempts at active reform). In a lecture given in Berlin in December 1932 Zimmern (1933) explains that growing economic interdependence had the double effect of making war more and more destructive and irrational and states less and less autonomous. People might ignore this development, but it would not go away. They might try to act against it, but their unequal battle against the dynamics of the historical process would sooner or later cause them to change their outlook.

From this perspective, the eventual adoption of peaceful means of settling disputes was simply a question of time. Distancing himself from the exaggerated hopes put in the League Covenant, and citing instead the example of the British Empire/Commonwealth as a model both for the future global order as such and for the gradual and incremental way in which it would be established, Zimmern (1933:15) stresses that the new framework of international affairs could not simply be legislated into existence or expected to come into being all at once. There was no need for a kind of global constitution.

> We only need the conscious recognition that we have reached a point where the preconditions of a juridical management of the problems of world politics are present. Once we have reached that point we can leave everything else to the best physician, the best political creator, time.[11]

The philosophy of history that Zimmern advances in this lecture is strikingly close to that of Immanuel Kant as expressed in such writings as *Idea for a Universal History* and *Perpetual Peace* (both in Kant, 1991). Kant, too, saw history as a process of increasing integration between states, not least through growing economic links; he, too, saw this process as headed towards a mode of interstate relations where conflicts would be settled by juridical, rather than violent means; and he, too, held that this new structure of international relations, which would grow over time to include more and more states, would come about in reaction to the experience of ever more ruinous arms races and wars.

This last notion is also present in the work of Delaisi, who summarises it pithily by declaring (1925:394) that "the excess of the evil may hasten the cure." Zimmern himself (1933:11) refers to the crises in contemporary world affairs as the "growing pains (*Wachstumskrämpfe*)" of the future global body politic. Neither, however, traces such ideas to Kant. Among the IR authors of the period the only one to have drawn attention to the obvious parallel between the early twentieth-century view of international relations as being shaped and transformed by an inescapable, directional historical process and Kant appears to be David Mitrany.

[11] The Berlin lecture (Zimmern, 1933) was published in German; quotations from it appear in my translation.

This is significant not so much because it suggests any direct influence of Kant on early twentieth-century IR thinking (this appears to have been nonexistent) but as evidence of the importance that this school of thought attached to the notion of a directional historical process. "In the international field," Mitrany (1933:51–2) writes in *The Progress of International Government*, "if my interpretation is correct, our problem is to induce the nations to adapt their outlook to the inescapable demands of civilised life. The problem has been stated in that way already by Kant, in his *Essay on Perpetual Peace*."

Mitrany approvingly emphasises that, rather than expect the solution of this problem from any change in human nature, Kant thought that it would be brought about "even against the will of man" because the very historical process that the mixture of aggressiveness and rationality in man predetermined made it inevitable. As Mitrany saw it, this thesis was borne out by the actual evolution of the international system since the Middle Ages; he, too, stresses the spontaneous, even unconscious nature of this process. "Progress has been laborious, and, on the whole, unaided by political wisdom. *Yet therein lies the true lesson of its story*." (Emphasis added.)

Zimmern, in the Berlin lecture (1933:3), merely mentions Kant in passing. However, he, too, highlights the importance he attached to the directionality of history by citing a philosopher of history in support of this notion, in this instance Max Scheler in his 1927 essay *Man in the Age of Equalisation* (Scheler, 1976). For Scheler, the present age is witnessing the gradual "equalisation" of the particularistic tensions characteristic of the preceding age—tensions between, among other things, such entities as races, civilisations, nations, and classes. Although this integrating and levelling (and, at least by implication, globalising) trend is inexorable, it is fraught with danger, provoking resistance and upheaval. Zimmern (1933:13), endorsing this view, quotes approvingly a passage by Scheler according to which efforts to stem the tide of "equalisation" will ultimately be "swept away," while at the same time the task of modern politics must be to manage the transition with a view to minimising the attendant destruction and dislocation.

Perception and the Role of the IR Analyst

A crucial aspect of the interpretation of world politics adopted by early twentieth-century IR writers was thus the need to bridge the gap between the rapid evolution of certain objective realities and the much slower, even countervailing evolution of popular attitudes—the key word here being perception. The interpretive overlay used to make sense of world politics was provided for many people by a set of ideas that would today be called Realist. But Realism—not for nothing proud of an assumed millennial tradition that today coopts figures like Thucydides, Machiavelli, or Hobbes as its intellectual forbears—is a doctrine that, insistently and tenaciously, takes its cues from pre-industrial historical experience, or more precisely, a specific retrospective reconstruction of this historical experience.

Ultimately, the only kind of interdependence between states that Realism admits as significant is the military kind, and the sole significant mode of conducting international relations, competition. There is little room here for acknowledging the increasing transborder *cooperation* brought about by the transborder division of labour that industrialisation entails. Realism has thus had a traditionally difficult relationship with industrial-age economic thinking.

In the type of international system that has shaped its vision, the classical, pre-industrial states system of Europe, military and economic rationality were not divorced, at least not glaringly so. In a system of (relatively) autarkic states, war could bring economic advantage, and conversely economic prosperity was seen as enhancing the potential of states for warmaking. With each economy relatively

self-contained, war could, at worst, cause damage to one or several of them, but hardly to all. There was thus always the promise of gain for *someone* as an incentive for war. But with the Industrial Revolution, each industrialising economy became increasingly dependent on an integrated economic system common and necessary to all of them. This common economic system, whose importance was growing steadily and fast, would be impaired by large-scale war regardless of who won it, with negative consequences for all. (This is of course the principal argument of Angell in *The Great Illusion*.)

In this situation, values subscribed to by large sections of society, such as military virtues in general and specifically heroism in war, were increasingly at odds with economic rationality. As a result, there was an anti-rationalist and—because industrial capitalism and its type of rationality were effectively bound up with classical liberalism—an anti-liberal reaction that extolled military virtues precisely as an antidote to the negative psychological effects attributed to economic rationalism. This is evident in many of the numerous late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century apologists of war. Significantly, the defence of war as a genre of political literature was an unprecedented new phenomenon that developed rapidly in the course of the second half of the nineteenth century (Janssen, 1995:259–60; see also Anderson, 1993:270–3).

Far from merely reiterating a secular or even millennial intellectual tradition—the self-proclaimed timelessness of Realist doctrine is more in the nature of a necessary corollary of its ideologically conservative character than of an objective interpretation of the history of ideas—this type of thinking was thus in itself a concomitant of industrialisation. The "will to power" (to quote Nietzsche as an extreme representative of this current) was, in origin, precisely the denial of the bookkeeper's mentality associated with the pervasive economic rationalism of industrial modernity. In muted form, stripped of the provocative glorification and instead presented fatalistically as the dominant element of human nature, this notion continued to inspire mid twentieth-century Realist IR writers. Indeed, as Christoph Frei (1994) has shown in his remarkable biography, the intellectual outlook of Hans J. Morgenthau was shaped directly and fundamentally by his study of Nietzsche.

As a result, Realism naturally discounts the importance of economic interdependence. Morgenthau in *Politics Among Nations* (1948), the best-known work of mid twentieth-century classical IR Realism, makes no mention of it, while Kenneth Waltz (e.g., 1979:138–46) as the foremost exponent of Neorealism actually contends that interdependence between the major states has diminished in this century. The concept is also absent from *The Twenty Years' Crisis*—a silence that becomes resounding when it is compared to much of the IR writing of the preceding three decades.

Pointedly, and indirectly suggesting that that body of writing was of course well known to Carr, the book instead devotes several pages to a discussion of the concept of autarky (Carr, 1939:154–8 [120–4]). Here, Carr takes note of the factors (all connected with industrialisation) that work to increase economic interdependence, and concedes that for industrial states the preservation of autarky now involved considerable effort and cost. Against the background of a political situation in which certain important states were clearly not in a very cooperative mood and in which war was therefore a likely possibility, he concludes (Carr, 1939:155 [121]) that "[i]n modern conditions the artificial [!] promotion of some degree of autarky is a necessary condition of orderly social existence."[12]

[12] Carr does devote some remarks to interdependence in a book published a little later, and contends there that as a result of the tendency for growing interdependence small states were no longer viable in the industrial age (Carr, 1943:e.g., pp. 63–4, 201–2, 277–9). See also Carr, 1941.

It might be objected that Carr, with his socialist, even pro-Soviet sympathies, can hardly be described as conservative. Indeed, although his critique of interwar IR thinking gave Realism its very name and was endorsed and appropriated by the rising Realist camp within the discipline, Carr personally was far from being a clear-cut Realist himself. The ambiguities of his own writings on IR have often been highlighted (for recent interpretations of Carr from a non-Realist perspective see Howe, 1994, and Linklater, 1997).

Yet it is no accident that *The Twenty Years' Crisis* could so easily become a founding document of IR Realism. There is a common denominator, and it consists precisely in the anti-liberal edge that is conspicuous both in this book and other writings by Carr. For Carr (1939:ch. 5), the defence of liberal values by the "utopians" reflected a self-serving rationalisation by those privileged elements of society for whose benefit the values in question had originally been evolved. For him (Carr, 1943:10–11, 128), the two world wars as well as "every significant political movement" of the intervening period were aspects of "a revolution against the three predominant ideas of the nineteenth century: liberal democracy, national self-determination, and *laissez-faire* economics"; indeed, World War II was "the final proof of the bankruptcy of the political, economic and moral system which did duty in the prosperous days of the nineteenth century." As Carr saw it, conditions in the modern age objectively favoured large, more or less authoritarian states with planned economies, whether one liked it or not.

With hindsight, this reassertion of the necessity of autarkism in international politics appears clearly erroneous. The autarkism practised by such states as for example Nazi Germany, Japan, or the Soviet Union (which Carr had in mind) can now be seen as the doomed rearguard action that it was, rather than the adequate response to industrial modernity for which Carr took it. From the perspective of the late twentieth century, the view of early twentieth-century IR writers that the Realist emphasis on state sovereignty and the importance of interstate military conflict was backward-looking and anachronistic, indeed the result of a subjective and even wishful interpretation of history, has regained plausibility.

Thus, Angell for example did not contest the inherent consistency of the Realist model of world politics; he even explicitly concedes its applicability to pre-industrial history. What he questioned was its timeless validity and its independence from the way people collectively *interpreted* the world. He saw history as a learning process in which the advantages of cooperation over confrontation would eventually be grasped and exploited even in the international sphere, the more so as increasing interdependence threw the options into starker relief.

In *The Great Illusion*, Angell appears quite optimistic that the necessary learning process would take place as a matter of course, as had other similar processes in the past. He adduces the familiar examples of slavery and duelling (Angell, 1913:esp. Part III, ch. 3). Following the experience of World War I, he became more doubtful. Writing shortly before the Paris peace conference of 1919, he thought (Angell, 1918:264) that a successful peace settlement was unlikely owing to "the force of the old conceptions and the lack of any definiteness of a newer principle." Though throughout the interwar period he continued to support the League of Nations, he had misgivings about it before it was even founded, noting the danger of expecting too much of a mere "piece of machinery" the installation of which was not accompanied by a reformed perception of international problems. According to him (Angell, 1918:268; cf. 340–1), "[W]e are not ready for the very profound modification of political ideas touching national independence and sovereignty necessary to make a League workable, and consequently any settlement a very hopeful one."

The key role that Angell assigns to "ideas" or perception is thus evident both in his relatively serene pre–World War I writings and in the more pessimistic later ones.

Leonard Woolf also thought that the problem with Realism (an expression which of course he does not use) was that its adherents saw their world of unceasing, recurrently violent antagonism between states as simply being "out there" rather than what later scholars, with an expression not yet available to him, would call a social construct, embodying certain fundamental but not inherently timeless assumptions.

In his review of *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, Woolf suggests that the book reflected current intellectual fashion (which it is tempting to call Nietzschean) rather than timeless truths: "Professor Carr," he claims (Woolf, 1940a:175), "is unconsciously infected with the temporary social psychology of the time, the acceptance of power and force and conflict as the primary . . . elements in social organizations and human relations."[13] Woolf (1940a:173–4) criticises "the common, but completely unscientific, assumption that power, violence, and conflict are more 'real' elements in society than, e.g., beliefs, law, and co-operation."

He then went on to write a book on this subject (*The War for Peace*, Woolf, 1940b), developing themes already present in earlier works. Among them is the notion that whether or not interstate relations are antagonistic and violent depends crucially on attitudes and perception. Elaborated on in the book, this was a position that Woolf (1928:3) had stated succinctly but forcefully before:

> War or peace, prosperity or poverty, civilisation or barbarism are the result of what men believe and what they desire, what they think and what they feel; they are also the result of the institutions and organisations which men create as the corollaries of their beliefs and the means for attaining their ends.

Because the nature of war in the industrial age had changed from what it was in the pre-modern era, making it a much greater threat to civilisation, deep-seated but retrograde attitudes towards war had to be overcome if civilisation were to continue. This, for Woolf, was the point of the allied war effort (the book was written after the outbreak of war in 1939): trying to help make the new attitudes prevail.

It was also, of course, Woolf's own motive for addressing international problems in print. The same rationale of helping a necessary learning process along is evident in the works of Angell and other IR writers of the period. Zimmern, in his inaugural lecture at Oxford, explicitly states it. For him (1931:13), it was the rapid growth of global interdependence as a result of industrialisation that gave rise to IR as a new academic subject in the first place. The subject itself was the product of a new reality:

> The real distinguishing mark of modern states and communities, as objects of study, is . . . their interdependence, . . . the extent and importance, for all of them, of their mutual relations. And it is therefore the nature of these relations which today, *as at no previous time*, calls for particular attention. [Emphasis added.]

For Zimmern (1931:17), it followed that the role of the IR scholar must be to highlight the need to adapt to changing circumstances, and to help the learning process thereby implied through analysis. "Our main duty, we feel, 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."

[13] J. D. B. Miller (1995:116) makes a very similar point.

Visions of the Future and the Role of Democracy

Yet what was the final goal to which this learning process would lead? What would a world in which the required transformation had been accomplished look like, according to Idealist IR writing? And, since the emphasis on process meant that obviously the anticipated new international structure would perhaps take a long time to evolve and would in the meantime coexist, even compete with the remnants of the old, how would the problems arising from that be resolved?

Zimmern (1932:117) thought that increasing integration of the international system nevertheless would not bring about a world state. "The world community, if it ever comes into existence, will not be a community of individuals. . . . It will be a community of communities, composed of representative individuals." In a way that is reminiscent of the functionalism of David Mitrany, Zimmern distinguishes three types of such communities: "territorial associations [which are subsequently defined as meaning state governments], functional or professional associations, and, thirdly, cultural and spiritual associations." While nationhood would continue to be of great importance in world affairs as a "vehicle of culture" and of wholesome diversity, the role of governments would be more limited in the future than at present. This was because of the tendency for the state to be reduced to a mere "geographic division" of the global economic system that enjoyed only limited autonomy (Zimmern, 1933:9–12; cf. 1936b:278).

Zimmern (1933:14–15) held that the growing acceptance of peaceful means of settling disputes—necessitated by the increasing senselessness of interstate military showdowns—did not mean an end to conflict, or indeed to the possibility of economic "war." The "game of power" would go on indefinitely, but, in what would gradually become a "global legal community (*Weltrechtsgemeinschaft*)," it would be transformed. For Zimmern (1932:120), "[t]he object of world organization should be to provide a broad and international framework, permitting of infinite flexibility and infinite diversification, and avoiding . . . any grouping which tempts to Power rather than to Service." Hence, "[t]he world organization will not be a State. . . . It will be a Realm of Law."

As mentioned, Zimmern saw the British Commonwealth, a loose federation of (democratic) states between which war had become "psychologically impossible" (Zimmern, 1933:14), as an anticipation of the likely future mode of interstate relations. Both Angell and Woolf also formulated this view. In *The Great Illusion*, Angell (1913:360) declares that the Empire, "a congeries of independent States, is itself a forecast of what the relationship of all European states will be." Likewise, Woolf in *International Government* (1916:367) states that "[i]n the British Empire and other loosely federated States, we see the beginnings of another system of government, and one to which International Government would necessarily approximate."

Later Woolf (1940b:224), too, anticipated a "European Confederation." The greater part of his 1940 book deals with the question of whether the Hobbesian state of war between states is inescapable. Woolf argues that it can be transcended, not only on general grounds (which cannot be summarised here), but on empirical grounds—he adduces various groups of states where it had visibly been overcome (Woolf, 1940b:156–62).

What Zimmern, Angell, and Woolf all had in mind is clearly what Karl Deutsch (1954:esp. 33–45) would later call security communities. Moreover, they all anticipated (or rather, as this was of course already put forward by Kant, discovered independently) the now famous tenet that "democracies do not fight each other," since they all held that such non-Hobbesian communities of states (such as, precisely, the British Commonwealth) would consist of democracies.

In the name of what he called "democratic internationalism" Angell had advocated a permanent "protective union of the democracies" as early as the end of

World War I (Angell, 1918; for the term "democratic internationalism" see, e.g., ibid. p. 13). Woolf (1944:4–5), looking back at the interwar period, points out that

> while governments or governmental cliques deliberately plotted war or helplessly drifted into it, an enormous majority of ordinary men and women in Europe desired nothing so much as peace and would have eagerly supported their governments in the cooperation necessary to prevent war and ensure a common prosperity. . . . The change of heart has, to a large extent, already taken place. The will to peace and cooperation in the world of states is there. What is required is that the will of the peoples shall be imposed upon their governments by the forces and institutions of democracy and so determine the policy of state and the actions of national governments.

Delaisi (1925:404) stresses the greater flexibility and adaptability of democratic government as compared to authoritarianism. The latter might be better adapted to resolve a one-off crisis, but it was unsuited to the dynamic, fast-changing nature of the industrial age: "Static conservatism is its only chance of permanency, and it hankers after immobility in proportion as the forces to which it owes its origin are more unstable."

Zimmern, who once more had the most developed views on the subject, thought (1936a:31) that one of the reasons that the League had failed was because, among its members, "only a small minority were constitutional democracies." As he saw it,

> collective security . . . cannot, at the present stage of human history, be a policy for the world as a whole. It can only be brought into practical effect between the free [i.e., democratic] peoples who, if they are sufficiently powerful, can form the nucleus of what, as the social and political advancement of mankind proceeds, will become an increasingly large and important political constellation.

Zimmern apparently thought that a democratic social order creates a reluctance to go to war simply because if the people as a whole control the government a main concern will be with their common welfare (on this see, e.g., Zimmern, 1936a:44–5, 50–2, 61), which would not be served by war. Authoritarian states, on the other hand, were able to strive for power for its own sake, including by military means, only because they could compel their people to make the necessary sacrifices in terms of welfare. This might seem an advantage, yet, for Zimmern, in the industrial age it also undermined their ability to compete and even, in the long run, condemned them. The reason for this was that (Zimmern, 1936a:7) "the skilled processes of the modern world, unlike plantation labor, cannot be effectively carried on under the dictation of force. They require intelligence, initiative, enterprise, forethought—qualities that can only be bred and nurtured in the climate of freedom." Unimpressed (unlike Carr) by authoritarian or totalitarian regimes, Zimmern thus confidently asserted that

> the willingness of free men to co-operate together for their common welfare is the necessary basis of our modern civilization. Jerry-built structures of imposing appearance and formidable pretensions may be built on servile foundations and may dazzle the eye for a time, but they are foredoomed to disintegration and collapse.

It should be noted at least in passing that once more there is a striking—though apparently coincidental—parallel here with Kant. This concerns the three notions (1) that democracies are inherently peaceful in their relations with each other (a point implicit in *Perpetual Peace*, First Definitive Article); (2) that democracies would cluster to form over time an increasingly numerous group within the international system (as surmised in *Perpetual Peace*, Second Definitive Article); (3) that states with greater civil liberty have a competitive advantage over others (*Universal History*, Eighth Proposition).

The Problem of Power

It was clear to the writers discussed here that even if strong historical forces might be assumed to be at work to help bring it about, the realisation of a cooperative, democratic international system on a global scale was still a long way off. Meanwhile, the problem of states not conforming to this aspiration was posing itself with growing urgency.

In early twentieth-century IR writing a chronological sequence is usually implied: the universe of power politics is associated with the past, the universe of interdependent cooperation with the future. This was a logical stance given the interpretation of history as a directional process. In practical politics, however, there was of course no single magic moment whereby the entire international system would switch once and for all from aggressive, war-prone power politics to largely peaceful cooperation between states. Rather one had to be resigned for the foreseeable future to the diachronic coexistence in one and the same system of old and new attitudes and modes of behaviour. Inevitably, the old attitudes remained stronger in some states than in others. As Zimmern (1936a:71) puts it:

> If the [democratic] peoples were living alone in the world, the policing which they would require would be comparatively insignificant, and so it may one day be. But today they are living side by side with other nations, or the rulers of nations, whose ideas do not belong to the twentieth century, but to some antedeluvian era—the flood in this case being the rise of the democratic movement.

Some, like Woolf, nevertheless put their faith in the League. Others, like Zimmern, did not. For one thing, for Zimmern, there were considerable intrinsic problems in the institutional arrangements of the League Covenant, in particular its failure to provide a forum for great-power cooperation along nineteenth-century lines. (The weaknesses of the League are discussed extensively in Zimmern, 1936b:277–310.) Far from rejecting wholesale the lessons of pre-1914 international politics, Zimmern saw the old European concert in a largely positive light. True to his evolutionary interpretation of history, Zimmern praised the nineteenth-century concert as an advance on the less integrated, "atomic" interstate politics of the eighteenth century (Zimmern, 1936b:288–90; cf. ibid. p. 65 and ch. 6 in general). From this perspective, Zimmern saw the admission of smaller states to the League Council as a grave mistake.

More importantly, however, and in line with Angell's point about the uselessness of a mere "piece of machinery" quoted earlier, Zimmern explains that "[w]hat the League *is,* at any given moment, is determined in fact by the degree of willingness on the part of the powers to co-operate with one another. . . . Thus 'the League,' from which some have expected wonders, is, in and by itself, politically impotent." For it to function properly required "a transformation of Power-politics into Responsibility-politics. . . . [F]ailing the adoption of such a new attitude, the new

machinery . . . cannot by itself bring about the passing of Power-politics" (Zimmern, 1936b:282, 283, 285). (Emphasis in original.)

While Zimmern evidently believed that this transformation would come about eventually, he did not think that in the present situation the League could act as a safeguard for peace or as a substitute for power politics. Zimmern (e.g., 1936a:54–5, 58–75) saw the international system as divided between the democratic "welfare states" and the aggressive, non-democratic "power states" (in particular, Germany, Italy, and Japan; the Soviet Union was seen by him to occupy an intermediary stage between the two groups). While the welfare states had abandoned warfare as an instrument of politics as between themselves and developed cooperative links, they were still obliged to be on their guard with respect to the "power states." The power-political mode of conducting international relations, then, though unwelcome and backward-looking, was not as yet a thing of the past. "To condemn power politics," Zimmern (1936a:59) declares,

> is not to deny that the welfare states have need of power in order to maintain themselves and their principles in the world of international politics. The contrast is not between welfare politics and power politics but between welfare politics and *pure* power politics. [Emphasis in original.][14]

In a later book Zimmern (1939b:40) reiterates that "[i]t is no more possible to renounce the use of power in politics than it is to renounce the use of money . . . in economic activity. . . . The real distinction is not between power and no power, but between the right and the wrong use of power." Basing himself on this tenet, Zimmern, in this book, discusses at length the then current argument that British policies were merely inspired by the desire of a satiated power to preserve a favourable status quo, that this attitude was no more moral than that of Britain's rivals, and that claims by other states to a greater role in the international system were legitimate (the position that, in the same year, Carr put forward in *The Twenty Years' Crisis*).[15] Zimmern (1939b:e.g., pp. 105–6) maintained that, given their respective political systems and foreign political attitudes, it mattered a great deal whether preponderant power was held by Britain or by Germany.

Somewhat paradoxically perhaps (in light of their perception as apostles of world peace), authors like Angell (e.g., 1939), Woolf (1940b), and Zimmern (e.g., 1939b) were thus far more ready to advocate the use of force when it came to dealing with what Zimmern called the "power states" than was E. H. Carr, whose backing of appeasement in the original 1939 edition of *The Twenty Years' Crisis* was famously expunged from the post-war re-issue.[16] Concerning Germany, Zimmern (1939b:97) held that what mattered was not primarily to defend or re-establish a balance of power but—unsurprisingly in light of what has been said about early twentieth-century IR writing—to initiate a learning process. To bring this about, power and even the use of force might well be necessary.

> There is no real *solution* of the German problem except through the political education of the German people—an education which will make them . . . the political equals of their politically more intelligent neighbours—a slow process, and a process that is not

[14] Carr (1939:152–4 [119–20]) contemptuously dismisses this distinction; cf. also Markwell, 1986:286.

[15] Carr, 1939:e.g., pp. 108–12 [85–8], 134–5 [105], 187 [147], 213–15 [168–9], 288–9 [225–6].

[16] The endorsement of the Munich agreement in Carr, 1939:278, is omitted from the same passage in Carr, 1946:219.

> likely to be accomplished except at the cost of much effort and suffering. [Emphasis in original.]

Conclusion: Early Twentieth-Century IR Writing from the Perspective of Today

In the preceding pages I have attempted an interpretive synopsis of the thinking of some important early twentieth-century IR authors. The main difficulty here was the failure of these writers to give key premises the salience that their importance for comprehending this body of thought requires. Such premises are rarely adequately "flagged," and never brought all together in a coherent, rigorous, and programmatic formulation. Instead, they tend to be somewhat submerged in the affable prolixity typical of these authors, and hence, despite their fundamental importance, to go unnoticed.

An important reason for this lack of methodological self-reflection was obviously the inchoate state of IR as an academic discipline. Writers like Angell or Woolf did not even hold academic posts but were essentially publicists. Their writing naturally reflects this. But even the holders of dedicated IR chairs, like Zimmern (or, for that matter, Carr, whose style of argument, be it noted, is no more rigorous than that of those whom he criticised), could not address themselves to a professional academic community since that did not yet exist in any very meaningful way. They, too, were expected to write for the larger public little interested in methodological disquisitions.

Moreover, the absence of any competing paradigm within the discipline meant that there had never been any pressure on these writers to define their own. Realism, while present as a set of ideas, initially commanded little academic respect; by the time it began to do so, against the stark, strife-ridden background of World War II and the Cold War, the paradigm that it replaced seemed too discredited to warrant a programmatic reformulation.

The failure of these writers to articulate their central assumptions conspicuously has made it easy for their critics and even, more recently, their defenders to misrepresent them. In particular, it has not been realised to what extent their work relies on the notion of historical *process* (rather than simply "progress"), on the perception of a world-historical tendency towards ever greater integration of the various subdivisions of humanity. If the interpretation of history underlying their approach is mentioned at all, it is done in passing and, almost always, in an incomplete or even downright misleading manner.

Thus, Jaap de Wilde (1991:208) qualifies the belief in progress that he sees in the early twentieth-century IR writers discussed by him (among them Angell, Delaisi, and Muir) as "chaff" and attributes it to their notion that "mankind was inherently good"—an interpretation which is not entirely wrong but, as should have become clear by now, incomplete. Cornelia Navari (1989) rightly emphasises that Angell is a theorist of industrial modernisation, but deals with Angell only, without noting the parallels with other writers of the period. She does not mention this aspect at all in her more recent discussion of Mitrany (Navari, 1995). Wilfried Eisenbeiß (1990), too, shows both the Angell of *The Great Illusion* (first published in 1910) and Jan Bloch (who died in 1902) to have been analysts of epochal change, but does not deal with any inter-war IR writing. Zacher and Matthew (1995) do note the emphasis on historical process and in particular modernisation as a common feature of "liberal" thought on world politics, a category in which they include authors like Angell, Delaisi, and Mitrany. However, they pay only cursory attention to IR writing from the period considered here.

Peter Wilson (1995b:153) states that Woolf believed history to be an evolutionary process, but without attaching any particular importance to this fact and, once more,

without noting parallels with other writers. Elsewhere, Wilson (1995a:19) mentions that the inter-war IR authors selected for discussion in the volume co-edited by him and David Long (such as Angell, Woolf, and Zimmern)

> sought to develop a general conceptual and historical framework within which past events could be meaningfully interpreted and future courses of action effectively prescribed. Indeed, they were historicists in that they saw international relations as part of an intelligible, and broadly progressive, historical process. The job of the observer of the international scene was to discover, understand, and clearly articulate this process and make policy recommendations consistent with it.

This is entirely in line with the interpretation that I have developed in this article, but Wilson is silent about the actual content of the "conceptual and historical framework" that he attributes to the authors in question. Moreover, Wilson (1995a:19) claims that this approach was something they had "in common with Carr"—a very misleading statement because, while Carr also adopts a historical perspective, it is very different from that of the Idealist authors discussed in this essay.

Realist critics of early twentieth-century IR writers have tended to qualify the latter's belief in a future that would be fundamentally different from the past as shortsighted naivety, which historical events from the 1930s onwards were quick to invalidate. From a post-1989 perspective the picture seems reversed. It would now appear that it was the early twentieth-century IR Idealists who had the correct long-term prognosis, while the adoption of the rival Realist paradigm by academic IR since the late 1930s was based on a shortsighted interpretation of events at that time. These now look more like a historical parenthesis, a temporary throwback within the overall process correctly described by the Idealists.[17]

In this sense it now seems ironic that Hedley Bull (1972:36) should have accused the Idealists of an "unlearning of old lessons." If they were to reply to Bull, some of them might well ask whether, from the vantage point of today, the most serious shortcoming of Realism is not its refusal or inability to learn the lessons of modernity.

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[17] Even though, while they rightly prognosticated the decline of interstate war, they did not foresee such intrastate phenomena—with international repercussions—as the growing virulence of ethnic conflict and the increasing incidence of "state failure."

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