

War, Commerce and Ethics in British International Political Thought

Ian Hall and Lisa Hill

Introduction

The workshop was held in the School of History and Politics, University of Adelaide, on 21-23 July 2008. It was opened by Professor Wilfrid Prest, who welcomed the participants to Adelaide and thanked the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia and the Academy for the Humanities in Australia for their financial support, as well as that of the University.

The workshop brought together 18 participants drawn from a number of institutions in Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Denmark, mixing historians with political theorists and specialists in international relations. This inter-disciplinary approach was designed to foster better dialogue between intellectual historians and those in politics and international relations working on past thinkers; it also sought to heal, at least partially, what one of the participants had earlier referred to as the ‘fifty years’ rift between International Relations and history’, the end of which, he surmised, would signal ‘the maturity of the history of international thought as a subfield of intellectual history’ and the opening up of ‘new conversations between historians, political theorists, International Relations scholars and international lawyers’.¹ Without doubt, the critical and fruitful exchange of ideas that took place over the duration of the workshop suggested that this rift had begun to close and that it will continue to do, particularly if further such collaborations attract the kind of support and encouragement that we received from our sponsors.

The objectives of the workshop were:

- To further interdisciplinary perspectives in the history of international thought and international theory, drawing upon expertise in history, politics, political theory and international relations;
- To further collaborative initiatives between Australian-based and international scholars in the important fields of international politics and ethics;
- To examine a range of thinkers and texts that have hitherto be neglected or (arguably) misinterpreted in the discipline of International Relations;
- To produce an edited volume of essays on British international thought.

Rationale

In the past twenty years, the study and the practice of international politics has been transformed by re-engagements with the history of political and international thought. Reconsiderations of the work of Immanuel Kant, for instance, stimulated the

¹ David Armitage, ‘The Fifty Years’ Rift: Intellectual History and International Relations’, *Modern Intellectual History* 1 (2004), 97-109.

development of the ‘democratic peace theories’ that have informed, in various ways during the post Cold War period, the foreign policies of the United States and European Union states.² Recent work on classical “realism”, from the history of Thucydides to Machiavelli to Carl Schmitt, have provided grounds from which to criticise both liberal and neoconservative theory and practice in international affairs.³ The growing interest in classical and Renaissance republicanism – exemplified by Andrew Bacevich’s *American Empire* (2002) or Daniel Deudney’s *Bounding Power* (2007)⁴ – is set to have an equally significant effect. The study of the history of ideas has, in other words, had a profound and lasting impact on research in international politics.

British thinkers have made a significant, indeed perhaps even disproportionate, contribution to the study of International Relations. They have set out some of the most fundamental concepts in the field, developed central arguments, and even lent their names to whole schools of thought. The notion, for instance, that the relations between sovereign states resembles that of the anarchical ‘state of nature’ is derived from the work of Thomas Hobbes.⁵ Likewise, the idea that states might, nevertheless, form an international society amidst international anarchy has been attributed, by twentieth century ‘English school’ theorists,⁶ to another Briton, John Locke. In the writings of David Hume we may find some of the first and best explorations of the ‘balance of power’; in Adam Smith’s thought we see the first systematic – as well as the most influential – elaboration of economic cosmopolitanism; in that of John Stuart Mill, a seminal study of the principle of non-intervention.⁷ British international lawyers were at the forefront of that field’s development in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, while British historians (and diplomats) played critical roles in the drafting of both the Covenant of the League of Nations and the United Nations Charter.⁸

² On Kant and the origins of twentieth century democratic peace theory, see especially Michael Doyle, ‘Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs’ (part I) & ‘Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs’ (part II), *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 12:3 (1983), pp. 205-235 & 12:4 (1983), pp. 323-353.

³ See, for example, Richard Ned Lebow’s *The Tragic Vision of Politics: Ethics, Interests and Orders* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), which makes particular use of Thucydides.

⁴ Andrew Bacevich, *American Empire: The Causes and Consequences of US Diplomacy*, new ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002); Daniel Deudney, *Bounding Power: Republican Security Theory from the Polis to the Global Village* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

⁵ One of the first to draw attention to this idea in Hobbes was Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, in *The International Anarchy, 1904-1914* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1926).

⁶ This attribution is made by Hedley Bull in *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* 3rd ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 46-47.

⁷ David Hume, ‘Of the Balance of Power’, in *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, Inc., 1987). Online at: <http://www.econlib.org/library/LFBooks/Hume/hmMPL30.html> (accessed 6 August 2007); John Stuart Mill, *A Few Words on Non-Intervention*, Foreign Policy Perspectives No. 8 (London: Libertarian Alliance, n.d. [1859]).

⁸ On the Covenant, Harold Nicolson, *Peacemaking 1919* (London: Constable, 1934). On the Charter, see Ian Hall, ‘The Art and Practice of a Diplomatic Historian: Sir Charles Webster, 1886-1961’, *International Politics* 42 (2005), pp. 470-490.

Proceedings

The workshop opened with a discussion, led by Ian Hall, of the contexts and character of British international thought. There was considerable debate about the utility of the idea of ‘character’ and especially of ‘national character’, despite its prominence in the work of past British thinkers like Hume and Namier. David Armitage, in particular, suggested that the notion of ‘national character’ persisting over time and exercising an influence over successive generations of thinkers was deeply problematic. There was general agreement that, while each paper might consider how its particular thinker conceived the relation between ‘Britishness’, Britain and international relations, the participants would not pursue any further the idea of national character and that it would not be a central or unifying theme of the edited collection.

The second day heard and discussed papers by Haig Patapan (on Thomas Hobbes), David Armitage (John Locke), Renée Jeffery (David Hume), Lisa Hill (Adam Smith), Richard Bourke (Edmund Burke) and Andrew Fitzmaurice (Travers Twiss). Ian Tregenza, Bruce Buchan and Richard Devetak acted as chairs and discussants.

In his paper, Haig Patapan argued that a purely historical approach to Hobbes’ thought leaves important questions about the implications of his work for international politics incomplete. His treatment of glory-seeking on the parts of sovereigns suggests that empire is its inevitable fulfilment, but that Hobbes was aware of that danger, and sought to limit, through political education, sovereigns’ tendencies to pursue glory. David Armitage, for his part, argued that recent interpretations of Locke’s work have not done full justice to his writings or to his practical experience in international affairs. The paper also drew distinctions between Hobbes’ and Locke’s accounts of the law of nature, pointing to the means by which the latter tried to distance his account from that offered in the Leviathan.

Renée Jeffery and Lisa Hill, speaking on Hume and Smith, concentrated upon the ethical visions of international politics to be found in their respective works. Jeffery explored the possibilities for contemporary international ethics inherent in Hume’s account of the moral sentiments. In her exploration of Smith’s economic cosmopolitanism and his accompanying critique of mercantilism and British imperialism, Hill disputed both realist and idealist interpretations of Smith’s international thought and challenged retrospective attempts to impose late modern IR tradition categories on a system of thought that resists easy categorisation.⁹

The third day began with three papers: Duncan Bell (on Leonard Hobhouse), Jeanne Morefield (Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson) and Ian Hall (Lewis Namier). Bell argued

⁹ Renee Jeffery has usefully problematised the ‘traditions tradition’ in Jeffery, R. 2005. ‘Tradition as Invention: The ‘Traditions Tradition’ and the History of Ideas in International Relations’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 34 (1): pp. 57-84.

that Hobhouse stands on the cusp of a more self-conscious liberal tradition in British international thought, and that his work offered a far more profound account of international politics than has hitherto be recognised. Morefield's paper sought to offer the first full account of the thought of a pivotal thinker: Lowes Dickinson having coined the term 'international anarchy' and offered the first analysis of how the structure of anarchy creates the conditions for outbreaks of war between states. Morefield sought to interpret Lowes Dickinson's thought in the context of his classical training and teaching. In his treatment of Namier, Hall attempted to sketch the tension between the historian's exhortations to eschew ideology in the formulation of foreign policy and the conduct of international politics, on the one hand, and his acute sensitivity to the role that ideas actually play in those realms. The paper suggested that Namier's stark portrayal of the power politics that supposedly drive international relations masked a deep-seated moralism, clear in his commitment to Zionism in particular.

The workshop closed with a general discussion of the idea of a 'British international thought' and the particular contribution of British thinkers to international relations. It was asked – by David Armitage – whether the edited book to follow the workshop ought to include further chapters. Duncan Bell and Richard Bourke argued the case for a chapter on John Stuart Mill, as one of the most obvious omissions from the programme. It was agreed to ask Georgios Varouxakis (Queen Mary, University of London) to contribute a book chapter on Mill. He has since agreed to this proposal. The other major issue raised, again by David Armitage, was the problem of bringing the book up to the present – of the coverage that ought to be given to other and later post-war thinkers. It was suggested that Ian Hall add some discussion of these developments to the introduction, as well as an explanation for ending the book with Namier.

In conclusion, the workshop was asked to consider what further work might be done in this field and what wider implications the work already done might have. The participants agreed that further work needed to be done, after the book was published, on the history of international thought, and that, in particular, greater efforts needed to be made to explore the uses of intellectual histories of this kind for contemporary theory and practice. While no specific policy recommendations were made, it was concluded that there were considerable resources available, especially for the ethical evaluation of international politics, in the work of Hobbes, Locke, Hume and Smith, as well as of the later liberal thinkers.

Outcomes

The papers from the workshop will be published in a book edited by Ian Hall and Lisa Hill entitled *British International Thinkers from Hobbes to Namier*. The book will be published by the New York branch of Palgrave Macmillan in September 2009 as part of their 'History of International Thought' series edited by Dr Peter Wilson at the London School of Economics. The book will have global distribution. The editors are also examining the possibility of publishing draft chapters on the internet.

The organisers and participants would like to thank both Academies for their financial support, as well as the University of Adelaide.

Acquittal of funds

Funds provided by Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Adelaide

International Airfares

Armitage USA-Australia return	Paid University of Sydney
Bell UK-Australia return	\$2924
Bourke UK-Australia return	\$3147
Morefield USA-Australia return	\$3409
Sub-total:	\$9480.00

Funds provided by ASSA and AHA

Domestic airfares

Armitage – Sydney-Adelaide return	\$412.75
Bell – Sydney-Adelaide return	\$240.27
Buchan – Brisbane-Adelaide return	\$413.60
Devetak – Brisbane-Adelaide return	\$496.11
Patapan – Brisbane-Adelaide return	\$401.43
Trogenza – Sydney-Adelaide return	\$542.05
Sub-total	\$2506.21

Accommodation

Hotel accommodation for Bell, Bourke, Buchan, Devetak, Fitzmaurice, Morefield, Patapan, Trogenza

Sub-total	\$3150.00
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Lunches, Coffees, Afternoon Teas

Sub-total	\$679.00
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ASSA funded total:	\$6000.00
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Grand total:	\$15865.71
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