

World Politics at the Edge of History:

R.G. Collingwood, Michael Oakeshott and Another Case for the 'Classical Approach'

by

Alexander Astrov

Department of International Relations
London School of Economics and Political Science
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Abstract

This thesis outlines an idea of world politics as a distinct activity of thinking and speaking about the overall conditions of world order in terms of their desirability. World order is understood not as an arrangement of entities, be they humans, states or civilizations, but a complex of variously situated activities conducted by individuals as members of diverse associations of their own. This idea is advanced from within one such association, or context, contemporary International Relations, wherein it entails a metatheoretical position, neotraditionalism, as a rectification of the initial, 'traditionalist' or 'classical', approach after the advance of rationalism and subsequent reflectivist critique. Since loose talk about traditions does not constitute a tradition, neotraditionalism is presented by drawing on the resources of a well-trimmed manner of thinking and speaking about human associations, political philosophy, again, understood not as a body of doctrine but a context-specific human activity which can be experienced only through concrete exhibitions of individual intelligence. Therefore, throughout the thesis, a conversation on the place of politics in human experience is re-enacted. Its major participants are R.G. Collingwood and Michael Oakeshott. Its major achievement is the conditional unity of understanding and conduct, tradition and individuality, the subject of inquiry and the manner in which it is conducted. As such, this conversation is neither an antiquarian item nor a timeless ideal, but an instance of an association to be desired, and thus an example which, once comprehended, that is, both understood and included into one's own context, becomes a historically enacted disposition for the activity of politics.

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Notes on usage

International Relations is capitalized when referring to the academic field of study. Once in lower case, it refers to the practices of the relations between human associations, not necessarily states.

Realism, Rationalism and Idealism are capitalized when referring to the schools of thought in philosophy. When in inverted commas, 'realism' and 'rationalism' refer to the 'traditions of thought' identified by the English school in International Relations. Otherwise, the terms refer to political doctrines and political theories associated with them.

Since neither Collingwood nor Oakeshott used the gender-neutral language, I refrain from using it as well.

Throughout the text, abbreviated references to Collingwood's and Oakeshott's works are given in parentheses, whereas works by other authors are referenced in full in the footnotes.

List of abbreviations

R. G. Collingwood:

SM – *Speculum Mentis or the Map of Knowledge* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924)

EPM – *An Essay on Philosophical Method* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933)

PA – *The Principles of Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938)

A – *An Autobiography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939)

EM – *An Essay on Metaphysics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940)

NL – *The New Leviathan or Man, Society, Civilization and Barbarism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1942)

IN – *The Idea of Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945)

IH – *The Idea of History*, ed. Jan van der Dussen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993)

EPP – *Essays in Political Philosophy*, ed. David Boucher (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989)

GRU – ‘Goodness, Rightness, Utility’ in *The New Leviathan*, ed. David Boucher (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992)

Michael Oakeshott:

EIM – *Experience and Its Modes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933)

R – *Rationalism in politics and other essays*, ed. Timothy Fuller (Indianapolis: Liberty, 1991)

OHC – *On Human Conduct* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975)

VMS – The Vocabulary of Modern European State, *Political Studies*, 1975, XXIII: 319-41.

MHC – On Misunderstanding Human Conduct: A Reply to My Critics. *Political Theory*, 1976, 4: 353-67.

HCA – *Hobbes on Civil Association* (Indianapolis: Liberty, 2000)

OH – *On History and other essays*, ed. Timothy Fuller (Indianapolis: Liberty, 1999)

V – *The Voice of Liberal Learning*, ed. Timothy Fuller (Indianapolis: Liberty, 2001)

HL – *Morality and Politics in Modern Europe: The Harvard Lectures*, ed. Shirley Robin Letwin (London: Yale University Press, 1993)

RP – *Religion, Politics and the Moral Life*, ed. Timothy Fuller (London: Yale University Press, 1993)

PF – *The politics of faith and the politics of scepticism*, ed. Timothy Fuller (London: Yale University Press, 1996)

Prologue

Responding to the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001 in New York, British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, diagnosed the situation: 'This is a moment to seize. The kaleidoscope has been shaken. The pieces are in flux. Soon they will settle again. Before they do, let us re-order this world around us'.¹ Despite all the talk about the 'new war of the new millennium', which, at least on the level of technology and military strategy this war soon turned out to be, the metaphor itself was familiar. Almost a century earlier, while preparing for the Peace Conference to be held in Paris so as to seize yet another opportunity provided by yet another disaster, Jan Smuts described the outcome of the Great War in similar terms: 'The very foundations have been shaken and loosened, and things are again fluid. The tents have been struck, and the great caravan of humanity is once more on the march'.²

There is, however, what seems to be an important difference. By the end of the Paris Conference, Smuts had to admit: 'I am grieved beyond words that such should be the result of our statesmanship'.³ In the immediate aftermath of September 11, Blair, invoking the 'power of community' as a remedy, came close to admitting that re-ordering the world may, on occasion, be beyond the power of the institution of statesmanship as such:

¹ Speech by Tony Blair, Labour Party conference, Brighton, 2 October 2001. Accessed at <http://politics.guardian.co.uk/labourconference2001/story/0,1220,561988,00.html>, October 2003.

² Cited in Margaret MacMillan, *Peacemakers: The Paris Conference of 1919 and Its Attempt to End War* (London: John Murray, 2001): 98.

³ *Ibid.*: 479.

Around the edge of the room, strangers making small talk, trying to be normal people in an abnormal situation. And as you crossed the room, you felt the longing and sadness; hands clutching photos of sons and daughters, wives and husbands; imploring you to believe them when they said there was still an outside chance of their loved ones being found alive, when you knew in truth that all hope was gone. And then a middle aged mother looks you in the eyes and tells you her only son has died, and asks you: why? I tell you: you do not feel like the most powerful person in the country at times like that.⁴

The gap between the ambition (re-ordering the world) and the means for its fulfilment (the state) points beyond isolated rhetorical gestures towards what Hannah Arendt described as 'one of the outstanding properties of the human condition' in her discussion of violence, where politics was placed into the context of a story of the transformation of impotence into omnipotence:

Death, whether faced in actual dying or in the inner awareness of one's own mortality, is perhaps the most antipolitical experience there is. It signifies that we shall disappear from the world of appearances and shall leave the company of our fellow men, which are the conditions of all politics. As far as human experience is concerned, death indicates an extreme of loneliness and impotence. But faced collectively and in action, death changes its countenance; now nothing seems more likely to intensify our vitality than its proximity. Something we are usually hardly aware of, namely, that our own death is accompanied by the potential immortality of the group we belong to and, in the final analysis, of the species, moves into the centre of our experience. It is as though life itself, the immortal life of the species, nourished, as it were, by the sempiternal dying of its individual members, is 'surging upward', is actualized in the practice of violence.⁵

In Arendt's interpretation, it was 'the certainty of death that made men seek immortal fame in deed and word and that prompted them to establish a body politic which was potentially immortal. Hence, politics was precisely a means by which to escape from the equality before death into a distinction assuring some measure of deathlessness'.⁶

This story has its counterpart in International Relations where the potential deathlessness of the state is often presented as a reason behind the recurrence and repetition of the condition of international anarchy. States have no incentive to pursue absolute gains, be it perpetual peace or assured cooperation.⁷ What is puzzling is that the word 'politics' is still used in this context, albeit inconsistently. There are references to 'geopolitics', 'international politics', 'world politics' or 'politics among nations', as there are studies of 'order in world politics' and attempts to escape from this theoretical confusion of tongues by introducing 'the political'. What matters, of course, is not the word but rather the availability of 'a means by which to escape from the equality before death' in a world divided into sovereign states; for it was this equality to which thousands of individuals were exposed on September 11 regardless

⁴ Speech by Blair.

⁵ Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1969): 67-8.

⁶ Ibid.: 68.

⁷ The argument runs, with various modifications, at least from Hobbes' initial formulation to Kenneth Waltz's brief response to September 11, 'The Continuity of International Politics', in *Worlds in Collision: Terror and the Future of Global Order*, eds Ken Booth and Tim Dunne (London: Palgrave, 2002): 348-53.

of their nationality and also in blatant disregard of their own words or deeds. If 'politics' no longer offers this kind of refuge, then what does?

What I want to argue is that, in the words of R.G. Collingwood, we still have 'the means of living well in a disordered world' (EPP 174); that is, the means for being normal people in a somewhat abnormal situation, and that this resource is still 'politics', an activity once roughly defined by Michael Oakeshott as that of 'private persons (that is, persons without authority) negotiating with holders of offices of authority' (OHC 163). As such, this activity is different from diplomacy (the holders of offices of authority negotiating with each other under the conditions of diluted authority), balance of power, great-power management, war or international law.⁸ Nor can it be defined by a simple reference to something else:

Politics is not religion, ethics, law, science, history or economics; it neither solves everything, nor is it present everywhere; and it is not any one political doctrine, such as conservatism, liberalism, socialism, communism, or nationalism, though it can contain elements of most of these things. Politics is politics, to be valued as itself, not because it is 'like' or 'really is' something else more respectable or peculiar. Politics is politics.... Why call, for instance, a struggle for power 'politics' when it is only a struggle for power?⁹

What I also want to argue, is that there is a human activity which can be legitimately described as 'world politics' even in the absence of a *cosmopolis* comparable to the state. Like any human activity, it has its conditions of possibility and limitations. The former are to be found in the interplay of 'international society' and 'world society', the latter are set by the operation of 'international system'. Although these three concepts have their origins in the English school of International Relations, my understanding of each of them and of the complex of activities constituted by the interplay of human relationships to which they refer, world order, is different from that of the 'pluralist' or 'classical' approach developed within this school. The main difference, however, concerns not so much the nature, or the 'constitution', of world order, as the route by which I intend to arrive at its understanding, namely, by way of focusing on the activity of politics the character of which will be explored by drawing on Collingwood's and Oakeshott's ideas about it. These choices themselves have to be accounted for prior to the main characters' appearance on the scene. To appreciate the difference that their appearance makes, a brief preliminary sketch of the scene itself, or context, is needed.

Despite the important variations within the classical approach, it can be roughly described as advocating a view of international relations in which the diversity of sovereign states is established, maintained and protected by the unity of international society as a manifold of customary legal and diplomatic practices the authorship of which belongs to states represented by a class of individuals, 'statespeople'. International society is distinguished from, and often opposed to, both international system composed of states as unscrupulous

⁸ I am referring here to the institutions of international society identified by Hedley Bull in his *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (London: Macmillan, 1977).

⁹ Bernard Crick, *In Defence Of Politics* (London: Continuum, 2000): 15-6, 20.

power-bargainers and world society which purports to embrace the whole of humanity in a single political entity. This view of the practice of statecraft is grounded in the understanding of theorizing which is firmly opposed both to the naturalism of positivism and to the 'criticism' of 'post-modern theories of an anti-foundational kind'.¹⁰ Both on the level of theory and practice, the classical approach is characterized by certain aversion to metaphysics exemplified by the following contention:

The rapid global expansion of international law and diplomatic practice in the twentieth century is an indication of the ease with which and extent to which the society of states can accommodate the numerous and various political systems of a large and highly diverse planetary population. But that does not require that statespeople must necessarily share deeper assumptions regarding social morality or political culture that are characteristic of particular civilizations.... On the contrary, the existence and success of their international statecraft requires that all such particular norms be set aside in favour of the global covenant. Civilization used to be a barrier to the political conversation of humankind. That is no longer so. The global covenant has made it possible for political people the world over to rise above their own civilizational parochialism in dealing with each other.¹¹

The problem with this argument is that it in fact relies on a set of strong metaphysical premises, not always recognized as such, that one way or another grant to states the unquestioned, and unquestionable, right to decide what form of good life is to be pursued within their boundaries. One such premise, to begin with, is that states exist for the pursuit of good life, and this is what makes them valuable. Another admits of the variety of the possible conceptions of good life, and this is what endows the diversity of states, and thus international society, with a value of its own. Yet it is difficult to see why statespeople, accustomed to putting aside their civilizational allegiances and capable of managing the diversity of vast political systems, should not attempt to extend the operation of a tool allegedly as valuable as the state to the whole of mankind. Why, in other words, should it be a global covenant of *states*?

As Collingwood, whom the classical approach often claims to itself, once wrote, states, each purporting to represent 'a complete system of law and thus a complete organization of human life', necessarily belong to a broader social context: 'The two states are not in fact two complete and independent systems of life; they are partners in a common life, sharing in a tradition which is wider than each of them or both together' (EPP 121). This context cannot be limited to the tradition of statecraft and presupposes that all human activities that may possibly comprise it can be brought into coherent relationship with each other so that the principle of non-contradiction could serve as a standard for the evaluation of the individual sets of rules which govern the conduct of the various institutions (122). This kind of global

¹⁰ Robert Jackson, 'Is There a Classical International Theory?' in *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond*, eds Steve Smith, Ken Booth and Marysia Zalewski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 213.

¹¹ Jackson, *The Global Covenant: Human Conduct in a World of States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). An earlier achievement of the classical approach is Terry Nardin, *Law, Morality and the Relations of States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

context either denies to the state its exclusive right to order the relations among human beings or requires that a global state serves as a 'weapon' with which to order them: 'the external, historical fact which we call the state', perhaps different in shape from the one we are familiar with, just as this familiar state is itself different from the ancient *polis*, but still 'an incarnation of political action; no more, and no less' (109).

This dilemma becomes even more acute if it is acknowledged, following Oakeshott, on whose thinking the classical approach relies even more strongly, that the overall context to which the conduct of statespeople belongs may be at once organized in a number of categorially distinct ways, so that political, or more generally, 'practical', organization is but one universe of discourse in the overall conversation that does not need a chairman, has neither predetermined course nor conclusion but is always put by for another day: 'Its integration is not superimposed but springs from the quality of the voices which speak, and its value lies in the relics it leaves behind in the minds of those who participate' (V 109–10). Such positioning of 'practice' or 'human conduct' alongside other modes of experience allows for the variety of the 'measures of deathlessness', as it were, and thus for the variety of expressions of human freedom, including that of escape from the dominance of 'practice' generally or the claims of politics in particular. It also questions the capacity of the state, at least in the West, where it has by and large lost its theological foundations that at the time of its emergence on the scene still put it beyond any need for ethical justification, to represent 'a complete organization of human life'.

In the absence of other stable forms of political organization, the state at best finds itself in a paradoxical position: it is forced to accept its limited place among other realms within which important human goods are pursued yet it cannot abandon its holistic ambition, perhaps even its duty, to provide the 'higher good' of the overall adjudication between these realms. The negotiation of this paradox is further complicated by the dualistic character of the state itself. On the one hand, it may be understood as constituted by individuals through the authoritative, non-violent, self-authenticating practice of living together in a manner different from that of the inhabitants of all other states; on the other, its capacity for action and survival depends on the practices of violence and domination in which not only natural resources but individuals themselves are treated as things. The ability to negotiate, rather than resolve, these paradoxes is among the achievements of the modern state, but this mediation has never been easy, nor has it ever been secure. And when, in times of crises, like that of September 11, statespeople appeal to the 'power of community', they appeal, knowingly or not, to subjects capable of recognizing their own responsibility for a kind of life which has no solid foundations, for 'the object of responsibility can be only that the stability of which cannot be guaranteed under any circumstances'.¹²

¹² Paul Ricoeur, 'Morality, Ethics, Politics', in *Hermeneutics, Ethics, Politics: Moscow Lectures and Interviews* (Moscow: Russian Academy of Sciences, 1995): 57; my translation. This lecture, the argument of which is summarized in the last paragraph, is based on an earlier essay published in

This view is closer to the ‘critical’, rather than ‘classical’, approach insofar as it refuses to repeat the ‘a state is a state is a state’ mantra and takes the following advice seriously: ‘look at the problems of world order in the whole, but beware of reifying a world system. Beware of under-rating state power, but in addition give proper attention to social forces and processes and see how they relate to the development of states and world orders’.¹³ Taking this advice seriously, however, means recognizing its own paradoxical character. Is it possible to address the problem of world order *as a whole* without any reification? ‘And can one avoid making of *res publica* the “thing”, the identificatory substance of a community? Our entire history seems to answer that this is not possible’; or so some ‘critics’ claim.¹⁴ What is at stake in such claims is, again, the availability of the subject capable of re-ordering the world that has gone fluid, capable of inhabiting politically a world without foundations.

Of all the post-positivist approaches ‘of an anti-foundational kind’, the one which consistently attempts to respond to this challenge without abandoning the pluralist position remains the least developed in contemporary International Relations. The approach I have in mind is ‘philosophical hermeneutics’ in its post-Heideggerian, ‘ontological’, form: not a theory of interpretation concerned with the epistemological travails of the knowing subject, but a theoretical engagement that raises the question: ‘what is the mode of being of that being that exists only in understanding?’¹⁵ The answer this approach gives goes as follows: ‘To recognize oneself (or one’s own) in the other and find a home abroad – this is the basic movement of spirit whose being consists in this return to itself from otherness’.¹⁶ That this neither entails ‘the secret return of the sovereign subject’ nor abandons subjectivity altogether is central for this mode of inquiry:

if it remains true that hermeneutics terminates in self-understanding, then the subjectivism of this proposition must be rectified by saying that to understand *oneself* is to understand oneself *in front of the text*. Consequently, what is appropriation from one point of view is disappropriation from another. To appropriate is to make what was alien become one’s own. What is appropriated is indeed the matter of the text. But the matter of the text

English as ‘Ethics and Politics’, in *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics, II* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991): 325-37. The Moscow lecture, however, contains an important, and characteristically Ricoeurian, attempt at mediating between the arguments normally believed to be irreconcilable, namely, those of John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), and Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defence of Pluralism and Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

¹³ Robert Cox, ‘Social Forces, States and World Orders: beyond International Relations Theory’, in *Neorealism and Its Critics*, ed. Robert Keohane (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986): 206.

¹⁴ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993): 108.

¹⁵ Ricoeur, ‘The Task of Hermeneutics’, in *Text*: 64.

¹⁶ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1993): 15. For a more precise positioning of philosophical hermeneutics vis-à-vis other post-positivist approaches, see Diane Michelfelder and Richard Palmer, eds, *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter* (Albany: State University of New York, 1989): 76.; Richard Bernstein, ‘What is the Difference that Makes a Difference? Gadamer, Habermas, and Rorty’, in *Philosophical Profiles: Essays in Pragmatic Mode* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986); Hans Herbert Kögler, *The Power of Dialogue: Critical Hermeneutics after Gadamer and Foucault* (London: The MIT Press, 1999); Ingrid Scheibler, *Gadamer: Between Heidegger and Habermas* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000).

becomes my own only if I disappropriate myself, in order to make the matter of the text be. So I exchange the *me*, *master* of itself, for the *self*, *disciple* of the text.¹⁷

Yet this response ought not to be mistaken for an answer of the 'what-had-to-be-demonstrated' kind. Rather, it relates the paradoxes of the state referred to earlier to the possibility of looking at the problem of world order as a whole. It is possible to understand world order as a text in which various boundaries and practices are seen as neither more nor less than inscriptions that, unlike more fleeting utterances of the face-to-face dialogical encounters, are potentially open for the investigation by anyone and not just the immediately present others. Consequently, the overall conditions of such order become open for deliberation despite the differences in one's situatedness vis-à-vis this or that practice or boundary.¹⁸ However, a subject whose identity is asserted *in front* of the world *confronts* the world and thus appears as estranged from the world. This distinctively modern subject acquires the possibility of having a world-view at the expense of the experience of inhabiting a world thus viewed politically, at least in the sense in which the ancients practised the arts of their politics within the bounds of the *polis*: what used to be an arena for action becomes an object of contemplation and technological exploitation.¹⁹ Nor is it possible to bring the 'world' and 'politics' together the way the moderns brought together politics and the state, for their interpretation was predicated on the state's monopoly on politics enjoyed in separation from society and became problematic the moment state and society began to penetrate each other: 'What had been up to that point affairs of state became thereby social matters, and, vice versa, what had been purely social matters became affairs of state – as must necessarily occur in a democratically organized unit'.²⁰

It can be argued, in fact, was argued by Arendt in her study of totalitarianism, that what caused the grief of General Smuts in the closing days of the Paris Conference was not the ineptitude of a particular set of statesmen, even less so the incompetence of the new great power, but the rise of what Heidegger described as the decisively modern 'gigantic' which manifested itself through the appearance on the scene, in quick succession, of total war, the totalitarian state and weapons of potentially total destruction. In general, it transformed the localized contests of the past into the battle of world-views and, as far as politics was concerned, revealed itself in what Carl Schmitt still referred to in the late 1920s as only a polemical concept: the 'total state' which attempted to restore its monopoly on politics by

¹⁷ Ricoeur, 'Phenomenology and Hermeneutics', in *Text*: 37.

¹⁸ The emphasis on the potentially universal intelligibility of inscriptions is what, according to Ricoeur, differentiates his version of hermeneutics from that of Gadamer and also endows it with greater methodological precision and, once applied to social action, the possibility of the critique of ideology. See his 'Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology', in *Text*: 270-307. Among 'deconstructivists', Nancy recognizes the requirement of 'any-oneness' by differentiating 'politics', as 'the place of being-together', from intimate experiences of 'being-with', such as love; a distinction, again, rather similar to the one made by Oakeshott. *Sense*: 88-9.

¹⁹ Cf.: Martin Heidegger, 'The Age of the World Picture', in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977): 115-54.

²⁰ Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996): 22.

denying any autonomy to such ostensibly neutral realms as religion, culture, education or economy.²¹ Now, in the aftermath of September 11, we still ‘do not think at all if we believe we have explained this phenomenon of the gigantic with the catchword “Americanism”’.²²

Insofar as the age of the world picture is also the age of science, it is hardly surprising that among its immediate reactions to the crises of the two world wars was the establishment of academic departments meant to provide a systematic account of the world order. This engagement, however, soon brought about more frustrations than achievements. The mere scale of the subject involved assumptions even less warranted and abstractions even more violent than those that, already once applied to the state, proved to be incompatible with the standards of good science, either natural or social. The gap between the ambition (‘planning and calculating and adjusting and making secure’²³ on the global scale, that is, ordering the world picture) and the means for its fulfilment (science) only grew wider with the end of yet another battle of world-views, the Cold War.²⁴ The debates that followed saw a revival of interest both in Heidegger’s reorientation of philosophy towards the question of the modality of being and also in a similar gesture attempted by Schmitt in political theory:

It may be left open what the state is in its essence – a machine or an organism, a person or an institution, a society or a community, an enterprise or a beehive, or perhaps even a basic procedural order. These definitions and images anticipate too much meaning, interpretation, illustration, and construction, and therefore cannot constitute any appropriate point of departure for a simple and elementary statement.... All characteristics of [the state] receive their meaning from the further distinctive trait of the political and become incomprehensible when the nature of the political is misunderstood.²⁵

‘Revival’ may seem to be too strong a word in this context. In fact, the founders of the discipline, so-called ‘traditionalists’, were castigated by the ‘critics’ for their philosophical ineptitude and the discipline itself was presented as in need of re-introduction.²⁶ This criticism is itself disputable, if one concentrates not on the traditionalists’ conclusions but rather on

²¹ Ibid.: 22. Richard Wolin developed Arendt’s brief remark about Schmitt in his ‘Carl Schmitt, Political Existentialism, and the Total State’, *Theory and Society*, 1990, 4: 389-416. His thesis, however, is grounded in a very non-Arendtian suggestion that Schmitt’s endorsement of Nazism was inevitable in view of his Weimar writings. It is disputed in Chantal Mouffe’s *The Return of the Political* (London: Verso, 1993). For a different from Wolin’s assessment of Heidegger, see Mark Blitz, ‘Heidegger and the Political’, *Political Theory*, 2000, 2: 167-96. Also, what can be described as a Heideggerian critique of later Schmitt can be found in Nancy, *Sense*; and a Heideggerian critique of Heidegger himself – in Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger, Art and Politics: The Fiction of the Political* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1990).

²² Heidegger, ‘World Picture’: 135 and note 12, 153.

²³ Ibid.: 135.

²⁴ Cf.: Friedrich Kratochwil, ‘The Embarrassment of Changes: Neorealism as the Science of *Realpolitik* Without Politics’, *Review of International Studies*, 1993, 19: 63-80.

²⁵ Schmitt, *Political*: 19-20. In contemporary International Relations see Michael Dillon, *Politics of Security: Towards a Political Philosophy of Continental Thought* (London: Routledge, 1996); R.B.J. Walker, ‘International Relations and the Concept of the Political’, in *International Relations Theory Today*, eds Ken Booth and Steve Smith (Cambridge: Polity, 1995): 306-27; Louiza Odysseos, ‘Dangerous Ontologies: The Ethos of Survival and Ethical Theorizing in International Relations’, *Review of International Studies*, 2002, 28: 403-418.

²⁶ Cf.: Jim George, *Discourses of Global Politics: A Critical (Re)introduction to International Relations* (Boulder: Lynn Reinner, 1994).

what was once described as their disposition to combine happily ‘traditions and theories normally not able to relate to each other’.²⁷ It is possible to argue that this eclecticism resulted not so much from their theoretical unscrupulousness but from a rather desperate search for theoretical alternatives, which at least some of them believed to be ‘the justification for entering into the business of political philosophy to begin with’ but which they also believed to be almost an impossibility ‘in a hopeless political situation’.²⁸ Making such an argument properly would be a separate engagement in the history of ideas, partly already undertaken, chiefly with the aim of (re)drawing a distinction between the traditionalists and the rationalists who succeeded them.²⁹ What I want to indicate is another distinction, less obvious perhaps and certainly more ambiguous, between the classical approach and traditionalism.

At the heart of this distinction is the difference between the traditionalist concern with the ‘autonomy of politics’ and the classical focus on the ‘nature of international society’.³⁰ The distinction is not watertight and one would be hard pressed if asked to box individual thinkers into one category or the other, not least because the two questions – What is politics? and What is political order? – are difficult to separate. Yet drawing this distinction may be a worthwhile engagement precisely when the order in question is that of a world turned into picture and thus made hostile to political action and therefore political theorizing. It will further gain in importance if viewed in the context of established theoretical traditions transcending the confines of a separate discipline. On the one side of this conditional divide, it is possible to locate thinkers, heavily indebted to the Continental tradition of political theorizing, for whom politics (often under the name of ‘diplomacy’) was a means by which to respond to the claims of ‘absolute war’ (Raymond Aron), revolutionary drive for ‘absolute security’ (Henry Kissinger) or the hegemonic subordination of politics to ethics already conflated with economics (E.H. Carr). On the other, one is likely to find those who, in line with the British tradition of pluralism, which never placed much stress on the state/society distinction to begin with, tended to understand the state as one association among others and did not assign to politics any special status.³¹ Characteristically, the latter are especially concerned with distinguishing themselves from the ‘realism’ of Hobbes for which purpose

²⁷ Ole Wæver, ‘International Society – Theoretical Promises Unfulfilled?’, *Cooperation and Conflict*, 1992, 27: 121.

²⁸ Hans Morgenthau, ‘Hannah Arendt on Totalitarianism and Democracy’, *Social Research*, 1977, 44: 131.

²⁹ Cf. Alastair Murray, *Reconstructing Realism: Between Power Politics and Cosmopolitan Ethics* (Edinburgh: Keele University Press, 1997); Tim Dunne, *Inventing International Society: A History of the English School* (London: Macmillan, 1998).

³⁰ The classic statement of the ‘traditionalist’ position, in this view, is Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: A. Knopf, 1973); the ‘classical’ questions are articulated in Martin Wight, *International Theory: The Three Traditions*, eds Brian Porter and Gabriele Wight (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1991).

³¹ Perhaps exemplary statement along these lines is Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1977).

Grotian 'rationalism' (conspicuously similar to Humean empiricism) is postulated as an alternative.³²

This is where Collingwood and Oakeshott enter the picture. Unmistakeably English in their theorizing, both are open to 'foreign' influences; both reach out to Hobbes and his 'absolutist' vision of politics which they then place into the context of a radically pluralist conception of human experience generally. What emerges out of such bringing together of 'traditions and theories normally not able to relate to each other' is an idea of mediation short of which, according to Collingwood, there are 'not so many independent political agents, as the pluralist thinks, but so many warring factions, whose mutual hostility only serves to show that none of them has risen to the level of political action' (EPP 108).

Unlike Schmitt, who, having defined the political, mapped it back, as it were, onto actually-existing states, Collingwood, having raised the question of the location of the 'absolute state', whose duty it is to mediate between the conflicting interests of the various associations, responded as follows: 'On earth, certainly; yet not visible in the outward form of parliaments and kings' (106). Like Schmitt, Oakeshott was interested in disentangling Hobbes the natural scientist from Hobbes the artist.³³ But whereas Schmitt's aesthetization of politics culminates in the decision on exception/exclusion so that Hobbesian 'silence of the law' emerges as a rupture in the rule-governed 'everydayness' of the bureaucratic routine, Oakeshottian 'poetry' appears as the critical ideal intrinsic to the day-to-day customary conduct. It is true that 'a rule of life (unless the life has been simplified by the drastic reduction of the variety of situations which are allowed to appear) will always be found wanting unless it is supplemented with an elaborate casuistry or hermeneutic' (R 473). It is also true that such casuistry alienates one from 'a world dizzy with moral ideals' in which the more one thinks about conduct the less one knows 'how to behave in public or in private' (481), so that the dominant disposition of the age becomes that of prosaic regularity (479). Yet all this calls not for the denial of rules, ideals or criticism in favour of 'organic' custom, but rather for the critical elucidation of ideals appropriate for the rule-governed customary moral conduct. The choice is not between thinking and acting, nor even between knowing-what and knowing-how, but rather between knowing in advance what ought to be done in any conceivable situation and knowing how to think *when acting*.

Thus, although the traditionalism I have in mind may indeed be distinguished from the classical approach by its stronger emphasis on the manner of ordering the world, as opposed to the 'classical' concern with the world's order, the two cannot be separated unconditionally.

³² For a recent critique of this classification, see Jens Bartelson, 'Short Circuits: Society and Tradition in International Relations Theory', *Review of International Studies*, 1996, 22: 339-60 and Richard Tuck, *The Rights of War and Peace: Political Thought and the International Order from Grotius to Kant* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

³³ See John McCormick, 'Fear, Technology, and the State: Carl Schmitt, Leo Strauss, and the Revival of Hobbes in Weimar and National Socialist Germany', *Political Theory*, 1994, 22: 619-52; and Oakeshott's review of Strauss (HCA 141-58). Symptomatically, Oakeshott's study of the ideologies of the inter-war Europe was followed up by his famous introduction to Hobbes.

But if some confrontation with the world indeed constitutes, at least in part, the reality in which we live, then 'all efforts to escape from the grimness of the present into nostalgia for a still intact past, or into the anticipated oblivion of a better future, are vain'.³⁴ And in this sense, 'neotraditionalism', meaningful, to be sure, only within a highly localized context of International Relations, is different from the classical (or 'neo-classical') approach with its tacit by-passing of the present by way of projecting a distant medieval past, for example, into an uncertain 'neo-medieval' future.³⁵

If this is a negative outline of 'neotraditionalism', then positively it asserts the availability of tradition as a modality of experience which brings together custom and criticism, action and contemplation, in which the distinctively modern 'conviction that everything that happens on earth must be comprehensible to man' capable of re-ordering the world is transformed into comprehension proper, as a decision on inclusion, 'the unpremeditated, attentive facing up to, and resisting of, reality – whatever it may be'.³⁶ Or, following Paul Ricoeur, it can be understood as the 'dialectic of the recollection of tradition and the anticipation of freedom', which, in the final analysis, remain irreducible to each other:

Each has a privileged place and... different regional preferences: on the one hand, an attention to cultural heritages, focused most decidedly perhaps on the theory of the text; on the other hand, a theory of institutions and of phenomena of domination, focused on the analysis of reifications and alienations. Insofar as each must always be regionalized in order to endow their claims to universality with a concrete character, their differences must be preserved against any conflationist tendency. But it is the task of philosophical reflection to eliminate deceptive antinomies that would oppose the interest in the reinterpretation of cultural heritages received from the past and the interest in the futuristic projections of a liberated humanity.³⁷

Some such dialectics is at play in, and between, the texts of Collingwood and Oakeshott. Insofar as it reflects the predicament of the subject making sense of the world by facing up to it the best he can, it is possible to put by the 'world picture' and to concentrate instead on the exploration of one localized attempt to do just that. To be sure, this locality is only one piece in the kaleidoscopic picture of political theory which at the moment seems to be settling into a new pattern, 'international political theory'. Similar movement is occurring in International Relations. In this situation, the task, as I see it, consists not in making sure that all the right pieces fall into the right places (for how can one ever be sure of that?) but in finding free spaces amidst mutually obtrusive discourses; that is, in finding alternatives in what may seem

³⁴ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London: Harcourt, 1976): ix.

³⁵ The immediate reference here is to the 'neo-classical constructivism' of John Ruggie which develops the 'neo-medievalism' theme of Bull (Cf.: Ruggie, 'Territoriality and Beyond: Problematizing Modernity in International Relations', *International Organization*, 1993, 47: 139-74; Bull, *Anarchical Society*: 254-94). More generally, it concerns the pervasive 'second-best' character of the 'classical' conception of international society in its pluralist version (Chris Brown, 'International Theory and International Society: The Viability of the Middle Way?' *Review of International Studies*, 1995, 21: 183-96) which, in my view, is only a reflection of the second-best character of the 'classical' present judged by comparison with a better past and, hopefully, a brighter future.

³⁶ Arendt, *Totalitarianism*: viii.

³⁷ Ricoeur, 'Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology', in *Text*: 306-7.

to be an exceedingly cluttered situation. Thus the modality of my argument, as far as Collingwood's and Oakeshott's texts are concerned, is not so much 'criticism' or 'commentary' as 're-arrangement', while its individuality is not the starting point but, hopefully, the outcome of this re-arrangement: its 'fit' into yet another pattern, already cultivated by others, namely, that of international political theory.³⁸

³⁸ To be more precise, a 'free space' I am looking for within international political theory can be delineated as follows. The analysis of Collingwood's and Oakeshott's texts helps to bridge the unnecessary schism which exists between such 'classical' applications of them as those of Jackson and Nardin on the one hand and the 'critical' work of David Boucher, *Political Theories of International Relations: From Thucydides to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) and N.J. Rengger, *International Relations, Political Theory and the Problem of Order: Beyond International Relations Theory?* (London: Routledge, 2000) on the other. This is possible insofar as this analysis provides a 'political' companion to the 'constitutional' analysis of international society of Bull in his *Anarchical Society*. At the same time, it is a 'conservative', and also 'English', counterpart to the 'revolutionary' and 'Continental' development of Heidegger's critique in Dillon's *Politics of Security* where 'philosophical hermeneutics' appears not as an engagement in self-understanding but as an outward looking and mostly other-regarding encounter with alterity.

Another Case for the ‘Classical Approach’

This thesis outlines an idea of world politics as a distinct activity of thinking and speaking about the overall conditions of world order in terms of their desirability. World order is understood not as an arrangement of entities, be they humans, states or civilizations, but a complex of variously situated activities conducted by individuals as members of diverse associations of their own. This idea is advanced from within one such association, or context, contemporary International Relations, wherein it entails a metatheoretical position, neotraditionalism, as a rectification of the initial, ‘traditionalist’ or ‘classical’, approach after the advance of rationalism and subsequent reflectivist critique. Since loose talk about traditions does not constitute a tradition, neotraditionalism is presented by drawing on the resources of a well-trimmed manner of thinking and speaking about human associations, political philosophy, again, understood not as a body of doctrine but a context-specific human activity which can be experienced only through concrete exhibitions of individual intelligence. Therefore, throughout the thesis, a conversation on the place of politics in human experience is re-enacted. Its major participants are R.G. Collingwood and Michael Oakeshott. Its major achievement is the conditional unity of understanding and conduct, tradition and individuality, the subject of inquiry and the manner in which it is conducted. As such, this conversation is neither an antiquarian item nor a timeless ideal, but an instance of an association to be desired, and thus an example which, once comprehended, that is, both understood and included into one’s own context, becomes a historically enacted disposition for the activity of politics.

Before considering what Collingwood and Oakeshott had to say on this subject, the reasons for turning to their work should be outlined. In fact, there is only one such reason: a lot can be learnt from their style of thinking about politics, yet the matter of style itself, especially in relation to politics, is also the subject of inquiry and has to be looked into in some detail. The first three characteristics of this style are fairly general. First, although the manner of Collingwood's and Oakeshott's theorizing is in many respects identical, it still yields different conclusions as far as the subject-matter is concerned. This difference, rather than being a sign of some deficiency in the course, or in the manner, of reasoning, is the strongest possible vindication of this particular way of theorizing, best appreciated through an example given by Collingwood: 'If Hegel's influence on nineteenth-century historiography was on the whole an influence for good, it was because historical study for him was first and foremost a study of internal strains, and this is why he opened the way to such brilliant feats as that analysis of internal strains in nineteenth-century economic society which entitles Karl Marx to the name of a great historian' (EM 75).

Oakeshott, despite his dislike for Marxian conclusions, would have almost certainly agreed. Yet it was not just the conclusions of Marx that mattered, nor even such premises as the inversion of the Hegelian dialectics of matter and spirit or the substitution of the sociology of economics for the philosophy of right. The latter point, for example, was explored by Kenneth Waltz when he proposed a 'theory of international politics' which he wanted to be as systemic as Marxian theory, but political rather than economic and international rather than internationalist.¹ However, Waltz never tells us what international *politics* is, except that it is not economics and certainly not 'international relations'. He also insists that this theory has to meet the standards of the philosophy of science while explaining the operation of causal laws, and this is what distinguishes 'theoretical explanation' from 'philosophic interpretation'.² Oakeshott's major objection to Marx puts Waltz into the same category as Marxists: 'Explanatory "laws" of social change cannot generate political deliberation capable of reaching "correct" political decisions, or political discourse capable of proving decisions to be "correct" or "incorrect"' (R 92). A theory of politics construed in the idiom of causal explanations cannot grasp the character of its subject-matter and thus fails both as an interpretation and an explanation.

So the second point about Collingwood's and Oakeshott's style of theorizing concerns their continuous insistence on the Aristotelian point that the manner in which an inquiry is conducted should be congruent with its subject-matter. It would be wrong to say that this point was lost on the 'scientists' in International Relations. In the course of the second debate, the 'scientist' Morton Kaplan agreed on it with the 'traditionalist' Hedley Bull, but with a

¹ Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979): 20-29.

follow-up: 'Even if some matters of concern to international politics are profoundly philosophical, not all are'.³

For Collingwood, this, at best, condemns one to a very limited view of politics and, at worst, represents a brand of reactionary 'anti-metaphysics', again, best understood through a historical example. The nineteenth century conducted its international politics in accordance with political theories developed on the basis of the 'absolute presuppositions' of the eighteenth century, presuppositions which the eighteenth century itself could neither question nor even articulate. What it could not theorize was 'nationality', which was conceived as 'natural', exempt from change and therefore from philosophical questioning. The nineteenth-century came to understand 'nationality' as something which was making history 'because history has made nationality and is constantly destroying and remaking it'. That was a piece of metaphysics, the continuous engagement of uncovering historically the absolute presuppositions of different ages and peoples, and those, in the nineteenth century, who 'wanted to go on practising the political arts of the eighteenth century' were sheltering themselves 'behind the cry "No More Metaphysics" in order to kill and destroy with good conscience as the obsolete metaphysics of the eighteenth century bade them' (EM 99).

Thus the first two points, once taken together, amount to this: to understand politics in the manner appropriate to it is to understand politics philosophically, which also means dialectically. Yet, since the dialectical philosophy in question is always in question indeed, driven by its intrinsic strains and contradictions, talking politics in this manner involves one further, paradoxical, twist. The one who wishes to understand politics has to 'forswear metaphysics' (Oakeshott OHC 25). Now the individuality of Collingwood's and Oakeshott's approaches becomes more visible while method begins to thicken into style proper. The starting point here is Collingwood's reform of metaphysics and related threefold taxonomy of anti-metaphysics.

According to Collingwood, while being engaged with a particular subject-matter, one can reject the presuppositions currently held in philosophy because these are thrown into question, and thus can no longer be taken as absolute, by the investigation of this particular subject-matter; this would be the case of 'progressive anti-metaphysics' (EM 84-90). One can reject a philosophy because its presuppositions embarrassingly throw into question one's own, dogmatic, understanding of the subject-matter; 'reactionary anti-metaphysics' (90-100). One can reject metaphysics because one rejects any systematic engagement with any subject-matter thus rejecting 'science', as Collingwood understands it in his later work, and with it the

² Ibid.: 1-6

³ Morton A. Kaplan, 'The New Great Debate: Traditionalism vs. Science in International Relations', in *Contending Approaches to International Politics*, eds Klaus Knorr and James N. Rosenau (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969): 60.

idea of progress; 'irrational anti-metaphysics' which, in some cases, may be 'a confused mixture' of the other two kinds (83-4).

To some, not entirely unsympathetic, observers, irrational anti-metaphysics seemed to be a peculiar English malaise:

We have the same respect for Blake's philosophy (and perhaps for that of Samuel Butler) that we have for an ingenious piece of home-made furniture: we admire the man who has put it together out of the odds and ends about the house. England has produced a fair number of these resourceful Robinson Crusoes; but we are not really so remote from the Continent, or from our own past, as to be deprived of the advantages of culture if we wish them.⁴

It is one thing to acquire one's artificial environment from a decent shop, whether its preferred brand is 'rationalism' or 'metaphysics', it is quite another to stick to the 'odds and ends about the house'. As T.S. Eliot, to whom the observation just quoted belongs, argued further, Blake was not to blame for following the latter habit. The habit itself was rooted in English history, in the way in which the Reformation and Romanticism severed the link between tradition and individual talent. In the absence of this link, Blake could 'only' become a poet of genius, whereas Dante, having the resources of tradition at his disposal, was a classic.⁵ As always, there are exceptions, and, in another essay, Eliot claims Shakespeare to be a 'finer instrument' than Dante for the transformation of the body of philosophical thought available to him into poetic images: 'He also needed less contact in order to be able to absorb all that he required'.⁶

This echoes Oakeshott's appraisal of Burke's political philosophy as one that 'touches, but lightly, upon principle' (PF 81). However, what once emerged as a peculiar meeting point of British political practice and philosophical reflection was not immune from change and required continuous adjustment. This is one of Collingwood's and Oakeshott's major achievements: a fine balance between the appreciation of tradition and criticism, and also between the undeniable Englishness of their style and the openness of their thinking to the wide range of various 'foreign' influences, not necessarily discussed in detail, but thoroughly 'absorbed' and thus at once transformed and made available for the transformation of one's native discourse.

⁴ T.S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1951): 321.

⁵ Ibid.: 322.

⁶ Ibid.: 139. The appearance of Eliot in this context is not accidental, for he is part of that context which shaped the thinking of both Collingwood and Oakeshott. Shortly before the outbreak of World War I, he completed his doctoral dissertation on the philosophy of F.H. Bradley, the leading figure within the British Idealist movement and also the major influence on Collingwood and Oakeshott.

Characteristically, it is Eliot's work that Collingwood presents as the prime example of art proper which underpins his own theory of imagination. The connection between Eliot, on the one hand, and Collingwood and Oakeshott, on the other, is only beginning to attract the attention of political theorists. Cf.: Corey Abel, 'Oakeshott and Eliot on the Relation of Poetry, Philosophy, and Practice', a paper presented at the APSA annual meeting in Boston, 2002.

Thus the question of style gets related to that of universalism and particularism in one of its specific expressions, exploration and cultivation, be it the exploration and cultivation of a political practice or a 'dialect of the tribe'.⁷ It also brings in the issue of the relation between politics and language, or politics and poetics. The two were tentatively brought together by Oakeshott in a footnote to 'The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind' where he suggested that the Machiavellian longing for 'greatness' in politics was a transformation of the Aristotelian understanding of politics in terms of 'glory' appropriate for poetry, transformation which had something to do with the changing relationship between 'truth' and 'beauty' in European languages and eventually resulted in 'the eristic tones of the voice of science in conference with that modulation of the voice of practical activity we call "politics"' (R 493). Later, this suggestion grew into a political philosophy which did not attempt anything as impractical or ahistorical as the restoration of the Aristotelian vocabulary, but amounted to the reinvigoration of the discursive and practical resources available to us, and thus distinguished the individuality of the activity of modern European politics by dissociating it from *both* power and poetry while keeping in sight its relation to both.

Whether that was the case of exploration or cultivation is hard to tell. Perhaps, the two can be neither separated nor blended completely without severing those internal strains that move both inquiry and conduct. Perhaps, this is why Oakeshott dismisses all sorts of political oppositions, such as 'left' and 'right' or 'conservative' and 'liberal', but only for the sake of another distinction, between the 'intelligent explorers on foot' and those who 'prefer to go by air and at night, reaching their destinations in sleep' (OHC 318). The difference between these two modes of travelling is reducible neither to the issue of technology nor to the direction of movement, backward or forward. It hinges on the willingness to observe and remember the route by which one travels and to value it no less than any possible destinations or ports of call. Being itself a matter of style, it is of particular significance in the context of contemporary International Relations.

The timing of the emergence of the new academic discipline contributed to the shape it has acquired just as much as the peculiarities of the Anglo-American social milieu in which the first departments of International Relations were established. Since then, complaints about the shape of the discipline have never been in short supply and various adjacent provinces have been explored in view of seeking refuge or staging an escape. Far from dismissing all these explorations, I want to explore a somewhat different possibility: to return to the point, in place and time, where and when it all started 'and know the place for the first time', for what was once said about the world in which all of us are situated may well be true about the world of

⁷ The terms 'exploration' and 'cultivation' appear in Oakeshott's Harvard lectures, delivered in 1958, to denote two dispositions evident in both conduct and understanding (HL 30). The 'dialect of the tribe' is Eliot's expression in 'Little Gidding', *Collected Poems* (London: Faber & Faber, 1962): 218.

International Relations: 'There are other places which also are the world's end... but this is the nearest, in place and time, now and in England'.⁸

Reflection, however subversive, may still draw on the intrinsic resources of a given practice; anti-metaphysics, however progressive, does not need to invalidate every single judgement within the framework it questions, provided this framework still possesses within itself a standard for the evaluation of various judgements. Here, I believe, lies the most interesting, and distinctively Oakeshottian, way of forswearing metaphysics by turning to poetry as an instance of the unity of style and subject. So, in what follows, I shall, first, examine Oakeshottian forswearing of metaphysics in relation to Collingwood's understanding of science and progress, then against the background of the various modes of anti-metaphysics practiced in contemporary International Relations, and, finally, arrange the questions arising from this twofold examination in that order in which they will be addressed in more detail throughout the thesis.

Politics at the edge of history

From the Prologue to his first major book, *Speculum Mentis*, published in 1924, to the Preface to the *New Leviathan* written, in 1942, shortly before his death, Collingwood maintained that the sole task of philosophy consisted in helping individuals to conduct a vigorous practical life by becoming 'whole of heart and secure in their grasp on life' (SM 35), under conditions hardly propitious, when, forced to 'blow away the mists of [the interwar] sentimentalism', they found themselves with little guidelines or guidance as to what to live for (NL lx). The task of philosophy was to provide 'the means of living well in a disordered world' (EPP 174) which made philosophy not only thoroughly political but also 'world-political'. Oakeshott suggested the same: 'Probably there has been no theory of the nature of the world, of the activity of man, of the destiny of mankind, no theology or cosmology, perhaps even no metaphysics, that has not sought a reflection of itself in the mirror of political philosophy; certainly there has been no fully considered politics that has not looked for its reflection in eternity' (HCA 5).

Yet there is a puzzle here. Although Oakeshott's thinking was more explicitly focused on politics than that of Collingwood and, as he admitted on a number of occasions, this theme was with him nearly as long as he could remember (OHC vii), his first major contribution to political philosophy came only in 1946, when he was already in his mid-forties, in the form of the introduction to *Leviathan*, followed up by *Rationalism in Politics* only sixteen years later. Perhaps this prolonged silence was not without significance, for, in the introduction to *Leviathan* Oakeshott pauses to discuss the similar riddle of Hobbes' late start and distinguishes between those philosophers who 'allow us to see the workings of their minds'

⁸ Eliot, 'Little Gidding': 215; line-breaks are removed.

and those, like Hobbes, in whose writing 'nothing is in progress; there is no promise, only fulfilment', suggesting that this assertive finality was due not only to Hobbes' personality but also his context, the 'tradition of Will and Artifice' (HCA 8-10).

Insofar as Oakeshott himself belonged to the 'tradition of Rational Will', with Hegel as its figure-head, such absence of progress in his own thinking would have been out of character. Still it is interesting to note his admission that, for the most part, he had 'gone slowly in order to avoid being flustered' (OHC vii), and to compare it to Henry Jones' report on Collingwood's manuscript reviewed for Macmillan, in 1918:

I do not know any writer more frank. He cares not one whit to what extent he exposes his flanks to his critics, and makes statements which, taken by themselves, look either purely absurd or preposterously untrue. But that is only one side: on the other is the fact that these statements are *stages* or *steps* in the development of his main argument, half truths or sheer errors in which it is not possible to rest and which just compel a movement onwards to a wider truth.⁹

This comparison leads farther than just to the difference between Collingwood's and Oakeshott's personalities or the identity of their attempts at approximating their style of writing to the character of their enquiries. It points at the difference between Collingwood's and Oakeshott's situatedness within the Hegelian tradition, in fact, raises questions as to their belonging to this particular tradition. This difference is not to be likened to a tiny initial crack which, once found, can be worked out, through a series of deductive inferences, into an unbridgeable gap. It may rather be seen as an ineliminable mark of personality revealing itself at every new turn in the argument, every time from a new angle, being that internal strain that moves the overall conversation; what Hannah Arendt described as 'the distance which the space of the world puts between us', or what Eliot thus expressed in an imaginary conversation with a fellow-poet: 'compliant to the common wind, too strange to each other for misunderstanding'.¹⁰

In both of these images, some notion of sameness is conjoined with that of difference. Similarly, in Collingwood's account of the evolution of political theory, the Platonic *polis* is different from the Hobbesian state, and yet, in some respect, they are the same. The sameness is not that of a 'universal' of which both entities are instances but of a 'historical process, and the difference is the difference between one thing which in the course of that process has turned into something else, and the other thing into which it has turned' (A 61-2). At the same time, Collingwood's understanding of historical process puts to one side the possibility, still present in Hegel, of locating the driving force of history, either in the form of God, Nature or Reason, outside human life (IH 116-7). History is the self-knowledge of the mind which can be experienced only through concrete exhibitions of human intelligence.

⁹ Jones' text is available as an appendix to Collingwood's *Essays in Political Philosophy* (EPP 232).

The same move displaces the state, and politics in general, from the central position assigned to it by Hegel. On Collingwood's reading, Hegel unwittingly accepted the Kantian contention that all history was political history. For Kant, it was grounded in his distinction between moral action, as the thing-in-itself, and political action, as its phenomenal manifestation. Having repudiated the underlying distinction between phenomena and things-in-themselves, Hegel, according to his own logic, should have arrived at the idea of history as 'the history of absolute mind, i.e. art, religion, and philosophy' (121). Collingwood's further reformulation of this logic suggests that all history is the history of thought and as such the highest form of the self-knowledge of the mind available at the moment. Accordingly, philosophy is not an attempt at knowing beyond the limits of experience but is 'primarily at any given time an attempt to discover what the people of that time believe about the world's general nature.... Secondly, it is the attempt to discover the corresponding presuppositions of other peoples and other times, and to follow the historical process by which one set of presuppositions has turned into another' (A 66).

In *On Human Conduct*, Oakeshott distances himself from Hegel on the same issue but in a different manner, starting with the point that, in his reading of Hegel, history is moved neither by an 'impersonal "force" loose in the universe' nor by Reason, but 'a procedure of "criticism" (dialectic)' which, 'if it may be said to exist anywhere', exists 'in the characters, the adventures, the works, and the relations of human beings' (OHC 257). Unlike Collingwood, he examines the overall system of Hegel's thought through the prism of his *Philosophy of Right* rather than *Philosophy of History*. Here as well the adventures of free-willing persons overflow, as it were, the locality of their immediate field of action resulting in the recognition of an overall context to which all these localities belong. Only now it is not a historical process but a constellation of the considerations of right conduct recognized, first, as 'a manifold of considerations instrumental to the satisfaction of wants, whatever they may be', and further, as 'a system of known, positive, self-authenticating, non-instrumental rules of law' (261). The former of these understandings of the Hegelian Right Oakeshott presents as an 'instrumental practice', and human association in terms of such practices (Hegelian 'civil society') as 'enterprise association'. The latter understanding becomes 'moral practice', and association in its terms (Hegelian 'state') 'civil association'.

The reason for such redefinition lay in Oakeshott's intention to reinvigorate what he believed had become an increasingly stale discussion of the vocabulary of the modern European state, but also in the misgivings he had about Hegel's interrelated understandings of the state and history. In accordance with Hegelian metaphysics, an association in terms of the recognition of the non-instrumental rules of law could not be deduced by thought from the

¹⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958): 242; Eliot,

mere existence of free-willing individuals 'unless there existed in the world some actual intimation of it' (262). This Hegel found in the European state emerging in the wake of the French Revolution. The emergence of such states also had to be part of a progressive historical development so that its recognition through a procedure of criticism could count for an advance in human self-understanding and thus an advance in human freedom. So Hegel's account of history was an account of the development of European political institutions towards the idea of the state, and it 'was based upon the belief that the human self-recognition implicit in this mode of association was an already recognizable (though yet incomplete) historic achievement' (263).

Not that this belief was implausible, yet, according to Oakeshott, it appeared somewhat far-fetched when assessed against what evidence obliged us to believe. Further, this evidence, invariably located in the practical present, cannot possibly warrant the certainty of one's conclusions about the past and the future, for the moment both are presented as being fixed, they become independent from the individual human intelligence by which the procedure of criticism is constituted, and the procedure itself is then bound to appear outside human life indeed. This danger was implied in the tension between Hegel's philosophical assumption of the unity of experience and his attempt at understanding experience historically. History owes its basic presupposition to something beyond itself, and what is presupposed is history's ability to separate its individuals/events from their environment/context. Without such presupposition no historical understanding would be possible. This presupposition, however, can be neither made nor questioned by history itself: 'History begins with a world of presupposed individuals, but in the attempt to make it coherent, to make it more of a world, there is a constant temptation to abandon the terms of the presupposition.... Historical experience, like all abstract experience, is always on the verge of passing beyond itself' (EIM 122).

Thus Collingwood's and Oakeshott's disagreements with Hegel, stated differently, amount to the same thing, both recognize a tendency for postulating some form of external reality implied in the Hegelian understanding of history. Yet, because this diagnosis is arrived at by different routes, suggestions as to the possible remedy differ. Whereas Collingwood calls for the enlargement of the scope of historical inquiry, Oakeshott attempts to establish its limits. For Collingwood, metaphysical inquiry conditionally culminates in establishing the identity of 'the historical process by which one set of presuppositions has turned into another'. For Oakeshott, this is more than we can achieve but also more than we need: 'For me the end of all experience is to distinguish individuality' (EIM 151), which, again, can be done only conditionally. For Collingwood, philosophy is approximated to history, that of the absolute

'Little Gidding': 217.

presuppositions, and historical understanding becomes the mode of inquiry appropriate not only for history or practice but also for science. For Oakeshott, understanding experience historically puts inverted commas around such words as 'scientifically', 'practically', but also 'historically', to indicate the conditionality of each mode of inquiry without denying their individuality by suggesting that 'all human utterance is in one mode' (R 488).

Thus Oakeshott agrees with Collingwood that each mode of inquiry involves a *scientia* as a systematic attempt at knowing. But what one is trying to know by way of an inquiry which is 'practical' or 'historical' is different from what one attempts to know 'scientifically', precisely because, historically, mankind have acquired a plurality of voices in which to express the various images of the world. So 'science', in Collingwood's own logic, is one particular thing into which *scientia* of a more monological primordial past has turned throughout history. Its method is not given or fixed once and for all, and its practitioners may well come to understand both the activity itself and its data as having histories. Yet, the way things stand, according to what evidence obliges us to believe here and now, this does not abrogate the character of 'science' as an activity concerned with a world in which, ideally, everything is independent from our practical desires and aversions and can be measured 'according to agreed scales' so that all measurements can be unambiguously communicated to everyone who takes the trouble of entering into the nature of the agreement (504-8). In this manner, 'science', no less than 'history', is only a voice in the overall constellation of discourses, the 'conversation of mankind'.

What Collingwood presents as historicism, which uniformly colours all forms of inquiry, Oakeshott identifies as conversability present in all the voices in this conversation: 'Each voice is at once a manner of speaking and a determinate utterance'. The manner of speaking and the utterance made in this manner cannot be separated. An utterance taken on its own and presented as a conclusion valid independently of the manner in which it was reached becomes a dogma. A manner of speaking presented as being appropriate for everyone is appropriate for speaking only to oneself, and when an attempt is made to impose one such manner onto the conversation, 'barbarism may be observed to have intervened' (492).

Paradoxically, but not surprisingly, Oakeshott's 'conversation' is as universal as Collingwood's 'historical process', and the paradox invites understanding and thus a philosophy. Such a philosophy may be regarded as a 'parasitic activity' that 'springs from the conversation,... but... makes no specific contribution to it' (R 491), but this does not make it any less systematic or disciplined. In fact, it is nothing else but an investigation of the presuppositions of the various universes of discourse and the overall constellation of them, that is, metaphysics as Collingwood understood it. Now forswearing metaphysics consists not in abandoning systematic reflection, *scientia*, but in the recognition that the one 'who swims too strongly in this sea is apt soon to find himself out of sight of his object' (495) and in

asking some very specific questions. For example: What do we mean by 'politics'? Is it a process of historical conversion of one practical condition into another, fuelled by the interaction among individuals? Or is it a conversation among individuals conducted in accordance with certain conversational habits acquired historically? These two positions are not mutually exclusive, but nor are they wholly compatible, and the choice between them is itself a matter of systematic reflection.

World politics: science, prescription or poetry?

So Oakeshott's forswearing of metaphysics has nothing to do with foreclosing on the possibility of systematic reflection. Insofar as it implies subjecting to a procedure of criticism anything that purports to be 'absolute', it has nothing to do with foreclosing on the possibility of subversive reflection. In this, it is not different from Collingwood's understanding of metaphysics as an inquiry in which there is no place for asking, 'how can you detect a presupposition in your neighbour's eye if you have a whole faggot of them in your own' (EM 63). We know anything at all because our understanding is conditional, and far from being the ground for denying the possibility of a systematic inquiry, this, according to Collingwood, impels one to abandon the eighteenth-century conception of science and to adopt the historicist one. Although Oakeshott objects to the imposition of a single idiom, be it 'historicism' or 'rationalism', onto all possible modes of inquiry, he does not reject the fact that both the subject-matter and the method of any inquiry are in the continuous process of becoming.

This, however, has implications for the understanding of 'progress', on which Collingwood's classification of anti-metaphysics hinges just as much as it does on his conception of science. Oakeshottian conversation, although conducted not to discover any truths, is also believed to be an 'achievement'. Thus, even if one chooses to forswear metaphysics by focusing on the meaning of 'politics', it is still important to decide whether the activity of politics involves a 'progression' or an 'achievement', and whether any of these are present in world politics. The latter question only gains in importance once naturalistic understanding of politics is ruled out. As Collingwood put it shortly before the outbreak of World War II:

If we want to abolish capitalism or war, and in doing so not only to destroy them but to bring into existence something better, we must begin by understanding them: seeing what the problems are which our economic or international system succeeds in solving, and how the solution of these is related to the other problems which it fails to solve.... It may be impossible to do this; our hatred of the thing we are destroying may prevent us from understanding it, and we may love it so much that we cannot destroy it unless we are blinded by such hatred. But if that is so, there will once more, as so often in the past, be change but no progress; we shall have lost our hold on one group of problems in our anxiety to solve the next. And we ought by now to realize that no kindly law of nature will save us from the fruits of our ignorance (IH 334).

In other words, some measure of conduct is needed. Collingwood's conception of it is closely related to his reform of metaphysics: 'Whether a given proposition is true or false, significant or meaningless, depends on what question it was meant to answer; and any one who wishes to know whether a given proposition is true or false, significant or meaningless, must find out what question it was meant to answer' (EM 39). From this an idea of scientific progress follows directly: 'Progress in science would consist in the suppression of one theory by another which served both to explain all that the first theory explained, and also to explain types or classes of events or "phenomena" which the first ought to have explained but could not' (IH 332).

This view, however, holds only with regard to a narrower view of science, not different from that of Oakeshott, so that progress is due to the existence of an agreement on the procedures for measurement. As Collingwood himself recognizes, the issue gets more complicated in the case of historical research, for example, for historians often cannot agree on, and sometimes remain ignorant of, the questions that various ages were facing. The distinction between 'enlightened' and 'dark' periods in history is only a distinction between historical periods illuminated by our own understanding of them through re-enactment and those that are not. While assessing social progress, one is confronted with the same difficulty. It is impossible to measure progress by the increase in the production of certain goods, for example, without knowing how this increase affected the whole way of life of a given community, and entering into an understanding of such a whole is beyond re-enactment, however rigorous (324-7).

So, already after the outbreak of World War II, Collingwood retracted some of his previously stated views without abandoning the major thread of his thinking. Now his formulation of the question-answer complex acquires an explicitly social form. Societies are held together by the practice of civility, so that anyone who seeks to better his or her condition can be sure of receiving a civil answer to a civil question as to how to do that. They are also in contact with their natural environment and their neighbours. Within this triadic pattern of interrelated activities appears a paradox. Particular societies, upheld by the recognition of their intrinsic diversity, happen to be incapable of recognizing otherness once confronted by nature or foreigners. In the former case, they are driven towards mindless technological exploitation. In the latter, strangers and *metics* are 'often treated with the utmost incivility; often, for example, murdered with impunity and a clear conscience even by peoples who enjoy a relatively high civilization'. In both cases, that which is not part of a society is treated as a thing to be dealt with by force (NL 35.25-35.66).

Collingwood's response to this hinges upon the distinction he draws between the activities of 'improving' and 'conserving': 'improving on what is handed down to us is far less important than conserving it' (36.33), for the continuation of this practice of handing down,

that is, tradition, is dependent upon, and also perpetuates, the spirit of agreement, this time social agreement. This contractual element is reflected in the image of the state. The state is a continuous polarized activity of interaction between two kinds of communities, the one within which social agreement is already achieved and the one where it still has to be brought about. Politics is the activity of conversion of the latter kind of community into the former, of non-agreements into agreements, in which the element of coercion is ineliminable, although it can take different forms, not all of them violent (25.11-25.59). This is underpinned by Collingwood's evolutionary conception of the self, grounded in his evolutionary conception of understanding as the self-knowledge of the mind. The mature self capable of entering into agreements with others evolves by learning to tame its desires through reason which, in turn, develops by learning to distinguish what is merely expedient from that which is right and these from that which is one's duty. The knowledge of the latter can be achieved only through historical understanding (15.1-17.83).

Thus the completeness of agreement within the truly social pole of the state is a reflection of the exactness of one's duty, itself a reflection of the relative completeness of historical self-understanding. Its counterpart in politics is the state conducting its relations with other states on the basis of its historical self-understanding as a community unified through the conversion of disagreements into agreements. Since such conversion is an impossibility among equals, and complete agreement is an impossibility among equals thus constituted, the best international politics can be is the conversion of disagreements into non-agreements (29.5-29.58).

All in all, a series of interrelated triads – utility-right-duty, economics-politics-ethics, disagreements-non-agreements-agreement – makes up the overarching one, man-society-civilization. Within each of them, the movement is progressive, according to the initial understanding of progression as comprehension in the double-meaning of understanding and inclusion. Knowing one's duty is knowing what is expedient and right and more. This 'more', by dialectically reconciling the claims of utility and right, converts a desiring animal into a unified duty-bound human being. In the case of 'civilization', it calls for a civilization which is universal. This drive is arrested within yet another triad – nature-society-foreigners – and barbarism intervenes. Here Collingwood's resort to tradition appears to be at odds not only with an idea of progress as an increasingly efficient exploitation of both nature and foreigners, but also with his own idea of progress in understanding.

Oakeshott did not write much about international relations. However, insofar as his overall argument was a continuation of Collingwood's it offers a conceptual vocabulary which can be applied to this region of human experience. But, first one needs to see in what exactly does Oakeshott's revision of Collingwood's position consist.

As far as the issue of social progress is concerned, Oakeshott shares with Collingwood the view that it is impossible to know different social conditions comprehensively enough to be able to draw comparisons on which to ground definitive practical prescriptions. He also agrees with Collingwood that, to be understood at all, social arrangements have to be understood historically. Yet, to be practically enjoyed, they need to be in constant competent use and cannot be abandoned at will for the sake of the contemplative re-enactment of past experiences, let alone the enactment of any radical plans for the future. What one has already learnt to enjoy is more valuable than whatever may still be enjoyed in the yet unknown past or in the unknowable future (R 407-37).

This, however, is only one disposition for attending to the world of practice. The other is more concerned with deliberate change. In the preliminary discussion of these two dispositions in European politics, Oakeshott labels them 'the politics of scepticism' and 'the politics of faith' and presents the modern European view of politics as 'the mean in action' in-between the two, suggesting also that it acquired its current shape in the ideological struggles of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when some of the most ambitious projects of the politics of faith started running on empty:

Faith had knocked up an impressive score, and its inning ended characteristically in hit-wicket. (The scorers, unaware of what had happened, went on chalking up the runs; faith, particularly in France, was believed to have 'a splendid future behind it'.) In the situation, however, it looked as if scepticism would take a mighty revenge. But not at all; the contest was adjourned for tea. And in the conversation that ensued, the political principle of the mean in action made its appearance (PF 122).

Later, Oakeshott presents the state as being a practical embodiment of the two historically acquired dispositions at once. This dualism is not due to the imperfections of the synthesizing process of civilization continuously off-set by the intervention of barbarism, as in Collingwood, but can be understood in terms of the dualistic character of rules, at once authoritative and prescriptive, or human utterances, characterized at once by the manner of speaking and by what is being said in this manner. As in Oakeshott's account of the conversation of mankind, it is the separation of the two that leads to the intervention of barbarism or dogmatism. What is usually referred to as 'politics' or 'government', is an amalgamation of a number of theoretically distinct activities with an overarching dualism of their own: such activities as legislation, adjudication and ruling are meant to ensure the continuous recognition of the authority of practices, whereas politics proper consists in deliberating these practices in terms of their desirability.

This contains a hint at a theory of international relations which distinguishes between the patterns of world-ruling, which may be qualitatively different from those of state-ruling indeed, and world-politics, the individuality of which is yet to be distinguished. It can be suggested, and the task of this thesis is to develop this suggestion in some detail, that

Oakeshott's own political theory, as it is presented in *On Human Conduct*, is not only a theory of civil association but also a theory of politics (if only as its 'secondary consideration' (MHC 356)) which stops short of discussing the character of world politics, although a lot of what is needed for such a discussion is outlined by Oakeshott in his account of the conversation of mankind.

The connection between the two discussions becomes clearer once it is noticed that, even when in his most sceptical moods, as in the piece written at the peak of the Cold War, Oakeshott never denies the existence, or the necessity, of meaningful criteria for the evaluation of social practices:

If one looks around the world today, the overheated imagination can find dozens of reasons for dismay, but if anything is certain it is that the collapse of our civilization will not come from any of the things which get into the headlines – not even from soil erosion.... When what a man can get from the use and control of the natural world and his fellow men is the sole criterion of what he thinks he needs, there is no hope that the major part of mankind will find anything but good in this exploitation until it has been carried far enough to reveal its bitterness to the full. This... is not an argument for doing nothing, but it is a ground for not allowing ourselves to be comforted by the prospect, or even the possibility, of a revolution. The voyager in these waters is ill advised to weigh himself down with such heavy baggage; what he needs are things that will float with him when he is shipwrecked (V 109-10).

Whereas the first part of this passage echoes Collingwood's despair with conduct driven by the criterion of use and control, the ending suggests the existence of the 'right' things to cling to. It is also similar to a passage in Collingwood's book written shortly before World War II:

We need not buy revolvers and rush off to do something drastic. What we are concerned with is the threatened death of civilization. That has nothing to do with my death or yours, or the deaths of any people we can shoot before they shoot us. It can be neither arrested nor hastened by violence. Civilizations die and are born not with waving of flags or the noise of machine-guns in the streets, but in the dark, in the stillness, when no one is aware of it. It never gets into the papers. Long afterwards, a few people, looking back, begin to see that it has happened.

Then let us get back to our business.... Here's our garden. It seems to need cultivating (PA 103-4).

The 'garden' Collingwood was referring to was art, and it is to 'poetry' that Oakeshott later assigns a special position in the conversation of mankind: 'a dream within the dream of life; a wild flower planted among our wheat' (R 541). What matters in this characterization is not only the difference between the 'flower' and the 'wheat' but also the inclusion suggested by 'among'. Poetry is characterized by Oakeshott as a performance, not limited to verse, in which it is impossible to separate the manner of speaking from what is being said. As an example of such unity, it plays the same role in his theory as the state did for Hegel: an actually existing intimation of a mode of human experience which is not really a 'mode' because the unity of the poetic image is not distorted, modified through theoretical abstraction. Unlike the Hegelian unity of experience which is, first, philosophically assumed and then shown to be brought into existence through historical progress, Oakeshottian poetry

is always in place as a historic achievement, and what is intimated in this achievement is not a future absolute redemption but a possibility of the current enjoyment of the ideal of absolute conversability.

Yet, although poetry is absolutely conversable, because its manner of speaking is inseparable from what is being said, it is also absolutely untranslatable because what is being said, poetic images, stop being poetic once put into constant use through imitation. Every translation, just as every new 'reading', if successful, results in a new instance of poetry, as unique as the 'original' was. In this sense, poetry represents what Eliot described as 'unity, but not universality' and posed as an alternative to the ongoing, and futile, philosophical attempts at 'identifying oneself with the Universe' or 'identifying the Universe with oneself', between which there is not much difference anyway.¹¹

This paradoxical character of poetry has its counterpart in Oakeshott's understanding of human conduct. Genuinely human conduct, as a reciprocal activity of questioning and answering, is situated in-between two modes of 'fabrication', the extraction of wished-for outcomes by force and the 'higher morality' of self-enactment in which the substantive wished-for outcome is not a response from one's fellow-beings but one's own character. In the former case, an attempt is being made to address everything and everyone in one manner, and that is barbarism. In the latter, one speaks, as it were, to oneself, attempting to achieve the unity of one's character. Such achievements involve a certain dogmatism but, insofar as they can only be intermittent and their intrinsic value is inseparable from the ongoing conversation to which one has to return, they can be likened to poetic images. Now their untranslatability is an invitation to others to take oneself on one's own terms or to go on with the tiresome negotiation of these terms (OHC 31-54).

To forswear metaphysics is to recognize the existence of a shadow-line which separates, however conditionally, the world of poetic images from that of politics, as a 'world inhabited by others besides ourselves who cannot be reduced to mere reflections of our own emotions' (R 436-7); and poetry, while included into the practice of civility already enjoyed, also provides a standard for the deliberation of this practice in terms of its desirability, that is, a criterion for the activity of politics. Far from signifying a resort to intuitionism and rejection of *scientia*, Oakeshott's 'poetry' is an expression of the same ideal of exactness as Collingwood's 'duty'. Only it is a kind of exactness which grants recognition to imperfection and calls for the plurality of utterance. Still, in virtue of its untranslatability, poetry points towards two specific experiences located outside genuinely political practices. The first is education. The second is tradition.

¹¹ Eliot, *Essays*: 139-40.

Neotraditionalism in International Relations

Without education there is no hope of ever recognizing the authoritative claims of poetry or any of the voices in the conversation of mankind. Thus, although Oakeshott's understanding of politics is at odds with Collingwood's contention that the 'life of politics is the life of political education' (NL 32.34), Oakeshottian civil association being possible only among persons already educated into the practice of civility, it nevertheless embraces Collingwood's 'conversion' as a precondition for its own 'conversation'. Secondly, insofar as poetry intimates undistorted, unmodified conversability, it intimates the unity of the conversation and therefore a 'procedure of criticism' which can be provisionally described as the procedure of adjudication among the various voices in the conversation; adjudication conducted in accordance with custom rather than a universal statute, called upon only once an 'intervention of barbarism' is alleged to have been already observed and only in order to deliberate the weight of this allegation so as to, through deliberation itself, uphold the practice of conversability. Such adjudication can only reveal itself through 'the characters, the adventures, the works, and the relations of human beings' and it can only be backward-looking. Still it is necessary to give it another name in order to avoid direct associations with legal practices and thus with the notion of legislation inappropriate for the conversation.

But what is the most appropriate name? Collingwood's later discussion suggests 'tradition', and so do Oakeshott's earlier works. However, towards the end of his career, Oakeshott abandoned the term (MHC 366). Further, there seems to be a number of specific reasons for rejecting 'traditionalism' when it comes to the conduct and understanding of international relations where it is marked with particular ambiguity. Thus, although Oakeshott refers to European state-conduct as a single, albeit multifaceted, historically identifiable practice, he is sceptical about its applicability to those societies outside Europe whose own practices of ruling are not touched by the genius of the Romans and the Normans and whose inhabitants are under no obligation to recognize such 'touching' as a blessing to begin with (OH 166). This points towards two possible attitudes to traditionalism in international relations, both of them negative. On the one hand, modern statecraft can be understood as threatening the practical artistry of traditional communities.¹² On the other, the practice of state-conduct appears as nothing more than a 'tradition' which lacks the critical resources of its own.¹³

¹² Cf.: Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need Virtues* (Chicago: Four Court, 1999).

¹³ This view is shared across the variety otherwise different approaches. Cf.: John A. Vasquez, *The Power of Power Politics: A Critique* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1983); James Der Derian, *On Diplomacy: A Genealogy of Western Estrangement* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987); John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples: With The Idea of Public Reason Revisited* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999).

In the context of International Relations theory, traditionalism may be seen as an example of irrational anti-metaphysics. Martin Wight, for instance, distinguished 'tradition' from 'theory' by claiming that, while there was no international theory, there were identifiable 'traditions of thought' in international relations. At the same time, international theory was distinguished from political theory, which constituted not only a tradition of speculation about the 'good life' but also a 'theory' proper, because the validity of its prescriptions could be assessed against the background of the continuous progressive change in domestic politics. In the realm of international relations, no such progress can be observed, therefore there is nothing to 'theorize'.¹⁴ From this one could draw the conclusion that the study of one particular form of human experience, international relations, has revealed the inadequacy of that mode of political theorizing which, by separating domestic and international practices, failed to address human experience in its complexity and interrelatedness. One could then reject this mode of theorizing by exposing its presuppositions, including those based on a particular understanding of social progress. This is what Collingwood did by stating his case for 'progressive anti-metaphysics'. Instead, Wight accepted the separation between the 'international' and 'political' and condemned international theory to the idiom of historical interpretation which, after all, provided a foundation for a 'theory' by offering a 'structure of hypothesis', but a theory more *modest* than that of naturalistic approaches.¹⁵

On the latter point, Hedley Bull, while advocating his 'case for the classical approach', was moving in a direction opposite to Wight's, insisting that 'the play of international politics' and 'the moral dilemmas to which it gives rise', that is, the subject-matter of International Relations, required an approach more *comprehensive* than anything that could be offered by the 'scientists' whose views of the discipline were too restrictive, so that whenever they succeeded 'in casting light upon the substance of the subject' it was by stepping beyond 'science', into the realm of the classical school with its reliance on historical understanding.¹⁶ However, the comprehensiveness of the classical approach culminated, for Bull, in the notion of judgement somewhat exempt from any systematic investigation on account of it being 'a rough and ready observation, of a sort for which there is no room in logic or strict science, that things are this way and not that'.¹⁷

It is on this point, among others, that later reflectivist critics responded that, despite its awareness of the work of such thinkers as Leo Strauss, Hannah Arendt, Collingwood or Oakeshott, International Relations traditionalism could not quite muster their language and

¹⁴ Martin Wight, 'Why is there no International Theory?' in *Diplomatic Investigations*, eds Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight (London: Allen & Unwin, 1966).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*: 33.

¹⁶ Hedley Bull, 'International Relations Theory: The Case for a Classical Approach', in *Contending Approaches*: 28.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*: 27.

turned it into its own 'hidden, ignored, or marginalized discursive dimension that speaks it but which it cannot speak'.¹⁸ To put it in Collingwood's terms, these were the absolute, that is, unarticulated and therefore unquestioned, presuppositions of International Relations traditionalism which prevented it from bringing its mode of inquiry in line with its understanding of the subject-matter, and while subject 'without style is barbarism; style without subject is dilettantism' (PA 299).

The disjunction between the style of theorizing and its subject is, again, visible in Wight's conceptualization of the 'three traditions', or rather two quite different classifications of them. On the one hand, 'realism', 'rationalism' and 'revolutionism' are distinguished in accordance with their images of 'international society' premised on three different conceptions of the self attributed to the state. The 'realist' state is driven by considerations of utility, that of 'rationalism' is constrained by existing conventions, the 'revolutionist' state is bound by universal moral law. On the other hand, traditions differ according to the way in which they approach the question, what is the nature of international society. The 'realist' is 'answering the question "What is?" by a description and classification of experience, and brushes aside the other kinds of question: "What is the essence of the matter?", and "What ought to be?", the metaphysical and the ethical questions'.¹⁹

These two, 'ontological' and 'methodological', taxonomies were never quite brought together by the mainstream of the English school, which accounts for the ongoing polemics between two different streams within it. The methodological one understands international society as an amalgamation of three distinct realities, the 'international system' of 'realism', the 'international society' of 'rationalism', and the 'world society' of 'revolutionism'. The ontological approach examines international society as a social fact which can be seen differently depending on the tradition, 'realism', 'rationalism' or 'revolutionism' in the second of Wight's meanings of them, from within which one is looking at it. Yet, on the metatheoretical level, both these approaches address their realities or social facts by way of description and classification, brushing aside the questions, what is the essence of these triadic metatheoretical constellations, or what ought they to be.²⁰

¹⁸ Jim George, *Discourses of Global Politics*: 42.

¹⁹ Wight, *International Theory: The Three Traditions*, eds Brian Porter and Gabriele Wight (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1991): 20-1.

²⁰ This distinction did not go unnoticed and was highlighted by Jennifer Welsh, for example, in her 'Edmund Burke and the Commonwealth of Europe: The Cultural Bases of International Order', in *Classical Theories of International Relations*, eds Ian Clark and Iver B. Neumann (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1996): 173-92, especially n. 6. The methodological stream has received its most comprehensive treatment in a series of publications by Richard Little and Barry Buzan culminating in their joint paper 'Why International Relations has Failed as an Intellectual Project and What to do About it', *Millennium*, 2001, 30: 19-39. The ontological investigations are continuously re-narrated by Tim Dunne; see, for example, 'Sociological Investigations: Instrumental, Legitimist and Coercive Interpretations of International Society', *Millennium*, 2001, 30: 67-91.

This is not to say that these questions are not addressed elsewhere. Despite the variety of alternatives on offer, they too can be clustered according to Collingwood's classification of anti-metaphysics. Thus metatheoretical rationalism ignores the challenge of historicism by committing itself to the view of reality unmodified by reflection (reactionary anti-metaphysics). Reflectivism, far from being homogeneous in its reaction to historicism, is unified in its recognition of the limitations of that mode of theorizing which refuses to recognize the challenge in the first place (progressive anti-metaphysics). Both tend to discard International Relations traditionalism as a 'confused mixture' of their own positions.²¹

To these specific reasons for discouraging references to traditionalism in International Relations a more general point could be added:

In English writing we seldom speak of tradition, though we occasionally apply its name in deploring its absence.... Seldom, perhaps, does the word appear except in a phrase of censure. If otherwise, it is vaguely approbative, with the implication, as to the work approved, of some pleasing archaeological reconstruction. You can hardly make the word agreeable to English ears without this comfortable reference to the reassuring science of archaeology.... Yet if the only form of tradition, of handing down, consisted in following the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind or timid adherence to its successes, 'tradition' should positively be discouraged.²²

Still, on closer examination, is this point really general enough? As Collingwood put it in a discussion of language, to apply a term theoretically is to speak 'not so much English as the common tongue of European peoples' (PA 274), and to be able to 'speak' practically is to go beyond the limited understanding of language as verbal expression and to accept the view that 'the dance is the mother of all languages', precisely as a rejection of an '*a priori* archaeology which attempts to reconstruct man's distant past without any archaeological data' in favour of the totality of human expression located in the present (246). Put differently, by limiting his or her understanding of a term or a pattern of conduct to its familiar expression within one particular context, be it 'writing', 'English', or 'international society', one confines oneself to a description and classification the terms of which are set by the particularity in question, instead of putting into question the particularity itself.

Similarly, a closer look at the reasons for rejecting traditionalism in International Relations reveals a commitment to a particular *shape* of an association, when 'tradition' is either opposed to or associated with the state or with a 'school' and thus defined by this opposition or association. Those who assign positive value to 'tradition' may deny it to state-conduct, or those who believe state-conduct to be 'traditional' may refuse to recognize the value of 'tradition', but both may do so either before defining what 'tradition' is or by defining it in a way which disregards the particularity of the situations in which states and 'traditional

²¹ Jim George's charge against the 'backward discipline', cited in n. 19, is perfectly matched by Kaplan's reprimand of 'the traditionalist view of philosophy as elegant but undisciplined speculation'; in 'Traditionalism vs. Science': 61.

communities' may be interacting with each other. In the same manner, theoretical traditionalism does not need to be associated exclusively with one group of thinkers or another only because this group used the term more often than others.

Oakeshott's abandonment of 'tradition' may be read as a move away from the shape of different practices towards 'practice' as a mode of human relationship.²³ However, such reading would repeat what Oakeshott himself criticized in Collingwood's expansion of the meaning of 'science'. There is some form of *phronesis* in every human activity, but to distinguish the individualities of the practices of a 'scientist' and a 'politician', for example, one needs to distinguish between their dispositions towards that which is practical in their engagements. One such distinction is repeatedly invoked by Oakeshott, the difference between solving problems and abating mystery. Thus, Hobbes, on Oakeshott's reading of him, while being a great philosopher, was not a scientist but rather an artist. As far as their relation to reality is concerned, both the artist and the scientist may be dreaming, but the genius of the former is to dream that he is dreaming, and 'it is this that distinguishes him from the scientist, whose perverse genius is to dream that he is awake' (HCA 160). One of Oakeshott's contemporaries, Iris Murdoch, saw the same, scientific, streak in the worlds created by those Continental existentialists who, like Oakeshott, recognized the importance of poetry but, unlike Oakeshott, rejected the possibility of experiencing it amidst 'our wheat': 'In these worlds there is ambiguity but there is no mystery.... This fact alone, that there is no mystery, would falsify their claim to be true pictures of the situation of man'.²⁴ Which brings one back to International Relations where similar calls for inhuman wakefulness can be heard on both rationalist and reflectivist sides.

Further, in *On Human Conduct*, Oakeshott no longer needs 'tradition' because he introduces the distinction between instrumental and moral practices, the latter being enacted and attended to historically, which significantly clarifies the earlier opposition between rationalism and traditionalism in politics. However, the possibility of enjoying a civil association, that is, the possibility of being associated civilly, rests on the double-pillar of authority and obligation specific to the European understanding of morality which, through the activity of law-making, can be transfigured into civility. In the much more diverse, and much less authoritative, context of international relations, 'civility' gets much more ambiguous while a hasty retreat from 'civil' to 'practical' endangers most of the distinctions carefully drawn by Oakeshott on the way from 'tradition' to 'civil association'. Last but not least, in the context of International Relations, traditionalism has a history, and thus a

²² Eliot, *Selected Essays*: 13.

²³ In a sense, this is what Terry Nardin's reworking of Oakeshott's 'civil association' into the 'practical association' of states implies.

meaning, of its own. It may be not the clearest of meanings, but taking the inadvertence of past utterances into one's stride is part and parcel of what Oakeshott understands by 'civility'.

What may be presented as an alternative, specific to the context of International Relations and capable of grasping the practical character of tradition while distinguishing practices that are traditional from those that are not, is an idea of tradition based on the distinction, made by the Romans in their discursive practices, between a city (*civitas*) and Rome (*Urbs*), of which every Roman city had to be a reflection, modified by the Oakeshottian shift of emphasis from a particular expression of an association ('the state') to the mode of association ('civil association'). Tradition can be understood as an abstract idea of human association, itself the activity of being associated in a particular manner, which finds its concrete expressions in, and can be experienced only through, the variety of actually existing associations different in their content and context. Thus divorced from the foundational overtones present in the self-understanding of the Romans ('you are what you are only within the bounds of the *civitas*'), tradition gets closer to a more peregrine idea of the Greek *polis* ('the *polis* is where you are'). On the other hand, whereas the abstract idea of *polis* predetermined the political self-understanding of its members, the *polites*, to partake of the idea of tradition one first has to learn the practice of civility, just as learning to be *civis* was anterior to becoming a citizen of a *civitas*. 'Tradition... cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour'.²⁴ But once it is obtained, one also acquires 'not merely a model for a particular occasion, but the disposition to recognize everything as an occasion' (Oakeshott V 62) and thus finds oneself 'in the company of thinkers and statesmen who knew which way to turn their feet without knowing anything about a final destination' (153). And this is one way of being 'whole of heart and secure in [one's] grasp on life', that is, one way of living well.

So education and tradition are brought into view and related to the activity of world politics concerned not merely with inhabiting 'a solid world' of particular associations, 'each with its fixed shape, each with its own point of balance' (Oakeshott R 436), and yet each recognized as an occasion, but with living well in this world of our making. Accordingly, International Relations, as an association of those disposed to teach and learn how to live well in a thus ordered world, is a passage in the conversation of mankind, and its contribution to this conversation consists in the interpretative understanding of the global political order,

²⁴ Iris Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997): 115.

²⁵ Eliot, *Selected Essays*: 14. Actually, this distinction between the Greek and the Roman understandings of 'civility' is explored in connection to Eliot's and Ezra Pound's different conceptions of 'tradition' by Jean-Michel Rabaté, 'Tradition and T.S. Eliot', in *The Cambridge Companion to T.S. Eliot*, ed. A. David Moody (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994): 215. A similar, although differently inspired, distinction is drawn by Arendt, 'What Is Authority?', in *Between Past and Future* (London: Penguin Books, 1977): 91-141.

world order, as a shifting pattern of situated activities, each a contribution itself and not merely to the world order, thus understood, but to the overall conversation.

Needless to say, in such understanding, International Relations seems to be verging beyond itself in an attempt to transform both itself and the world into a pattern which is more coherent. This is an elusive quest. Absolute coherence is not to be found anywhere, not in any historical process, not in the conversation of mankind, not in some other, perhaps more fortunate, academic discipline such as political theory; except maybe for the occasions of poetry, as instances of the unity of subject and style, and also historic achievements, whose counterpart in political thought is 'the still centre of a whirlpool of ideas which has drawn into itself numberless currents of thought, contemporary and historic, and by its centripetal force has shaped and compressed them into a momentary significance before they are flung off again into the future' (Oakeshott HCA 8).

A place for poetry

The subject, then, is world politics, as approached from within International Relations as a way of thinking and speaking about world order. The style appropriate for such thinking and speaking is that of political philosophy, not as a body of doctrine, or an *a priori* 'tradition', immune from change or the possibility of subversion, but an ongoing activity that can be experienced and enjoyed only in its concrete exhibitions, of which the thinking of Collingwood and Oakeshott is but one. The task is to achieve the unity of style and subject or, more plausibly, to indicate a possibility of such unity, as a standard for the evaluation of both style and subject, within International Relations and what constitutes, in this view, its own subject-matter. Since such unity, 'poetry', is meaningful inasmuch as it offers the possibility of the deliberation of the conditions of world order in terms of their desirability, world politics, the task is to explore the connection between the two, to understand the activity of world politics in its relation to poetry. The point of this exploration is not to deny the connection between world politics and, say, 'the struggle for power', nor to imagine what happens or what might have happened once power is taken out of the picture. The point is to assert that there are spaces in the picture which are not dominated by power. Accordingly, the disposition is not to discourage, to escape, to transcend or to tame 'power-politics', for there is no such thing as power-politics. There is power, there is politics and there is much else. As there is poetry. So there ought to be some place for it. 'Here is our garden. It seems to need cultivating'.

The cultivation will proceed through the following steps. First, the identity of the language of Oakeshott's and Collingwood's thought will be distinguished by way of outlining a definition of politics. The conclusion of this stage, however, will identify the difference in their thinking about human action and human experience in general. This will be approached,

in the next step under the heading of 'poetry'. The task here is to locate the 'critical' aspects in Collingwood's and Oakeshott's theorizing and to see how these enable the critique of the modern European state. The latter theme will be in the focus of the third stage where Oakeshott's and Collingwood's discussions of 'civilization', or the practice of civility, will be examined so as to be to discussed further, in the next step, against the background of some contemporary accounts of world order. In this manner the vocabulary of contemporary International Relations will be integrated into the language of Collingwood's and Oakeshott's conversation. Thus 'world order' will emerge as an embodiment of two historically acquired dispositions at once, towards a transactional association of states, as enterprise associations ('international system'), and a *polyverse* of states, as genuinely political associations ('international society'). These will be supplemented with an idea of 'tradition', as mode of existence of 'world society'. Finally, neotraditionalism, as a metatheoretical position alternative to both rationalism and reflectivism, will be outlined, and the place of political theorizing within International Relations ascertained.

Politics

Politics is a kind of human activity. Few, if any, would seriously quarrel with this. To understand any human activity, Oakeshott once told his students, is 'to discern the character of the activity itself and not merely to classify its products'; that is, to establish the place of a given activity 'on the map of human activity in general' (HL 15). Here agreement is less likely, especially so once it comes to the possibility of world politics. The task of this chapter is to explore what is meant by politics as a human activity.

The place of politics, it is often believed, is within a bounded association known in modern history as the sovereign state. The modern state, Collingwood seems to agree, 'established itself as *par excellence* the political organ of society', and 'those who would banish sovereignty as an outworn fiction are really only trying to shirk the whole problem of politics'. Sovereignty, however, 'is merely a name for political activity' and, as such, 'does not belong to any determinate organization. It belongs only to that political life which is shared by all human beings' (EPP 106). Now, it seems, all politics is world politics, 'and not to recognize the claim of politics' of this kind is to disclose, in Oakeshott's words, 'some defect of character or sensibility' (RP 91). This was written with clear intention of setting a limit to the claims of politics; but also at a time, in 1939, when Oakeshott referred to politics as 'a second-rate form of human activity... at once corrupting to the soul and fatiguing to the mind'.¹ In *On Human Conduct*, it is an activity 'as rare as it is excellent' (OHC 180).

¹ This is how Oakeshott characterized politics in his introduction to Hobbes' *Leviathan* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1946): lxiv. The line was dropped from later editions.

This change of attitude had nothing to do with some sudden, inexplicable improvement in the quality of political action in the years that separated the two statements. Rather, Oakeshott took politics out of the context of the actually-existing European states and their analogues elsewhere and placed it into a different one, that of civil association. In fact, 'politics' is one of the very few words from the vocabulary of the modern European state for which Oakeshott did not substitute some term of his own so as to distinguish them from their current counterparts too often 'mistaken for the characteristics of historic and equivocal associations' (109).

This does not mean that civil association or politics are treated in separation from *any* locale. No human action can be understood this way:

The overt actions of men take on a certain intelligibility when we recognize them as the ingredients of a disposition to behave in a certain manner, the dispositions of conduct in turn become understandable when they are recognized as the idiosyncrasies of a certain human character, and the human character becomes less mysterious when we observe it, not as a general type or as a possibility, but in its place in a local context. And the process may be continued in the gradual expansion of this context in place and time (HL 3-4).

Once it comes to the understanding of politics, the limits to such gradual expansion are set by the circumstances to which a certain view of the office of government is appropriate:

And the chief feature of these circumstances is the appearance of subjects who desire to make choices for themselves, who find happiness in doing so and who are frustrated in having choices imposed upon them.... All that could make such a political theory unintelligible would be the demonstration that subjects of this disposition have never existed; and all that could make such a political theory of merely historic interest would be the recognition that subjects of this sort do not now exist (84).

Thus the theory of politics in question appears in the first instance as limited to the conditions of modernity as these took shape in Europe. However, these limits themselves are the proper subject of inquiry, and here, anticipating a great deal of what was to become the central concern of contemporary International Relations, Collingwood attributed them to the failure of liberalism 'to affect international relations', so that the 'unnatural union of internal liberalism with external illiberalism... led by way of international anarchy' to the desuetude of liberalism as such and raised suspicions about the character of subjects disposed to understand human action in terms of their own individual choices. Yet this unnatural union was only an outward expression of the failure to affect the inner life of human associations. This was due to a more profound boundary, drawn both in theory and practice, 'between the public affairs of the community as a whole and the private affairs of its members' (EPP 185). Therefore political theory had to address itself to the conditions of international anarchy and not only domestic order, but to do so it had to begin not from the study of interstate relations but from its own first principles most of which 'had been distilled from the body of Christian practice by a long chain of thinkers' and then 'bottled and labelled' for further theoretical use (189).

In other words, certain political practices do stop at certain manmade borders, but to understand why they do so, one has to take Hume's advice and, 'instead of taking here and there a castle or village on the frontier, march up to the capital or centre' of all understanding, 'to human nature itself'.² To be sure, as Collingwood once remarked, rather angrily, it will take 'the most pedantic kind of imbecile' to attempt to tackle comprehensively such questions as 'What is man?' or 'What is society?' as 'a mere preliminary to a question in practical politics' (227), and some such objection to metaphysics informs one of the recurrent themes of the classical approach where International Relations is seen as a 'craft discipline' which does not call 'for knowledge of the philosophy of science'.³ Yet Collingwood made his remark in a state of emergency while recognizing any 'permanent declaration of the state of emergency' as a 'genuine and absolute' threat to the kind of practical politics he was advocating (179). For Oakeshott, the virtue of studying politics in a university, and thus of having an academic discipline dedicated to such study, lay in the possibility of moving away from the manner of thinking and speaking practised by political actors themselves: 'If there is a manner of thinking and speaking that can properly be called "political", the appropriate business of a university in respect of it is not to use it, or to teach the use of it, but to explain it – that is, to bring to bear upon it one or more of the recognized modes of explanation', such as philosophy, history, but also science or mathematics (R 212).⁴ It is true that Hobbes' *Leviathan* or Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* may be more appropriate for the study of politics than Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, but their propriety consists not so much in their being dedicated to 'politics' as their subject but rather in their quality as the exemplars of the philosophical mode of thinking about this subject (213). And to be able to appreciate this quality, one has to know what it takes to think about politics in this manner.

Therefore before answering the main question of this chapter – What is the place of politics on the map of human activity generally? – it is necessary to address another one: What does it mean to think about politics philosophically? To be sure, the discussion of Collingwood's and Oakeshott's answers to both questions will be rather cursory, glossing over most of the differences which exist in their accounts of both philosophy and politics. The task, at this point, is to establish the identity of the language in which both thinkers speak, so as to see, in subsequent chapters, what difference this language makes once brought to bear upon the study of world politics.

² David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed. rev. by P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978): xvi

³ Jackson, *Covenant*: 91.

⁴ See also note 5 on page 213, where Oakeshott explicitly states that an 'opportunity may properly be taken' to think and speak about politics in the language of science, for example, but expresses some doubts as to the availability of a study of this kind that is 'even remotely suitable to be put before an undergraduate'.

Contemplation

A lot in contemporary debates in International Relations revolves around naturalism and corresponding divisions between outsider's and insider's stories. To take one step backwards, Terry Nardin addressed the issue long before it got onto the mainstream agenda by outlining two ways of understanding the balance of power. On outsider's view, the balance, as 'the work of nature', leads to an equilibrium as 'the result of a process, not the outcome of choice'. For the insider, the balance of power 'appears as a condition of international society that must be consciously pursued in order to be enjoyed'.⁵ In substance, in not in presentation, this was not a new idea particularly well-developed by the English school. Yet the key-word in Nardin, borrowed from Oakeshott, is 'enjoyed', and a *key*-word it is; with its help it is possible to unlock an interesting passage connecting the 'ontological investigations' of the English school with metaphysical inquiries of the British Idealism.

Contemplation and its modes

Appeals to 'enjoyment' in the discussion of 'reality' is not Oakeshott's invention. The most immediate authority is F.H. Bradley's *Appearance and Reality*.⁶ According to Bradley, reality as the whole of experience immediately presents itself to the individual. However, immediacy, by implying the separation of thought from perception, contradicts the requirement of totality. The resulting dilemma is stated by Collingwood:

Either reality is the immediate flow of subjective life, in which case it is subjective but not objective, it is enjoyed but cannot be known; or else it is that which we know, in which case it is objective but not subjective, it is the world of real things outside the subjective life of our mind and outside each other (IH 141).

Note 'subjective *but not* objective' and 'objective *but not* subjective'. For both Collingwood and Oakeshott, these two extremes are rooted in the same philosophical error, the antinomy of subject and object. An individual's understandings of situations in which he finds himself are his and in this sense they are 'subjective'; but as understandings they can be interrogated (successfully or not) both by the individual himself and by others, and in this sense they are 'objective' (OHC 51; EIM 48-69).

Still Oakeshott makes significant use of rejected extremes by identifying two kinds of responses to the world which bear some resemblance to the Bradlean dilemma as stated by Collingwood:

Either we may regard the world in a manner which does not allow us to consider anything but what is immediately before our eyes and does not provoke us to any conclusions; or we may

⁵ Nardin, *Law*, 30-31.

⁶ F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1897).

look upon what is going on before us as evidence for what does not itself appear, considering, for example, its causes and effects (R 157).

The first response is that of the artist whose reaction to the immediate flow of causeless images is best described as 'delight'. The second is subdivided into 'practical' and 'scientific'. In the former, particular situations are understood in respect of their relationship to ourselves; in the latter, the attitude to the world is 'objective', as the world is seen as independent of ourselves and the idiosyncrasies of our individual perception of it (158-9).

Thus initial enjoyment is worked out into aesthetic delight and practical enjoyment understood as competence in conduct resulting from the acquisition of skills of responding to the world. And if scientific 'knowledge' is added to this pair, the trinity of Science, Practice and Poetry as alternative modes of understanding is complete. The thing is, neither Oakeshott nor Collingwood is ready to grant science the sole possession of knowledge: 'Science is the scene of remarkable triumphs; so is agriculture; that does not prove either that surgeons ought to perform their operations with a plough or that philosophers ought to attack their problems with the weapons of the scientist' (SM 281). Knowledge is indivisible; it is present not only in the formulae of a scientist but in the contemplation of a poet as well. It varies in kind from one form of experience to another and this variation has to be explained. But to apply a single mode of inquiry to all provinces of experience is to commit the cardinal sin of theorizing: irrelevance, *ignoratio elenchi*. Appealing to 'that love of moderation which has as frequently been fatal to English philosophy as it has been favourable to English politics', irrelevance masquerading as a compromise increases, instead of mitigating, the errors of extremes (EIM 196-7).

The horns of the Bradlean dilemma can be escaped by a radical philosophical move re-establishing the totality of experience. Reality is experience and nothing but experience. Experience is the world of ideas marked with unity and self-completeness. Thought is no longer separated from perception and thus stops performing the negative function of destroying the totality of experience but performs the positive one of bringing about its coherence as the world of ideas, since for any world of ideas coherence is the mark of its unity and self-completeness and therefore of it being a world.

The task of philosophy is akin to that of poetry insofar as both are contemplation, but unlike the artist the philosopher contemplates not delightful images but experience in its totality in order to make it intelligible. Not that it is impossible in principle. But a man 'cannot be a philosopher and nothing else; to be so were either more or less than human' (3). The mind 'feels cold without an object other than itself' and creates 'a palace of art, a world of mythology, a cosmos of abstract conceptual machinery, and so forth' (SM 291). This is as childish as to wish to get to heaven in order to want there a salmon-rod; but this is what all of us do, philosophers, when off-duty, included. And this is how the complex landscape of the world of knowledge is turned into

an abstract map divided into the provinces of art, religion, science and history (Collingwood); or the universal stream of experience is arrested into the backwaters of science, history and practice (Oakeshott). There is no limit to the number of modes—because ‘modifications’—and the choice of those to be investigated is, to an extent, arbitrary.

What matters is that once experience is thus divided opposition between its modes takes the form of the ‘state of nature’ in its starkest version. At the point of arrest, construction work begins: each mode creates its own world of ideas in accordance with its peculiar method and puts forward a universal claim since every one of them is ‘not an island in the sea of experience, but a limited view of the totality of experience’ (EIM 71). There is no one to arbitrate between these competing claims; and philosophy is the least acceptable judge. As Collingwood puts it:

On this scene of international warfare the philosopher pictures himself as looking down calmly... seeing perhaps that it is God’s will for these deluded mortals to fly at one another’s throats, or perhaps, in a voice of authority, bidding them be still, with a result suggestive rather of Canute than of Christ. For they, poor things, do not recognize the philosopher’s superhuman status: they actually think he is one of the combatants.... And this is perfectly just; for the philosopher asserts philosophy as the only legitimate form of experience, and not only condemns the others as illusionary but adds insult to the injury by giving reasons for this condemnation, which goes against all maxims of civilized warfare. Philosophers are justly, therefore, the objects of universal dislike. They fight their own professional battle and claim to be defending the ark of God (SM 307-8).

In the same ironic vein Oakeshott retells the story of Plato’s cave-dwellers one of whom, driven by ‘philosophical’ curiosity, leaves a hollow in the earth and after prolonged travels returns to instruct his fellows that what they are taking for a horse is ‘a modification of the attributes of God’. At this stage, they ‘will applaud his performance even where they cannot quite follow it’; but were he to meddle into their practical affairs by insisting, for example, that a particular court-ruling should be postponed until the meaning of truth is elucidated, ‘the more perceptive of the cave-dwellers would begin to suspect that, after all, he was not an interesting theorist but a fuddled and pretentious ‘theoretician’ who should be sent on his travels again, or accommodated in a quiet home’ (OHC 30).

The problem is, philosophers cannot help it. Not dabbling in the affairs of practical, historic or scientific men; from these it is possible to abstain, although this is likely to invite accusations of treason. But philosophy should not be really troubled by what others think of it (and there is hardly any doubt as to what they think). What philosophy cannot do without betraying its *own* character, is, it cannot stop seeking reasons for its assertions. As such this reasoning may be quite instructive but: ‘We should listen to philosophers only when they talk philosophy’ (EIM 355).

The scale of contemplation

But what does ‘talking philosophy’ mean? Defining philosophy as thinking about experience in its totality will put on one side all thinking that does not hold this view of experience with an implication that the view itself was reached by way of thinking other than philosophical. An approach that starts with a definition of philosophy’s subject-matter ‘would offer no hope of success except to a person convinced that he already possessed an adequate conception of this object; convinced, that is, that his philosophical thought had already reached its goal’ (EPM 2). Instead, philosophy can be understood as a procedure conducted in accordance with a method that, if philosophy is to be distinguished from other such engagements, has to have some peculiar features.

Thus, in *On Human Conduct*, Oakeshott returns to the story of *Experience and Its Modes*, inverting the flow of inquiry. In *Experience* the view of the all-embracing world of ideas was postulated, particular arrests in it identified, studied and recognized as philosophical errors. The questions of why and how these arrests come into being were put aside (EIM 72-3). Now he begins by stating that the gross total of whatever may be going on is incomprehensible until arrested. In error or not, this is how we make the world intelligible, and therefore habitable, by identifying a particular ‘going-on’ in terms of its ‘character’ which in turn is an arrangement of ‘characteristics’ that we learn to notice, remember, recollect, recognize and select.⁷

Once any such character is identified, a ‘platform of understanding’ is reached and a verdict on a going-on, a ‘theorem’ (to distinguish this juncture in the adventure of understanding from the activity as such, that is theory) is passed. Any such platform is ‘conditional’ insofar as the intelligibility it offers is conditioned by postulates or assumptions on the basis of which a particular character is abstracted from whatever else may be going on. This conditionality cannot escape the theorist’s attention thus turning every theorem into a provisional juncture, not only an achievement in the adventure of understanding, but also an invitation to further travels: ‘The irony of all theorizing is its propensity to generate, not an understanding, but a not-yet-understood’ (OHC 11).

This saddles the theorist with a dilemma: either the *engagement* or *enterprise* of understanding; unconditional critical reflection whose only proper object is a going-on called

⁷ The exact timing of this reversal is a matter of some debate in Oakeshottian scholarship. At any rate, it happened prior to the publication of OHC. What is specific to OHC, is a related withdrawal of ‘practice’ as a name for the mode of experience. Thus, in ‘The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind’, where the hierarchical view of experience is already resolutely rejected, ‘practice’ still stands, alongside ‘science’ and ‘history’, for a particular voice in the conversation. In OHC, Oakeshott explicitly refuses to use the expression ‘practical understanding’ where he would have used it previously, mainly because subscription to specific practices is required both in ‘historical’ and in ‘scientific’ understanding otherwise released from the considerations of ‘practice’ as it was presented previously (57, n. 1). In other words, what was ‘practice’ in EIM or ‘The Voice of Poetry’, becomes ‘conduct’ in OHC.

‘mind’, or rational investigation of specific ‘bodies’. Both commitments are valuable but the propriety of each has its limits. To switch gears from one to another is to commit the sin of irrelevance, Oakeshottian *ignoratio elenchi* presented by Collingwood as the ‘fallacy of misplaced argument’ and the ‘fallacy of swapping horses’.

From a single going-on distinct identities predicating distinct ‘orders’ of inquiry can be abstracted. The movement of a human eyelid can be identified as a wink or as a blink and there is a possibility of misidentification; but once the theorist makes up his mind, he commits himself to a certain order of inquiry. Now he cannot seek answers to the question: What is the meaning of this blink? This would be the fallacy of misplaced argument since blinks do not have meanings and the question does not arise. Nor can he claim that *the same problem* can be addressed in two distinct stages or steps one of which will treat of ‘blinkness’ and another of ‘winkness’; or to postulate some ‘rump blinkness’ in every wink in order to investigate the correlation between ‘blinkness’ and ‘winkness’ which will provide him with superior understanding of moving eyelids. A problem identified at the first stage of such a dualistic enterprise will cease to be the same problem at the second (OHC 15):

Here you are in the middle of a problem. The same horse that got you into it must get you out again. No amount of admiration for some other horse must betray you into the FALLACY OF SWAPPING HORSES. If the wretched horse called Mental Science has stuck you in mid-stream you can flog him, or you can coax him, or you can get out and lead him; or you can drown, as better men than you have drowned before. But you must not swap him for the infinitely superior horse called Natural Science. For this is a magic journey, and if you do that the river will vanish and you will find yourself back where you started (NL 2.6-2.74).

Thus, not all platforms of understanding are related to each other, and of those that are, not all form a philosophical ladder leading to unconditionally satisfactory understanding. Cartesian and positivist projects ‘are to be deprecated not for what they have achieved (because, of course, they have achieved something), but for what they deny—the significance, or even the possibility, of radically subversive reflection’ (RP 142). They attempt to do so by postulating ‘facts’, *a priori* or empirical, that are independent of thought and therefore remain unmodified by reflection. By supplementing such ‘facts’ with reasons they produce what Collingwood describes as science of the second order the ultimate achievement of which is progression from a ‘this-is-so’ to a ‘this-is-so-assuming-that’. Achievement possibly it is, but not from the standpoint of philosophy, which recognizes assumptions and conclusions alike as abstractions to be got rid of since a ‘philosophic concept is not a... scientific concept plus the presuppositions which lie behind it, but is itself a concrete unity’ (128-9).

The definition of a concept, thus understood, begins with the question—What is going on here?—which contains not only an invitation for an answer but a recognition that an answer is giveable, a recognition that some specific going-on is identifiable, in fact already identified in a

rudimentary form, otherwise the question would not have arisen. In other words, 'in all philosophical study we begin by knowing something... and on that basis go on to learn more; at each step we re-define our concept by way of recording our progress; and the process can end only when the definition states all that the concept contains' (EPM 97-8). Philosophy can be understood as keeping a philosopher's log on the never-ending voyage aimed not at discovering any new worlds but at abating mystery in the one already inhabited. What formal logic condemns as arguing in a circle, accusing those engaged in it of coming out at the same door as they went in, and therefore coming out empty-handed, may be of utmost value. Philosophical exposition is akin to empirical description, that is, aimed at collecting all attributes of a concept, but unlike empirical science philosophy at any point seeks to understand logical connections between these attributes, and this makes philosophical definition dependent upon the circumstances in which the concept is considered (92-100; also RP 142, 151):

To follow such an exposition means gradually building up in one's mind the conception which is being expounded; coming to know it better and better as each new point is made, and at each new point summing up the whole exposition to that point.... [T]he phases through which the definition passes in its growth are not only new in degree, as we come to know the concept better, but new in kind, as we come to grasp new aspects of it. The various aspects will therefore constitute the scale of forms, beginning with a rudimentary or minimum definition and adding qualitatively new determinations which gradually alter the original definition so as to make it a better and better statement of the concept's essence: a statement, at each step, complete as far as it goes, and expressing a real and necessary specification of the concept (EPM 100).

Adjacent forms on this scale are not merely alternative views of the same 'thing' or 'fact'. By affirming only part of a concept, the lower form denies whatever else may be found in it, and by superseding this lower form the higher rejects this denial, thus subsuming the positive content of the lower form and denying the negative one. For instance, utilitarianism is not untrue; its error 'lies not in what it asserts but in what it denies; but it asserts so little and denies so much that the error in it is a great deal more conspicuous than the truth' (SM 172; EPM 86-91). Or, as Oakeshott puts it, if philosophy rejects utilitarianism in favour of 'self-realization', 'what it is asserting is *not* that happiness and self-realization are two possible ends... and that self-realization ought to be preferred, but that happiness is the false analysis of the end actually sought and that self-realization is a true analysis' (RP 125; compare EPM 102-3).

To restate Collingwood's idea of the scale of forms using Oakeshott's metaphor, reflection may be likened to ascending a glass tower. It starts with a picture of the world as seen from the ground floor gradually altered by new scenes brought into view by further ascent. The philosopher may be inclined to climb higher than the rest since he is interested not in examining details or even general outlines of particular goings-on but in grasping the picture of the world in

its totality. This, however, is not the primary ground of the distinction between philosophy and other forms of reflection:

What at bottom distinguishes different forms of reflection is... the willingness or unwillingness of the thinker to carry with him to higher levels the fixed and remembered relics of the view as it appeared at a lower level, the willingness or unwillingness to allow what was once seen to determine a later vision. The important distinction is between the thinker for whom the different levels of observation provide views of 'things' already known, and the thinker who, as it were, uninfluenced by memory and carrying nothing with him as he climbs, knows at each level only the scene presented to his vision and the mediation by which it came into view.... Thus, philosophy may be thought of as unhindered reflective enterprise; we should all be philosophers were we not liable to be distracted by what we first saw (RP 142-4).

If this view of philosophy, as an activity of keeping records in order to forget, appears paradoxical, one has to recall (with necessary caution) the postulates of psychoanalysis or, still better, an old wisdom, actually invoked by both Oakeshott and Collingwood, that the best way of redeeming one's sorrows is to write them down as a story. In fact, this apparent paradox holds the clue to the one I have been concerned with so far. To restate, philosophy cannot begin with (or be contained to) a 'purely philosophical' form of experience, it springs from some practical concern; but having once set its sails to the wind of critical reflection it gets pulled farther and farther away from its mooring-place until it dissolves from view and the thread attaching philosophy to it is broken. It is here that the records kept secure 'unbroken descent' to the mooring-place in experience (152-3). This adventure of keeping the reflective impulse in one's sails while trying to anchor the enterprise of theorizing in some particular point appears to be nonsensical unless it is remembered that the anchorage is sought not in a fixed foundation but in a *going-on*, which is in the process of becoming itself powered by the same reflective impulse.

In other words, philosophy, when understood in advance as merely contemplating the totality of experience, stays in opposition to particular modes of experience by virtue of their being arrests in this totality. When viewed the other way around, as springing from specific concern with particular forms of experience, it tends to subvert reflection overbalancing it into regions too far removed from the starting point. But there is a possibility of understanding the relation between particular forms of experience and philosophy as that of text and context, where the purpose of reflection is to determine the meaning that, in turn, 'is not something which belongs to the text or to the context, neither of which is fixed independently of the other, but is properly assumed to be in the unity which text and context together compose' (151). Both text and context are intelligible in terms of a 'language' which is philosopher's records, understood not in terms of conclusions reached but problems or questions responded to. Particular philosophical doctrines may still hover in the background but they are not allowed to guide reflection towards predetermined conclusions. And if an objection arises that, following this mode of reflection, one

would not see the wood for the trees, the answer is straightforward: Who wants to? 'A tree is a thing to look at; but a wood is not a thing to look at, it is a thing to live in' (A 53-76; R 184, 218).

The business of a theorist is not to construct a 'philosophy' but to think philosophically. Once this skill is acquired it can be employed at any level on the 'scale of forms' or the 'tower of reflection'. With this in mind it is possible to turn to politics philosophically conceived.

Action

What is needed now, is the definition of 'politics'. This involves considering what politics is not; first, because what is sought is the place of politics on the map of experience and not just the ability to recognize the political when one sees it, second, because of what Collingwood and Oakeshott describe as systemic ambiguity springing from the fact that what is being defined is a concept in a living language (PA 7-9; PF 12-6):

The proper meaning of the word... is never something upon which the word sits perched like a gull on a stone; it is something over which the word hovers like a gull over a ship's stern. Trying to fix the proper meaning in our minds is like coaxing the gull to settle in the rigging, with the rule that the gull must be alive when it settles.... The way to discover the proper meaning is to ask not, 'What do we mean?' but, 'What are we trying to mean?' And this involves the question 'What is preventing us from meaning what we are trying to mean?' (PA 7)

This ambiguity is not just an unfortunate outcome of the corruption or historical evolution of language, nor is it merely a constant companion to the ambivalence of action; it is a reflection of the heterogeneity and complexity of 'this brittle world, so full of doubleness'; and in the case of politics it is both a curse and a blessing:

Its merit is practical: like a veil which softens the edges and moderates the differences for what it at once hides and reveals, this ambiguity of language has served to conceal divisions which to display fully would invite violence and disaster. Its defect is mainly philosophical: the ambiguity makes it difficult for us to think clearly about our politics and stands in the way of any profound political self-knowledge. And it may be added that the opportunity it gives the disingenuous politician to spread confusion is a practical defect to set against its practical usefulness (PF 21).

What follows is a strategy to be pursued: to investigate the boundary of meaning in hope of locating there the character of extremes that shape the field of political activity and then to elucidate the manner in which this shaping goes on. This is what Oakeshott repeatedly does, identifying two poles between which both the activity of governing, and the understanding of it, oscillate in Europe. However, while defining politics in *On Human Conduct*, he makes little use of the offspring of the 'politics of faith', the 'enterprise association'. Instead this mode of association is subsumed under the rudimentary definition of human conduct out of which the ideal character of the civil association is gradually built up. This later approach corresponds to what Collingwood identifies as the major insight of the 'classical politics':

It... recognizes in the facts of political life... a polarized complex, a thing with two ends: a dialectic.... It has not only two ends like a bit of string, it has two ends like a mill-race, one where the water goes in and one where the water comes out. Politics is a process whereby one condition of human life is converted into another.... [S]uch a process could not happen of itself; it had to be brought about by hard work; and the hard work had to be done by persons who were already mature in mind, already possessed of free will, already members of a society.... So far as this process actually takes place there is no need to describe the non-social element. If all the water that goes in at one end comes out at the other, we need not bother to measure it at both ends..., the social end of the process is not only the right one to begin at, it is the only one that need be thought about (NL 32.21-32-39).⁸

In what follows I shall trace the growth of the definition of politics, thus adding some flesh to this outline.

Utility, rightness, duty

Since what is sought is a philosophical definition of politics, in answering the question 'What is preventing us from meaning what we are trying to mean?' it is reasonable to begin with the ambiguity which springs from a special kind of duality: that between philosophical and non-philosophical concepts. The answer is implied in the understanding of philosophical thinking presented above: a concept in its non-philosophical phase 'qualifies a limited part of reality, whereas in its philosophical, it leaks or escapes out of these limits and invades the neighbouring regions, tending at last to colour our thought of reality as a whole' (EPM 34). Consequently: 'Philosophical thought is that which conceives its object as activity; empirical thought is that which conceives its object as substance or thing' (EPP 58).

This means going beyond political theory conceived as the theory of the state. 'Empirical' understanding of politics in terms of substance (the state) and its attributes (sovereignty) has its merits, but its defect is grave: sooner or later it finds itself incapable of answering the questions concerning 'the limits of the state, and its relations with other bodies, be they states, or churches, or trade unions, or municipalities'. One possible way-out is to start from the conception of political action, 'and think of the state not as a thing but as a collective name for a certain complex of political actions' (92-4; compare RP 119-26).

For Collingwood, action is specified in terms of its goodness. Absolutely, everything is good insofar as goodness, along with unity and reality, is assigned as a predicate to every being. But goodness is a matter of degree; something is called 'bad' when it falls short of satisfying a standard imposed for purposes arising out of particular practices or situations. Thus, to say that something is good is to say that it is chosen from a number of alternatives recognized by the

⁸ Collingwood's understanding of 'free will' has nothing to do with caricature accounts of Idealism's spirit creating reality. Rather, it is best summed up by Oakeshott's rejection of the term in favour of the freedom of an agent in conduct where conduct is specified as 'actions and utterance, wise or foolish, which have reasons, adequate or inadequate, but not causes' (OHC 235).

agent as open to him in a given situation. What seems to be an attribute of things can be properly defined in terms of a specific activity: choice or decision. Choosing falls into two categories: caprice, when the agent chooses without being conscious of any reasons for doing so; and rational choice, when such reasons are given as answers to the question, 'Why do I choose this?'. Modern Europeans are accustomed to giving three such answers. Because it is useful. Because it is right. Because it is my duty (GRU 391-435; NL 13.1-14.69).

Now, utility, conformity to rules and performance of one's duty are alternative standards for the evaluation of action. The relation between them, stated negatively, is that of the degree of capriciousness involved. Utilitarian analysis goes some way in understanding choices by stating a relation between ends and means, but fails to account for preferences given to specific means or for the choice of ends to be pursued. Analysis in terms of rules, by stating what kinds of action are right on particular occasions, goes farther than that but does not specify all possible occasions or the precise manner in which a rule should be followed; and further, it cannot account for actions that, while obeying one rule, violate another (NL 15.1-16.63; GRU 435-67). Next comes an important junction in the argument at which Collingwood introduces a distinction between right and duty, thus stating his disagreement with those for whom they are identical.

The contention that one's duty should be identical with right is grounded in the belief that an action cannot be both right and wrong at the same time. For Collingwood, this is unsound. Since rightness is the form of goodness and goodness is not an attribute of things intrinsic to them, but conferred upon them by human choices made in specific situations, the propriety of both the agent's situation and individuality should have some bearing on the goodness of the action and its relation to the standard of rightness. As far as situational propriety is concerned, no one is so fanatical a Kantian as to believe that the same set of rules is appropriate for a heathen Greek and a modern Christian. Individuality is a function of free will, understood as capacity for self-liberation, not merely from the dictate of desire, which is the extreme form of capriciousness, but from capriciousness as such. Therefore a way out of the brain-twister introduced by Kant and Fichte – whether one should tell the truth when that leads to murder – depends on what kind of person one is or intends to be: 'If your rule is to tell the truth at all costs,... you will tell the truth at the cost of human life.... If your rule is to save human life, tell a lie. Kant and Fichte will be very shocked; but need you care?' (NL 16.72)

This emphasis on individuality allows Collingwood to articulate the highest (as devoid of caprice as possible) form of action: performance of one's duty, which in the case of a concrete individual acting in a concrete situation (and now this is the only case conceivable) can be defined as 'the act which for him is both possible and necessary: the act which at that moment character and circumstance combine to make it inevitable, if he has a free will, that he should freely will to do' (NL 17.1-17.83; GRU 467-79).

Thus action is specified in terms of its goodness. Goodness is conferred upon action by human choices. It changes in kind according to the change in the degree of rationality. In other words, utility, rightness and duty constitute a hierarchically linked scale of forms. Accordingly, moral philosophy, as the science of human conduct, is subdivided into economics, politics and ethics. Politics seems to belong exclusively to the sphere of the regularian analysis. But, as we shall see shortly, there are difficulties here.

To return to the Oakeshottian figure of the tower of reflection, for those occupying its ground floor, all action is capricious. From the next level (according to Collingwood, occupied by the Greeks with their teleological understanding of Nature) the view of the world of action is limited by the horizon of utility. Further ascent (to the level reached by the Romans and European Christians who understood both Nature and human artifice as governed by laws) brings into view the world of rules. The next step (intimated by the rise of historical consciousness in modern Europe) modifies the picture by awakening those who reach it to the idea of duty. Similarly in Oakeshott, there are three traditions of thinking about politics: Rational-Natural (Aristotle and Plato); Will and Artifice (Spinoza and Hobbes); Rational Will (Hegel), as an attempt to synthesize the first two while operating 'on the analogy of human history' (R 227).

Within the corners of this figure, while exploring the horizons of conduct from within the world of action, agents are guided by 'practical reason', whereas while contemplating this conduct from the tower they are engaged in 'theoretical' reasoning (NL 14.1-14.5, 18.1-18.92). The two forms of reason are inseparable not least because of our propensity to carry with us to higher levels 'the fixed and remembered relics' of the view as it appeared at a lower one; this is one expression of what Collingwood calls the 'law of primitive survivals' (9.5), in this case understood as the survival of practical reason into the theoretical reason that has developed out of it. As with all Collingwood's concepts, it can be applied positively and negatively. Positively, it guards theoretical reason against degeneration into 'academic thinking' pursued by 'practitioners of a fugitive and cloistered virtue peeping out of their hermitage windows to spy on the body politic' (32.11). Negatively, it entails anthropomorphism, a relic of practical reason that cannot be eradicated, only rendered harmless by 'our own laughter at the ridiculous figure we cut, incorrigibly anthropomorphic thinkers inhabiting a world where anthropomorphic thinking is a misfit' (14.5-14.61).

One manifestation of such thinking is an understanding of social activity as a case of 'we do *this*' which substitutes *this* for me doing the 'this' and someone else responding by performing the 'that' (16.41). Once human conduct is thus reified, utilitarian thinking takes charge and embarks upon an activity for which its ends-means analysis is best suited—planning (15.73). This Collingwood recognizes as policy-making, distinct from politics proper. Where he fails, in my view, to laugh himself out of anthropomorphic thinking is when he suggests the possibility of

‘the politics of duty’ as prescribed by the historically developed character of a society taken as a whole (28.85-28.89). The problem is not with the corporate identity as such but with the fact that *any* corporate identity is an abstraction, and abstractions do not sit particularly well with Collingwood’s understanding of duty.

So it is to Oakeshott’s understanding of associations that I now turn, making sure on the way that the thread attaching his analysis to Collingwood’s understanding of action remains unbroken.

Choices, practices, politics

Oakeshott starts his investigation of the character of human conduct by unpacking the we-do-this construct. Each agent is pursuing his individual satisfactions but, since no action is complete in itself, these are sought in the responses of others. There is a mode of action that can be understood without reference to any such responses, but it does not belong to the character of human conduct as conduct *inter homines*. This is an instance of ‘fabrication’, as opposed to ‘performance’. Strictly speaking, there are two instances of fabrication which delimit the genuinely civil performance in human conduct. The first is the extraction of imagined and wished-for outcomes by force. The second is the pursuit of ‘moral excellence’, engagements of self-enactment, since here, as well, responses from others remain unrequited (OHC 31-54).

The difference between fabrication and performance is rooted in the ancient distinction between *tēchne* and *phronesis*. Collingwood invokes it in order to distinguish art proper from ‘craft’ (PA 15-26), and Oakeshott, for reasons to be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, maintains a connection between self-enactment and artistic experience. However, when Oakeshott turns to the art/craft distinction, he questions the correspondent position of Collingwood (A 105-9; IH 204-31) that meaning is invariably conferred upon action by its purpose: some artefacts acquired the status of a work of art once their initial meanings, conceived in terms of practical purposes for which they had been ‘fabricated’, were lost as an outcome of their transport from one culture into another (HL 6-7). It is here that the difference between the two accounts can no longer be glossed over and has to be accentuated. The point to begin with is the question: If, in order to be understood properly, an action has to be understood historically, how do we know what a person’s purpose was when he performed this or that action in the past?

Collingwood’s answer is: when we know what happened, we already know why it happened (IH 214). One possible reading of this could be as follows. We know what happened from knowing the responses to this happening. Focusing on these responses (the ‘outside’ of the performer’s story) rather than on what he was thinking (its ‘inside’), we are driven in our investigation by a series of questions meant to clarify the overarching one: ‘*What* was so-and-so really doing?’ And this does not contradict either Collingwood’s dictum that a proper

explanation of action should be concerned with its 'inside', or his equally fundamental insistence on the importance of asking the right questions. Everywhere in his writings Collingwood insists that 'inside' and 'outside' form a unity and cannot be separated, let alone set against each other. It is true that the fundamental premise of Collingwood's question-answer complex is that any performance can be understood only as an answer to a specific question. But it is equally true that in the case of intelligent performance this question—the 'inside'—can only be reconstructed from the answer given plus its context, the 'outside' (A 29-42). Therefore, a satisfactory answer to the question, What really happened? is one that offers an understanding of why it happened. Knowing an agent's purpose is an outcome of inquiry, not its starting-point.

Similarly in action itself. An agent begins not by setting a purpose for himself but by asking questions about his current situation and this involves the 'acceptance of badness in oneself and weakness in relation to other things' (NL 13.29); he then chooses a course of action aimed at his liberation from this condition; some of these actions are recognized as 'questions' addressed to other agents, to which they offer their own actions as 'answers'. This continuous activity of questioning and answering is embedded into the fabric of social practices which—bringing one back to the point of choosing—delimit the scope of alternatives recognized as open. Hence Collingwood's contention that all history is the history of thought: 'the historian is not interested in the fact that men eat and sleep and make love and thus satisfy their natural appetites; but he is interested in the social customs which they create by their thought as a framework within which these appetites find satisfaction in ways sanctioned by convention and morality' (IH 216).

Something similar is going on in Oakeshott's analysis of human conduct with 'self-disclosure' being his term for the activity of questioning one's current situation, 'diagnosing' it in terms of its unacceptability, responding by 'prescribing' to oneself the appropriate course of action, which is, in turn, an invitation for others to respond accordingly. Which they rarely do, because they often fail to read off one's question-invitation correctly and have other invitations to respond to. This creates new situations marked with new unacceptabilities.

Conjoined with this activity of self-disclosure is an equally primordial one of learning. Once the activity of learning is institutionalized, however loosely, thus turning into education, it proceeds by offering abridgements. Their function is, as always, to abate mystery; what is being abridged in the first instance is the multiplicity of all conceivable choices and a by-product of these abridgements are 'practices' (OHC 55). Practices endow the activity of self-disclosure with order, in like manner language orders human self-expression without obliging everyone to say the same thing, still less to do so in chorus. As subscription to the practice of speaking requires saying something substantive, practice and performance are inseparable. But they are not indistinguishable, and according to this distinction practices fall into two categories: instrumental and moral. The former provide prudential guidelines for better performances and can be invented

or subscribed to by agents that are either not really associated with each other or joined in the pursuit of common purpose. The latter are concerned with acting as such and only in terms of its impact on other agents. Both can be abridged further to make action still more determinate. Thus, in the case of instrumental practices, we end up with all sorts of 'texts', all the way down to cookery-books, and, in the case of moral practices, with vernacular moral 'languages' that acquire their shape from the nodal points of moral rules and duties (66-7).

For Oakeshott, like for Collingwood, the difference between moral rules and duties is in the degree of strictness imposed by them upon human conduct:

What a moral practice intimates as, in general, proper to be said or done, a moral rule makes more explicit in declaring what it is *right* to do.... Where it is recognized as a *rule*, the conduct which will be taken to subscribe to it is more exactly determined, there may be circumstantial 'exceptions' to be taken into account, and the requirements of this rule may have to be reconciled with those of another. But where... it is recognized to be a *duty*, what is due relates to assigned persons; it is spelled out to leave little room for honest hesitation, and utterance is both required and required to be exact subscription (67).

Yet the two accounts are not identical. One important difference is that in Oakeshott the exactness of duty is not derived from individuality as such, as in Collingwood, but from further specification of the fabric of human association in terms of 'offices' and corresponding roles performed by the occupants of those (67). In a way, 'duty' makes sense for Oakeshott only in relation to one particular moral practice, that of civility. Another difference concerns Oakeshott's understanding of rules more generally.

To return to the Kantian example of being torn between the dictates of two contradictory rules, for Oakeshott, it hinges upon the misconception of the character of rules. Rules are neither prescriptive nor proscriptive. Like practices, they are the considerations of conduct to be subscribed to in choosing particular actions, only stated more strictly. Further, rules cannot be stated categorically, like 'never (or always) do this or that'. A better clue to the understanding of rules may be found in games. For example, in chess, pawns always move in a number of clearly defined ways. Yet, although certainly a rule, in itself it does not tell the chess-player which pawn to move and when. Moreover, the game of chess, if one chooses to theorize rather than to play it, requires an elaborate system of rules which is not limited to that cluster of rules which describe the movement of the pieces on the board but includes those of setting the time limits, awarding the titles, such as the *Grossmeister* or the world champion, organizing major tournaments or, on a less formal level, even inviting someone to play a game after dinner or over the Internet. In this manner every individual rule receives its authority from its place in the wider context, which in turn is intrinsically expansive and may often be constituted by a number of practices.

Thus, importantly for the understanding of the difference between Oakeshott's and Collingwood's conceptions of law (to be discussed in detail later), whereas in Collingwood the

performance of one's duty has about it an air of release from the entanglement of rules, Oakeshottian 'duty' is firmly placed in the context of practice, in fact, requires uncommon exactness in subscription to practice. Still, there is one further step in Oakeshott which brings him closer to Collingwood, that from self-disclosure to 'self-enactment'.

The transition is made by what Oakeshott believes to be the only route available—justification of action, when the moral discourse is concerned with excuse for an action already performed and reacted to (78). When responding to allegations of non-performance of duty or violation of rule, an agent may appeal not only to his understanding of his situation but also to the motivation for his performance. By doing so he escapes, as it were, the court where he can be pronounced guilty to stand in front of another, where his conduct can be condemned as shameful. At this point diagnosis of one's situation includes the acceptance of not only 'weakness in relation to other things', but also 'badness in oneself', and what matters is not the severity or exactness of penalty, but the very appropriateness of 'judging'. Self-enactment is an assertion of concrete individuality, and by insisting on being a concrete individual and not merely an agency of self-disclosure one invites his fellows to take him as they find him, not to 'judge' but to contemplate 'with admiration, with reserve, or with indulgence' (77).

So, it is self-enactment that correlates in Oakeshott's analysis to Collingwood's duty, but again, not without a problem as far as understanding of conduct is concerned. Once an agent is recognized as a concrete individual and his action as truly individual action, nothing is left outside this totality. Unlike utilitarian or regularian explanations where action is polarized into ends-means or authority-obligation and one pole is explained by reference to another, this is a one-one relationship for which philosophical contemplation is the only form of understanding appropriate. For Collingwood, philosophy, in our own time and place, is equated with history as the highest form of theoretical reason available and as such offers the highest degree of comprehensiveness of understanding. However, for Oakeshott, at this stage in the development of individuality even human conduct, as a reciprocal activity, disappears; and with it—the authority of moral practices which shape human choices while being shaped by them. Oakeshott's discussion of this problem introduces what may be taken as the nucleus of his conception of politics.

If self-disclosure and self-enactment are two ways of speaking the moral language, then the difference between them is in the degree of competence: self-enactment is an attempt at 'speaking this language as it should be spoken' (75). However, by the rules of this language there can be no self-appointed custodians of it since the finesse of the connoisseurs' style gradually chisels out the rut of practice excavated by human choices as much as the inadvertence of less competent speakers. These outbursts of personal style occur at numerous points of arrest in the flow of self-disclosure, when an agent recognizes the actions of others not merely as questions

(invitations to act) addressed to himself but also as answers (responses) to his own past actions. If he takes this seriously he, as far as self-enactment is concerned, suspends his transactions with others and concentrates on negotiations with himself in which case the wished-for satisfaction is not something extrinsic but his own character. Insofar as his expectations with regard to his own character cannot be spoiled by any unintended consequences of continuous self-disclosure, in self-enactment 'doing is delivered, at least in part, from the deadliness of doing' (74). Now, the second of these characteristics of self-enactment introduces ineliminable 'play' into the overall conditions of practice, while the first obliges agents not to lose sight of its authority. Taken together, they intimate a distinct activity of the deliberation of practice in terms other than its authority, in terms of its desirability, while not questioning the authority itself. This specific activity is intimated by any moral practice and in the case of the practice of civility becomes 'politics'.

Politics is unique to civil association where self-enacted agents are neither 'partners or colleagues in an enterprise with a common purpose' nor 'individual enterprisers related to one another as bargainers for the satisfaction of their individual wants', but related solely in terms of their subscription to a moral practice (122). As a practice civil association is composed entirely of rules, and an understanding of civil association is built up from that. First, Oakeshott identifies one particular type of rules as being specific to civil association, laws, and then makes the picture still more precise by defining 'offices' appropriate for the maintenance of the system of law (*lex*): adjudication, legislation and ruling. An important point, on which Oakeshott insists throughout, follows from his understanding of practice as a historic development: *lex* cannot be either established once and for all or deduced from any abstract principle. Therefore it cannot be evaluated either through backward-looking reference to any such principle, or 'original constitution', or forward-looking estimation of its efficiency. The only criterion is its coherence, but not merely logical coherence, as was the case with the modes of experience, but coherence 'historical', understood as a quest for coherence unfolding within limits established by the authority of civil practice as a whole.

The activities of adjudicating, legislating and ruling ensure just this: a piecemeal maintenance of the overall coherence of practice from within. The springs of this intrinsic movement are to be found in the rule-like nature of laws. As such they are indeterminate, not capable of describing every possible situation. Adjudication, understood as the elucidation of the meaning of *lex* in relation to particular situations, inevitably leads to the growth of *lex* and then legislators and rulers have to re-establish the overall coherence of that specific practice, taken in its totality, the authority of which is shaped by *lex*: civility. That in the practice of civility which is the public concern of all *cives* is *respublica*, whose intimate relation to *lex* limits the legitimate scope of all

three activities. Adjudicating, legislating and ruling can be related to *respublica* exclusively in terms of authority.

Something, however, has to be done about *respublica* in terms of desirability, not least because existing societies are 'wantonly productivist' and technological advances require continuous adjustment of *lex* to the new patterns of production and distribution (R 384-406). But if the authority of *respublica* is to be preserved, change has to be introduced only via *lex* and only by those authorized to do so. Thus deliberation of conditions specified in *respublica* in terms of their desirability is an activity distinct from legislation, adjudication or ruling and in the first instance it is deliberation and nothing else. But since the substantive wished-for outcome of this activity is an act of legislation, its other facet, persuasion, reveals itself. And this is politics, the activity of deliberation and persuasion meant to bring about change, or to resist projected change, in the conditions of *respublica*:

Politics is thinking and speaking about a rule of civil intercourse which has been notionally resolved from being an authoritative prescription into a conclusion in order that what it prescribes may be distinguished from its authority and thus be made available to be considered in terms of its desirability; or it is thinking and speaking in order to reach a conclusion which may then be translated into a rule by an authoritative act (165).

Since *respublica* does not specify substantive performances of the agents who subscribe to its conditions, its overall coherence cannot be brought about by any single act of legislation. At any given moment only a limited number of components of practice can be chosen for examination and then put back into place in amended form so as to increase (or not to decrease) the overall coherence of the whole. Since this whole is a vernacular moral language, 'there are etymological decencies and syntactical proprieties to be taken account of even if they are themselves indirectly modified in the new expressions proposed for use'. Therefore politics, although far from being a necessary engagement of all the *cives*, when practiced requires the mastery of the language of civility and a lively political imagination that recognizes situations calling for changes 'before they are half over the moral horizon':

And although this engagement of caring for the conditions of a civil association may seem less demanding, as it is certainly less exciting, than that of deliberating the policy and conducting the affairs of an enterprise association, it calls for so exact a focus of attention and so uncommon a self-restraint that one is not astonished to find this mode of human relationship to be as rare as it is excellent (OHC 180).

In fact, being appropriate only for civil association, it is not to be found in actually existing states at all and for reasons indicated by Collingwood: not all the water that goes into the mill-race of civility at one end comes out at the other. The place of politics within such ambiguous association as states or 'international society' still has to be considered. What, however, can be

identified by way of conclusion is those aspects of politics which require consideration on the way to 'world politics'.

Politics and poetry

Politics, then, is the activity of thinking and speaking about the overall conditions of an order composed entirely of moral rules. It does not exclude either prudential considerations or 'higher' moral considerabilities. In fact, it is intrinsically related to both these standards of action, but it is not reducible to any of them. Last but not least, it is clearly distinguished from the activity of ruling and does not occupy, nor does it require, any specific office within the kind of order to which it belongs. This kind of order can be described as civil association or the condition of civility and is opposed to enterprise association or the state of nature. Importantly, neither of these two kinds of order can be equated with the state. Rather, at least in Collingwood's account, the state is an ingenious human invention, the mill-race constructed so as to ensure the conversion of one kind of order, the state of nature, into the other, the condition of civility. Politics, in this view, is the procedure by means of which such conversion is maintained.

This is how, according to Collingwood, the thinkers of the seventeenth and eighteenth century understood 'classical politics': by analogy with 'classical physics'. The latter became possible once modern Europeans understood the necessity of limiting their theoretical objectives, decided that the body of science consisted of logical abstractions and empirical facts, and recognized mathematics as providing the armature of abstractions, thus limiting their inquiries to empirical facts which admitted of mathematical treatment (NL 31.1-31.39). Similarly, 'classical politicians' understood law as providing abstractions for their science, and limited the scope of empirical observation to facts which admitted of regularian treatment, that is, to the social end of political life. The rest became 'the state of nature' described only insofar as it was needed for an adequate account of society. But regularian thinking begins with setting a rule for oneself. So classical politics describes a process 'whereby a centre already infected with freedom, existing in an uninfected environment consisting of human beings in the "state of nature", gradually infects the environment and brings it into a condition of homogeneity with itself: brings it out of the "state of nature" into the "condition of civil society"' (NL 32.33).

The state of nature is not the state of war; it is an abstraction needed to indicate the direction of the expansion of civility. War is an activity marking the break-down in this expansion: 'the state of nature catabolically re-establishing itself on the ruins of a civil society' (NL 32.69). Civil society is an abstraction of the same kind; both are abstractions from change. Politics, in turn, is the activity of controlling change. Insofar as classical politicians believed change to be unidirectional they did not need to understand both ends. Whether they held such beliefs is a historical question. What matters is that 'we of the twentieth century' do not. But giving up on

the idea of progress does not entail giving up on reason. On the contrary, it is here that the difference between the methods of natural and social sciences acquires practical relevance, especially so once it became clear that 'for sheer ineptitude the Versailles treaty surpassed previous treaties as much as for sheer technical excellence the equipment of twentieth-century armies surpassed those of previous armies' and 'the reign of natural science' thus threatened to convert 'Europe into a wilderness of Yahoos' (A 91).

Theory should be grounded in a historical understanding of politics, in which case it matters 'which end of the process is the right end and which the wrong; so that, granted we need not hope ever to reach the one or fear ever to reach the other, we can tell which is being brought nearer by a certain change' (NL 30.79). In other words, to conduct politics one has to know the difference between 'society' and 'nature', 'civilization' and 'barbarism'.

In Oakeshott, the story begins with the dissolution of the morality of communal ties into that of individuality and the subsequent transformation of 'community' into 'association' (HL 18-24; R 364-9; OHC 233-42). In a world thus being transformed successful entrepreneurs were accompanied by displaced labourers, and enthusiastic self-directed men by dispossessed believers (OHC 275-9; HL 24-7; R 370-81). Alongside the individual proper stood the individual *manqué*, and around these two characters, modern European states organized themselves in terms of *societas* and *universitas* respectively, a distinction corresponding to the ideal characters of civil and enterprise associations.

Within the modern European state, the relation between these two is never in terms of either/or. The very term 'state' is a 'masterpiece of neutrality', an attempt not to grant unconditional allegiance to any of the modes of association (OHC 233). But 'a modern European state at war, whatever the strength of its disposition to retain its character as civil association, is indisputably turned in the direction of association in terms of a substantive purpose'. Having turned into an *universitas*, it turns its citizens into individuals *manqués* and thus perpetuates acquired purposeful disposition, for lessons learnt in wars are remembered when hostilities subside: 'The model of a state understood as association in terms of a substantive purpose and of its apparatus of ruling has always been sought and found in the image and organization of a state bent upon conquest or of a city besieged' (272-4).

So, to decide between war and peace, between 'managing' and 'civilizing' relations among agents, one has to know the difference between 'nature' and 'society', enterprise and civil associations. Collingwood's and Oakeshott's political theories define both ends of the political process while arguing that there is nothing within, let alone without, this process that may cause its unconditional flow in one particular direction (and for Oakeshott, this makes the word 'process' itself inappropriate). Unless, that is, individuals either do not acquire or surrender their freedom understood as their capacity for intelligent conduct. It is on this premise that Oakeshott,

in one of his rare comments on the international situation of the cold war, insists that the 'shadow of the atomic bomb... obscures the diagnosis', while 'the havoc wrought in Eastern Europe... is as bad as any atomic devastation; a powerful mass of deluded human beings is far more destructive than any bomb' (V 109-10).

To say, then, that civilization is preferable to barbarism, is to say that individuality is preferable to herd-marching, and to say so is not only to distinguish between rationality and capriciousness but to define rationality in terms other than the mere ability to pursue premeditated purposes, or to apply ready-made rules. In what kind of understanding such rationality can be found will be discussed in the next chapter.

Poetry

The idea of politics presented so far opens up a possibility for the discussion of world politics but as yet cannot be directly followed up by it. The possibility is open because politics is not tied conceptually to any entity. It is meaningful mostly in relation to the choice between two distinct conditions, enterprise and civil associations (Oakeshott) or the state of nature and the state of civility (Collingwood). Thus the question of the actual or possible location of politics in the world of states (or other such institutions) will be put by for the next chapter. The task of the present chapter is to see what exactly is involved in the choice between the two ideal characterizations in terms of which any specific institutions purporting to be 'political' can be understood.

What is at stake is individuals' freedom to make their own choices while subscribing to the conditions of a moral order. This order, and nothing else, is the object of the activity of politics. Being the condition for the satisfaction of unspecified wants, this order cannot be derived from these wants themselves. Also, it is not an entity but an activity the quality of which can only be revealed in the individual subscription to its conditions. Politics is either the activity of thinking and speaking about this order in terms of its desirability (Oakeshott) or that of establishing and maintaining it, in which case its desirability is already ascertained (Collingwood). But what are the criteria, if any, by which such desirability can be judged?

Here it is not enough to say that only that order is desirable which allows for the enjoyment of concrete individuality as it reveals itself through the performance of one's duty (Collingwood) or in self-enactment (Oakeshott). For Collingwood, to think about order in these terms is to think about it historically: 'to explore a world consisting of things other than myself, each of them an individual or unique agent, in an individual or unique situation, doing an individual or unique action which he has to do because, charactered and circumstanced as he is, he can do no other' (NL 18.52). For Oakeshott, this calls for the suspension of one's judgement for the sake of the contemplative 'admiration' of others besides oneself (OHC 77). However, this is not a call for the abandonment of inquiry but rather a conclusion of a critical inquiry different from Collingwood's 'history'. Oakeshottian 'historic' self-enacted individuals may be similar to Collingwood's agents performing their duties in the presence of others. Yet inverted commas indicate the possibility of another kind of history. In itself, this other kind of history has little direct bearing on the understanding of human conduct and therefore will not be considered in any significant detail here. However, some rough preliminary distinction between the two kinds of inquiry is needed so as to highlight the difference between Collingwood's and Oakeshott's understanding of the relationship between theory and practice more generally. Further, Oakeshott's discussion of historical inquiry proper supplies a model for his idea of political deliberation.

In Collingwood, history enters the discussion of politics because without knowledge of the past one cannot understand any present situation. The past is within the historian's reach since it survives into his present through a series of modifications of social practices. In the abstract it is impossible to separate the past from the present; but for a concrete historian the past becomes identifiable once he faces a modification of practice which is not immediately comprehensible from within that of his own. His immediate evidence of its existence is the difference that this survival of the past makes and therefore, as always, the question, 'What is going on here?' which takes the form of 'What was intended then?' (A 107-15). The past is 'a living past; a past which, because it was thought and not mere natural event, can be re-enacted in the present and in that re-enactment known as past' (IH 158).

For Oakeshott, such living past may 'afford us a current vocabulary of self-understanding and self-expression' (OH 21) while its survivals 'are *legenda*, what is "read" and what may be read with advantage to ourselves in our current engagements' (18-9). This is the past of human conduct. It cannot be re-enacted on account of it being an outcome of intentional action: 'A recorded past is no more than a bygone present composed of the footprints made by human beings actually going somewhere but not knowing (in any extended sense), and certainly not revealing to us, how they came to be afoot on these particular journeys' (36). The survivals it

offers cannot attain the status of 'facts' because their propensity to point towards a possible future 'may make it worthwhile to corrupt the record, to see that it gets lost or to destroy it' (19). The world approaching its past in the idiom of conduct deals with it as with a 'practical' man whom it expects 'to talk sense and have something to say apposite to its plebeian "causes" and engagements', whereas for the historian, the past is feminine: 'He loves it as a mistress of whom he never tires and whom he never expects to talk sense' (R 182).

What is proposed here is not merely a 'methodological' defence of a 'genuinely historical' knowledge but a view of human life in which the claims of conduct are recognized as being conditional and therefore questionable. In Collingwood, historical understanding, as all theoretical reason, is an outgrowth of practical reasoning. This postulates an agent 'endowed with a capacity for free, "transcendent", purposive activity', whose 'sole concern is to "live"; that is, to seek and enjoy his identity in the exercise of this capacity', for whom 'the meaning of everything he encounters, as of everything he fabricates and every action he performs, must be its propensity to illuminate, to promote or to hinder that pursuit' (OH 23). This understanding might not be possibly 'questioned, confirmed or refuted', its universe of discourse 'must itself be nothing else than an object of practical concern, and the engagement of making and elucidating this claim in respect of it can be no more or other than an action performed by the claimant in pursuance of a current practical purpose' (25).¹

However, a lesser claim on behalf of practical understanding – that it is primordial and inescapable – can be conceded:

The contentions here are that practical understanding is that in which a human being awakes to consciousness; and that, while other modes of understanding may be concerned with objects of other kinds than those which compose the present-future of practical engagement, such objects are conceptually constructed out of those which belong to practical understanding and unavoidably reflect the modality of the materials out of which they are constructed. In short, all modes of understanding have an intrusive, qualifying component of an original practical understanding which may never be excluded.... Moreover, this practical understanding may be recognized as unique in being universal to mankind and a condition of survival (25-6).

This closely matches Collingwood's understanding of human identity to be outlined in the first section of this chapter. It is against the background of such understanding that he defends his idea of human freedom. In Oakeshott, and this will be the theme of the second section, this view is qualified, if not rejected altogether: 'What we ordinarily perceive... is a much more messy affair in which we come and go somewhat inconsequentially between a variety of universes of discourse. And as for priority, some of our earliest experiences are not practical, governed by

¹ Oakeshott clearly states whom he is arguing with: 'Heidegger and some others, rather than... more commonplace pragmatists whose award of unconditionality to *praxis* is both arbitrary and obscure' (OH 23, n. 5).

usefulness, but poetic and governed by delight' (25-6, n. 8). Accordingly, the 'so-called "priority" of practical understanding and of the subject and objects which compose the present-future of practical engagement is at best circumstantial, not logical; in relation to other modes it is obtrusive, not intrusive' (26-7). This obtrusiveness has to be insisted upon. Any engagement of understanding 'emerges in a choice to undertake this inquiry and not another.... each has a meaning as a constituent of the *Lebenswelt* of the agent concerned' (27). Yet this cannot deny the historically acquired disposition for being engaged with the world differently, 'historically', 'aesthetically', 'religiously' or 'scientifically'. All such engagements may be distractions from conduct, but 'as categorially distinct modes of understanding they cannot be subordinate to practical understanding, the circumstantial priority of which gives it no superior status. Their relationship to it and to one another is conversational, not argumentative' (28-9).

Accordingly, there are at least two kinds of 'history', 'freedom' or 'identity'. The ones that exist in 'practice' and those shaped by the conversation of mankind conducted in the voices of 'practice', 'history' or 'science'. Oakeshott's account of 'practical' freedom is not that different from, albeit not identical with, that of Collingwood. But what may be called 'conversational' freedom is different. The highest degree of the former is usually referred to as 'autonomy'. The highest expression of the latter is 'poetry'. Since they are categorially distinct, one cannot be derived from the other. Nevertheless, poetry, although itself necessarily ignorant of 'truth' or 'moral excellence', provides a 'critical' standpoint from which the achievements of practical freedom can be questioned because what is intimated in poetry is individuality achieved through unusual exactness in subscribing to a given way of 'speaking', be it dancing, painting or writing. Thus, whereas for Collingwood, 'there is nothing that a poet is trying to say; he is trying simply to speak' (EPM 200), for Oakeshott, what is said in poetry is inseparable from how it is said. Poetic utterance is 'authentic' like no other performance is.

Each individual achievement of authenticity is an *eventum*, and some kind of it exists in every universe of discourse. In history proper, as distinguished from the *legenda* of a given *Lebenswelt*, it is the component feature of some 'authenticated survival from the past' which makes a difference in terms of how this survival, itself a difference in the historian's present, came into being:

An historically understood past is... the conclusion of a critical inquiry... in which authenticated survivals from the past are dissolved into their component features in order to be used for what they are worth as circumstantial evidence from which to infer a past which has not survived; a past composed of passages of related historical events (that is, happenings, not actions or utterances, understood as outcomes of antecedent happenings similarly understood) and assembled as themselves answers to questions about the past formulated by an historian (OH 36).

The counterpart of such ‘critical inquiry’ in *respublica* is ‘political deliberation’. Like any deliberation, it is ‘limited only by the virtuosity of [the agent’s] imagination’ (OHC 43). Yet, insofar as civil association is composed entirely of moral rules, political deliberation is also guided by the agent’s virtuousness, which cannot be acquired within the bounds of any given mode of experience: ‘good behaviour is what it is with us because practical enterprise is recognized not as an isolated activity but as a partner in a conversation... in which all universes of discourse meet’ (R 491).

Before presenting all this in greater detail and in closer relation to politics, it is important to note that Collingwood also attempts to establish a standpoint from which to question the directedness of the agent’s free will. Like the state in his account of politics, individual consciousness appears in this attempt as a ‘mill-race’ that drives the activity of self-determination through history. Oakeshott’s investigation of historical inquiry provides a different image, that of a ‘dry wall’. I shall use these two images in turn to revisit Collingwood’s and Oakeshott’s accounts of both action and contemplation, now in view of highlighting their conceptions of freedom.

The mill-race

For Collingwood, politics is the process of the historical conversion of one condition of human life into another, more specifically, into the condition of civility. Yet the admission that ‘we need not hope ever to reach it’ poses serious problems, not dissimilar to that resulting from the liquidation of philosophy as the highest form of theoretical reason polemically announced by Collingwood in 1939. To retain an idea of progress, either in theory or in practice, without a preconceived idea of a final destination, one has to proceed on the basis of what seems to be a mere assumption, as Collingwood does, in the case of theory when he says: ‘So far from apologizing... for assuming that there is such a thing as the tradition of philosophy, to be discovered by historical study, and that this tradition has been going on sound lines, to be appreciated by philosophical criticism, I would maintain that this is the only assumption that can be legitimately made’ (EPM 224-6).

Historical study, however, is not merely an intellectual pastime but a form of theoretical reason appropriate for the understanding of the highest form of practical reason, the performance of one’s duty, and as such it cannot be content with the critical interpretation of the philosophical tradition or actions performed in the past. Both the past and the future are interesting insofar as they respectively intimate the necessities and the possibilities hidden in the present.² Once

² See Jan van der Dussen’s discussion of Collingwood’s 1926 paper on the nature of time; IH, xlv-xlv.

historical understanding eschews the naturalistic conception of the necessities imposed upon human action by the past, it introduces the possibility of 'the activity by which man builds his own constantly changing historical world' as an experience of freedom (IH 315). This freedom has nothing to do with man being 'captain of his soul' but rather presents him with an immediate future saturated with the experience of the otherness:

A healthy man knows that the empty space in front of him, which he proposes to fill up with activities for which he accordingly now begins making plans, will be very far from empty by the time he steps into it. It will be crowded with other people all pursuing activities of their own. Even now it is not as empty as it looks. It is filled with a saturate solution of activity, on the point of beginning to crystallize out. There will be no room left for his activity, unless he can so design this that it will fit into the interstices of the rest (316).

Put differently, rational action entails thinking about one's situation as constituted by other actors, and, although any situation consists entirely of thought, one's own and other people's, it cannot be changed by a voluntaristic change of mind: 'The freedom that there is in history consists in the fact that this compulsion is imposed upon the activity of human reason not by anything else, but by itself.... The hard facts of the situation, which it is so important... to face, are the hard facts of the way in which [one] conceives the situation' (316-7). Thus Collingwood's twofold contention, that philosophical thinking is historical thinking and all history is the history of thought, presents him with the task of accounting for the reality of others which also has to be brought into line with his evolutionist understanding of politics.

Action

This task Collingwood attempts to fulfil in the first part of the *New Leviathan*, which traces man's awakening to consciousness and then his evolution towards theoretical reason and historical understanding in particular. This adventure begins as an ordeal experienced by a creature born, as it were, into the fuzzy, undifferentiated mass of sensual experience, possessing a rudimentary language (more precisely, 'discourse' as 'the activity by which a man means anything' (NL 6.12) of which language is a specific abstraction) in which to express his ambiguous feelings. Becoming conscious of a feeling coincides with naming it in this crude language and also with giving this particular sensation an edge (4.53), a boundary of meaning, and thus breaking the totality of one's immediate here-and-now, as well as the totality of one's discourse, into a manifold of specialized abstractions.

The experience in which feeling is first infected with the beginnings of thought is defined as 'appetite' and it falls into two types, 'hunger' and 'love' (7.1-69; 8.1-12). Hunger arises out of a feeling of weakness which, because it is not yet associated with any particular way of eradicating it, seems to pervade the whole of the world and calls for an equally obsessive response: 'the

heaping up of “Power after power” in oneself” (8.51). This, as yet, has nothing to do with fear (as it does in Hobbes whom Collingwood is quoting), for a hungry self is not yet aware of the existence of others and imagines the whole of the world in its own image: ‘The first notion of a god which arises untaught in every man’s mind is much older than fear. It is born of hunger. It is the notion of what a hungry man is pursuing: the infinitely magnified image of himself.... No religion quite forgets that, whatever else its God may be, he is first and foremost the infinite satisfaction of man’s hunger: man himself become omnipotent’ (8.28-9). Omnipotent maybe he is, but he is also undefined, blended, as it were, back into the immediacy of his initial here-and-now enormously enlarged and, according to some versions of Idealism, awaiting to be transformed through thought to subsume the totality of experience, ‘a divine event [located in the future] whereby thought shall not only return into the womb but there digest its own skeleton’ (7.67).

Love, in contrast, requires a specialized self but also carries with it an expectancy of a kind, understood as an evolution from some actual condition towards an ideal one: ‘The actual self of love is a self with which you are dissatisfied because it is *lonely*. The ideal self of love is a self which has achieved a relation with something other than itself... of such a kind that the dissatisfaction is removed’ (8.16). Love is directed not towards one’s self infinitely enlarged, but towards a relation with an object it can practically create, a not-self. Now a variety of new, explicitly relational experiences is intimated. Thus ‘love turns into fear when a man starts thinking of the not-self no longer as existing for the satisfaction of his own appetites but as having an independent character of its own: as being, so to speak, *alive*’, when ‘a lover finds the object of his love no longer content with the passive role of accepting adoration, but behaving like a real person or whatever it is’ (10.3-32). This is when man becomes ‘healthy’, that is, begins to realize that others have reality of their own which might be quite different from the one fancied by him in his initial solitude. Characteristically, this recognition of the reality of the not-self engenders what Collingwood presents as the state of war fought on two fronts: ‘You have to fight not only the victorious not-self but the self which has been frightened into treachery. The renewal of the war against the not-self is *anger*: the renunciation of the cowardly self is *shame*’ (10.48).

At the same time, this ongoing warfare implies also the plurality of the possible not-selves of love. It is only through this recognition of plurality that appetites are converted into specific desires, which are always directed towards one possible satisfaction among many and thus imply valuation, the notion of goodness and the possibility of choosing. A self which has reached this stage in its mental development, so that it can recognize the possibility of doing otherwise, is free. It is constituted by its consciousness awakened to its freedom, whereas everything that precedes

this awakening (e.g., immediate sensations and appetites not yet converted into desires) is the apanage of this self; thus a plank constitutes a boat while a mooring is only its apanage and, although both may be seen as belonging to this boat, the nature of this belonging is different (4.14-16). Historical understanding begins only at that level at which humans are already constituted as free actors: 'The world of Nature... is as real as you will; but it is not history, it is the background of history.... For twentieth-century thought the problems of history are the central problems: those of Nature, however interesting they may be, are only peripheral' (18.91-2).

Thus Collingwood believes that he has overcome the futile expectation of the 'divine event' of thought's absolute reconciliation with immediate sensual reality which plagued the philosophies of Bradley or Bergson, for example, by establishing the unity of the worlds of nature and history or the symbiosis of immediate consciousness and abstractions (7.62-66). Yet there is a price to be paid for this symbiosis when it comes to the theory of society or politics.

Contemplation

The central character of Collingwood's social theory is a self situated within the web of concrete intersubjective relationships, 'love', seeking highly specialized satisfactions from concrete non-selves each of whom is 'accessibly lodged in the world, an "immanent" god whose many addresses the worshipper knows, with whom he can take tea, and whom he can hope to find about his path and about his bed'. Yet, insofar as these concrete intersubjective relationships originate in the abstract notion of subjectivity, 'hunger', they are tainted with the 'fatally transcendent' religion of unsatisfied love, whose practitioner 'cries into the dark and gets no echo because there is nothing there' (8.38). This religion has found its concrete historic expression in Christianity, which continuously reproduces the war on two fronts, with anger directed at gods and shame at one's sinful self. It can also be found earlier, in Plato's doctrine of the tripartite soul, where humans are already pictured as inevitably passing through 'anger' (or more generally, 'passions') on their way from appetites to reason (10.1-63).

Collingwood is clearly dissatisfied with this image and wants to replace it with a 'religion of dependence' which would put hunger into commission so that 'the one final absolute satisfaction for which appetite in its primary form is the quest is cut up into an infinite number of partial, temporary satisfactions'. However, his own tripartite evolutionary conception of action, as guided by the standards of utility, rightness and duty, mirrors the initial image, as does his political theory (to be discussed in more detail in the next chapter) where he resorts to 'contentment' with what falls short of perfection (8.59). This may well be a recognition of the 'necessities' present in historical understanding in the form of the discursive practices conditioning the ways of thinking about one's particular situation or human condition in general (more precisely, conditioning the

way in which every particular situation can be thought only in some relation to human condition in general so that it is not possible to put subjectivity into commission by cutting up the latter into the manifold of the former). As such, this recognition would be consistent with Collingwood's understanding of the 'hard facts' of any given situation. What it is less consistent with, is his assumption about the evolutionary character of the European philosophical tradition, at least if evolution is understood as promoting the 'religion of dependence'. This, perhaps, is best seen in Collingwood's treatment of imagination as one way of exploring the possibilities of a current way of thinking about the world and also going beyond this way of thinking.

Collingwood's major concern in the *Principles of Art*, where the discussion of imagination is taking place, is to distinguish artistic performance from two other conceptions of creation. The first is Plato's idea of it as craftsmanship, which, both in its human or divine forms, entails a distinction between a vision of a thing as it really is and an activity of copying an image thus visualized by means of 'making' (PA 15-7). This is a 'technical theory' inappropriate for any human activity. The artist is certainly not making copies of some ideal things or worlds he is creating, but in a specifically human manner, distinct from another possible idea of creation, appropriate only for God who does not have any environment and creates out of nothing (128-30).

The artist's environment is the world of practice. Collingwood examines the situatedness of human experience in connection with 'feeling' so that to ground the character of artistic experience (as one way of thinking about the possibilities open to human reason) in the conception of imagination not tainted by the 'confusions which in the minds of most [English] philosophers beset the whole idea of sensation' and reality (201). Now he re-arranges the Humean distinction between ideas and impressions into a triad: 'bare feeling, below the level of consciousness', 'feeling of which we have become conscious', 'feeling which, in addition to becoming conscious of it, we have placed in its relation to others' (213). These, as in Hume, are distinguished in terms of their 'vivacity', but in a manner different from Hume's. Both the first and the third are 'strong', but whereas the former controls us, the latter is under our control due to the activity of 'intellection'. The second is transitory, fleeting and feeble. The 'bare feeling' is impression proper, the other two are ideas but different in kind. Impressions are converted into ideas by the activity of consciousness. At the level of experience at which this conversion occurs, further bifurcation is taking place: 'there is a distinction between that which effects the conversion and that which had undergone it. Consciousness is the first of these, imagination is the second'. Thus 'imagination is a distinct level of experience at which the life of thought makes contact with the life of purely psychical experience'. In this manner 'ideas of imagination'

provide the data for the intellect. On this characteristically transient level of experience relations between them do not yet exist and every such idea is singular and unique, 'a simple indivisible unity: a sheer here-and-now' (215).

In Collingwood's earlier account, thought was bound to proceed towards Absolute Knowledge. Now it is different. Intellectually mature individuals are differently situated in the totality of human experience and therefore they differently come into contact with the 'purely physical experience' and differently convert it into the ideas of intellect. Those whose attention is directed towards history, for example, will experience 'historical imagination'; the same applies to 'political' or 'artistic' individuals. Accordingly, 'beauty' is no longer a mistaken conception of truth held by the artist (as opposed to philosopher) but the only truth there is for him as an artist. Collingwood explicitly retracts his own 'youthful follies': 'on the poet's behalf it may be replied, to some one who argues that a lady cannot be both adorably virtuous and repellently vicious, or that the world cannot be both a paradise and a dust-heap, that the arguer seems to know more about logic than he does about ladies, or about the world' (288).

At this point Collingwood's view of experience gets closer to Oakeshott's. Yet differences remain. All Collingwood's individuals are located in the practical experience.³ It is from there that they slip, as it were, into their different imaginative moods, and it is back into practice that they are bound to return. Imaginative experience is invariably located at the intersection of practice with some specialized mode. A work of art is born and exists exclusively in the artist's mind so that the music an artist 'actually enjoys as a work of art is thus never sensuously or "actually" heard at all', it is imagined. What is imagined is not sounds but the totality of experience available to this particular artist. Any 'work of art proper is a total activity which the person enjoying it apprehends, or is conscious of, by the use of his imagination' (151). But, situated as he is in practice, the artist attends to emotions arising from practical experience and has to express himself through language which is communal experience.

Thus Collingwood's triadic, and also evolutionist, conception of understanding (impression/consciousness/intellection) is matched with a triadic conception of artistic practice (emotion/imagination/expression), and both are underpinned by the idea of the totality of human experience: 'The poet converts human experience into poetry not by first expurgating it, cutting out the intellectual elements and preserving the emotional, and then expressing this residue; but by fusing thought itself into emotion: thinking in a certain way and then expressing how it feels to think in that way' (295). Inasmuch as artistic experience is inseparable from the totality of

³ 'Practice' here, unless preceded by an adjective, like 'artistic' or 'scientific', denotes 'human conduct'.

experience, the business of art 'would be to construct possible worlds, some of which, later on, thought will find real or action will make real' (286).

It is this triadic conception of artistic experience that Oakeshott explicitly rejects ('but not without consideration'): 'A poet does not do *three* things: first experience or observe or recollect an emotion, then contemplate it, and finally seek a means of expressing the results of his contemplation; he does *one* thing only, he imagines poetically' (R 525). Behind this reformulation lies a different mode of putting into commission 'the one final absolute satisfaction' sought in all experience by cutting it up into an infinite number of partial, temporary achievements.

The dry wall

The question Oakeshott addresses is similar to that of Collingwood, namely, how to relate the idea of human freedom to the 'hard facts' of human condition? In relation to politics it takes a paradoxical form: 'it is not at all inconsistent to be conservative in respect of government and radical in respect of almost any other activity' (R 435). For Oakeshott, however, this task appears as doubly challenging because he rejects the hierarchical view of experience in which different modes of self-knowledge succeed each other in an evolutionary progression. Collingwood abandoned the idea of Absolute Knowledge but postulated instead the apanage of pre-conscious condition so that to establish a critical standpoint from which to judge the achievements of the individuals and the quality of the relations between them. Humans are liberating themselves from the dictates of desire and, out of respect for similar efforts in their fellow-beings, should abstain from any attempts, deliberate or inadvertent, to upset this undertaking.

For Oakeshott, this is inadequate as an account of both human freedom and the way humans think about their situations. The former is unduly linked to the world of nature (if only as a background of all genuinely human activity), while the latter is too monological for the highly specialized world of modernity. A human being is born not into 'a world lit only by the flickerings of biological urges from which he escapes with difficulty into agency', learning on the way how to control his unconditional desires 'with the aid of moral practice' (OHC 62-3), but comes into the manifold of practices, each with an edge already in place. Human freedom consists not in drawing and re-drawing these boundaries, as in Collingwood's account, but in learning how to move within and across them while recognizing the authority of practices thus shaped. The resulting image is not that of the mill-race of the evolutionary process of conversion, but rather the dry wall of contingently related performances held together, not by any mortar, but by the magnetic field of the conversation of those performing them. This image, in turn, has a history of its own which spans the whole of Oakeshott's work.

In *Experience*, Oakeshott is still uncommitted in respect to the relation between different modes of experience. All of them are deviations from the ideal totality of experience and, as abstractions, they are equidistant from this totality. The question, whether different modes succeed each other historically, is put by rather than resolved. However, in 'The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind', Oakeshott states resolutely that 'voices' (the new name for the modes of experience) in which humans speak in their 'conversation' (the meeting-place of the different universes of discourse which takes the place of the postulated totality of experience) do not compose a hierarchy (R 490), nor are they 'divergences from some ideal, non-idiomatic manner of speaking, they diverge only from one another' (497). There is nothing 'above' the individual voices but there is also nothing 'below' to ground them in. The utterances they offer 'are not made out of some other, less-defined material (impressions or *sensa*), for no such material is available' (496).

Still, the task is to ascertain the reality of each voice and to offer a view of their meeting-place, conversation, where each voice is taken at face-value and 'everything is permitted which can get itself accepted into the flow of speculation' (490). In fact, nothing of value should be excluded from conversation, for an 'excluded voice may take wing against the wind, but it will do so at the risk of turning the conversation into a dispute' (494). The value of the individual utterance cannot be derived from the mere fact of its existence or dominance: the 'insidious vice' of the appropriation of the conversation by one or two voices consists in the fact that 'in the passage of time it takes on the appearance of a virtue' (494). Scepticism may serve as a check against all exclusion, but it cannot help in telling a vice from a virtue, especially so if straightforward appeals to the current consensus are ruled out. Meanwhile, what Oakeshott demands from the different voices in the conversation of mankind—ability to take each other at face-value without endangering the overall constellation—is exactly what is required from the 'historic' self-enacted individuals capable of speaking the language of civility as it should be spoken. So how is this condition met in both cases?

Action

Oakeshottian world is constituted by selves which emerge out of possibilities, harden into 'facts', only to dissolve back into the possibilities again. They do so not by coming into contact with some certainties or with doubt, 'but by being kindled by the presence of ideas of another order' (489). What 'on occasion is recognized as self is recognized on account of its separating itself from a present not-self: self and not-self generate one another' (495). The self is activity, not something capable of acting, but activity as such which cannot be intrinsically good or bad but is always understood as conducted well or ill in accordance with the intrinsic standards of a given

practice: 'to be skilful but with no particular skill, is as impossible to the self as not to be active at all' (496). This activity Oakeshott calls 'imagining' and it is 'neither the *φαντασία* of Aristotle, nor is it the "original fancy" of Hobbes, nor is it what Coleridge called "primary imagination", nor is it the "blind but indispensable link" between sensation and thought which Kant called imagination'; it is thought itself in one of its modes, while various not-selves made by it are 'images' (497).

In conduct, self is first and foremost a desiring self, its images are the objects of desires and aversions, while relations between self and not-self are an unavoidable *bellum omnium contra omnes* even when not-selves are other humans recognized as being different from 'things' because they have desires and aversions of their own. In this case, war is carried on by other means, requiring more skill and cunning, but does not entail the genuine recognition of the subjectivity of the not-self. However, conduct constituted exclusively by desiring selves is an abstraction and a merely desiring self is 'an image which remains a mere image and refuses to qualify as "fact"' (501).

The distinction between 'mere images' and 'facts' is central to the discussion in *On Human Conduct*, although here Oakeshott no longer uses these terms. Now an agent inhabits a world of intelligible *pragmata* so that 'when alternatives present themselves to his imagination, he must be able to choose between them and decide upon a performance' (OHC 36). The images thus created qualify as 'facts' inasmuch as an agent composed of beliefs about himself and his situation can move about them without severing the link between belief and conduct. In instrumental practices this link can never be secured in principle, in moral ones it can never be broken.

An agent may subscribe to an instrumental practice because he believes that such subscription can best promote some particular wants of his. These may or may not coincide with the wants of other participants to this practice, for, insofar as the terms of their subscription are set exclusively by the pursuit of their wants, collective or individual, the mode of their association is still that of an enterprise, transactional or co-operative. Each agent, then, should be able to revoke his subscription the moment his wants are satisfied or in the case that he no longer believes they can be satisfied through his participation in this practice. In moral practices, where agents are related exclusively in terms of their recognition of the non-instrumental, self-authenticating considerations of conduct, the link between belief and conduct cannot be broken and practices themselves cannot be chosen, precisely because the standards of conduct intrinsic to moral practices are not the matter of beliefs, but what Collingwood would call the 'absolute presuppositions' of these practices, the conditions of their continuous enactment.

Thus, in the case of *respublica* composed entirely of rules, such rules specify ‘performances in terms of obligations to subscribe to injunctions’ (67). Obligation denotes ‘a reason, distinguished from all others, not for acting, but for subscribing to the conditions specified in a rule; namely, because it is acknowledged to be a rule’, that is, understood exclusively in terms of its authority (155). Each rule receives its authority from its place in civil practice as a whole, and as far as the authority of *respublica* itself is concerned, it matters not whether an agent who recognizes it believes *respublica* to be good or bad, right or wrong. Obligation ‘is not to be identified with having a feeling of being obliged or constrained, or even with a belief that one ought to do so; obligations subsist independently of any such beliefs’; they cannot be identified with the habit of obedience, for ‘rules are not responded to in acts of “obedience” and habits are not reasons’, and it is a mistake ‘to identify having such obligation with membership in an association in which such obligations are usually fulfilled’; obligations ‘cannot be extinguished by non-fulfilment, whether it be that of one or of many, and they are not denied even in refusal to subscribe’ (155-6).

So, in the first instance and in a rather restricted sense, obligation and authority are the ‘hard facts’ of one’s civil condition; they are ‘just there’, insulated from the vicissitudes of the individual beliefs, the way Latin, for example, is there and, even when it is not practised routinely, anyone who wants to read St. Augustine in the original has to learn this language and not any other. Yet it is not on account of this ‘reality’ that a world of conduct composed of merely desiring selves remains an abstraction. Even in non-subscription, obligations have to be recognized as such, that is, as human inventions, the ‘reality’ of which is revealed only once they are fulfilled (or rejected) through substantive individual performances. The skill of being obligated has to be learnt and it is learnt prior to entering a *respublica*. A self lacking in this skill altogether would be incapable of ascertaining itself as being human, for human conduct, as an activity in which self and not-self reciprocally enact each other, postulates agents who are free, that is, act in accordance with their beliefs (36-7; 157-8).

This link between conduct and belief, in turn, is established and maintained through learning, which is the most basic capacity of humans distinguishing them from things (12-4). Learning requires the ability to approve or disapprove of one’s situation and one’s own responses to it. When this situation is recognized to be constituted by other humans in whom the same capacity for learning is expected and whose own freedom is thus recognized, an agent embarks upon the activities of approval and disapproval. Here, again, he is not constrained by the mere presence of others, by their choices, by previous choices of his own or by his physical strength. All these and similar considerations may have a bearing on the range or the character of his responses to his situation but they do not qualify his freedom to understand (or misunderstand) his situation as an

invitation for action, to 'imagine it different from what it is' and to 'recognize it to be alterable by some action or utterance of his own' (36).

Thus, long before subscribing to the conditions of *respublica* as a *civis*, a human being 'comes to consciousness in a world illuminated by a moral practice and as a relatively helpless subject of it' (63). As he comes along by way of learning, including learning under the conditions of imposed criticism (education), he becomes a 'historic' self-enacted individual capable of recognizing *his* situation as 'you are shivering' and responding accordingly (52). The actions he chooses to perform are his own (although the way he performs them, well or ill, is conditioned by his competence in subscription to a practice) and their outcome is neither more nor less than he himself in a new situation of his; but from this 'it does not follow that what he intends, the meaning of his action, must be a self-gratification.... Agents are related to one another in terms of understandings... they may care for one another because they think of one another. The myth of the necessarily egocentric agent is a denial of agency' (53).

There is a long way to go from this distinction between conduct as the world *sub specie voluntatis* and the world *sub specie moris* to the clearly specified texture of *respublica* and the distinction between enterprise and civil associations.⁴ Yet first, it is clear that the most important distinction between the two modes of association is not that between their respective characteristics, nor even between their characters composed of these characteristics, but that between their postulates. What the two modes of association postulate is two different conceptions of human freedom. In enterprise association freedom is 'conceptually tied to the choice to be and to remain associated' and is threatened every time such association becomes compulsory (158). Accordingly, 'the undertaking to impose this character upon a state whose membership is compulsory constitutes a moral enormity, and it is the attempt and not the deed which convicts it of moral enormity' (MHC 367). In civil association, there is nothing 'to threaten the link between belief and conduct which constitutes "free" agency, and in acknowledging civil authority *cives* have given no hostages to a future in which, their approvals and choices no longer being what they were, they can remain free only in an act of dissociation' (OHC 158).

It is also clear that Oakeshott's conception of civil freedom is related not to the background reality of nature, but to that of the authority of existing practices. To be consistent with this conception of freedom, Oakeshott cannot be content with the reified 'hard facts' of these

⁴ Thus, in 'The Voice of Poetry', approval and disapproval are 'moral' activities, as opposed to desire and aversion. But in OHC, they, when exercised in the context of *respublica* and exclusively in relation to its conditions rather than the individual performances of others, are considerations 'political', distinguished from 'moral' in that the latter are the considerations, intrinsic to moral practices, which an agent takes into account while choosing to perform this or that action.

practices, nor can he aim at transcending them. To remain free, humans have to recognize these practices as alterable by some action or utterance of their own, to imagine them being different. At the very least, there should be a possibility of interpreting these practices differently, and mere doubt offers little guidance here. Thus, acknowledging that most of the human ideas have their theological analogues, Oakeshott rejects, as does Collingwood, the idea of 'a divine Purpose to which [man's] conduct willy-nilly contributes', but also that of 'a divine Will to which he must submit himself and his conduct or join the party of the devil' (this, according to Collingwood, is an attribute of a god born out of man's primordial 'hunger'). Instead, God may be understood to be a law-giver 'and the believer is not only necessarily left to subscribe to his obligations as best he may but can do so only in self-chosen actions' (158).

As in Collingwood, analogy with religious experience is significant, and in what are perhaps the most moving five pages of *On Human Conduct*, Oakeshott sketches out an account of it very different from that of Collingwood. For Collingwood, religion is a historical expression of the 'fatally transcendent' love directed towards the unattainable not-self which at once infects human experience with hope and the frustrations of shame with oneself and anger at there being nothing to respond. For Oakeshott, what is sought in religious belief 'is not merely consolation for woe or deliverance from the burden of sin, but a reconciliation to nothingness' (83-4). Salvation it offers consists not in the promise of a hereafter but in the intimation of the highest expression of freedom authentically related to the highest expression of rule.

Freedom for Oakeshott, as it is for Collingwood, is a matter of degree insofar as it implies 'the quality of being substantively "self-directed" which an agent may or may not achieve and which, when a high degree of it is enjoyed, is properly called "self-determination" or "autonomy"' (36-7). It is clarified later that 'moral autonomy' has nothing to do with one's ability to make moral choices as a 'gratuitous, criterionless exercise of a so-called "will" (an isolated *meum*) in which a lonely agent simultaneously recognizes or even creates a "value" for which he is wholly responsible and places himself under its command, thus miraculously releasing himself from organic impulse, rational contingency, and authoritative rules of conduct'; it does not require 'some other release from having to recognize a rule of conduct merely in terms of its being a rule; that is, in terms of its authority'. The moral autonomy of an agent 'lies, first, in his character as an agent (that is, in his action or utterance being a response to an understood want and not the consequence of an organic impulse), and secondly, in his action or utterance as self-disclosure and self-enactment in a contingent subscription of his own to the conditions of a practice (which cannot tell him what to do or to say) recognized in terms of its authority' (79). This is why, on another occasion, the *meum* of an agent in self-enactment is described as 'authenticity' rather than

autonomy to indicate that even the quality of his sentiments, something an agent negotiates with himself, is still judged in relation to a practice (75).

Still, what is sought in self-enactment is a 'release from the bondage of contingent circumstance' (76), an 'echo of an imperishable achievement', heard more clearly when an agent is primarily concerned with the virtues or sentiments in which he performs this or that action, 'when the valour of the agent and not the soon-to-vanish victory, when his loyalty and fortitude and not the evanescent defeat, are the considerations'. But even thus enacted self is 'a fugitive; not a generic unity but a dramatic identity without benefit of a model of self-perfection' (84). Religious experience offers such a model:

Religious faith is the evocation of a sentiment (the love, the glory, or the honour of God, for example, or even a humble *caritas*), to be added to all others as the motive of all motives in terms of which the fugitive adventures of human conduct, without being released from their mortal and their moral conditions, are graced with an intimation of immortality: the sharpness of death and the deadliness of doing overcome, and the transitory sweetness of a mortal affection, the tumult of a grief and the passing beauty of a May morning recognized neither as merely evanescent adventures nor as emblems of better things to come, but as *aventures*, themselves encounters with eternity (85).

However, in the absence of a substantive image of God, a similar echo of durability may be heard in 'the magnitude of the agent's malice and not merely the injuriousness of his action: the grandeur of devilry' (84). This is why the spectrum of the possible understandings of freedom is supplemented in Oakeshott with a hierarchy of rules, so that the image of God is not eliminated altogether, but presented as that of a law-giver. This image originates in the conversation, rather than decrees it, for religion on its own cannot provide a unity which is unconditional, it also oscillates between the extremes and 'may be terrible, it may sink to the prose of a merely anticipated release' from 'malignant current condition, or it may rise to a serene acquiescence in mortality and a graceful acceptance of the *rerum mortalia*, joys and sorrows alike transformed'. Its dignity lies not only in the recognition of the true character of human condition, nor merely 'in the cogency of the reconciliation it intimates', but also 'in the poetic quality, humble or magnificent, of the images... in which it recalls to us that "eternity is in love with the productions of time" and invites us to live "so far as is possible as an immortal"' (86). Thus the 'motive of all motives' is intimated not in religious belief (here it is only more readily recognized as such), but in the experience of poetry, for it is in poetry that, through imagination, one engages in the activity of contemplation.

Contemplation

Oakeshott's account of poetic experience begins, as does Collingwood's, with the rejection of Platonic Rationalism, only it rejects not just the 'technical theory' of art but that tradition of

European thought 'in which all activity was judged in relation to the *vita contemplativa*' (R 493), while the supremacy of contemplation in the conversation of mankind was asserted 'on account of its release from the concerns of craftsmanship' (511). Oakeshott does not deny the possibility, nor does he question the desirability of such a release, and he follows tradition in describing this activity as 'contemplation'. What he rejects is rather the possibility of the contemplative *life*.

If human life is illuminated by practices created by humans themselves, then in contemplation humans slip into a less structured world of indistinct images following one another in 'lazy association' (513). This individuals can do only by renouncing the authority of existing practices or modes of experience, as in

a pathological condition, called *apraxia*, in which a subject is still able to identify an object... as a concretion of qualities, but has lost all sense of the purpose for which it might be used or for which it was designed and is, thus, incapable of recognizing it as an object of practical concern, and yet does not replace it in his perception with an object of any other sort—an object of worship, of love or of poetic contemplation (OH 13).

Since participation in the modes of experience, as in moral practices, is involuntary (there is no intelligible experience in-between the modes, as there are no habitable worlds outside all morality), this is a pathological condition indeed which can only be transient and, strictly speaking, cannot be 'achieved' but can only 'happen' due to some distraction from the routine of doing, historic or scientific imagining. The generic name for this distraction is 'wonder' and 'any practical image which, from the unfamiliar circumstances of its appearance, induces wonder may open a door upon the world of contemplation, so long as wonder does not pass into curiosity (*scientia*)' (513). In this sense, contemplation is always a journey into a foreign land and subsists only insofar as the foreignness is not abated or reified.

Thus art, according to Oakeshott, emerged not out of premeditated attempts at creating a work of art but out of the unsought encounters with the foreignness, as when 'the invading Romans were provoked to contemplative delight by the temples and statues of Greece because for them they had no religious-symbolic significance' (532). It became art proper, more readily recognizable as such, with the dissolution of the pre-modern homogeneity of human condition (if that ever existed), when the activity of an artist could be no longer confused with those of the ancient seer or his counterpart, the gleeman (530). Once this happened, art proper, 'poetry', became the only genuinely contemplative activity. As such, it 'can only have an intermittent fulfilment.... there is no *vita contemplativa*; there are only moments of contemplative activity abstracted and rescued from the flow of curiosity and contrivance' (541).

Thus the outcome of Oakeshott's inquiry into the character of poetic experience is not just the reversal of the traditional hierarchy of *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa* but the dissolution of the

totality of the flow of experience, as it appeared in his earlier work, into episodic encounters matching the inconclusive character of human conduct. As for the relationship between action and contemplation, certain sentiments in conduct, relationships arrived at in these sentiments partake of the character of poetry, in particular of its unconditional conversability. Unlike in all other voices in the conversation of mankind, in poetry what is being said cannot be separated from how it is said, not only is every performance a perfect subscription to a practice, but practice and performance are invariably one and the same. And although this level of authenticity can never be achieved in human conduct, some uncommon excellence, reminiscent of poetry, may be observed in such undeniably practical experiences as 'moral goodness', childhood, friendship or love:

Loving... is not a duty; it is emancipated from having to approve or to disapprove.... What is communicated and enjoyed is not an array of emotions – affection, tenderness, concern, fear, elation, etc. – but the uniqueness of the self.... Neither merit nor necessity has any part in the generation of love; its progenitors are chance and choice – chance, because what cannot be identified in advance cannot be sought; and in choice the inescapable practical component of desire makes itself felt (537).

In other words, virtuous individuals do have an earthly model for self-enactment, while characters located on the other side of the spectrum of freedom, despite the wonder excited on occasion by the grandeur of their actions, are condemned by the standard of conversability because their heroic exploits disrupt the flow of conversation. Here one meets, for example, the snake of the Lost Garden recast into a 'slick encyclopaedia salesman'; the architect of the Tower of Babel, who in his revolt against the gods 'is not a petty thief, like Prometheus' but 'the leader of the cosmic revolution whose enterprise is not only doomed to failure but entails the destruction of all the virtues and the consolations of the *vita temporalis*, a destruction of which the "confusion of tongues" is the emblem'; a character in Dante's *Inferno*: 'a deformed human being, a giant, who out of vanity made war upon heaven and in consequence confounded the conversation of mankind', 'a gibbering idiot forever blowing a tin trumpet: *O anima confusa*' (OH 189).

This is the spectrum of freedom, at both ends of which one finds some form of release from the deadliness of doing, and, contrary to both Samuel Butler's 'sceptical' remark that it is not possible to adjudicate between God and the devil, for God has written all the books, and Eliot's 'authoritarian' injunction that it is better to worship the Golden Calf than to worship nothing, virtuous individuals know their way because they have learnt how to reconcile themselves to nothingness through the practice of conversation, and in so doing they have also learnt to recognize all sorts of devilry (including that of rationalism in conduct) as the emblems of the denial of this practice. This criterion of conversability is present in human conduct even on the crudest level, when agents are concerned mostly with their immediate wants, insofar as the

satisfactions sought are ‘*imagined* and wished-for’ outcomes of their reciprocal engagements with others besides themselves.

Thus the extremes are the absolute authenticity of ‘delight’ (Oakeshott’s word for contemplation proper) and the absolute autonomy of disgrace, intimating the Conversation of Mankind and the Tower of Babel respectively. Between these extremes is the day-to-day conduct of the ‘unprofessional guardians’ of the vernacular of moral practice, ‘who speak it somewhat monotonously but with a care for its intimations of balance, sobriety, and exactness’ and whose ‘solid gracelessness makes possible the stylist, the hero, the saint, the aristocrat and the vagabond, who, caring only for its intimations of magnificence, are apt to neglect the prosaic pieties which keep barbarism at bay’ (OHC 66). As concrete exhibitions of reflective consciousness, they are the postulate of the conversation of mankind. It is delight in their monotonous inconclusive encounters that is intimated in poetry. And if to prop themselves up in their daily engagements they rely on the historically acquired ways of abstracting their highly indeterminate moral practices into a *respublica* with its ‘hard facts’ of authority and obligation, it is not the theorist’s business to convict them of reification.

The theorist’s task, firstly, is to show how exactly a disposition to be radical almost about everything is consistent with being conservative in respect of government:

Since life is a dream, we argue (with plausible but erroneous logic) that politics must be an encounter of dreams, in which we hope to impose our own. Some unfortunate people, like Pitt (laughably called ‘the Younger’), are born old, and are eligible to engage with politics almost in their cradles; others, perhaps more fortunate, belie the saying that one is young only once, they never grow up. But these are exceptions. For most there is what Conrad called the ‘shadow line’ which, when we pass it, discloses a solid world of things, each with its fixed shape, each with its own point of balance, each with its price; a world of fact, not poetic image, in which what we have spent on one thing we cannot spend on another; a world inhabited by others besides ourselves who cannot be reduced to mere reflections of our own emotions. And coming to be at home in this commonplace world qualifies us (as no knowledge of ‘political science’ can ever qualify us), if we are so inclined and have nothing better to think about, to engage in what the man of conservative disposition understands to be political activity (R 436-7).⁵

Secondly, since this recognition of the individuality of ‘others besides ourselves’ is inseparable from the recognition of the authority of rules (since individuality can be revealed only through an authentic subscription to a rule), the theorist may recognize that, in the case of a civil practice, the validation of its authority, when it becomes an explicit engagement, inevitably ‘moves up the scale of authorizations’, but he has to make it clear that, however ‘high’ the hierarchy of rules might turn out to be on any given occasion before it ‘yields a contingently

⁵ In this passage, the distinction is not yet made between ‘government’ (or more precisely, ‘ruling’) and ‘politics’.

satisfying conclusion', it will nevertheless culminate, not in a principle, nor in a charismatic personality, but in yet another rule (OHC 151). Hence the image of a divine law-giver. As a poetic image, it carries with it, perhaps more clearly than other images, an intimation of both the ubiquity of rule and the uniqueness of individuality. Thirdly, because this image is arrived at through conversation (rather than preceding it and then conditioning its flow, as it does in Collingwood), even when signalling the possibility and the desirability of 'escape', it does not deny the conversation itself.

However, the interplay of poetry and conversation, action and practice, wants and moral considerabilities to be taken into account in their satisfaction requires important addition to the understanding of the character of human conduct. Knowledge of the latter does not result in an understanding of substantive performances and, at the same time, remains incomplete without such understanding. Since practices are not law-like processes, they are not demonstrated by substantive performances (like a falling stone demonstrates the operation of the law of gravity), but constituted by them through contingent relationships. This understanding of substantive performances as contingent relationships is distinguished by Oakeshott from theorizing them in terms of 'human nature' or 'social structures' (91-100). Although these modes of analysis approach action differently, on closer examination, both 'human nature' and 'structure' are meaningful only as practices and therefore neither adds much to the task of understanding a substantive performance in which agent, his understanding of his situation, his action, the response it receives and the practice in subscription to which it is performed form a relationship which has to be understood. This relationship is 'contingency' and 'the identity it constitutes is an *eventum*' (101).

Contingency in Oakeshott is clearly distinguished from 'chance' and moved closer to the notion of 'cause' so as to re-define the latter. This move is indicated already in *On Human Conduct*, where contingent relationship is presented as requiring, at the very least, 'the absence of interval and therefore the absence of a mediator between occurrences, which is not itself an occurrence', and that 'every antecedent is itself a subsequent and every sequel is an antecedent' (104). If this echoes Humean requirements for causation (proximity in space and sequence in time), so does Oakeshott's denial of any 'necessary connexions', but his reasons for this denial are different because what is being related contingently are *intelligent* individual occurrences which through this relationship acquire conditional dependency (104). Here 'what went before, in respect of its going before, is understood... as an action which calls for a response, which perhaps even knows how it would be responded to but, since there are many possible alternative responses, is necessarily ignorant of the exact response it will receive' (104). There is no

‘constant conjunction’ either. This, however, does not warrant arbitrariness in assembling a contingent relationship, for what is being assembled (understood) in this manner is already recognized as a concrete individuality and thus requires deepest respect and ‘an eye for shades of difference between plausible likeness, an ear for echoes and imagination, not to conjecture what is likely, but to devise, recognize, entertain, and criticize a variety of contingent relationships, each sustained by a reading of the evidence’ (106). Such an understanding is ‘historical’ and in *On History* Oakeshott gives it more exact shape.

As with the recognition of individuality in human conduct, historical events are understood in terms of the interplay of chance and choice. Chance is ‘the exemplar of purely external, insignificant relationship’ (OH 101), a relationship the historian chooses to consider as either incomprehensible or insignificant, since everything in experience may be related to everything else, but not everything can be established or assigned equal value. This in itself does not render historical understanding impossible but rather makes it conditional, limiting the historian’s ambitions and subordinating chance to his choices. As in Collingwood, the historian chooses to investigate those situations that strike him, in his present, as making a difference. Unlike Collingwood, Oakeshott refuses to limit the historian’s understanding of the antecedents to their purposeful contribution to the emergence of a subsequent. Rather, an antecedent makes that difference which shapes the character of a subsequent as being itself a difference which attracts historian’s attention in the first place. A historical event has neither necessary nor essential character but is ‘a conflation of accessories which... are the difference they made in a convergence of differences which compose a circumstantial historical identity’. Historical inquiry is neither an explanatory nor a metaphysical exercise, nor it is an attempt to solve a problem, but ‘an engagement to infer, to understand discursively and to imagine the character of the historical event’ (103).

The same is true for humans as ‘historic’ self-enacted individuals and their practices, for the individual voices and the conversation of mankind and, paradoxically, for the *future* condition of *respublica* once it is imagined politically. The whole point of Oakeshott’s critique of historical research is that historical events, understood as assignable individual performances or as ‘structures’, are often taken as given: a known destination *X* located in the past to which the historian has to arrive from some yet more distant point *Y*. When such teleological understanding of history is further confounded by the suggestion that the character of *X* is interesting merely insofar as it contributes to the understanding of some present condition, then history is conflated

with practice: 'Once it was religion which stood in the way of the appearance of the "historical" past; now it is politics; but always it is this practical disposition' (R 182).⁶

Assembling a historical event is never a simple reconstruction of a given fact, even if this fact is understood as a practice ('paradigm' or 'structure'). It is the elucidation of the 'conditions of human circumstance come upon from behind and understood in terms of their emergence'; its outcome is 'a past of which there can be no record and one necessarily unknown in default of such an inquiry' (OH 65-9). This involves taking a number of related individual occurrences out of some context which up till now endowed them with conditional intelligibility and composing out of them an event which is not yet given. As a new context for the thus re-assembled occurrences, this event constitutes the unintended by-product of the 'transactional engagements which, because they are not assignable performances, cannot be understood in terms of "personalities" but which may be understood in terms of their relation to antecedent by-products of human engagements' (71).

In the language of *On Human Conduct*, 'practices' are just such unintended by-products of the transactional human engagements. Substantive performances are not simply individual actions, but actions recognized as authentic, that is, constituted by the relationship of 'touching' which, in turn, shapes the practice in subscription to which these actions are performed. Thus, 'a sequence of contingently related occurrences is not a process in which there is room for manoeuvre; it is wholly composed of manoeuvrings in touch with one another', and 'understanding in terms of contingent relations is contextual: what has to be understood and the terms in which it is understood are not two different kinds of identities (like a "law" and examples of its operation), they are individual occurrences made to elucidate one another in an investigation of their evidential relationships' (OHC 105).

Political deliberation, like historical inquiry, is concerned not with individual transactional performances but with one particular by-product of them, *respublica*. Like historical inquiry, it is concerned with its subject in terms of the possibility of change. Insofar as it is concerned with *respublica* as an event located in the future, it approaches it 'from behind' and in view of the re-arrangement of the practices and rules which compose it. Needless to say, it is categorially distinct from historical inquiry, or any theoretical investigation, insofar as what is sought in political deliberation is the satisfaction of a substantive want (a change in the conditions of *respublica*) brought about in an authoritative manner (through an act of legislation), and any

⁶ Here both 'practice' and 'politics' are used in their earlier meanings: the former as the mode of experience, the latter as an activity not wholly commendable.

‘practical’ want is excluded by Oakeshott from the scope of the legitimate concerns of the theorist.

Yet even an articulation of such a want would be impossible without political deliberation partaking of the character of historical inquiry in respect of at least three of its characteristics. First, it has to recognize the practices or rules which are proposed for amendment as human creations. Second, it recognizes practices as contingent compositions of ‘historic’ events rather than processes. Third, an act of legislation which modifies the conditions of *respublica*, although an action of an assignable person, insofar as it is preceded by genuinely political deliberation is ‘a convergence of occurrences’ and thus itself an *eventum*: ‘not a merely recorded occurrence, not itself an assignable action or an assignable response to an action, but the contingent outcome of the choices and encounters of assignable agents and understood as this outcome’ (107). Change in the overall conditions of a *respublica* is not powered by any political mill-race, which ensures the purposeful concentration of the resources of civility. Assembling a *respublica* politically out of the milling about of human conduct is ‘historical’ not on account of it being evolutionary, nor simply in virtue of its concern with change, but because it is akin to historical inquiry proper in recognizing both humans and their creations as individual events:

When a historian assembles a passage of antecedent events to compose a subsequent he builds what in countryside is called a ‘dry wall’: stones (that is, the antecedent events) which compose the wall (that is, the subsequent) are joined and held together, not by mortar, but in terms of their shapes. And the wall, here, has no premeditated design; it is what its components, in touching, constitute’ (OH 102).

Thus, what is true of historical inquiry, is also true of the activity of politics: ‘As nothing here is necessary, so also nothing is impossible’ (104).

Poetry and civilization

Despite the important differences between Collingwood’s and Oakeshott’s understandings of politics, in both cases politics is understood ‘historically’. Central to such understanding is the idea of human freedom. Both historical consciousness and political action are possible because the ‘facts’ of the human condition, however ‘hard’ they may appear to an agent deliberating some imperfect and inconclusive bargain with the future, are recognized as amenable to transformation through deliberate human action because they are human inventions. To recognize the human condition as a human invention is to recognize it as composed of ‘others besides ourselves’ and to accept the reality of these others as, perhaps, the least conditional of all the conditions to be taken into account in conduct.

Here the difference between Collingwood’s and Oakeshott’s accounts of this reality is most explicit. It is tempting to present it in terms of the individualism/holism opposition. When

Collingwood's individuals step into society, they are already engrossed in the idea of subjectivity and their subsequent 'historic' conversion into the condition of civility (a never fully-attainable congregation of the immanent 'religion of dependence') is marked by an attitude of 'contentment' with what falls short of the standards of both individuality and civility as they imagine them. Oakeshott's individuals are born into practices and 'historically' enact themselves towards the highest degree of freedom by learning to subscribe to these practices so authentically that this act of subscription becomes a 'release' performed in the attitude of 'delight' (enchantment rather than enjoyment) in which all human transactions, including those of appraisal and censure, are intermittently suspended; both the practice of civility and the moments of 'poetry' are readily available for those willing and capable of recognizing them here and now. This, however, is not the whole story. Collingwood's account is holistic insofar as it begins with the gross-total of sensual experience, and it is out of the first encounter with a more structured world of human artifice that the idea of individuality arises. Oakeshott's story is invariably composed of events recognized in their individuality. What matters is not so much the preference given to individuality or practice, but how the tension between individuality and practice is resolved.

In Collingwood, the resolution is brought about by reasoning capable of establishing specialized relations between the selves. This is what distinguishes 'love' from 'hunger'. In Oakeshott, already in *Experience*, where the 'practical' self first appears convinced of its own reality and uniqueness, 'it is never a philosopher, persuading us that this separate self is an abstraction, who will succeed in ridding us of this obsession; it is a lover who momentarily convinces us that it is an illusion' (EIM 272). In 'The Voice of Poetry' this is reversed. Love, rather than reminding humans of the unity of experience, intimates the uniqueness of the self. But in one respect these conflicting accounts are similar. In both cases, concrete individuality, be it the individuality of the totality of experience or that of a human being, cannot be demonstrated or proven from any set of assumptions or principles. Acceptance into the flow of the conversation of mankind cannot be secured through reasoning but can only be achieved discursively, since the standard of excellence intrinsic to this practice is conversability.

In 'demonstrating' how this standard of conversability is kept alive in poetry, Oakeshott is concerned not with establishing a starting point for a chain of inferences but with illustrating the current availability of this standard, and also its historic character as a human invention. Love, friendship, moral goodness and the reality of 'others besides ourselves' can be shown to be akin to poetry, but they cannot be deduced from its presence. Still, what is achieved, in relation to politics, by casting a ray of poetry onto these expressions of self-enactment which themselves do not belong to the practice of civility, is the recognition of individuality as a dramatic identity, and

thus not a principle but a moral considerability to be taken into account in political deliberation: 'while there can be no action specified in terms of place (e.g. "at home"), or circumstance, or consequence, or relationship (e.g. that of a man to his dog or to inanimate things), in principle exempt from civil conditions, civil intercourse recognizes a circumstantial privacy... which merits consideration' (OHC 179).

Conversely, while all political desirabilities necessarily stem from some transactional interest or moral grievance, the art of politics requires from those willing to practise it an ability to translate such interests and grievances into concrete proposals concerned exclusively with the conditions of *respublica* and only in terms of their desirability rather than authority.

And since men are apt to make gods whose characters reflect what they believe to be their own, the deity corresponding to this self-understanding is an Augustinian god of majestic imagination, who, when he might have devised an untroublesome universe, had the nerve to create one composed of self-employed adventures of unpredictable fancy, to announce to them some rules of conduct, and thus to acquire convives capable of 'answering back' in civil tones with whom to pass eternity in conversation (324).

There is a counterpart to this image, and this self-understanding, in Collingwood's argument, where artistic experience is recognized in its individuality, but also, and invariably, in some relation to the idea of the totality of experience, be it the Absolute, the imperfect world in which man is lodged, or the totality of language in which he expresses himself. The playfulness of art is acknowledged as one possible intimation of Absolute Knowledge (when Collingwood is still discussing experience in these terms), but only to be contrasted with the 'higher' claims of utility, right and duty:

So art and play have something in them which though not really divine is a likeness of divinity; and God may be pictured as an artist, or as playing, with far more verisimilitude than as a scientist or a business man. Aristotle actually raised the question whether play might not be considered a good definition of God's activity; and the only reason why it cannot is that the *sit pro ratione voluntas* of play is below the claims of expediency and right, the action of God above them (SM 105).

This earlier arrangement was to be significantly revised by Collingwood towards the end of his life, but what was never to change was the attitude, the upbound thrust of human existence grounded in the evolutionary conception of both action and understanding expressed in the image of the scale of forms and the corresponding idea of the seriousness of man's tasks:

And those of every age who permit themselves to play are permitting themselves to forget that there are duties waiting to be done and evils crying out for correction all around them. Nor is it an answer to protest that the bow cannot always be bent, that the overstrained spirit must be allowed some relief from the burden of responsibilities; for these responsibilities, properly understood, are nothing but its highest and freest life, and to face them is to find, not to sacrifice, our happiness (107).

For Collingwood, practising the immanent 'religion of dependence' based on the recognition of the plurality of others besides ourselves is one such responsibility, and the recognition of this plurality itself is each individual's achievement brought about by highly disciplined 'work'. For Oakeshott, individuality itself is an achievement possible due to the ineliminable 'play' in the conditions of practices which results from their, equally ineliminable, plurality. When, in his later work, Collingwood brings into view yet another totality, that of 'physical experience', his reasons, stated as a rebuttal of Rousseau's idea of freedom, could be also presented as an objection to Oakeshott's view:

The facts of human infancy are dirtier and less picturesque, perhaps, than the fancies of Rousseau; but they are the safer foundation on which to build a science of the relations linking a man to his fellow men.... A man is born a red and wrinkled lump of flesh having no will of its own at all, absolutely at the mercy of the parents by whose conspiracy he has been brought into existence. That is what no science of human community, social or non-social, must ever forget (NL 23.92-7).

This image of human condition is reflected in Collingwood's understanding of civilization, where man's upbringing into the condition of civility is explored through his relations with nature, members of his own society, and 'strangers'. Underneath this exploration is yet another triad, that of civilization as an ideal, as an actually-existing practice and as the process of approximation of the latter to the former. What drives this process is the idea of a universal society implied in every particular society. The historic expression of this driving force is the state, polarized into the rulers and the ruled, related to each other by the process of law-giving. And although Oakeshott's image of 'external relations' at first appears as a rejection of almost every single point in this construction, it contains a triad of its own: an idea of *respublica*, its reflection in the actually-existing states (*societas*), and yet another expression of these same states, *universitas*. In this case, 'civilization' stands for a historically enacted practice of modern European statecraft in which not only *societas* and *universitas*, but also *respublica* are related to each other.

Civilization

The previous chapter outlined two different modes of contemplation and action. In the first mode, both are powered by the ‘mill-race’ of the individual consciousness. In the second, human practices, including that of contemplation, are likened to the ‘dry wall’ composed of contingently related images-events. In both cases, politics is concerned with the possibility of change, while change is recognized as being possible due to the ‘historical’ understanding of human associations as human inventions. Yet politics in the ‘mill-race’ mode (Collingwood) is an activity which brings about the progressive conversion of individuals and their associations to the condition of civility, while politics appropriate for the ‘dry wall’ mode (Oakeshott) is a procedure meant to increase (or maintain) the overall coherence of the already existing practice of civility. This way or another, politics is meaningful only in relation to civility and the question of this chapter is that of the location of civility in the world of states.

To begin with, the different modes of politics presuppose different location of civility vis-à-vis the state. In Collingwood, there is a distinction between universal and particular ‘society’. In Oakeshott, this corresponds to the distinction between *respublica* (limited to the area where the European mode of civility is competently practised) and *societas* (locked within particular state-borders). The counterparts of particular ‘society’ and *societas* are territorially located ‘community’ and *universitas*, representing that which is non-civil in human associations. A particular ‘community’ and ‘society’ are brought together by the ‘body politic’, the state, through the activity of politics. Every particular ‘society’ is potentially universal, but the realization of this potential through politics would require the territorial expansion of the ‘body politic’ and thus the creation of the global state. In Oakeshott, the state oscillates between *universitas* and *societas* and politics belongs to *societas* only. Politics, rather than requiring the expansion of *societas*, let alone the state, is practised by way of the careful anatomizing of existing practices of civility. In Collingwood there is, however, a counterpart to this location of civility and politics. To see it more clearly, additional concepts – ‘civilization’ (Collingwood) and *civitas* (Oakeshott) – need to be introduced.

The following passage in Oakeshott may serve as an example of *civitas*:

The members of the Order which constituted the Abbaye de Thélème dispensed with rules and duties to govern their conduct and took as their Rule a precept about how they should think when acting: the Augustinian principle of conduct, 'Love and do what you will'. But... this was a sufficient rule, not because 'virtuous' sentiment suffices, nor because the Thélèmites had been miraculously redeemed from inclination to incontinent self-assertion in their adventures in self-disclosure, but because they were well-born, well-bred, and well-educated in a language of moral intercourse. In the absence of rules and duties, wanton conduct was to seek in the Abbaye (and in the lives of those who went thence into the world), not because the Thélèmites were conspicuously indifferent to self-disclosure in action, but because of their exceptional mastery of a vernacular of moral self-disclosure and their unhesitating acknowledgement of its authority (OHC 78).

Respublica can be seen as *civitas* shaped by a historically acquired constitution and equipped with the apparatus of ruling. Thus *civitas* is sought, not beyond the bounds of *respublica*, but in the interstices of power that holds *respublica* together. The possibility of going 'thence into the world' is not ruled out, but it is the peregrination rather than the expansion of *civitas*.

As conversation verges onto the outbursts of poetry, so the peregrinations of *civitas* tend towards a pilgrimage, or even the hermitage of 'moral excellence', an escape from the practice of civility. There is in them a tendency to sweep aside 'the narrow boundaries of the local and the contemporary' so as 'to reveal, not what might be going on in the next town or village, in Parliament or in the United Nations, but a world of things and persons and happenings, of languages and beliefs, of utterances and sights and sounds past all imagination' (V 32). *Respublica*, as the meeting place of *cives* at once less disciplined than the Thélèmites and more diverse in their choices of the precepts about how they should think when acting, holds them all together by the power of 'being able to formulate [its rules] clearly and to make them known in utterances which reach and are readily understood by all those concerned' (OHC 194). The bounds of *respublica* are limited not by territorial arrangements but by the range of the principles of conduct which *respublica* can accommodate without frustrating altogether the 'sentimental' dispositions of its *cives* towards 'virtuous', as distinguished from 'civil', action.

In contrast, the power of the European states was acquired by settling and guarding 'frontiers to their areas of authority, marked upon accurate maps, which none may pass without scrutiny and perhaps only by permission' (194). In so doing, they also acquired the character of *universitas* and the habit of using their power in a way appropriate for things rather than humans, so as to be able 'to act quickly, economically, certainly, with the desired effect and as little hindered as may be by the undesired consequences of action' (HL 34). Thus within Europe every *societas* is a species of *respublica* bound to a particular territorial arrangement by the presence of its local counterpart, *universitas*. In relations between such territorial units, politics is likely to be found, if at all, only once they relate to each other as *societates*. What is sought in this mode of politics is not the reconstruction of an original

respublica, but the dissolution of the existing *societates* into more detailed instances of *civitas* out of which a *respublica* not yet known might be composed as a dry wall.

In Collingwood, 'civilization' has three meanings. As an ideal and potentially universal state of civility, it is similar to *civitas*. As a form of civility which actually exists in modern Europe, it is closer to *respublica*. As a historical process by which a particular form of civility is being approximated to the ideal, it is powered by the mill-race of the 'body politic'. This way of 'going into the world' may be seen as intimated not so much in the practices of the nation-state as in the European, and more specifically British, idea of empire, in which the experience of 'being kindled by the presence of ideas of another order', with poetry as its likely companion, is categorially distinguished from the actual practices of imperialism, while politics, rather than 'corrupting the soul', becomes the school of virtuous sentiment.¹ Once notionally resolved from the rest of what may be going on in the practices of imperialism, this idea of empire may serve as a nucleus for the idea of world politics, which would be no longer related to the modern European state.

Such resolution requires two further distinctions, to be explored in two separate sections: between politics and policy and between laws and manners. Each of these distinctions may be seen as a reaction to particular historical wave of imperialism. The first may be described as 'republican', the second as 'historicist'. In both, the central concern is with the power of the state, and solution is sought in the re-constitution of this 'mill-race' of civilization. In Oakeshott's 'dry wall' re-arrangement of both responses, concern with growing state-power is preserved, but the focus of attention is shifted towards the mode of governance in its relation to the character of governed subjects. One possible way of entering into both 'republican' and 'historicist' stories is at one point of their intersection, where what Collingwood calls the 'English school', culminating in David Hume, is 'reorientating philosophy in the direction of history, though as whole it is not clearly aware that it is doing so' (IH 73).

Policy and politics

There is a significant tension between Hume's essay 'Of the Balance of Power' and that 'Of the Balance of Trade'. The balance of power proper, according to Hume, was known only in modern Europe, where individual states maintained the tranquillity of the whole of the continent by way of deliberate policy. The ancient city-states, although the outcome of their conduct seemed to be the same, achieved it by chance rather than choice, through the jealous emulation of each other's greatness. The right balance of trade required nothing more than such unrestrained emulation. Once, however, state-power became increasingly associated

¹ Compare Arendt's interpretation of the legend of the British Empire: 'its result is the imperialist character (imperialism was the only school of character in modern politics). And while the legend of the British Empire has little to do with the realities of British imperialism, it forced or deluded into its services the best sons of England. For legends attract the very best in our times, just as ideologies attract the average, and the whispered tales of gruesome secret powers behind the scenes attract the very worst'. *Origins of Totalitarianism* (London: Harcourt, 1976): 208-9.

with trade, balancing became more problematic. When taken in its entirety, Hume's argument was directed not only against mercantilists but also those who believed that benign commercial empires would supersede the more militant territorial entities of the past, establishing the harmony of individual interests, be it the interests of states or humans.² For him, and all those whom Burke once called 'economical politicians', the problem of burgeoning capitalism 'was not whether or how the state (or natural law) should regulate the investment of private capital in private enterprises, but how private or joint-stock capital should be invested in the war-making and governmental power of the state'.³ Meanwhile, this growing power, although often justified in republican terms, undermined the republican conception of citizenship insofar as the balance of power, sought in the world of expansively trading empires, transformed 'politics' into 'policy' and, by the same token, made obsolete the previous republican balancing strategy of setting limits to the state's size. Thus, against the background of the continuous discussion of the idea of a 'perfect commonwealth' triggered by the Peace of Westphalia, important changes were taking place in the mode of the understanding of politics.

The mill-race

When the Swedish Vasas abandoned their long-standing tradition of neutrality and plunged into the Thirty Years War, the Austrian Hapsburgs were unprepared for the entrance of such ruthless belligerents, whom they saw as opportunistic newcomers moved by conflicting sources of intellectual inspiration. The Vasas' reasons for plundering the palaces of the Empire were derived both from national identity myths about their Gothic descent and from Grotian legal writings, which explicitly excluded such claims from the spectrum of just causes of war.⁴ Although this eclecticism can be explained by straightforward opportunism, there is also a possibility that Sweden's major prize in that war was recognition rather than domination.⁵ Since recognition required a certain status, Gustav Adolf was attentive to all its major attributes: credible imperial lineage, diplomatic etiquette and international law. The achievement of all of these at once was more important than the intrinsic coherence of the overall construction and, where all the relevant nuances could not be put into a single coherent story, story-telling gave way to naked force.

Philosophers of the time attended to incoherencies with more care but not necessarily with more success. Right after the settlement of Westphalia, Pufendorf famously referred to the

² John Robertson, 'Universal monarchy and the liberties of Europe: David Hume's critique of an English Whig doctrine', in *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain*, eds Nicholas Phillipson and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993): 371.

³ John Pocock, 'The political limits to premodern economics', in *The economic limits to modern politics*, ed. John Dunn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990): 131-2.

⁴ Cf.: Robertson, 'Empire and Union: Two Concepts of the Early Modern European Political Order', in his *A Union for Empire: Political Thought and the British Union of 1707* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁵ Erik Ringmar, *Identity, Interest and Action: A Cultural Explanation of Sweden's Intervention in the Thirty Years War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

constitution of the Holy Roman Empire as a 'deformed monster', meaning that it did not fit into any of the categories known from Aristotle or the Romans.⁶ As always, his staunch opponent, Leibniz, disagreed: 'In explaining the concept of sovereignty, I confess that I must enter into... a field which is thorny and ill-cultivated. The reason for that, because of a deplorable mania, those who undertake to write [on sovereignty] have eyes only for what is ancient, of which vestiges scarcely survive, while they are not interested in more modern things'.⁷ For his part, Leibniz distinguished between simple powers to coerce within a given territory and 'supremacy' proper, as an attribute of those only who could 'wage war, sustain it, survive somehow by their own power, make treaties, take part with authority in the affairs of other peoples', and do all this by effectively controlling territories large enough to make them 'somehow exempt from the commerce of private persons'. These entities could unite into a larger body, like the United Provinces and the Empire. Yet there was a crucial difference between the two, one was a confederation, another a union: 'A confederation is entered into by words alone and, if necessary, forces are joined. For a union, it is necessary that a certain administration be formed, with some power over its members'. Only the latter could be properly called the state.⁸

When, towards the end of the next century, Burke reproached the makers of the French Revolution for not understanding the character of their trade and thus wasting their tools, what he meant was very similar: 'society is indeed a contract' that can be taken up or dissolved at will in pursuit of a temporary interest, 'but the state ought not to be considered as nothing better than a partnership agreement'.⁹ Yet by then the opposition between 'society' and 'company' had acquired a new countenance appreciated, among others, by Hume, who considered this change in meaning to be the single most important development in political theory since Machiavelli: 'Trade was never esteemed an affair of state' until the 'great opulence, grandeur, and military achievements of the two maritime powers seem first to have instructed mankind in the importance of an extensive commerce'.¹⁰ The two maritime powers were England and the Netherlands, and the character of their conflict differed significantly from that of the Thirty Years War which preceded it.

Like the Hapsburgs and the Vasas before them, the English were well aware of the idea of universal monarchy, which circulated around Europe consequently gaining currency at one place or another, and saw the Dutch as the most immediate aspirants for its fulfilment. This attitude was echoed in London taverns, where the Dutch were called 'butter-boxes' because

⁶ Cf.: David Boucher, 'Resurrecting Pufendorf and Capturing the Westphalian Moment', *Review of International Studies*, 4, 2001: 557-77; Robertson, 'Empire and Union': 25-7.

⁷ G. W. Leibniz, *Caesarinus Fürstenerius (De Suprematu Principum Germaniae)*, in *Political Writings*, trans. and ed. Patrick Riley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988): 111-20; 113-4.

⁸ Ibid.: 114-7; see also Riley's discussion in 'Unpublished Manuscript on the Allegiance Due to Sovereign Powers': 119-24.

⁹ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987): 84-5, 139.

¹⁰ David Hume, *Essays Moral Political and Literary* (Indianapolis: Liberty, 1985): 88-9.

they were 'apt to spread everywhere' and for their sauciness had to be 'melted down'; and at the Court, where Dryden in his bid for laureateship produced the following pearl:

Trade, which like blood should circularly flow,
Stop'd in their Channels, found its freedom lost:
Thither the wealth of all the world did go,
And seem's but shipwreck'd on so base a coast.¹¹

The conflict no longer concerned territorial conquests and even when it was about one's status the recognition sought was different in kind: 'The Kingdoms and Principalities were in the World like the Noblemen and Gentlemen in a Countrey; the Free-States and Cities, like the Merchants and Traders:... Some of these came to grow Rich and Powerful by Industry and Parsimony; and some of the others Poor by War and Luxury: Which made the Traders begin to take upon them, and carry it like Gentlemen; and the Gentlemen begin to take a fancy of falling to Trade'.¹² Like the commercialising domestic societies, international society was undergoing a change in the order of ranks. Commercial competition was no longer waged by small trading republics among themselves; large territorial monarchies were pressing them out of the market.

There was scant doubt as to who was to lose out in this new conflict: small states whose often sophisticated financial, legal or trading practices were not matched by their military resources. Even less happy was the predicament of the mostly agricultural entities, like Scotland, drawn into the vortex of the great-powers' competition.¹³ The 'insuperable difficulty' of making such states happy in a world where trade had become the 'golden ball' for which all nations were competing led Andrew Fletcher to believe that there was 'no other tendency than to render, not only my own country, but all mankind as happy as the imperfections of human nature will admit'.¹⁴

Fletcher's argument was grounded in the recognition of the growing importance of commerce and its impact on the nature of European politics. The universal empire could be realized not only through territorial expansion but by way of the radical concentration of all the trade in one place. This would invite corruption of manners and the inevitable collapse of the commercial empire. Such catastrophes were disastrous not only for those who

¹¹ Cf.: Steven Pincus, 'The English Debate over Universal Monarchy', in *A Union to Empire*: 37-62; Annabel Patterson, "'Crouching at home, and cruel when abroad": Restoration constructions of national and international character', in *The Stuart court and Europe: Essays in politics and political culture*, ed. R. Malcolm Smuts (Cambridge: CUP, 1996); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System. Mercantilism and the Consolidation of the European Economy, 1600-1750* (Cambridge: CUP, 1980): 160.

¹² William Temple, *Observations Upon the United Provinces of Netherlands*, ed. George Clark (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972): 124.

¹³ Cf.: H.F. Kearney, 'The Political Background to English Mercantilism, 1695-1700', *The Economic History Review*, XI, 1959: 484-96; David Armitage, 'The Scottish Vision of Empire: Intellectual Origins of the Darien Venture', in *A Union to Empire*: 97-120.

¹⁴ Andrew Fletcher, 'An Account of a Conversation concerning a Right Regulation of Governments for the common Good of Mankind', in *Political Works*, ed. John Robertson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997): 168.

immediately suffered them but for the overall texture of world politics. Therefore trade is 'not the only thing to be considered in the government of nations: and justice is due, even in point of trade, from one nation to another' insofar as it facilitates the recognition of diversity. In the situation, however,

not only all those who have ever actually formed governments, but even those who have written on that subject, and contrived schemes of constitution, have... always framed them with respect only to particular nations, for whom they were designed, and without any regard to the rest of mankind. Since, as they could not but know that every society, as well as every private man, has a natural inclination to exceed in every thing, and draw all advantages to itself, they might also have seen the necessity of curbing that exorbitant inclination, and obliging them to consider the general good and interest of mankind, on which that of every distinct society does in a great measure depend. And one would think that politicians, who ought to be the best of all moral philosophers, should have considered what a citizen of the world is.¹⁵

Fletcher's 'citizen of the world' was opposed here not to the idea of state-citizenship but to the universalizing effect of trade which, through the 'corruption of manners', threatened any genuine citizenship regardless of the location of this or that state-boundary. There was nothing 'natural' or sacrosanct about state-boundaries, and Fletcher's own design for the constitution of Europe – ten roughly equal in size entities capable of defending themselves but made unfit for conquest by means of internal limitations on their sovereignty achieved through division into yet smaller units – resembled, in character if not in the detail, both discussions conducted by Pufendorf and Leibniz half a century earlier, in the immediate aftermath of the Peace of Westphalia, and Hume's 'Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth', published half a century later.

Characteristically, however, in two instances when it perhaps came closest to its fulfilment, in the form of the 'Philadelphia system' and the German Confederation designed at the Concert of Europe, a carefully established balance was eventually upset either by the unrestrained 'external' expansion or 'internal' consolidation of power.¹⁶ By then it would have hardly appeared 'natural' to anyone to compare politicians to moral philosophers. The maintenance of both the balance of trade and the balance of power was believed to be the business of the 'insidious and crafty animal, vulgarly called a statesman or a politician'.¹⁷ 'Politics' no longer meant what it still did for Fletcher: the activity of ruling and being ruled within a shared social space in which everyone knew his place and the duties it entailed. Instead, it mostly referred to the Lockean understanding of 'government', the multifarious activities of the occupants of numerous *bureaux* (such as the *prévôt de la police*, for example, whose main concern was with the efficient administration of the market-places of Paris):

¹⁵ Ibid.: 175.

¹⁶ Cf.: Daniel H. Deudney, 'The Philadelphia System: Sovereignty, Arms Control, and Balance of Power in the American States-Union, Circa 1787-1861', *International Organization*, 1995, 49: 191-228; Henry Kissinger, *A World Restored: Europe After Napoleon* (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1973).

¹⁷ Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (Indianapolis: Liberty, 1981): 468.

'Politics' now denoted the conduct of the policy and *police* of... states, expanding their internal and external power in consequence of their engagement in market processes they did not attempt to control. To the individual... it meant his involvement in the life of such a state, which expanded its power by recognising his freedom, but no longer treated (if it ever had) his participation as defining his moral personality or minded very much what sort of moral personality he had. He had to decide whether he felt liberated or alienated by this indifference, which is why the term 'liberalism' is now used as a term of reproach, both by conservatives, who fear that it is not libertarian enough, and by radicals, who fear that it is not liberating enough.¹⁸

The dry wall

This diagnosis is the starting point of Oakeshott's analysis, the recognition that modern 'government in respect of its pursuits had come to enjoy a lengthened tether and could browse upon pastures hitherto far out of its reach' (HL 11). Consequently, instead of focusing on questions of the constitution and authorization of governments, the most perceptive of the early-modern theorists began to concentrate on the tasks appropriate for the office of government within associations grown 'political' as they came to practise politics as an activity, 'not of governing, but of determining the manner and the matter of government' (8). Theorizing became 'political' too, owing more to Hegel's understanding of politics as 'the counterpart of the modern state whose government and public arrangements are recognized to be the product of human choices and therefore alterable at will' (9) rather than Aristotle's vocabulary, where 'politics' and 'rule' remained indistinguishable because 'civil' condition was not yet introduced and distinguished from the 'political' one (OHC 167, n. 1).

Thus Montesquieu, according to Oakeshott, was interested in 'democracy' or 'aristocracy', not as forms of rule grounded in the particular constitution of the office of government, but as two different modes of governing appropriate for different self-understandings of the governed subjects (HL 29-43). From this distinction follow two of Oakeshott's rare remarks about the relations of states:

Kant and others conjectured that a Europe composed of states with republican constitutions would be a Europe at peace. This absurdity is often excused on the ground that it is a plausible (although naïve) identification of war with so-called dynastic war, but it is in fact the muddle from which Montesquieu did his best to rescue us, the confusion of the constitution of government (republican) with a mode of association (civil relationship) (OHC 273, n. 1).

Another confusion identified by Oakeshott was that international peace was sought in the 'wrong' mode of association:

It is perhaps worth notice that notions of 'world peace' and 'world government' which in the eighteenth century were explored in the terms of civil association have in this century become projects of 'world management' concerned with the distribution of substantive goods. The decisive change took place in the interval between the League of Nations and the United Nations (313, n. 1).

¹⁸ John Pocock, 'Political limits': 141.

This latter confusion represents what Oakeshott described on another occasion as ‘the impulse to escape from the predicament by imposing it upon all mankind’ (HL 24). The ‘predicament’ here is a disposition of modern state-conduct towards a transactional association of states in which prudential rules of conduct certainly exist but do not constitute the terms of this association. ‘Escape’ is sought in a co-operative association of states by which their divergent interests are subordinated to a single one. Again, rules are devised and enforced in order to bring about and sustain such a convergence of interests, but the terms of association are still constituted by interests rather than civil rules. Now confusion results not so much because the imposition of a single interest denies individual states the freedom to pursue their own ends, but rather because world government of this kind would achieve world peace by way of denying a particular understanding of human freedom and a mode of governing appropriate to it. While attempting to overcome the all too obvious ‘entrepreneurial’ streak in the character of the modern state, this mode of governing denies to individual states what they in fact possess, a disposition towards civil association of their citizens. Judged from the standpoint of individual freedom, a co-operative association of states does not add anything to the transactional one. Both kinds of association belong to a single mode of relationship, enterprise association, in which there is no politics, but ‘only Purpose, Plan, Policy and Power’ (OH 135).

However, even if the aforementioned confusions are resolved, there are still important objections to the idea of world government. The first concerns the absence of any interstate system of *lex* in the recognition of the authority of which a global *respublica* could be anchored. Not only does not such a system exist, its absence prevents individual states from acquiring a less ambiguous character:

there has been one unavoidable contingent circumstance of modern Europe for which the rule of law cannot itself provide, namely, the care for the interests of a state in relation to other states, the protection of these interests in defensive war or in attempts to recover notional *irredenta*, and the pursuit of larger ambitions to extend its jurisdiction. And this is not on account of the complete absence of rules (although most of so-called international law is composed of instrumental rules for the accommodation of divergent interests), but because ‘policy’ here, as elsewhere, entails a command over the resources of the members of a state categorially different from that required to maintain the apparatus of the rule of law, and may even entail the complete mobilization of all those resources. This, of course, does not entail the destruction of all law; but it does entail the desuetude for the time being of a state as an association exclusively in terms of the rule of law (177-8).

The second objection concerns the impossibility of a global morality. Although composed entirely of rules recognized exclusively in terms of their authority, *respublica* is the public concern of its *cives* rather than *homines*. This involves a distinction between ‘the conditions of moral association (“good conduct”), and those which are of such kind that they should be imposed by law (“justice”)’ (174). Thus Oakeshott interprets Aristotle’s understanding of civil condition as a diluted or ‘watery’ version of such human relationships as ‘friendship’ (OHC 110). Although the claims of morality and legality (and thus civility as a special mode

of morality) never fully coincide, nor do they diverge from each other at random: 'Law and morals normally have the same centre but not the same circumference' (HL 16). Civil association is possible only when the gap is not too wide, when the practitioners of diverse moral languages still recognize civility as being constitutive of their shared condition, while such recognition does not require of them unbearable moral compromises. Only then will the non-instrumental and constitutive practice of civility meet two other conditions, Aristotelian in spirit if not in letter: the equality of all its practitioners as *cives* and their authenticity as *homines* (OHC 110).

The last of these four conditions, authenticity, is yet another way of saying that civil relationship is possible among humans who are free not only to disclose but also to enact themselves. And this may be problematic on the global scale, given the diversity of vernacular moral languages:

This unresolved plurality teases the monistic yearnings of the muddled theorist, it vexes a moralist with ecumenical leanings, and it may disconcert an unfortunate who, having 'lost' his morality (as others have been known to 'lose' their faith), must set about constructing one for himself and is looking for uncontaminated 'rational' principles out of which to make it. But it will reassure the modest mortal with a self to disclose and a soul to make who needs a familiar and resourceful moral language (and one for which he may hope to acquire a *Sprachgefühl*) to do it in and who is disinclined to be unnerved because there are other such languages to which he cannot readily relate his own (80-1).

Insofar as rules are abridgements of moral practices, and civility, as a specific moral practice, is composed entirely of rules, *civitas* is an abridgement from less determinate but also 'thicker' practices, to which it owes its authenticity. Such moral practices, allowing for the 'making of one's soul' rather than just the civil pursuit of imagined and wished-for outcomes, come prior to civil practices. It is not altogether impossible to fancy a gradual emergence of a moral language of this kind out of increasingly global communication of humans. Yet it is easier to imagine this global language to be so 'thin' that, by failing to accommodate the immense diversity of self-enactment, it would also fail to meet at least one consideration of any political deliberation: the recognition of a circumstantial privacy, which merits consideration.

Further, were a global *respublica* to be established on the basis of such thin moral language, it would require an apparatus of ruling capable of the enforcement of the civil conditions prescribed. In principle, any rule can be enforced. There are, however, rules which might require for their enforcement 'an apparatus of search and inquisition... such as to conflict with the norms of civil conduct written or plausibly tolerated by the *respublica*' (OHC 179). The tether of world government would extend dramatically, while the resources for world politics, which can be found only in the vernacular moral languages, would be put under additional strain. Consequently, global government, while becoming oppressive for the individuals, might also destroy already existing practices of civility. This contradicts another important consideration in political deliberation: that the 'fit' of whatever is proposed is

‘acknowledged to be among the desirabilities – lest one good rule should destroy the coherence of the practice’ (180).

Thus there is no *a priori* given ‘*cosmopolis*, discernible to Civil Imagination, the rules and arrangements of which provide wholly reliable and sufficient models for those of a *civitas*’ (176). Nor can *cosmopolis* be modelled upon the practice of civility as it exists within the modern European state. Yet there seems to be a possibility for a ‘cosmopolitan’ mode of action and contemplation within Oakeshott’s political theory. It can be discerned from his earlier pronouncements about the building of the British Empire, but to see what kind of imperialism Oakeshott has in mind, one has to compare his views of the relation between ruling and politics to those of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century thinkers.

Oakeshott’s distinction between civility and morality is similar to Smith’s attempt to articulate the ‘science of the legislator’ which he limited to the ‘rules of grammar’ which do not specify the content of individual performances and distinguished from ‘the rules which critics lay down for the attainment of what is sublime and elegant in composition. The one are precise, accurate, and indispensable. The other are loose, vague, and indeterminate’.¹⁹ This also echoes the earlier distinction between ‘civil’ and ‘natural’, a ‘considerable, though very uncertain, achievement’ of the seventeenth century (OHC 111). The uncertainty resulted not from the distinction as such but from the unwarranted firmness with which ‘natural’ was endowed:

John Locke... inadvertently imposed the idiom of faith upon the sceptical understanding of government. But how out of character this enterprise was soon became apparent. To turn ‘rights’ and ‘duties’ which were known as historic achievements, elicited by patient and judicial inquest from the manner in which men were accustomed to behave, into ‘natural’ rights and duties was to deny them just that contingency of character which was the heart of the sceptical interpretation, and was to attribute to them an absoluteness and a permanence which in the sceptical understanding of them they could not possess. And political scepticism was recalled from its unnatural alliance with the politics of Natural Rights, not by the criticism of Bentham (which was never quite critical enough), but by the genius of Burke and Hegel (PF 83).

Burke was not the only (and, according to Oakeshott, not even the most successful) opponent of the Lockean understanding of ‘natural’.²⁰ Moreover, he himself was perfectly aware of the existence of his allies in this undertaking, sometimes rather ‘unnatural’ ones, for whom current ‘manners’ were the only natural foundation for politics:

Mr. Hume told me that he had from Rousseau himself the secrets of his principles of composition. That acute though eccentric observer had perceived that to strike and interest the public the marvelous must be produced; that the marvelous of the heathen mythology

¹⁹ Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Indianapolis: Liberty, 1984): 175.

²⁰ Actually, despite some consensus about the usefulness of the natural/civil distinction, there was never much of an agreement on the meaning of ‘natural’. Compare Pufendorf’s plea to study ‘diligently the Ambiguity of the Word Nature’ (*Of the Law of Nature and Nations*, 4th ed. (London, 1729), Book 2, chapter 3, 16) and Hume’s claim that our understanding of the fundamental principles of morals ‘depends upon the definition of the word, Nature, than which there is none more ambiguous and equivocal’ (*A Treatise of Human Nature*: 473-4).

had long lost its effect; that the giants, magicians, fairies, and heroes of romance which succeeded had exhausted the portion of credulity which belonged to their age; that now nothing was left to the writer but that species of the marvelous which might still be produced, and with as great an effect as ever, though in another way; that is, the marvelous in life, in manners, in characters, and in extraordinary situations, giving rise to unlooked for strokes in politics and morals.²¹

What, however, in Oakeshott's interpretation, set Burke apart from some of his contemporaries was the immediacy of the connection between the assertion of selfhood and the duty to recognize individuality in others: 'what for Kant was a piece of illogicality (claiming individuality to oneself and denying it to others), and for Adam Smith a failure to recognize the minute human disposition of "sympathy", Burke identifies as a moral enormity' (HL 70). The same enormity that is, as, on Oakeshott's account of morality, would manifest itself in the inability to recognize the authority of a moral rule and to subscribe to it adequately. Only, whereas in Burke 'the transference from the proposition *this is what men are like*, to the proposition *this is how they ought to behave*, is made in the perception that *this is how God created them*' (70), in Oakeshott this theological premise is transformed into a 'poetic' one, and the overall construction is returned to the realm of human artifice.

This 'return', while reinforcing the diversity of vernacular moral languages, does not relieve the individual of what Hume described as the 'absolute necessity' to act 'and live, and converse like other men'.²² But it does make the task of the political reformer more difficult, precisely because he has to imagine the constraints of the daily intercourse as already existing in not yet experienced situations located in the future: 'No difficulties occur in what has never been tried. Criticism is almost baffled in discovering the defects of what has not existed; and eager enthusiasm and cheating hope have all the wide field of imagination in which they may expatiate with little or no opposition'.²³ For Oakeshott, imagination thus freed from the constraints of conversation is fancy. Yet it is difficult to see him embracing, at least without qualification, the Burkean 'solution':

It may be allowed to [the true lawgiver's] temperament to catch his ultimate object with an intuitive glance, but his movements toward it ought to be deliberate. Political arrangement, as it is a work for social ends, is to be only wrought by social means. There mind must conspire with mind. Time is required to produce that union of minds which alone can produce all the good we aim at. Our patience will achieve more than our force.²⁴

For Oakeshott, what has to be achieved by the true lawgiver is the union of the system of *lex* which recognizes the diversity of 'minds'. Political imagination stems from this diversity, recognized as the diversity of moral standpoints and not interests. Legislators or rulers may engage in political deliberation not because they occupy specific offices but in spite of this. To become 'politicians' they have to put by their identities of rulers or legislators. As far as

²¹ Burke, *Reflections*: 150.

²² Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980): 6-7.

²³ Burke, *Reflections*: 148.

²⁴ *Ibid.*: 148.

the relations between states are concerned, this separation of politics from ruling implies that, rather than envisaging, as most of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century thinkers did, global legislative acts and constitutional transformations intended to curb the insatiable appetites of states, one has to anatomize existing civil practices with a view to their possible re-arrangement. If a particular manner of governing 'is to be planted elsewhere in the world', it cannot be 'abridged into something called "democracy" before it is packed up and shipped abroad'; rather 'what is exported is the detail and not the abridgement of the tradition and the workmen travel with the tools – the method which made the British Empire. But it is a slow and costly method. And, particularly with men in a hurry, *l'homme à programme* with his abridgement wins every time' (R 55).

Nothing could be farther removed from Oakeshott's intentions than slowing down the world of modernity, returning it to a more 'traditional', more uniform rhythm or arresting its characteristic 'bustle of getting and spending' (OH 191). This would have required a return to the pre-modern understanding of both politics and political theorizing, whereas Oakeshott clearly intends to move on, following Hegel, from the origins of modernity towards the idea of politics as the counterpart of the modern state already recognized as a powerful human invention. Even a quick perusal of the third essay of *On Human Conduct* would be enough to dispel any suspicion that Oakeshott attempts to idealize the actual practice of empire-building. Moreover, he clearly states that for those whose own manner of ruling was not touched by the genius of the Romans and the Normans the imposition of the rule of law 'could not be anything but an ordeal, the difficult surrender of one *persona* for another' (166). What he insists upon is that the activity of politics becomes closer to that of civil philosophy (as Fletcher in his opposition to the nascent British imperialism wanted it to) when it is distinguished from the writing of abstract constitutions or from the enactment of concrete laws, not to mention the 'crafty and insidious' policy-making.

Yet Oakeshott's political theory departs also from Hegel's: 'So far from its being the case (as Hegel suggested) that the character of an association in terms of the rule of law is most fully expressed when it is engrossed in the pursuit of policy or when it is at war, these are the occasions when it is least of itself' (178). This departure is due to a different idea of history, and also a different conception of the state, which is never an association in terms of the rule of law, but nor is it merely an enterprise in pursuit of power. Here again it is interesting to compare Oakeshott's idea of the state with that of Collingwood, focusing primarily on the difference between their responses to the Hegelian identification of history with political history and an idea of world politics implied in it.²⁵

²⁵ Hegel, according to Arendt, overheard in the cannonade of Jena not only the political attempt to usher in a new beginning for the whole of mankind, and thus a new form of imperialism, but also the descending of the realm of Truth onto the world of human action. Truth, although unfolding in time and in this sense 'historical', was believed to be valid for all men: 'Truth had to relate to man *qua* man, who as worldly tangible reality, of course, existed nowhere. History, therefore, if it was to become a medium of the revelation of the truth, had to be world history.... The very notion of world history was

What constitutes a shared background for these responses is the distinction between laws and historically acquired manners of particular societies. What makes a difference is the attitude towards the plurality of 'others besides ourselves', Collingwood's 'contentment' and Oakeshott's 'delight', discussed in the previous chapter. In accordance with his view of history as an evolutionary process powered by the mill-race of human self-determination, Collingwood, while rejecting Hegelian 'finalism', introduces the background of man's relation to nature so as to establish a universalist critical standpoint. Oakeshott, in contrast, finds intimations of unity in the instances of poetry and difference and thus anatomizes practices into the individual performances-events.

Laws and manners

The state, according to Collingwood, is capable of both creating and abating various social nightmares, including the favourite one of the twentieth century: our 'powerlessness in the giant grip of economic and social and political structures', when these 'creatures formed by the art of man, "for whose protection and defence" they were intended', become 'the chief authors of the evils for whose ending we have made them'. Then hope turns to despair. Yet, if 'the hope went, the despair would go too. If we believed Marx's monstrous lie that all States have always been organs for the oppression of one class by another, there would be nothing to make all this fuss about' (12.9-95).

The concluding reference to Marx has more to it than just an assertion of the ambiguous character of the state as well as its importance (two points on which there is little disagreement between Collingwood and Oakeshott). A much more important issue concerns what Collingwood believes to be Marx's denial of human freedom (again, a criticism with which Oakeshott would agree). Collingwood's way of re-asserting the importance of both the state and politics for human freedom locates politics within the state, as the site of civilization 'domestically' and the vehicle of it 'internationally'. The state, at least in the second part of the *New Leviathan*, is the mill-race indeed, a human invention meant to accumulate power and to put it into the service of civility. However, while discussing civilization, Collingwood reverses the flow of analysis, beginning this time not with the purposive individual action but with the practice of civility. This introduces a tension into the overall argument so that it ends up telling two conflicting stories at once. Oakeshott's idea of the state, as oscillating between *universitas* and *societas*, offers a possibility of locating the activity of world politics on the map of human experience, again, in relation to laws and manners, but in a manner different from Collingwood's.

The mill-race

This difference is best seen against the background of what is similar in the two accounts. Thus Collingwood's understanding of civil condition is also premised on the four Aristotelian

born from the first attempt at world politics, and... in one form or another world politics has been an adjunct to politics ever since'. *On Revolution* (London: Penguin Books, 1990): 53.

characteristics identified by Oakeshott, although formally his idea of society is stated in opposition to that of class (19.1-7). The basic distinction is that classes are organized in terms of resemblance, societies in terms of participation. To be able to make a classification, one has to participate in a society within which public agreement as to what resembles what already exists. This agreement *constitutes* a society. Insofar as human societies are constituted by social consciousness, they can be constituted only by agents who have and can share it, that is, by humans who are *free* and capable of recognizing the freedom of others. Thus members of society are also *equal* as far as their membership is concerned.

The remaining characteristic of the civil condition, the non-instrumental character of civility, is presented by Collingwood, again, with reference to Marx, but also to the Roman idea of *societas*. His disagreement with Marx concerns the contention that it is humans' social existence that determines their consciousness. As a description of the capitalist system imposed upon humanity by brute force, Marx's dictum first denies any social existence proper to this particular system and then, as a more abstract statement, subordinates human freedom to a non-entity (19.83-94). Meanwhile, the words 'society', 'social' already contain a reference to free will, often however obscured because the Roman conception of *societas* is 'swallowed... [as it is] found in text-books' without looking at the facts of modernity (20.82). The Romans were interested in partnerships as long as these involved economic interests, but with some modifications their theory holds good without any reference to transactional considerations. The most important of these modifications concerns the criteria of membership, which were defined by Romans in terms of sex, age and citizenship. These were context-specific safeguards 'of the idea that no one could legally be a party to a contract unless he was capable of making up his mind for himself and explaining it, if need be, in court', that is, the idea 'that a contract must be a *joint activity of free agents*; their free participation in a joint enterprise' (19.57).

Collingwood repeatedly stresses that 'enterprise' here is as far removed from economics as might be the joint decision to 'go for this walk' or to 'sail this boat' (20.91). But the stress on *this*, as in 'this society', results in a tension in his theory of 'external politics'. Politics in Collingwood belongs to the body politic, which is always and irredeemably a mixture of a non-social community and society proper: 'The world of politics is a dialectical world in which non-social communities (communities of men in what Hobbes called the *state of nature*) turn into societies' (24.71). What constitutes a society is an authoritative agreement presented in the 'contractual' idiom of decision-making. Society, as a joint will of its members, is also an enterprise, but of a special kind, 'intended to "travel hopefully" but not "to arrive": no time of termination being either stated or implied' (21.92).

Within a body politic, authority belongs exclusively to its social part and here it is clearly separated from force. But every body politic invariably includes non-social element, those incapable of ruling themselves and therefore unfit to enter a society. Hence the distinction

between the rulers and the ruled: the rulers constitute a society and rule the rest of the body politic by force (the first law of politics). Politics is the process of up-bringing the ruled so that they might become the rulers (the second law of politics). This process can be maintained only in a manner historically established and accepted within a given body politic (the third law of politics). All three laws operate concurrently, but logically the process is firmly grounded in the activity of self-ruling (25.7-9).

For Collingwood, there are also three possible reasons for the outbreak of war: first, 'because men charged with the conduct of external politics are confronted by a problem they cannot solve'; second, 'because the internal condition of the body politic is unsound'; and finally, 'because the rulers [of a given body politic] are at loggerheads' (30.31; 30.34; 30.37; emphasis deleted). The problem men charged with the conduct of external politics cannot solve is 'systemic': there are ineliminable differences between the bodies politic (29.55). But differences as such need not result in war. War is a failure to obey international law, which Collingwood believes can operate without legislators to enact or rulers to enforce it (28.76-9). The internal condition of a body politic depends on the operation of law and order within it (30.25). Law and order are bound to break down when 'the rulers are at loggerheads', which is the main cause of war, since this marks a breakdown in the activity of participation in a society and therefore a breakdown in the activity of self-ruling.

Thus Collingwood's theories of man, society and 'external politics' are all presented in the idiom of conversion, all three are theories of 'human nature', where 'human nature' is human history and as such the history of the self-knowledge of the mind. Yet there is one important difference. In the 'theory of man', the universalism is triggered by subjectivity and then converted by reason into a web of intersubjective relationships. Now universalism takes two forms. It is either the 'slavishness' of the ruled that infects the rulers, or it is universalism inherent in the idea of society as such. In the theory of man this dualism was not visible since both subjectivity (hunger) and reason were assumed to be universal in character, common to all men as men. In external politics, a different kind of *persona*, a citizen, enters the scene and particularity takes a different form:

The idea of a *particular society* is the idea of a society distinguished from other societies not by having different members but by having a different aim. The idea of a *universal society* is the idea of a society having no special aim which might distinguish it from any other; the idea of a society whose only aim is to be a society; one, therefore, which has for members all such agents as, being conscious of free will in themselves and each other, are able to be members of any society at all. The idea of a universal society is implied in the idea of a particular society. For the aim of a particular society is always twofold. First, it aims at establishing social relation between agents capable of social action; secondly, it aims at devoting this social activity to a particular enterprise (21.41-3).

One way of imposing the character of an enterprise onto the body politic without resorting to straightforward utilitarianism is by relating society's 'aim' to its territorial boundaries. Although Collingwood occasionally refers to the notion of territorial integrity as a ground for

the observance of international law, such grounding would constitute the 'fallacy of swapping horses', an appeal to 'bodies' when wills are at stake. This is not to say that state-borders do not matter, only that they should be accounted for. This is what Collingwood cannot do at this stage in the argument since the whole process of conversion is conceptualized as upbringing from within a territorial locality constitutive of the non-social community prior to its participation in the process of conversion into a society: 'there are some things which [a community] must have to do with and cannot neglect, whatever kind of community it happens to be. Thus, any community must have a home or place in which corporately it lives' (20.18).

Insofar as the idea of a universal society is implied in the idea of a particular society, the body politic has to develop a mode of 'contentment' with its territorial condition. This cannot be grounded in law, which requires rulers to give it, unless international law with its requirement of the formal equality of states is different in kind. This difference is not likely to be in international law's favour. Rather, as in Oakeshott's description of it, international law would be an amalgamation of 'instrumental rules for the accommodation of divergent interests', while the 'aim' of a particular society will acquire a more tangible and more familiar form of the balance of power. The only remaining kind of 'external politics', as an activity of upbringing, would be that of 'true imperialism: to bring light to the darker places of the earth' (EPP 205).

As Collingwood argued shortly after the end of the First World War, such an imperialism cannot take place between already established states but has to become their mutual civilizing undertaking: 'mutual service and devotion, abnegation of self, of class, of race, nation, and language in the service of civilization and of the world' (206). Twenty years later, he clearly had second thoughts, and in the third part of the *New Leviathan* outlined a different idea of civilization in which appeal to man's natural environment takes an altogether different form. By now it is not a condition from which man liberates himself by acquiring social consciousness, but the one to which he returns in an attempt to recover his civility.

This transition is made through the outline of 'classical politics' already presented. Classical politics was understood in early-modern Europe by analogy with classical physics. The latter implied the necessity of limiting one's theoretical objectives. This meant taking time and history seriously and abandoning the ancients' search for essences for the combination of logical abstractions and empirical data. In classical politics, abstractions were drawn from the legal experience of the Romans and empirical observation was confined to the social end of the process of politics, the rest becoming the 'state of nature'. However, the principle of limited objectives did not abrogate the whole idea of the search for essences but only modified it: 'it is no longer held that the properties of a given thing can be exhaustively deduced from one single essence, but there is still what may be called a "relative essence", an "essence from our point of view", where "we" are the persons engaged in a certain kind of... inquiry' (36.21). This is Collingwood's outline of the transition from the tradition of Nature

and Reason, through that of Artifice and Will, to the tradition of Rational Will. This way history and difference enter the picture to be treated under the heading of 'civilization'.

Collingwood identifies three meanings of 'civilization': the ideal condition of civility, the process of approximation to this ideal and a particular, locally arrived at, stage in this process. Of these, he is focusing on civilization as the process. It is something which an association undergoes.²⁶ For its own members, an association is a 'we' to which there is always a 'not-we'. But there are two kinds of a 'not-we'. The first is an absolute 'not-we', 'not a self at all but a piece of unconscious matter'. The second a relative 'not-we', 'a self in its own right, an "I" to itself, but an "I" other than myself' (35.26), that is, what was presented as the not-self in the 'theory of man'. Thus through the process of civilization, an association sorts out relations between its own members, the relation between any of its own members and the world of nature, and relations between any of its members and those of any other association. 'In relation to members of the same [association], civilization means *coming to obey rules of civil intercourse*. In relation to the natural world civilization means *exploitation*' (35.36). In relation to the members of other associations it all comes down to the question: 'Are foreigners human?' (35.61).

Collingwood approaches this question with the same relentless logic with which Hobbes addressed the issue of absolute sovereignty. The moment one admits the slightest degree of difference between himself and 'strangers', he is on the way to the most outrageous displays of violence. There is nothing in logic which could arrest this movement. There is nothing in practice which could prevent one from perceiving the difference. 'Contentment' does not work in relations between associations, for strangers are denied the recognition of their humanity. But if this is human condition, humans have to take a closer look at how they treat their natural environment.

What Collingwood is looking for now is a kind of natural science 'more akin to folklore than to mathematics, riddled with superstition, and from the point of view of a twentieth-century "scientist" lamentably unscientific' (36.31). What he is concerned with, is how human relation to the world of nature shapes relations within an association and also relations with otherness as such. The crucial distinction is that between improvement and conserving. Improvement has no meaning if it is justified by appeals to the satisfaction of 'needs' because 'needs' only have meaning in relation to the current state of civilization (35.58). Conserving is all about the current state of civilization maintained through transition, but of a certain kind: 'Consider knots. The life of every sailor, the catch of every fisherman, and a thousand of other things of varying importance, depend on knowing that a knot will not come untied until you set out to untie it, and will quickly come untied when you do' (36.35). There are many

²⁶ Although Collingwood uses the term 'community' in this context, I am using 'association' to distinguish this type of community not only from Collingwood's 'non-social community' or 'society' proper but also from the 'body politic', the state, within which the process of the transformation of 'community' into 'society' is 'politics'.

different types of knots but only a small number of these is in constant use. Whoever invented them, was 'a man in whose presence a fellow-inventor consisting of Archimedes and Gutenberg and George Stephenson and Edison, rolled into one, would hide his diminished head' (36.41):

Who invented the bow-line? *Ignoramus, ignorabimus*. How did he invent it? *Ignoramus, ignorabimus*. I cannot conceive how anybody ever did anything so brilliant.... But how, once invented, was it transmitted? In general terms I know the answer. The conditions for such an event are that there should be a community in which inventions are not hoarded, but taught; that there should be men who know them and are willing to teach them, and men who do not know them and are willing to learn them (36.59).

Such a community is possible only in the spirit of agreement now understood not as individual decision but as belonging to the custom that 'everybody who does not know a thing that may be useful for the betterment of living shall go frankly to one who knows it, and listen while he explains it or watch while he shows it, confident by custom of a civil answer to a civil question' (36.46). And if such conception of science, and a world it implies, is only an ideal, a golden age, then nothing can help the world as we know it.

So, if 'contentment' with the presence of strangers is an impossibility, toleration can be introduced by issuing a warning against the ruin wrought by the mindless exploitation of man's environment in general. Now analysis begins with practice, the practice of civility which, without losing its character as an ideal, is located not in the future but within current experience. Reason supports human cooperation, and powerfully, 'but it does not originate in it' (36.74). The origins of authority are now in the custom of maintaining law and order, while law, as an experience of converting non-agreements into agreements, is not given by the rulers but rooted in the manners of a society which arise historically and have nothing to do with vulgarly understood 'politeness' (40.73-5).

Now difference can be accounted for by reference to the historically acquired manners rather than deliberately subscribed to 'aims' of particular societies. Civility, as a given state in the process of civilization, knows no distinctions between the rulers and the ruled. It is sustained by the confidence in the custom of receiving a civil answer to a civil question. This practice is threatened by the 'world of office-drudges and factory-drudges', the world of technological exploitation of nature, 'the world of Fascist or Nazi dreams', the worlds of Marxian socialism and state-promoted capitalism, all of which are 'only our present world with bankruptcy brought nearer' by the industrialization of the most basic human relationships, education in particular: 'These are the alternative forms of ruin which by now confront a civilization where men have been fools enough to hand their children over to professional education' (37.56-60).

So, if previously, while presenting the state as the mill-race of civilization, Collingwood described the life of politics as 'the life of political education', now it becomes important to dissociate education, and thus civility, from the state so that to protect it from the malaise

of technology. Even more important is to locate that region of experience in which the practice of civility is visibly present:

there is a vast region of experience in which the irresponsible attitude of doing things for fun resists all the onslaughts of professionalism. For every man who indulges himself in games and sports and pastimes, this region includes all those things. For almost every human being it includes eating and sleeping and making love. ('Philosophers' have traditionally belittled these things. More fools they. Look closely, and you will see in them the sheet-anchor of civilization.) This region includes almost all that is enjoyable in life, and almost all that people do well for the excellent reason that they have no motive to shirk it (37.83-6).

This is more than just a retraction of Collingwood's own earlier views. It is also another departure from the Hegelian philosophy of history dominated by the presence of the state: 'This is what comes of treating political history by itself as if it were the whole of history. The moral is that political developments should be conceived by the historian as integrated with economic, artistic, religious, and philosophic developments, and that the historian should not be content with anything short of a history of man in his concrete actuality' (IH 122). Political theory and politics are still firmly anchored in the state, but the state itself stops being the vehicle of civilization. Rather, humans learn the practice of civility from within the localities of their landscapes and manners. In so doing they participate in a potentially universal society. This shared participation allows for the classification of human associations in terms of their resemblance and thus for a distinction between the ancient *polis* and the modern state as different forms of human association constituted by a shared context of historical process.

Put differently, humans are making history by inventing and inhabiting institutions appropriate to their historically acquired manners. This process is driven by human consciousness born out of the 'primal' struggle with man's natural environment. Yet, insofar as the (Hegelian) ultimate resolution of this struggle is ruled out (a 'practical' counterpart to the 'theoretical' liquidation of philosophy), the state begins to lose its attractiveness as the site of historical progress. Now man turns, as it were, back to nature and his childish experiences, not so much in search of consolation or protection, but for a lesson in civility. This, however, weakens Collingwood's initial critique of Marxism, at least if the latter is released from its economic determinism. Consequently, this also weakens Collingwood's defence of the state and makes 'external politics', as an activity of social conversion brought about by the consorted effort of the states, an impossibility.

The dry wall

Oakeshott's disagreement with Collingwood's conception of the state is stated clearly: 'It is often suggested that all human association must be supposed to begin in the relationship of a potentate (or a class of potentates) and those over whom they exercise power.... But it is safe to say that, in general, there is little to be said in favour of these speculative suggestions; and as an account of the emergence of modern European states, nothing at all' (VMS 333). States

emerged as pieces of 'inhabited territory with a government: land (often ill-defined), people (often miscellaneous) and ruling authority (usually in the course of seeking recognition)' (319). As far as the territorial arrangements are concerned, the 'history of modern Europe is the history of Poland only a little more so' (OHC 186). As for the government, its history is that of 'inconclusive encounters... in which Christendom was transformed into a still to be imagined and invented modern Europe' (OH 164-5).

The dualism of territoriality and government is similar in Oakeshott to that of body and mind. State-boundaries do matter, but only insofar as they acquire specific meanings through understanding:

We are apt to think of a civilization as something solid and external, but at bottom it is a collective dream. 'Insofar as the soul is in the body', says Plotinus, 'it lies in deep sleep'. What a people dreams in this earthly sleep is its civilization. And the substance of this dream is a myth, an imaginative interpretation of human existence, the perception (not the solution) of the mystery of human life (HCA 159-60).

It is in this sense that Oakeshott presents Hobbes' work as belonging not only to the philosophy of politics, but also to 'our language and civilization' (159), and states as 'instruments whose resources awaited the explorations of yet unborn composers' (OHC 185). More often than not the fugue of European state-conduct was played by ear and replayed by heart, and there was a lot of 'poetry' in that. But poetic utterance has no settled value, its language is 'without vocabulary, and consequently one that cannot be learned by imitation' (R 527-8). In conduct, unsettled authority invites either force or a 'procedure of moral casuistry', in which 'every man must do his own casuistry for himself' (OH 146-7). Alternatively, he is disciplined into obeying rules through the unreflective acceptance of the conclusions of some moralist.

Ironically, this is how Machiavelli, Hobbes or Hegel were seen by their contemporaries and later commentators: as moralists, whose conclusions assigned special importance to force. For Oakeshott, they are the 'composers' providing the rules of notation, and not of conduct, the terms in which practical utterances can be understood, learnt and taught. These are never created out of nothing. There are no situations in which there is no some authoritative provision for deliberating existing rules. What there may be is confusion or mystery about the character of such authority, and this needs to be abated. In Oakeshott's own rendition of the history of this engagement, familiar patterns of political theorizing are anatomized into significant details which are then re-assembled into a new tapestry. Hobbes is a towering presence, although Oakeshott sees his contribution not in the polarization of social life into the states of 'nature' and 'civility' but in assigning authority to the office of government. The attribution of authority is 'not a matter of choice but of subjecting what purports to be authoritative to a certain test and giving reasons for a conclusion; and *respublica* itself provides reasons which, because it is composed of rules, must themselves be rules' (OHC 154).

This self-authenticating character of *respublica*, together with its capacity of evoking the acceptance of all *cives* without exception, is what makes it a considerable human achievement. However, *respublica* is never without play in its conditions and the validation of its authority is always an inquiry that pulls those engaged in it beyond the already known system of *lex* (151). This intrinsic pull is due to the habit of the identification of rules with ‘rightness’ and laws with justice (or *lex* with *jus*). As Oakeshott clarifies in ‘The Rule of Law’, this is due to the dualistic character of moral rules, at once authoritative and prescriptive, even if what they prescribe is not a substantive performance but conditions to be observed in moral conduct. Not surprisingly, there were theorists (Oakeshott describes them as neoplatonic), who attempted to tackle two problems at once: validating the authority of *lex* and ascertaining its *jus*. *Respublica* was to be ruled by *lex* authority of which lay in *jus* conceived either in terms of some ‘higher’ law or some readily available and demonstrable principles such as absolute ‘values’, inalienable ‘rights’ or unconditional ‘liberties’ (OH 168-70).

Like these thinkers, Hobbes also identified the rule of *lex* with that of *jus* by holding that authentic *lex* cannot be *injus*. Yet Hobbesian *jus* consists exclusively in ‘faithfulness to the formal principles inherent in the character of *lex*: non-instrumentality, indifference to persons and interests, the exclusion of *prive-lege* and outlawry, and so on’ (173). This is not enough and requires a Hegelian addition: ‘the negative and limited consideration that the prescriptions of the law should not conflict with a prevailing educated moral sensibility’ within *respublica*, so that justice of the non-instrumental conditions imposed upon moral conduct by authentic law, thus turning it into civil conduct, should be recognized ‘as a combination of their absolute faithfulness to the formal character of law and their moral-legal acceptability, itself a reflection of the moral-legal self-understanding of the associates which (even when it is distinguished from whatever moral idiocies there may be about) cannot be expected to be without ambiguity or internal contradiction—a moral imagination more stable in its style of deliberation than in its conclusions’ (174).

This is a restatement of Collingwood’s ‘third law of politics’, supported by a similar understanding of the succession of the three major traditions in political thought. There is also in Oakeshott’s version a touch of British eighteenth-century political theorizing, meant to offset the Hegelian conflation of world history with politics. Oakeshott’s ‘anatomizing’ of world history into a dry wall of contingently related local practices-events is more at home within the Humean metaphor of society as ‘a wall, built by many hands, which still rises by each stone that is heaped upon it, and receives increase proportional to the diligence and care of each workman’.²⁷

²⁷ Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975): 305.

Hume's subsequent suggestion that the building of a just society required a premeditated design and cooperative effort added more than a touch of utilitarianism to his construction. In Oakeshott, human associations are judged in relation to human freedom, while the intimation of freedom is sought, not in the state, nor in history, but in poetry (dramatic individuality). And there is one metaphor that makes possible a comparison between states and buildings, both of which 'may be said to be intrinsically ambiguous because they demand to be considered not only as poetic images but also from the point of view of their durability and the manner in which they satisfy a practical need' (R 538). These ambiguous constructions may, often by chance rather than choice, lure an attentive observer 'into looking or listening', and then 'the mood of contemplation may supervene' and the character of the building 'as a poetic image may, suddenly or gradually, come to impose itself upon us' (539).

This should not, however, be pushed too far. Political deliberation requires an exceptional focus of attention rather than a willingness to get distracted. Yet here as well, an entrance to the world of poetry is present. The key to it, as always, is wonder; only now it imposes itself differently, as in Oakeshott's image of a particular association: 'There was once a building which had been constructed by many hands and over a long period of time. Its architecture represented many different styles, and so far conflicted with the known rules of construction that it was a matter of wonder that it remained standing' (V 158). Needless to say, decisions whether to expand such a building or whether to provide a room within it to 'strangers' are driven by considerations of durability or the building's ability to satisfy a practical need, nor can one ignore the bustle of construction work in the neighbouring districts. However, one can distinguish theoretically between that which is appropriate for the treatment of 'things' and that which is due to humans.

In the case of the state, this means distinguishing between its character as *universitas* from that as *societas*. One of the virtues of this distinction is that it locates politics in *societas* rather than the state, and world politics in the relations between, again, not states, but *societates*. This does not deny the importance of the transactional (or, on occasion, co-operative) relations between the same states as *universitates*. But deliberation, even if triggered by some urgent interest in or moral indignation with whatever may be going on outside the contingently established borders of one's own state, becomes political once it is transformed into an exercise of political imagination; and this invariably begins with an instance of wonder, especially so once a style of construction different from one's own is encountered.

Here again affinity between political imagination and poetry may be deceptive. First, as far as human conduct is concerned, poetry is akin to violence, and thus to 'fabrication', in seeking magnificence and release from the reciprocal engagements of self-disclosure. Second, the veil of poetry may well be more difficult to transgress than a simple country wall erected to protect one's landed property. It is knit from a language emancipated from that very transactional character which in the vernacular of conduct is easily abridged into pocket-

dictionaries or exchange-rate tables to equip the tourists with. One cannot be sure that a 'golden meadow' is indeed and always a 'sunlit field of grass', and 'plum blossom' invariably stands for 'charity' (R 528). The origins of poetry are in the experience of learning one's mother-tongue which, unlike foreign languages, is never learnt by the book and always by ear, and unlike languages learnt in the preliterate transactions of the market place or the playground, is spoken, not for the sake of transaction, but as an attempt to speak: 'We speak an heroic language of our own invention, not merely because we are incompetent in our handling of symbols, but because we are moved not by the desire to communicate but by the delight of utterance' (539). And delight, as more than one poem attests, can be sought not only in 'golden meadows' but also in 'man's newest form of gamble with death', in the 'tumult in the clouds' crowded with deadly pieces of technology.²⁸

Political deliberation is dramatic rather than 'poetic'. Nevertheless, to be possible, it has to be related not only to the practice of civility but to other regions of experience as well. The balance is never perfect, never final and never uniform. There are associations whose philosophers stress the communicative aspect of politics to counterbalance the claims of poetry, which in their climes acquired a character too heroic. There are others, always more fortunate with their poets than with the politicians; their songs, even when composed as political marches, outlive the sentiments of those who once marched to them. And there are those perhaps, where the 'right' balance was once struck, by chance and choice, and whose political climate acquired a permanent grim mistiness, displaying neither much madness nor iciness.

Perhaps this is what Collingwood meant when, contemplating the disgrace of the Vichy France and picking up the Nietzschean gauntlet of the 'nation of shopkeepers', he told his students that none of the 'little fat men with a star', including those of his own country, stood any chance as long as there was someone still capable of imagining 'the ghost of Nelson' and seeing it 'smile grimly as one who knew it all the time' (EPP 222). Civilization cannot be defeated because it fights in a 'sentimental' manner, not by pursuing a premeditated purpose but by upholding its historically acquired disposition and thus turning its own 'playfulness', diversity and imperfection into its major assets: 'What ensures the defeat of barbarism... is the literally infinite possibility of varying the nature of the thing called civilization, leaving it recognizable in its diversity' (NL 41.7).

This is another way of saying that 'as nothing here is necessary, so nothing is impossible', another way of re-asserting human freedom and the possibility of the continuous re-arrangement of the overall conditions of the practice of civility; that is, the possibility of politics. For Collingwood, 'sentiment' is the evolutionary 'process in which the same thing begins as an emotion and ends as a thought' (41.33), for Oakeshott, it is 'virtue', an attitude in

²⁸ Cf.: Eliot, 'Defence of the Islands', *Collected Poems*: 227; W.B. Yeats, 'An Irish Airman Foresees his Death', in *Collected Poems* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1994): 111.

which an action is performed and thus, as a performance itself, an event, meaningful in its relation to a practice. Thus difference persists, but against a shared background of the recognition of the diversity and the open-endedness of human experience:

The road runs always to the sea
'Twixt duty and delight (OHC 324).

Civilization and tradition

The point of this chapter has been mostly negative: to show that the modern European state cannot serve as a model for a global order compatible with the understanding of human freedom that is central to Oakeshott's idea of civil association and Collingwood's conception of the state of civility. Nor can such order be found in the relations between actually-existing states. Rather, the global association of states may be understood as at once composed of *universitates* and *societates*.

As far as relations between *universitates* are concerned, these are driven by 'policy', that is, 'designs to promote and to seek substantive conditions of things recognized as the satisfaction of an *interest* or held to be the common *interest* of the associates' (OH 176). Whether such interest is identified with the establishment of perpetual peace or with 'the prosperity of the associates or the maximization of the pleasurable sensations of the associates and their pet animals' (146), make little difference for the terms of association. The nobleness or the scale of ambition involved in any such project is irrelevant inasmuch as the imagined and wished-for outcome it postulates is understood as a want to be satisfied. World politics may be possible, if at all, only in the relations between *societates*, provided the diversity of both 'laws' and 'manners' across them can be reconciled.

In fact, some such reconciliation is necessary. Whereas *respublica* is considered, as far as this is possible, as a self-contained ensemble of practices, inhabitants of any given *societas* cannot attend to its 'agreements, treaties, covenants, etc. negotiated and entered into with the rulers of other such associations' as merely 'miscellaneous arrangements' which 'bear upon the conduct of *cives* with varying degrees of remoteness' (OHC 147). In Oakeshott's own account, these arrangements unavoidably undermine the practice of civility within territorial boundaries to which every *societas* is tied by its local counterpart, *universitas*. It is quite possible that *cives* may come to believe that the conduct of neighbouring, or remote, associations makes it desirable to introduce certain changes into the conditions of their own *societas*. In itself, the deliberation of such changes will not be different from the activity of politics as it was defined initially. To occupy a distinct place on the map of human activity, world politics has to be addressed to the overall conditions of a global order composed entirely of moral rules and understood exclusively in terms of its civil authority and obligation.

The 'classical approach' claims that some such order exists in the form of 'international society' distinct both from the merely transactional association of states, 'international

system', and the global order of human beings, 'world society'. One of the early formulations of this three-fold distinction identified international society with 'civilization', understood along the lines of Collingwood's account of the latter – not as an original condition of mankind, nor as a given entity, but as a process. As Herbert Butterfield put it, 'in the long run many people, who only see the surface of things, come to forget that there ever had been the sword behind the velvet – and imagine that the world had been naturally civilized all the time, civilized in its original constitution'; but to give civilization its due one has to think of it as a procedure by which 'the régime of power politics' comes 'to be chastened and qualified'.²⁹

It may seem that in this formulation the connection between international system ('the sword') and international society ('the velvet') is stressed, while the possibility of world society (the world's 'original constitution') is flatly denied. On closer reading, however, this is not the case:

The real clue to the whole civilizing process lies in the development of an international order and the consequent release of certain 'imponderables' which seem to operate on human affairs by a species of chemistry. And it is important that we should understand this phenomenon; for it is not any international paper constitution, nor is it any particular disposition of forces in the world, but it is just these imponderable factors, which constitute the operative virtue of the supra-national system. Since it is precisely these 'imponderables' which have been destroyed in our time as the result of two world wars, we have lost the most essential aspect of an international order – the one thing that cannot be recovered by the mere drafting of a paper code.³⁰

To be sure, thinking about world society in terms of a 'species of chemistry' is hardly helpful. In a sense, the two preceding chapters were meant to ponder over these 'imponderables' which Butterfield otherwise accurately describes as 'the operative virtue of the supra-national system'. As such, they are the conditions for the possibility of international society, that 'spirit of agreement' which, according to Collingwood, necessarily precedes all classification and therefore, in the case of global order, the attribution of agency to this or that class of actors, be they states or any other institutions.

As has been argued in this chapter, the thinness of such an agreement on the global scale may not allow for the existence of an order analogous to the one which exists in civil association. However, Oakeshottian 'civilization', as an instance of *civitas* into which *respublica* is 'carefully anatomized' so as to arrange out of such instances a *respublica* not-yet-known, offers a possibility of an activity which, in the words of C.A.W. Manning, is 'logically pre-legal' and yet constitutive of all the practices of international society.³¹

What I want to suggest in the next chapter is that such careful anatomizing of existing *societates* into highly localized *civitates* out of which a kind of world society might be arranged is the activity of world politics. 'World society', however, is not the most appropriate name for this mode of relationship. What I propose instead is 'tradition'. Its

²⁹ Herbert Butterfield, *Christianity, Diplomacy and War* (London: Epworth, 1953): 75, 79.

³⁰ Ibid.: 79-80.

³¹ C.A.W. Manning, *The Nature of International Society* (London: Macmillan, 1975): 132.

origins, as those of *societas*, are in Roman Law where *traditio* was understood as ‘a mode of transferring the ownership of private property’.³² With the rise of contemporary sociology and anthropology, ‘society’ and ‘tradition’ became opposed to each other, while ‘civilization’ acquired a purposive countenance as a process of turning ‘traditional’ associations into ‘societies’ proper. Responding to this specifically modern opposition, Collingwood wrote: ‘Do you brush aside... a distant past... with the latest word of bogus anthropology: “No savage ever invented anything; all they possess is decayed scraps from the cultures of more civilized peoples”?’ (NL 36.58). If so, then ‘God help us as anthropologists; for we cannot explain, with all our myths about diffusion, how any civilization, however low, ever continued in existence for more than a single generation. We are diffusionists who do not believe in diffusion’ (36.6).

Under the pressure of modernity, the voice of *traditio*, like that of the Oakeshottian civil association, ‘has, here and there, sunk to a whisper, but nowhere has it been totally silenced’ (OHC 313), and as an ideal character it can be still overheard ‘here and there in the features of human goings-on, intimated in some choices and dispositions to choose and in some responses to actual situations, but it nowhere constitutes a premeditated design for human conduct’ (180-1). A disposition to assume this voice to ‘be unique in being universal to mankind and a condition of survival’ should be resisted. But the disposition to speak ‘traditionally’ while deliberating the conditions of one’s own *societas* in its relation to international society ought not to be neglected either. What this disposition might entail is the subject of the next chapter.

³² Edward Shils, *Tradition* (London: Faber & Faber, 1981): 16. ‘Tradition’ Shils maintains, ‘is whatever is persistent or recurrent through transmission, regardless of the substance and institutional setting’.

Tradition

The task now is to relate Collingwood's and Oakeshott's analyses of the 'imponderables' of human conduct to that of international society so as to arrive at an idea of world politics. The need for such a connection is not merely theoretical (one cannot be content with loose talk about the 'operative virtue of the supra-national system') but also practical, in the sense in which one cannot, according to both Collingwood and Oakeshott, be indifferent towards the possible range of choices between the various kinds of inquiry: 'The difficulty posed by claims about brute realities and eternal necessities of the kind affirmed by so many theories of international relations is... that they depend on, and work to affirm, a very restricted repertoire of metaphysical possibilities, while pleading innocence of all metaphysical responsibilities and thus of all responsibility'.¹ Thus the classical approach, while enlisting the support of Collingwood and Oakeshott for the defence of its version of international society against the international system of rationalism, also distances itself from the 'critical' investigations of world society. In so doing, it appeals to Collingwood's, and especially Oakeshott's, rejection of cosmopolitanism. However, cosmopolitan options are not exhausted by the idea of a global state. An idea of 'tradition' compatible with Collingwood's and Oakeshott's analyses may be, first, much more 'critical' than the 'classics' would have it, and second, may be interpreted as a kind of world society, as a mode of human relationship, located on the map of human conduct as it unfolds in the world of states (or any possible ensemble of institutions that make up the pattern of world order).

¹ Walker, 'The Political': 310-1.

One way of advancing such an interpretation is to anatomize the idea of 'civilization' as it exists in contemporary International Relations so as to re-arrange its various authenticated features into an idea of world order more hospitable towards Oakeshottian poetry. These features I shall describe as international system, international society and world society. Each requires authentication, since these components will be borrowed from different theoretical discourses. Thus international system will be presented in its rationalist version, international society as it is understood by the classical approach, and different accounts of world society will be taken from 'classical' and 'critical' political theories. While mediating the claims of these kinds of inquiry, I shall indicate the affinity between Oakeshott's analysis and 'philosophical hermeneutics' as this was defined in the Prologue.

At least three conceptions of civilization can be identified in contemporary International Relations. The first is straightforwardly rationalist and announces itself in the form of the 'clash of civilizations'.² Although staged in the post-Cold War world, it is rooted in the discontents of the late 1960s, when it was argued that, whereas modernity may be associated with stability, modernization is more likely to produce revolutionary upheavals.³ Now Westernization is presented as having a similar effect on non-Western 'civilizations'. The problem lies not so much with this diagnosis as with the understanding of what civilizations are. These are portrayed as rigidly bounded territorial entities organized around certain given, mostly religious, ideas. How exactly such entities may be understood as acting or clashing remains, for the most part, unclear. Civilizations, supposedly, are powered by their core-states, if they have one, and the whole construction, as far as the explanation of action is concerned, tends to fall back on the meaner and leaner neorealist version of international system in which states, perhaps more easily allied along 'civilizational' lines, bargain with each other for their individual survival as minimum and world-domination as maximum.

Another 'civilizational' story is told within the English school, although under a less pessimistic heading of the 'evolution of international society'.⁴ Here the master-image is that of the three concentric circles, so that international society is located in-between international system and world society. 'Evolution' may be understood in temporal terms, so that the world order, taken as a whole, is seen as evolving from the condition of international system into that of international society and then world society.⁵ Such a location is opposed to the Augustinian version of realism which does not question the existence of international society

² Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

³ Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (Yale University Press, 1968).

⁴ Cf.: Adam Watson, *The Evolution of International Society* (London: Routledge, 1992); Hedley Bull and Adam Watson, eds. *The Expansion of International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

⁵ Most recent and most rigorous account of this mode of the evolution of international society can be found in Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); but see also Barry Buzan and Richard Little, 'Reconceptualizing Anarchy: Structural Realism Meets History', *European Journal of International Relations* 1996, 4: 403-38.

but understands it as a way of (eternal) coping with the consequences of man's fall from the original condition of world society into that of international system.⁶ Alternatively, 'evolution' may be understood in spatial terms, so that international society first develops into a localized nucleus of world society and then expands to the rest of the world.⁷

The third image originates in one of the critical approaches. Here civilization is understood as a dynamic search for a fit between material conditions of existence and intersubjective meanings characterized by three basic dimensions: the notions of time and space, the tension between individual and community, and a shared set of ideas about the relationship of humanity to nature and the cosmos.⁸ Although civilizations vary, depending on how they contingently resolve these tensions, each tends to acquire an institutional structure some of which are uniformly imposed by the most powerful onto the rest. There is also a possibility, in fact, a need for a supra-intersubjectivity to resist the imposed homogeneity of the global structures of dominance. This may take shape around the 'organic intellectuals' who, at the points of intersection of the various realms of meaning and dominance would 'eschew determinism, and offer alternative conceptualizations of how things might be done'.⁹

Of these three approaches, only the second, in its 'pluralist' or 'classical' version, remains unequivocally committed to the state as the major actor in international relations. Consequently, it turns out to be engaged in a battle on two fronts, defending its conception of international society against both international system and world society. If this is the nature of the engagement, then neither Collingwood nor Oakeshott can be of much help in this undertaking, mainly because this kind of international society cannot support the idea of human freedom which underpins Oakeshott's account of civil association or Collingwood's understanding of civility. The 'classics' do provide an interesting analysis of what, following Oakeshott, could be described as international *lex*, but fail to extend it towards an Oakeshottian understanding of world politics. Nor is there a place for politics in the 'clash of

⁶ Murray, *Reconstructing Realism*.

⁷ Cf.: Charvet, 'The Idea of an International Ethical Order', *Studies in Political Thought*, 1992, 1: 59-72. All these 'concentric' images of world order are conceptualized on the margins of the English School by James Der Derian in his *On Diplomacy: A Genealogy of Western Estrangement* (London: Blackwell, 1987) and Roger Epp, 'The English School on the Frontiers of International Society: A Hermeneutic Recollection', *Review of International Studies*, 1998, Special Issue: 47-63.

⁸ Robert Cox, 'Thinking about civilizations', *Review of International Studies*, 2000: 217-34. Cox explicitly draws on Collingwood's, among others, account of civilization and historical understanding.

⁹ Ronnie Lipschutz, 'Politics Among People: Global Civil Society Reconsidered', in *Pondering Postinternationalism: A Paradigm for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Heidi H. Hobbs (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000): 94. Importantly, Lipschutz's argument locates authority outside of the modern state, in the web of transnational, but also localized, institutions. See his *After Authority: War, Peace and Global Politics in the 21st Century* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000). Similar shifts in the location of authority are explored by Thomas Biersteker, 'State, Sovereignty and Territory', in *Handbook of International Relations*, eds Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse and Beth Simmons (London: SAGE, 2002): 157-76. In principle, none of this invalidates Oakeshott's analysis of human associations in terms of their dispositions to become *societas* or *universitas*, insofar as these dispositions are present in the conduct of these associations, whatever their name or shape is.

civilizations' or international system. With some modifications, however, the 'critical' image of world order may accommodate an Oakeshottian idea of world politics.

Thus I shall first examine the insights and the limitations of the classical approach. The former consist in the valuable distinction it makes between policy and politics. The latter results from its failure to grasp the distinction between laws and manners. I then turn to the 'critical' way of drawing these distinctions. Finally, I shall assemble an Oakeshottian image of world order and locate 'tradition' and world politics within it.

World order

Before considering the classical approach and its version of international society, a few words have to be said about the international system of neorealism, mostly regarding the latter's claim to provide a theory of international *politics*.¹⁰ The word 'politics' in the title of Kenneth Waltz's book has at least two interrelated meanings. First, 'politics' is defined by reference to what it is not, that is, 'relations' which, Waltz explains, may mean two different things: 'the interactions of units and the positions they occupy vis-à-vis each other'.¹¹ Since Waltz is interested in presenting a systemic theory, he insists on abstracting from the interactions of units and concentrates on a purely positional image of international system. Second, this system is 'political', this time defined positively, because the governing principle of its structure is not that of wealth, beauty or physical strength, but 'anarchy', as opposed to the 'hierarchy' of domestic political orders.

Advocates of the Waltzian version of neorealism have always stressed the positional character of his international system, insisting that the behaviour of its units, namely, their preference for relative over absolute gains and thus the impossibility of cooperation between such units, was caused exclusively by the anarchical structure of the international system.¹² Critics have always maintained that Waltz's theory contains the individualist assumption concerning the units' propensity to maximize their power.¹³ Another line of criticism conceded to Waltz the holistic account of behaviour but claimed that his understanding of units' identity remained individualistic, chiefly because of the absence of rules in his conception of the system.¹⁴

Without entering into all the intricacies of these longstanding debates, suffice to say that Waltzian states may be as positional or holistic as one chooses, and the system in which they are positioned as abundant with rules as that of the most elaborate game. What matters in this context is that these rules are exclusively prudential and the system is exclusively

¹⁰ Waltz, *Theory*.

¹¹ *Ibid.*: 80.

¹² Cf. Joseph Grieco, 'Anarchy and the Limits of Cooperation: A Realist Critique of the Newest Liberal Institutionalism', *International Organization*, 1988, 42: 485-507.

¹³ Cf.: Keohane, 'Theory of World Politics: Structural Realism and Beyond' in his ed. *Neorealism and its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

¹⁴ Cf.: Wendt, 'Anarchy is What States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics', *International Organization*, 1992, 46: 391-425

transactional. While such rules are designed to promote certain purposes, the authority of these rules does not constitute the terms in which the states are associated. Nor are they specific to the interactions of states. As Oakeshott puts it, describing the rules governing the operation of a fire station, 'many or indeed all of them might not be inappropriate for a police station'. The problem is, 'no fire would ever be prevented or put out if the associates recognized themselves to be related solely in terms of these rules, or if they did nothing but observe them' (OHC 117).

Put differently, whatever the merits or faults of Waltzian theory as a theory of the enterprise association of states, this is what, at bottom, this theory is, and there is no place for politics in enterprise association invariably governed through managerial decisions. On the definition of politics presented so far, Waltzian theory is a misnomer, it is a 'theory of international management'. As such, it can only offer a partial account of world order, and international system, as one ideal characterization of such order, analogous to the Oakeshottian *universitas*, and has to be supplemented, in the first instance, with another one, in which the authority of the procedural rules of 'good international conduct' will constitute the terms of association. This is what Terry Nardin and Robert Jackson attempt to provide in the form of international society.

Although both Nardin and Jackson draw on Oakeshott's understanding of human conduct, their versions of the classical approach are quite different. First, they understand the state differently. Second, they ground international society differently. Nevertheless, in both accounts, international society is opposed to both international system and world society. This indeed bears some resemblance to Oakeshott's positioning of human conduct in-between two modes of 'fabrication': extraction of wished-for outcomes by force and the pursuit of the 'higher morality' of self-enactment. Yet Oakeshott's account is meaningful, first and foremost, in relation to the understanding of individual identity which, by and large, remains under-theorized in both Nardin and Jackson, and in the classical approach more generally. Consequently, the 'classical' understanding of the overall constellation turns out to be predicated on a rather limited account of world society, in which Oakeshottian rejection of one particular mode of cosmopolitanism is taken for a denial of any cosmopolitanism whatever.

Policy and politics

Unlike Oakeshott, who introduces the *universitas/societas* distinction so that to problematize the modern European state, Nardin takes the states as he finds them in today's world. Accordingly, that very apparatus of power which prevents the actually-existing state from obtaining the unambiguous character of *societas* serves, insofar as it allows for the personification of the state internationally, as the precondition of having what Nardin describes as 'practical association' of states. This mode of association is opposed by him to 'purposive association' in which states jointly pursue shared ends so that 'an international

society can be said to exist only to the extent that there is cooperation in this pursuit'.¹⁵ Nardin rejects this kind of association as non-feasible, non-desirable and at any rate non-existent. States pursue divergent ends, while durable relations between them 'presuppose a framework of common practices and rules capable of providing some unifying bond where shared purposes are lacking. Such practices are embedded in the usages of diplomacy, in customary international law, and in certain moral traditions'.¹⁶

Contrary to some cursory statements of Oakeshott, Nardin demonstrates that at least some international institutions are not merely instrumental in their character but shape the morally authoritative context for the conduct of states. The dualistic, instrumental and authoritative nature of these institutions is, however, undeniable. Thus Nardin takes up Oakeshott's brief sceptical remark about 'world government' and develops it into a detailed analysis highlighting the incoherence of the idea of the United Nations, which posits itself both as an association *within* the society of states and the institutional embodiment *of* this society; an ambiguity which undermines its authority as either.¹⁷ The argument is that, if only one focuses on whatever is 'practical' in international society, one can still meaningfully speak about world governance if not 'government'. International society, construed in 'practical' terms, is the mode of such governance.

What, then, accounts for the instrumental, purposive disposition in the relations of states? One possible answer is: both the anarchical nature of international system and the aspiration to transform international society into a mutually advantageous global enterprise of either states or individuals; that is, to recall Oakeshott's expression cited earlier, 'the impulse to escape from the predicament by imposing it upon all mankind'. If this 'impulse' alone is considered, then the plurality of states appears as an alternative. If further it is argued that the purposeful disposition thus conceived is undesirable, then this plurality acquires positive value. Such positive value is what Nardin attempts to establish. If, however, it is recognized that the 'purposive' disposition in the life of international society, realized in the form of transactional rather than co-operative association, may well spring from the plurality of states as self-seeking power-bargainers, then upholding the intrinsic value of the pluralist position becomes more problematic.

This is recognized by Robert Jackson who, first, substitutes 'prudential association' for Nardin's 'purposive' (this accommodates Oakeshott's 'transactional' association, distinct from co-operative but still belonging to the 'enterprise' mode of relationships between agents), and second, stresses the dualist character of the state: 'Prudential association between states ordinarily is entangled in procedural association between states: the *Machtstaat* and the *Rechtsstaat* usually exist and operate in tandem and not in isolation'.¹⁸ He

¹⁵ Nardin, *Law*: 3.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*: 5.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 97-112.

¹⁸ Robert Jackson, *The Global Covenant*: 118.

then sets for himself the two-fold task of defending the *societas* of states against both the ‘solidarists’, whom he understands as advocating a global co-operative *universitas* of individuals, and realists, for whom international society exists, at best, as a charitable addition to the international system so that the ‘*Machtstaat* carries the *Rechtsstaat* on its broad shoulders’.¹⁹ Another important clarification concerns Jackson’s insistence that the subject-matter of the ‘classical approach’ has always been, and ought to be, human conduct rather than the conduct of states. States may be understood as acting only insofar as they are represented by humans, ‘statespeople’, the occupants of specific offices endowed with authority to enact and interpret the practices of international society.²⁰

The authority of these offices is derived from the *Grundnorm* of international society: the principle of non-intervention. Its value is ‘negative’, it only establishes conditions under which particular states can pursue their preferred forms of the ‘good life’. Whether any of these are actually achieved within any particular state is beyond the responsibility and the power of international society.²¹ The norm itself is a contingent historic achievement. Its first expression, and also its character as a principle, is to be found in the double-maxim of the Peace of Westphalia, *cujus regio ejus religio* and *rex et imperator in regno suo*: matters of religious faith, and thus the forms of ‘good life’, were to be decided ‘domestically’ by statespeople equal in their ‘international’ status.²² Consequently, statespeople became the authors of international law and international society more generally.

Jackson recognizes, in fact, insists, that international society ‘is lacking almost entirely in the assets and instrumentalities that sovereign states possess... virtually by definition’. It has no territory, government or population of its own, nobody “‘lives” in international society the way millions of people do live in particular countries’.²³ Lurking behind this image, however, is what John Ruggie described as the paradox of absolute individuation: ‘Having established territorially fixed state formations, having insisted that these territorial domains were disjoint and mutually exclusive, and having accepted these conditions as the constitutive bases of international society, what means were left to the new territorial rulers for dealing with problems of that society that could not be reduced to territorial solution?’ As it happens, the only solution, as expressed in such early Westphalian practices as ambassadorial extraterritoriality, was the gradual ‘unbundling’ of territoriality, so that over time the ‘nonterritorial functional space’ became the ‘place wherein international society is anchored’.²⁴

This is not to say that international society is hopelessly ungrounded, only, to use Oakeshott’s phrase, that its anchorage is to be sought in a sea-anchor rather than any fixed

¹⁹ Ibid.: 118.

²⁰ Ibid.: 30-9, 130-4.

²¹ Ibid.: 372-3.

²² Ibid.: 163-6.

²³ Ibid.: 104.

²⁴ Ruggie, ‘Territoriality’: 164-5.

foundation. Such grounding is explored by Nardin in his analysis of the character of international law. The central point of this analysis is that 'the most striking feature of customary international law is that, although its standards are standards of conduct for states and statesmen, the judgements upon which the creation and application of these standards rest are those of a specialized community of international lawyers'. Moreover, 'these same practices figure in the judgements of many others who know little of international law and for whom the rights and wrongs of states and statesmen are a matter of viewing international conduct from the perspective of a tradition... over which lawyers and politicians by no means have a monopoly and which is indeed often opposed to the particular usages of law and government'.²⁵ While recognizing the importance of these other judgements, Nardin argues that customary international law is a moral practice capable of accommodating the liberties of not just states but also individuals.

The authorship of international law, however, matters. In order to uphold the intrinsic value of the plurality of states as embodied in international law, Nardin needs to resist the critical pull of the pluralism of moral traditions and not just individual viewpoints generated and assessed from within any single tradition. This he does by noting that international law 'is not only a *kind* of law but a particular *instance* of that kind: the international legal system'.²⁶ It is the only existing tradition which addresses itself to (and possesses traditional resources for) the issue of *international* morality. Thus Nardin finds a point of universality to match the unity of the territorial world subdivided into sovereign units. Unlike Jackson, he associates it not with a principle but with an actually existing tradition. This tradition is obviously tainted with contingency, contingencies of power included. Accordingly: 'If there does exist an international morality transcending the contingent features of particular moral communities or traditions, it is likely to be found in the ongoing conversation or dialogue among them'.²⁷ But would that be an *international* morality then?

It seems that Nardin's theory is also a misnomer, but in a sense different from that in which Waltz's is. What it actually suggests is a theory of 'law, morality and the relations of humans, as inhabitants of particular traditions, in the world contingently divided into states'; that is, a theory of 'human conduct in a world of states' indeed. The overall construction can be understood as self-contained, and thus more or less safely lodged in a single world, only insofar as the correspondence between international law and the diversity of moral standpoints belonging to different traditions is somehow related to this contingent division. To use Oakeshott's metaphor, it has to be shown that a world in which not only the circumference but also the centre of the international legal system does not coincide with the multiple centres of morality can still be understood and inhabited as a single social whole.

²⁵ Nardin, *Law*: 240-1, 223.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 241.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 243.

Both Jackson and Nardin argue that international society constitutes such a whole, the international equivalent of Oakeshottian *societas*, which holds the world composed of diverse moral traditions together. Where their accounts differ is in the grounding of the authority of international society. For Nardin, it is anchored in the 'ongoing conversation or dialogue' of diverse moral traditions; for Jackson, in the ground-norm of non-intervention. Yet both distinguish international society not only from international system composed of Waltz's 'like-units', Jackson's *Machtstaaten* or Oakeshott's *universitates* but also from world society. Despite the different grounding of international society, Nardin is likely to agree with Jackson that world society does have a positive historical existence but only as a construction of the society of states.²⁸ This is so because both understand world society as an institutional expression of the idea of the unity of mankind which spans at least from the time of the Stoics to the modern practice of the protection of human rights.²⁹ In this manner, especially so in Jackson's construction, an uneasy alliance between international system and international society is being forged against world society, or cosmopolitanism, as yet another mode of universalism.

However, three questions are pertinent here. Whether cosmopolitanism ought to be equated with universalism. Whether in the alliance of international system and international society *Rechtsstaat* becomes the hostage of *Machtstaat*, while 'world policy', as the ongoing struggle over divergent interests, leaves no space for world politics. And what if Nardin's 'ongoing conversation or dialogue' between diverse moral traditions is the mode of existence of world society which, insofar as this dialogue is limited to the deliberation of the overall conditions of international society in terms of their desirability, constitutes the activity of world politics.

Leaving the last two questions for the next section, I shall now focus on the first one. My suggestion is that cosmopolitanism does not have to be equated, in fact, cannot be equated, with any global institutional arrangement but can be understood as a disposition in human conduct in the world of states.

Laws and manners

Political deliberation, according to Oakeshott, presupposes two distinctions. The authority of *lex* should be distinguished both from prudential considerations which necessarily exist in the life of any association and from moral considerations of a 'higher order' to be taken into account in self-enactment. The first of these distinctions may be understood as that between policy and politics; the second as that between laws and manners. Nardin and Jackson, while concentrating on the first distinction, offer a view of international *lex* different from Oakeshott's. To address the second distinction, one can also re-assess his account of the Kantian federation of republics so as to examine the relation between international *lex* and

²⁸ Jackson, *Covenant*: 112.

²⁹ Nardin, *Law*: 43-44.

possible conceptions of *jus*. In such re-assessment, there is more to cosmopolitan *jus* than the kind of universalism presupposed in Nardin's and Jackson's understanding of world society.

Here one can start, as Onora O'Neill does, by stating that 'the justice of states will suffice for justice only if we can show that any system of just states will itself be just. But this claim is implausible'.³⁰ This argument can be expanded to the general criticism of legal positivism thus stated by John Charvet:

The positivist aspires to provide a wholly self-contained theory of legal authority, but this aspiration cannot be satisfied. For it can be reasonable for each participant in a rule-governed system to acknowledge the authority of the rules solely on the basis of their acceptance by the others only if the various rules available for an authoritative choice all satisfy some basic condition of justice, so that the choice itself is to that extent morally indifferent. Positivism cannot explain that basic condition, since there is no ideal element in its notion of general acceptance.³¹

This is yet another attempt at grounding the authority of *lex* in some notion of *jus* external to it. What is sought is a conception of equality more fundamental than that of Oakeshott: equality of *homines* and not just *cives*. However, there are different ways of arriving at it. Charvet and O'Neill aim to do so without assuming any knowledge of any such equality which comes prior to social interaction.

Both present their constructions against the background of those of John Rawls while revising his distinction between private and public reasoning or metaphysical and political justice. The international analogue of this distinction is the 'classical' separation of the Westphalian principles of *cujus regio ejus religio* and *rex et imperator in regno suo*. According to Charvet, Rawls articulated this distinction so as to meet the communitarian critique of an implicitly Kantian metaphysics of his *Theory of Justice*. Instead of responding by developing a 'nonmetaphysical, but comprehensive, theory of the autonomous person' and showing 'how such a theory can be used to ground an antirealist account of the authority of social norms', Rawls committed himself to the view of humans who 'are not after all one person, but quite distinct private and public entities'.³² O'Neill also rejects Kantian two-world metaphysics but sees Rawls's conception of public reasoning as inadequate, in fact, more essentialist than that of Kant.

Thus O'Neill and Charvet approach the private/public and by implication the inside/outside divide from opposing directions and arrive at rather different ideas of cosmopolitanism. Charvet's can be described as 'institutional' insofar as it advocates a confederation of states evolving into a world state, an arrangement grounded in the principle of just social interaction. For O'Neill, all institutional arrangements are subject to

³⁰ Onora O'Neill, 'Bounded and Cosmopolitan Justice', *Review of International Studies*, 2000, 26: 45-6.

³¹ John Charvet, 'International Society from a Contractarian Perspective', in *International Society: Diverse Ethical Perspectives*, eds David Mapel and Terry Nardin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998): 130.

³² Charvet, *The Idea of an Ethical Community* (London: Cornell University Press, 1995): 5-6.

questioning and all principles 'are intrinsically indeterminate, and can be institutionalized in many distinct ways'.³³ She seeks to ground equality not in a principle, nor in any set of institutions, but in the modality of reasoning. In the end, both may be forced to make important concessions, but an exploration of their arguments allows for locating a modality of cosmopolitanism, and therefore an idea of world society, which is closer to Oakeshottian framework than to the classical approach.

Charvet begins by dismantling the idea of 'private' by way of a contractarian procedure. While seeing the standard contractarian device of the 'original position' as useful for the elucidation of the foundational principle of order, he also holds that any such position constructed on moral-realist premises would be redundant since by claiming *a priori* awareness of the fundamental principles of justice it will already presuppose what has to be established. What, in contrast, underpins his analysis, is a 'historical' claim that at a certain point in the life of human associations their members may be forced to realize that they can no longer rely on any external authority for the maintenance of the moral order enjoyed so far. This leads not so much to a change in political arrangements as to their relegitimation from a new, 'nonmetaphysical', standpoint. Contractarianism here is meant to bring moral and social spheres into a coherent relationship with each other by highlighting the conditionality of both.

Charvet's contract begins on the 'domestic' level. Here contractors are motivated by their recognition of the gains from cooperation, desire to cooperate on the basis of authoritative norms and acknowledgement that the authority and content of these norms spring solely from their own wills. Once this triadic conception is supplemented with the ideal constraint of equal bargaining power, contractors have to arrive at the foundational principle of collective moral life: 'the equal value of persons as free or self-directing beings'.³⁴ But not before they establish a political form, the state, with a dual function of solving the assurance and determinacy problems among co-operators and generating in them the required individualism which is then led 'back to a collective expression of social cooperation'.³⁵

The latter point is of particular importance for the 'international' part of the overall construction, since now political autonomy cannot be granted to states unconditionally, regardless of the content of their domestic conceptions of justice. It becomes derivative of the individuals' autonomy which each state is put under obligation to secure for its citizens. However, once Charvet moves his construction to the international level, it becomes clear that here one additional condition is implied in his procedure: it has to unfold within actually-existing state-borders. Two interrelated problems arise from this requirement. First, one has to account for the identity of states. Second, significant inequalities in power between actually-existing states impose additional requirements onto the centralized interstate

³³ O'Neill, 'Cosmopolitan Justice': 46.

³⁴ Ibid.: 119.

³⁵ Ibid.: 118-20.

authority (whatever its form) in terms of its capacity to satisfy the assurance and determinacy conditions for the moral international society. Further, having been shaped as moral beings domestically, individuals will attempt to interact globally, but since such conduct will obligate them to abstract from their particular situations, and no global individual morality can be presupposed in advance, they will be confronted with assurance and determinacy problems again and will have to fall back on their particular associations. Since, for practical reasons, the assurance and determinacy conditions cannot be satisfied by a world state (although it is not ruled out in principle) this task has to be fulfilled through the relations of states.

So now states are put into a contractarian procedure which, unlike the initial domestic one, does not require pre-existing interstate morality. States, as personalities (assuming that the problem of their identity is solved) are already shaped as moral beings. The best they can agree upon in this manner is to recognize each other's equality as states, that is, to recognize each other's political sovereignty and territorial integrity. While this satisfies the minimal requirements for cooperation on morally just terms, this is not enough. First, identity of particular states remains disputable. Second, in the contemporary world, political sovereignty and territorial integrity in themselves do not make all states truly autonomous agents. Therefore, to be fully just, the society of states has to develop into a confederation with authority to adjudicate on questions of identity, distribution and the use of force. The removal of the rigid private/public divide may sanction the establishment of such a confederation (and eventually a world state) through a kind of 'moral imperialism' checked mostly by prudential considerations.³⁶

All in all, international society is not merely a society of states but a 'network of private relations... built up on the basis of the moral life created within each state together with the interstate peace that is made possible by the states' commitment to respect one another's rights to political sovereignty and territorial integrity'.³⁷ World society seems to be included into the scope of international society rather than being merely an outgrowth of it, as in Jackson. Yet this is not the case. In fact, Charvet relies on states, and more specifically on *universitates*, more heavily than the principle of equality would allow.

Although Charvet advanced his idea prior to the publication of *The Law of Peoples*, it makes explicit what, according to O'Neill, is the major shortcoming of the latter work. Rawls' 'peoples' (and Charvet's 'ethical communities') are hostages not just to actually-existing states but to that in these states which corresponds to Oakeshott's *universitas*: 'There is something laborious about anchoring an account of [public] reasoning in a conception of territorial agents not well exemplified in our world, who (if they were exemplified) would

³⁶ Ibid.: 121.

³⁷ Charvet, 'International Society': 122.

acquire the political capacities Rawls imputes to them only by developing the very state and governmental structures from which he tries to detach his argument'.³⁸

According to O'Neill, Rawls' conception of public reasoning, or political justice, does not sit particularly well with his idea that justice is possible only within bounded communities. In her reading of Kant, any reasoning that appeals to an authority which is not vindicated can only be 'private'. Rigidly policed and jealously protected territorial boundaries are the means for such 'privatization': 'Boundaries of whatever sort are not unquestionable presuppositions of thinking about justice, but rather institutions whose structure raises questions of justice', while 'commitment to cosmopolitan principles does not entail—although it may not rule out—commitment to cosmopolitan political institutions, such as world state or world federation'.³⁹ Thus, whereas Rawls' and Charvet's constructions are cosmopolitan, or semi-cosmopolitan, as far as proposed institutional arrangements are concerned, they are not that different from Jackson's or Nardin's in terms of the modality of reasoning involved. Only Charvet, contra Rawls, embraces such communitarianism and, contra Jackson and Nardin, refuses to be content with the status quo.

However, in order to attain a standpoint from which to judge the status quo, Charvet, while refusing to assume the universality of natural rights, assumes the universality of the human condition. Although his 'original position' is not an encounter prior to all interaction, its 'metaphysical crisis' befalls the world as a whole uniformly wiping out all previous conceptions of authority. The uniformity of calamity results in a uniform remedy. Although some tribal associations may well satisfy Charvet's requirements for an 'ethical community', the 'great advantage of the state over tribal association lies in its ability to integrate individual interactions over a much wider area and on a much more intensive scale, and hence to facilitate economic and cultural developments that make it impossible for human beings to return to stateless societies'.⁴⁰ It is difficult to see, however, why this of itself should be an advantage for anyone but the citizens of such states. Unless, that is, one accepts the argument of those eighteenth-century thinkers who recognized in modernity the promise of the enrichment of human personality through its 'reorientation towards history', but recognized also that it came at a price which included not only the crisis of authority (the presupposition of Charvet's contract) but also the temptation of institutional imperialism (such contract's possible implication) as yet another impulse 'to escape from the predicament by imposing it upon all mankind'.

As shown in the previous chapter, in his response to this temptation Collingwood turned to the experience of man's emancipation from his natural condition so that to posit human freedom or self-determination as a criterion for action. A similar attempt, grounded in the philosophy of history as the story of man's emancipation, was undertaken by Andrew

³⁸ O'Neill, 'Justice': 51.

³⁹ Ibid.: 46.

⁴⁰ Charvet, *Ethical Community*: 185-6.

Linklater so as to make possible the 'radical critique of the state which historicism [that is, communitarianism] was unable to supply and modern natural law theory was unwilling to undertake'.⁴¹ However, nature, as a background for historical understanding inseparable from the locality of human situations, could not possibly provide a desired universal standpoint. Thus Collingwood turned to 'tradition', as the modality of man's engagements with both nature and his fellow-beings. This shift of attention, from institutional arrangements to the mode of governance, is what, according to Oakeshott, characterized specifically modern European political thinking in the first place. Accordingly, Kantian 'perpetual peace', sought in the confederation of states with republican constitutions, was read as a 'muddle', an unfortunate theoretical retreat from the achievements of earlier thinkers.

In O'Neill's reading of Kant's political writings, however, what makes up a republican state is a combination of three requirements quite similar to the three characteristics – freedom, constitutiveness, equality – with which Oakeshott, following Aristotle, begins his own exploration of the civil condition. Republican citizens should be free. They recognize their mutual dependence on a single shared legal system. And in relation to this legal system they are equal.⁴² The fourth characteristic, non-instrumentality, is implied in O'Neill's interpretation of Kant's idea of public reason as a strictly procedural way of thinking which cannot, and did not for Kant, suggest any institutional arrangement as being intrinsically just or peaceful. Commitment to public reason is neither more nor less than a recognized obligation to proceed so that every action or argument could be understood by anyone else.

Inherent in this interpretation of public reasoning is a reference to what one believes to be possible for others to follow and thus a reference to the 'private' identity (both one's own and that of any possible other one may encounter) shaped prior to the exercise of public reasoning. Recognizing the problem, O'Neill shifts the emphasis in the Kantian account of individual autonomy as self-legislation away from 'some (rather amazing sort of) self that does the legislation' to the activity of 'legislation that is not borrowed from unvindicated sources, that is not derivative, that is both freely chosen and has the form of law'.⁴³ Thus public reasoning is not exempt from the rule that 'any activity in human life that can count as reasoned must be structured'.⁴⁴ Accordingly, although the known boundaries of humanity constitute the only legitimate boundaries of justice, a realistically institutionalized world, and this is what Kant proposed, 'will be a world in which boundaries are not absent, but also one in which there are further institutional structures which support international justice between states and cosmopolitan justice for people when they interact across borders'.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Linklater, 'Men and Citizens in International Relations', *Review of International Studies*, 1981, 7: 37.

⁴² O'Neill, 'Cosmopolitan Justice': 58.

⁴³ Ibid.: 56; emphasis deleted.

⁴⁴ Ibid.: 55.

⁴⁵ Ibid.: 59.

Thus O'Neill's idea of public reasoning requires neither assumptions nor conclusions about the substantive equality of *homines*, save for the belief in their ability to formulate and follow authoritative rules, with further insistence that the authority of these rules cannot be derived from anything but human freedom. However, it also requires an autonomous subject which is less amazing than Kant's, namely, a subject whose identity is shaped within some particular association. Freedom, then, has to be conceptualized along the communitarian lines proposed by Charvet.⁴⁶

It seems that, even with these amendments, cosmopolitanism will still be at odds with Oakeshott's claim that, as *cives*, humans are free to choose anything but their civil obligation which is the counterpart of the authority of *respublica*. Yet *respublica* is treated by Oakeshott, as far as this is possible, in isolation from any environment. The authority of a *societas* is linked to the territorial boundaries established through the interaction of states (which includes *universitates*) that cannot stand the test to which civil authority is always subjected. This does not abrogate the authority of *societas* altogether, but it does increase significantly the 'play' in its overall conditions, even when *societas* is notionally rescued from the presence of *universitas*. Accordingly, the territorial arrangements of a given state necessarily fall into the scope of the deliberation of the overall conditions of 'its' *societas* in terms of their desirability, that is, within the scope of the activity of politics. And just as *homines* are responsive to the invitation to live 'so far as is possible as an immortal', *cives* can respond to the call of the self-authenticating, non-instrumental 'public reasoning', provided it is a discursive rather than demonstrative engagement, and to converse so far as is possible as participants to the conversation of *mankind*, 'simply' because they are capable of thinking about those beyond their own borders.

Put differently, O'Neill's 'public reason' can be incorporated into the Oakeshottian framework as a 'sentiment' in which *cives* may choose to attend to the overall conditions of their *societas*. Insofar as such deliberation is limited to a given *societas*, it remains the activity of politics. The activity of world politics has to be directed at the overall conditions of an ensemble of moral practices enacted and ruled by *societates* which, in the language of the classical approach, constitute international society. Its counterpart in O'Neill is 'institutional structures which support international justice between states'. A world divided by boundaries policed by *universitates* would be international system. As the modern European state can be understood in terms of both *universitas* and *societas*, so international system and international society make up world order. They coincide in space and time, and neither evolves into the other, although the density of each may vary across time and space. Both are human inventions and what distinguishes them is the mode of human association.

O'Neill's structures supporting 'cosmopolitan justice for people when they interact across borders' make up world society. As there is no need, in Jackson's account, to armour

⁴⁶ Charvet, *Ethical Community*: 63-85.

international society with a government, territory or armies of its own, there is no need to think about the structures of world society as being more solid than, to use Oakeshott's expression, 'what a people dreams in its earthly sleep'. Only 'a people' now has to be substituted not with an impersonal 'mankind' but with the individuals capable of visiting each other in their civilizational dreams. After all, 'public reasoning' is anything but 'collective'. Now disposition to participate in the conversation of mankind ought to be counterbalanced by the disposition to recognize everything as an occasion, an occasion for being kindled by the presence of the ideas of another order, for there is no way of knowing in advance of such experience whether a proposed moral rule can be indeed followed by concrete others. Put differently, O'Neill's idea of public reasoning and Charvet's understanding of individual identity, conflicting as they are, have to be put into a single story.

World politics

Like international system and international society, then, world society is a mode of human relationship. To deny its existence or importance here and now would be similar to denying the existence or importance of self-enactment for human conduct. To expect its arrival, through the evolution of international society, in the future, is to endow international society with the character of a global *universitas*. Rather, world society is to be found, if at all, in the ongoing conversation among diverse moral traditions unfolding within or across the boundaries established and upheld through the practices of international system and international society. The stories told in this conversation do not cross state-boundaries easily, not least because in such stories individual identity is linked to that of a closed territorial unit, while adventures of self-enactment are routinely likened to heroic conquests.⁴⁷ Characteristically, O'Neill's idea of cosmopolitanism, while treating all territorial boundaries as conditional, stumbles at the amazing character of a self-legislating subject, whereas the global communitarian contract of Charvet, while rejecting any objective standards against which to measure our thinking about individual identity, cannot account for the identity of states.

Perhaps this tension cannot be resolved. However, the task of a theory of politics is to offer an understanding, not a resolution. Thus, despite the superficial similarity between the 'classical' location of international society in-between international system and world society and the way Oakeshott locates human conduct in-between two modes of 'fabrication', Oakeshott's account of the overall constellation offers an understanding of the individual identity that the classical approach, with its exclusive focus on the practices of statespeople, cannot provide. The authority of statespeople, however, depends 'on myths of origin and projections of the edge of time' continuously narrated by 'ordinary' people.⁴⁸ Accordingly,

⁴⁷ Hume's 'marching up directly to the capital or centre' of all sciences, cited in chapter 3, n. 2, provides a paradigmatic example.

⁴⁸ Walker, 'The Political': 311.

what Nardin presents as 'the most striking feature of customary international law' (that its standards, as standards of conduct for states and statesmen, are rooted in the judgements of the inhabitants of various moral traditions), for Oakeshott would be 'not a paradox but a truism': any system of *lex* 'regulates its own creation' (151, n. 5) by establishing who and how assumes the roles of legislators, adjudicators and rulers within it. The most striking feature of international *lex* indeed consists in that it often does so through such institutions as war. Yet even in war it is possible to distinguish policy from politics and laws from manners, so as on the ground of these distinctions to distinguish world ruling from world politics.

In this section, I shall draw these distinctions by addressing in turn the two questions raised but put by in the beginning of the previous section. Whether in the 'classical' alliance of international system and international society the latter inevitably becomes the hostage of the former. Whether the ongoing conversation or dialogue between diverse moral traditions can be understood as the mode of existence of world society. Here I shall draw on the so-called 'critical' understanding of identity, arguing that Oakeshott's account of politics is closer to this mode of theorizing rather than the classical approach.

Policy and politics

The location of international society in-between international system and world society was codified in Hedley Bull's taxonomy of traditions which associated the classical approach with the name of Grotius and distinguished it from the realism of Hobbes and the idealism of Kant.⁴⁹ The names given to the three traditions were meant to indicate dispositions in thinking rather than precise theoretical directions. Therefore that line of criticism which focuses on the actual pronouncements of Grotius, Hobbes or Kant, highlighting those aspects of them that do not fit into this classification, interesting though it may be, is not really damaging for the classification as such. After all, one can always change the labels. Another line of criticism addresses the very practice of the personification of the state claiming that the problem lies not with any personification but with the inadequacy of both 'classical' and neorealist understanding of personality or identity as such. This results in what Erik Ringmar, following Martin Hollis, describes as 'the two-way vanishing trick': either the state, endowed with a Grotian (or Humean) character, vanishes into the manifold of conventions that make up international society the durability of which this state was meant to explain or, in its Hobbesian variety, it is kept outside of international system thus making any account of the latter non-falsifiable.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Bull, *Anarchical Society*: 24-7; 'The Importance of Grotius in the Study of International Relations', in Hugo Grotius and International Relations, eds Bull, Benedict Kingsbury and Adam Roberts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); 'The Grotian Conception of International Society', in *Diplomatic Investigations*.

⁵⁰ Erik Ringmar, 'On the Ontological Status of the State', *European Journal of International Relations*, 1996, 2: 448.

To maintain their own identities, however, both schools put forward their stories in which the state reappears, just like man reappears in the stories which Hobbesians tell about his redemption or Humeans about his futile attempts to 'catch himself'. Both stories may be flawed in their own terms or those of their rivals; but as stories they stand, if understood appropriately: as neither more nor less than a succession of metaphors arranged in a particular way for a particular reason. And there are compelling reasons for taking metaphors and stories composed of them for what they are – not a substitute for theorizing, but an integral part of any theorizing that attempts to understand the conduct of humans as story-tellers.

Metaphors are the most basic tools of human understanding and, since understanding is involved in every intelligent performance, of human action. They are 'the currency of interpretation just as they are of the texts interpreted'; the very idea that 'we can escape from metaphor to some other conceptual mode – especially to the idiom of ontology – is a mistake, although those who apparently commit that mistake may in fact covertly be using their own metaphors in some more-or-less successful attempt to pre-empt the possibility of rival interpretations'.⁵¹ Rival stories composed of metaphors are employed to promote interests under the conditions of stability or to foster identities in times of crises. In a story of world politics which purports to provide an account of both continuity and change, law and war appear as 'not so much contradictory moments – "morality" [be it Grotian or Kantian] and its negation – as complementary processes which presuppose each other'.⁵² The outcome of this interplay is recognition granted to a particular kind of actors. What such actors, be they sovereign princes, social forces or religious movements, are is 'neither a question of what essences constitute [them] nor a question of how [they] conclusively should be defined, but instead a question of how [they] are seen and a question of which stories are told about [them]'; for what we are as subjects, more generally, 'is neither more nor less than the total collection of stories that we tell and that are told about us'.⁵³

As far as the stories told within International Relations go, the classical approach (what Richard Ashley, following Habermas' classification of cognitive interests, terms 'practical realism') concentrates on a social order derived 'from a usually protracted and arduous (although not necessarily intentional) struggle to establish and maintain a consensus of co-reflective self-understanding: *a tradition*'.⁵⁴ However, as long as the self central to this tradition is equated with a state effective in its use of power, practical realism inevitably allies itself with its 'technical' (instrumentalist) counterpart against any possibility of a

⁵¹ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy and Tradition* (London: Duckworth, 1990): 37.

⁵² Ringmar, 'The relevance of international law: a Hegelian interpretation of a peculiar seventeenth-century preoccupation', *Review of International Studies*, 1995, 21: 97.

⁵³ Ringmar, 'The State': 452.

⁵⁴ Richard Ashley, 'Political Realism and Human Interests', *International Studies Quarterly*, 1981, 2: 211.

universal consensus other than that achieved by the only legitimate participants in such an order, states, concerning the proper handling of power. This is not an alliance of equals. Practical realism, by accepting the exclusive legitimacy of the state, enjoys in it only partial autonomy, whereas technical realism, due to its unfailing capacity to reduce all possible concerns to the single measure of efficiency, purports to establish its total autonomy and to capture the 'essence' of the realist tradition.⁵⁵

Thus technical realism constitutes, as it were, the hegemonic core of the overall construction, whereas practical realism adds only a hermeneutic superstructure which, no matter how refined or extended, cannot alter the fundamentals of such an order. Accordingly, 'the only kind of criticism that would possibly do away with realism is a global revolutionary change that would end the current order of domination without establishing a new one in its place'.⁵⁶ This Ashley launches, as far as the order of theorizing is concerned, by attacking the neorealist base of the realist tradition, exposing the connection between its individualism, utilitarianism and statism.⁵⁷ Yet criticism alone rarely brings down hegemonic orders. In his next move Ashley engages realism on its own terms: 'the job is a matter of doing interpretative violence to a tradition notorious for its celebration of violence. It is a matter of the violent and surreptitious appropriation of a realist community in order to impose a new direction, to bend it to a new will, to force its participation in a different game. It is a matter, in short, of participating in the making of history'.⁵⁸

The argument, however, is also targeted at the 'classics'. International society 'is not hidden away in some deep structure, customary rules, immanent revolutionary imperatives, or murky truth behind and unifying a fragmented political experience. It is right there on the surface, in the regularized practices, techniques, and rituals of realist power politics'.⁵⁹ Now interpretation is not hostage to the 'technical' understanding of power but an exercise of power itself, as seen from afar so that 'there is only interpretation, and interpretation itself is comprehended as a practice of domination occurring on the surface of history'.⁶⁰ Consequently, there is no interpreting subject in sight to be recognized for anything but a contingent nodal point on the turbulent surface of power. As Ashley puts it later, to participate in the business of mancraft is to do the job of the state which, by imposing itself in the form of the borderline between domesticated order and threatening 'war', re-creates a 'man' incapable of recognizing the humanity of 'strangers', or coping with his own estrangement for that matter, because all otherness is construed as a threat and in this capacity constitutes 'manhood'. To displace the state from its dominant position is not to rob

⁵⁵ Ibid.: 220-5.

⁵⁶ Ibid.: 234.

⁵⁷ Ashley, 'The poverty of neorealism', *International Organization*, 1984, 38: 225-61.

⁵⁸ Ashley, 'The Geopolitics of Geopolitical Space: Toward a critical Social Theory of International Politics', *Alternatives*, 1987, XII: 429.

⁵⁹ Ibid.: 406.

⁶⁰ Ibid.: 408.

it of its power but to cut off all the moorings of this power, including the idea of subjectivity. It is no longer a question of participation in the making of history, but one of 'the historicization and politicization of man as the corner and foundation of modern narratives of history'.⁶¹

In other words, it seems, the only alternative to the policy of realism is the permanent revolution or exile and thus, again, an impulse to impose the predicament onto the whole of mankind so that the anticipated end of all order and the end of subject are one. This oneness, however, is recognized by Ashley for what it is: yet another promise of finality and yet another paradox. The subject-in-estrangement, as a model for an authentically critical enterprise, turns out to be conspicuously similar to the central figure of the tradition he undertakes to criticize: an heroic, tough-minded character galloping 'across the surfaces of historical experience, a stranger to every place, seldom pausing to... explore any locale, eschewing all commitments, always moving as if chasing some fast-retreating end or fleeing just ahead of the grasp of some relentless pursuer'.⁶²

Instead of denying this paradoxical similarity, Ashley steps back to introduce a very old character onto the scene: the itinerant *condottiere*, an 'uprooted, estranged, nomadic figure, who is never far from engagement in battle but who, in his engagements, is committed to nothing other than an abstract and mobile will to territorialize, to make some sort of sovereign territorialization of life work, wherever he might be'.⁶³ His 'subjective posture', characteristic though it may be of the 'conversational battlefield' of International Relations, is not uniform. Under conditions of estrangement, that is, when 'the subject does not relate to self and circumstances in a relation of unquestioned familiarity', it assumes three different shapes: 'a project, an effect, or a work of art... in which one's own participation is required'.⁶⁴

The driving impulse in all the encounters of the itinerant *condottiere*, as in all the struggles for power and peace of the Augustinian realist, is this loss of 'unquestioned familiarity', understood by realism as the lack of a given, fixed 'balance' and by poststructuralism as the absence of a fixed, essential 'centre'. To this he responds, first, by establishing a realm where 'a word... can never lack for power,... can never fail to prevail, because its claims to represent the ultimate source of power can never be doubted'; second, by accepting the impossibility of such a realm and compensating for this loss 'by effecting here or there whatever can be made effectively to count as a territory of self-evident being'

⁶¹ Ashley, 'Living on Border Lines: Man, Poststructuralism and War', in *International/Intertextual Relations: Postmodern Readings of World Politics*, eds James Der Derian and Michael Shapiro (New York: Lexington, 1989): 309.

⁶² Ashley, 'The achievements of post-structuralism', in *Positivism and Beyond*: 240.

⁶³ Ibid.: 250-1. (*Condottiere* is most probably borrowed from Machiavelli; perhaps, with some mediation by Arendt: an actor who rose 'from low conditions into the splendour of the public sphere and from insignificance to a power to which [he] previously had been subjected'. *Revolution*: 36.)

⁶⁴ Ibid.: 252.

through an act of will, 'a will to territorialize, a territorializing intentionality, in the making of self and selves'; and third, by refusing to be 'mesmerized by the works he creates,... trapped within the territories he would inscribe,... to mistake his renditions for earthly realizations of the ideal'.⁶⁵

Thus Ashley's own, 'critical', story returns to its starting point, the triadic rendition of the realist tradition. Now, however, 'criticism' is not meant, as was the case with the critical theory's emancipatory project, to widen the hermeneutic circle of the classical approach beyond those experiences 'that are personally meaningful in terms of the "true tradition's" personal prehistory' so as 'to embrace the whole of international society and its history, not just a "true tradition" of statesmanship'.⁶⁶ Rather, insofar as the three modes of estrangement make up a single character, criticism is located in the very centre of this character and this tradition, while being accompanied by the acknowledgement that no such centre can ever be fixed within any territory of meaning and is 'ever nomadic, ever ready to move on in search, not of a destination, not of an end, but of whatever localities might be made the object of a strategy, an art of life, a way of problematizing self and selves'.⁶⁷ What is rejected here is neither subject nor tradition, but the hegemony of one mode of action and contemplation; that is, Oakeshottian 'barbarism'. What is defended is a balance of dispositions, virtues, or 'sentiments' in which the *condottieri* of international relations and International Relations are coping with their mutual estrangement in a shared public space.

Oakeshott's restless adventurers are much closer to Ashley's *condottieri* than they are to the princely statespeople of the classical approach. It is not altogether impossible to relate Ashley's three modes of estrangement to Oakeshott's traditions of Reason and Nature, Will and Artifice, and Rational Will. Yet more immediate connection exists between 'a word that never lacks for power' and Hobbesian 'absolutism', between that which 'counts as a territory of self-evident being' and Humean 'conventionalism', between refusal to get trapped within the territories once inscribed and Nietzschean 'genealogy'. What makes all these stories 'political' is not merely that they 'support, or undermine, a certain perspective on the world and hence also a certain distribution of power' but also the manner in which, by envisaging particular trajectories through which the past has turned into the present and might develop towards the future, they set the parameters for possible action: 'The tension of a plot needs to be released... and release can only come about through the actions that the characters of the story perform. From the perspective of these characters, the "directedness" of the story – its movement from "once-upon-a-time" to "happily-ever-after" – thus comes to correspond to the intentional quality of action'.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Ibid.: 253.

⁶⁶ Ashley, 'Realism': 230.

⁶⁷ Ashley, 'Post-structuralism': 253.

⁶⁸ Ringmar, 'The State': 455.

In the 'critical' story, at least as it is presented here, release is sought not in the transcendence of the monotonous and repetitive world of realism but in the gradual effacement of it through that very recurrence and repetition on which realism insists. Far from celebrating the 'death of subject' or the end of the territorial world, this story presents its subject and the world it inhabits as being at once unbearably heavy and unbearably light, while world politics appears in it as a world-effacing procedure of continuous return.⁶⁹

There is, however, one quality in the character of Ashley's itinerant *condottiere* which distinguishes him from the Oakeshottian 'self-employed adventurers of unpredictable fancy', namely that: 'Even from his own most beautiful accomplishments he is estranged, knowing that they can never be more than contingent effects, ever threatening to come undone'.⁷⁰ Not that Oakeshottian individuals are unaware of the fragility of what they call poetry. The difference has more to do with their willingness to form attachments and the corresponding belief that without some such ability no awareness of either space or time or poetry would be possible. Ashley's story questions the conqueror of the hegemonic discourse and lures him into accepting the wanderer in oneself, someone who is 'trying like the Flying Dutchman to escape from himself', not so much because of the 'closeness of the home atmosphere, the coldness there, the intolerable ache of discords always repeated and right notes never struck' but rather because 'the world is too much with us, and we are too much with ourselves'.⁷¹ What this story assumes without much questioning (and not without some reasons) is the war-inspired imagery of the human condition. An Oakeshottian response to this would be not to deny the prevalence of conflict in human life but to assert that there is more to life than one particular kind of conflict:

while it may seem plausible that the prevalence of political individualism on its own be attributed to the fortunate outcome of politico-military struggles in history... it is much less obvious that the hold on us of the reigning images of sexual love and personal fulfilment is to be explained in the same terms. We can indeed speak of these emerging through a struggle. But this has partly been the struggle of daily life, in which individuals and couples strive to make sense of their lives and give shape to their hopes, fears and aspirations.... [We] still have some way to go before we understand the terms and the nature of this struggle... [but war] and the preparations for war... [do not] even begin to give us the key.⁷²

Ashley's analysis of tradition, I want to suggest, is misplaced because any system of relations that does not include some reference to these 'struggles of daily life' cannot be properly called 'tradition'. At the same time, tradition proper includes references both to the world and to society and thus to what may be described as world society.

Laws and manners

⁶⁹ Ashley, 'Post-structuralism': 252.

⁷⁰ Ibid.: 253.

⁷¹ George Santayana, 'The Philosophy of Travel', *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, 1964, 40: 7-8.

⁷² Charles Taylor, 'The hermeneutics of conflict', in *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and his Critics*, ed. James Tully (Cambridge: Polity Press 1988): 225-8.

Like O'Neill and Charvet, Ashley problematizes the link between man and the state. Man in his story acquires more interesting contours than in those of Nardin or Jackson but, to dwell on Jackson's metaphor, he also happens to be a Sisyphus condemned to carrying a *Machtstaat* on his shoulders while reflecting on its and his own closely interlinked fortunes. The link between international system and international society remains intact and, although this alliance is no longer opposed to the ongoing dialogue of individuals, the dialogue itself turns out to be a 'conversational battlefield'. An 'extreme of loneliness and impotence' this image indicates is reminiscent of 'the most antipolitical experience there is', death, rendered paradoxical and deprived of its finality by the figure of eternal return.⁷³ In this, the story is close to that of realism indeed: 'Human beings are not prepared to accept that there are conditions – the "state of nature" – which does not end.... Since it has no proper ending, the... story has no readily graspable *sense morale* and no morally edifying conclusion can be drawn from it. Not surprisingly, the being – the state – which appears in, and through, this account will at the same time seem unbearably heavy and unbearably light'.⁷⁴

This assessment draws on the Aristotelian understanding of story-telling, with its insistence on the cathartic quality of the story, but the teleology implied in it seems to suggest the same kind of 'evolutionism' that the classical approach presupposes in its location of international society. However, a closer look at what a 'conclusion' might mean in this context discloses a possibility of a different story.

For Oakeshott, it is likely to begin with Hobbes, but a Hobbes rather different from that of realism. Man in this story is solitary 'in the sense that he belongs to no order and has no obligations'. His desires 'are centred upon no final achievement, but are confined to obtaining what he has set his mind upon in each moment of his existence'. His happiness is hindered by fear 'that his natural powers will be insufficient to assure him of the satisfaction of his next desire'. His salvation is sought in some agreement with his fellow-inhabitants of the world 'which may establish a kind of superficial peace and orderliness'. But this is only a 'lesser fear' and an agreement as transitory as all other satisfactions he seeks. The great fear that cannot be removed is 'the constant fear that death may supervene and put an end to satisfaction by terminating desire'. Awareness of this great fear offers an opportunity to ignore the lesser one, but only for 'those who possess a certain nobility of temperament which refuses the indignity of unconditional competition' (HCA 161-2).

Importantly, Oakeshott locates Hobbes at a point of rupture in the civilizational dream, when the proud myth of the Fall of Man was losing its power, 'but before the tide of science, with its project of destroying all myth, had begun to sweep over our civilization'. Hobbes,

⁷³ Arendt, *On Violence*; see note 4 in the Prologue. Of course, poststructuralist engagement is not exhausted by this metaphor. More optimistic accounts call for the exploration of the possibilities 'after eternity' (Walker, 'The Political': 322). One of Ashley's remarks, however, is noteworthy: 'I confess that I can summon little optimism in reply'. 'Post-structuralism': 248.

⁷⁴ Ringmar, 'The State': 454 and 461, n. 15.

then, 'recalls us to our mortality' and, 'with a sure and steady irony, does what... the literature of Existentialism is doing today with an exaggerated display of emotion and a false suggestion of novelty' (163). Later, Oakeshott, with the same sure and steady irony, recalls an earlier beginning of this story: 'Zeus had commissioned Hermes to teach mankind how to manage the condition of mortality with understanding: the cunning of Prometheus had already enabled them to exploit the resources of the earth, but they had yet to learn how to accept *rerum mortalia* with grace' (OH 181).

Thus, if Collingwood attempted to ascertain the 'directedness' of human life by reference to its beginning in 'a red and wrinkled lump of flesh having no will of its own at all', Oakeshott refers to its unavoidable ending, but for the same reason of establishing not so much a 'superficial orderliness' but 'a certain nobility of temperament' which may grace life with a sense of individual achievement. Both reach out for the experiences of 'ordinary' life so as to account for the possibility of the 'extraordinary' in it. This, again, brings certain Aristotelian themes into the story but in a way which is sensitive to the standard criticism of Aristotle.⁷⁵

Collingwood, in his discussion of Plato's and Aristotle's writings on poetry, stresses one difference in their accounts. Plato describes tragedy as generating in the audience emotions unfitted for practical life and concludes that 'tragedy is detrimental to the practical life of its audience'. In Aristotle, emotions 'are not in fact allowed to remain burdening the mind of the audience. They are discharged in the experience of watching the tragedy' (PA 51). This cathartic quality of tragedy, however, is achieved, according to Aristotle, not by the ending as such but by the necessary presence of the 'marvellous' in the action, rather than specific characters, presented in the story: 'Tragedy is primarily an imitation of action, and... it is mainly for the sake of the action that it imitates the personal agents'. The most beautiful characters, like the most beautiful colours in a painting which lacks order, 'will not give one the same pleasure as a simple black-and-white sketch of a portrait'.⁷⁶ What is intimated by the marvellous and reflected through it in any order is the 'true nature of things', and in this manner Aristotle's teleology as well as his theory of form and matter re-establish themselves.

However, as Collingwood's discussion of metaphysics, Burke's reference to the marvellous or sublime in politics, or Oakeshott's account of poetry demonstrate, one does not have to follow Aristotle to the bitter end to retain some aspects of his understanding of order. In fact, none of the contemporary neo-Aristotelians does so, just as none of the contemporary neo-Kantians holds to Kant's two-world metaphysics or his Newtonian theory of action. A central issue in the current debate between them is whether cosmopolitanism can be reconciled with contextual sensitivity.⁷⁷ What is preserved in the neo-Aristotelian accounts of

⁷⁵ Cf.: Charvet, *Eithical Community*: 10.

⁷⁶ Aristotle, *On the Art of Poetry*, tr. Ingram Bywater (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1920): 38.

⁷⁷ Seyla Benhabib, 'Judgement and the Moral Foundations of Politics in Arendt's Thought', *Political Theory*, 1988, 1: 41.

order is a certain, but in no way unconditional, reverence towards 'most beautiful accomplishments' specific to particular traditions. After all, even Nietzsche did not restrict his list of possible histories to the antiquarian and critical ones. There was also the 'monumental history' which, when at its best, was 'addressed to political actors, to remind them that great deeds were performed by notable men and that what was once feasible is at least possible again'.⁷⁸

The specific problem of International Relations, according to Martin Wight, is that there are few great deeds to report and even less notable reporters.⁷⁹ The classical approach emerged as a response to this challenge: 'Yes, there is little that is given to us by the great political theorists, but the difference that today makes requires a re-enactment of their conversation, to be staged in Kaliningrad rather than Königsberg'.⁸⁰ Quite often, however, it slipped into the antiquarian understanding of history as a storage of the universally valid ideas in need of re-legitimization in the form of the 'true tradition'.

Responding to Hans Morgenthau's evocation of such a tradition with its alleged reliance on 'higher faculties of mind' needed by statesmen to cope with the 'tragic sense of life' and 'the unresolved discord, contradictions and conflicts which are inherent in the nature of things', Oakeshott remarked:

This comes pretty close to the higher nonsense.... What, of course, the statesman requires is nothing higher than the ordinary 'faculties' and ordinary knowledge that everyone (even the convinced rationalist) uses every day in the conduct of his life and in his relations with other men.... To children and to romantic women, but to no one else, it may appear 'tragic' that we cannot enjoy Spring without Winter, eternal youth, and passion always at the height of its beginning. And only a rationalistic reformer will confuse the imperfection which can be remedied with the so-called imperfection which cannot, and will think of the irremovability of the latter as a tragedy. The rest of us know that no rationalistic justice (with its project of approximating people to things), and no possible degree of human prosperity, can ever remove mercy and charity from their place of first importance in the relations of human beings, and know also that this situation cannot properly be considered either imperfect or a tragedy (RP 107-8).

Characteristically, Oakeshott's own image of government as 'the cool touch of the mountain that one feels in the plain even on the hottest summer day' (R 434) is built up from such day-to-day images as 'a favourite view', 'the death of friends', 'the retirement of a favourite clown', 'the loss of abilities enjoyed and their replacement by others' (409). Such a government should be capable of injecting into the heat of the daily clash of beliefs, 'into our enthusiasm for saving the souls of our neighbours or of all mankind... an ingredient, not of reason (how should we expect that?) but of irony that is prepared to counteract one vice by another, of the raillery that deflates extravagance without itself pretending to wisdom, of the

⁷⁸ Judith Shklar, 'Rethinking the Past', *Social Research*, 1977, 44: 80.

⁷⁹ Wight, 'International Theory'.

⁸⁰ Michael Donelan, 'Political Theorists and International Relations', in his *The Reason of States: A Study in International Political Theory* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1978) and *Elements of International Political Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

mockery that disperses tension'. But it is an addition to all these human enthusiasms and extravagances, not a denial of them. It is needed 'to do for us the scepticism we have neither the time nor the inclination to do for ourselves' (R 433-4).

To translate this into the language of the classical approach, a 'conservative' acquiescence to the authority of international society presupposes quiescence, a point of serenity and stillness worthy of being conservative about. In the case of human conduct in the world of states, this is likely to be found not in contingently established territorial boundaries, and thus in the reified alliance with international system, but in the daily experiences of 'ordinary life' which constitute a kind of 'world society'. The term, it seems, does not really belong to this context and a closer look is needed at what is meant by 'world' and 'society' in it.

The Aristotelian 'marvellous' of the ongoing conversations of daily life is meaningful, first and foremost, as 'the projection of a world which I could inhabit'.⁸¹ This world cannot be closed by any single vision, but nor can it be limited to anything short of the total mediation in which 'all human tidings... speak to us', because our ability, as well as the inclination, to expand the horizons of our immediate worlds beyond those of immediate perception is rooted in the experiences of growing up, meeting a friend ('My, but he has grown old') or hearing of the death of an acquaintance:

how suddenly the person's mode of being changes, how permanent he becomes, how much purer, not necessarily better in a moral or affectionate way, but rather with closed and clearly defined contours – all this for the simple and evident reason that we can expect no more from him, and can do nothing more for him. The experience of this extreme case seems... to be a mode of knowledge. What emerges from it is truth.... That something suddenly stands still and remains standing still seems to help the truth to speak.

This truth intimates not only the interplay of the continuity and discontinuity of time and space but also their reality. Although the world is available to us only through language, our consciousness of history, and thus of ourselves as 'historic' self-enacted individuals, 'is determined by real events rather than left on its own to float free over against the past'. These events are real insofar as they do not let themselves be forgotten and call for decisions that cannot be suspended: the foreignness 'which we experience forces us to deal with it and... to take its truth [and the truth of a single world] upon ourselves'.⁸²

No society, no association, however 'civil', can shield itself from this experience of foreignness by its vernacular moral language because any such language is inevitably saturated with this experience. Thus Alasdair MacIntyre, for example, in his engagement with the different modes of moral inquiry, links the interminability of contemporary debates, and conflict more generally, to the incoherence of our conceptual vocabulary with many of its terms being unrecognized survivals of forgotten and radically different ethical systems. More precisely, it is in the character of rationalism to misconstrue the multilayered nature of moral

⁸¹ Ricoeur, 'Phenomenology and Hermeneutics', *Noûs*, 1975, 9: 93.

⁸² Gadamer, 'The Continuity of History and the Existential Moment', *Philosophy Today*, 1972, 16: 234-9.

discourse and to exacerbate disagreement by postulating agreement as an absolute value.⁸³ Nietzschean genealogy understands the problem acutely but adds the despair of endless perspectivism to the failure of the morality of rules to cope with contingency. What is needed is a positive addition to the negative morality of rules, 'a certain nobility of temperament', enabling humans to face those situations in which a movement between different sets of rules has to be considered in the absence of any readily available rule for such consideration. The starting point is to recognize that to enter an association is to be drafted into one social role or another. Roles entail dispositions for acting, virtues, and so with roles, as with rules, one has to be able to move between them without experiencing incoherencies amidst such dispositions. Roles are shaped by wider social contexts – practices – with their intrinsic standards of excellence. Since we partake of different practices throughout our lives, practices need to be part of a broader context which ensures the overall coherence of different standards.

This is tradition, an image of the broadest available, historically contingent social whole within which various practices are so constituted that the intrinsic dispositions of each of them cohere with those of all possible others. More precisely, this is an image implicitly held by every human association, however small or localized, 'a dream that a people dreams in its earthly sleep', and continuously negotiated with its neighbours. This imagined order of dispositions is itself a disposition, that of a conditionally well-ordered tradition as a kind of experience.

In this manner, 'world' and 'society' come together in the form of 'tradition'. No state, no bounded community can embody tradition thus understood. Equating tradition with local communities leaves them with nothing to guard themselves against 'corruption by narrowness, by complacency, by prejudice against outsiders and by a whole range of other deformities, including those that arise from a cult of local community'.⁸⁴ Equating it with the state entails outcomes perhaps even more 'ludicrous or disastrous or both', for the counterpart of such misconception of the state 'is a misconception of its citizens as constituting a *Volk*, a type of collectivity whose bonds are simultaneously to extend to the entire body of citizens and yet to be as binding as the ties of kinship and locality. In a modern large-scale nation-state no such collectivity is possible and the pretence that it is is always an ideological disguise for sinister realities'. The modern state does provide important goods, but as long as 'the rhetoric of the nation-state presents it as the provider of something that is indeed, in this stronger sense, a common good, that rhetoric is a purveyor of dangerous fictions'.⁸⁵

⁸³ For MacIntyre's argument see *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (London: Duckworth, 1985); *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (London: Duckworth, 1988); *Three Rival Versions*.

⁸⁴ MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*: 142. In this work, MacIntyre does not use the word 'tradition'. However, the one he does use, 'the network of giving and receiving', accords well both with the etymology of *traditio* and his earlier writings on 'tradition'.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*: 132-3.

Insofar as the state cannot provide this kind of good, the small class of statespeople routinely referred to as 'politicians' in their capacity of the agents of the state have little, if anything, to contribute to the activities of deliberation and persuasion constitutive of politics proper, neither domestically nor internationally. This is not to say that genuine 'politicians' cannot, on occasion, occupy this or that office of the state, only that the occupation of any such office, of itself, does not make one a 'politician'. Accordingly, world politics is likely to be found, if at all, not at the conferences of the Plenipotentiaries but in the comparative study of local associations 'at their best and at their worst, and most of all examples of communities that have been or are open to alternative possibilities and that sometimes move towards the better and sometimes towards the worst':

What such comparative studies will bring home to us is both the variety of social forms within which networks of giving and receiving can be institutionalized and the variety of ways in which such networks can be sustained and strengthened or weakened and destroyed. Different conditions pose different threats and in turn require different responses. Yet the tasks that have to be undertaken to meet these threats share a great deal in common. So it is, for example, with the tasks of providing for the security of a local community from internal crime or external aggression, tasks that can never safely be handed over completely to the agencies of the state. (On occasion it is the danger presented by just those agencies that has to be guarded against.)⁸⁶

A specific contribution of International Relations to such interdisciplinary inquiry may consist in exploring all such localities in relation to the idea of world order as constituted by international system and international society. This will involve the 'critical' task of unbundling the territoriality of international society by distinguishing it from international system: 'To this task belongs the destruction of all romantic illusions regarding the good old days and the snug security provided by a Christian cosmos', while International Relations will ally itself with philosophy which recognizes itself 'as a kind of secularized eschatology, possessing a kind of expectancy which takes pride in expecting nothing definite, but being, as it were, a kind of challenge.'⁸⁷ There would also be a place, then, for a 'conservative' engagement that does not seek to defend the state from such a criticism or to protect international society by means of international system, but reaches out instead towards tradition as a kind of world society on the assumption that 'the technological dream entertained by our time is really just a dream, a series of changes and transformations in our world, which, when compared to the actual realities of our life, has a phantom-like and arbitrary character':

What is involved is not a plea for the preservation of the existing order. The concern is simply with a readjustment of our consciousness. The conservative, like the revolutionary, seems to... require a similar rectification of his understanding. The unavoidable and unpredictable realities – birth and death, youth and age, native and foreign, determination and freedom – demand the same recognition from both groups. These realities have measured out what men can plan and what they can achieve. Continents and empires,

⁸⁶ Ibid.: 143.

⁸⁷ Gadamer, 'Notes on Planning for the Future', *Dædalus*, 1965: 589.

revolutions in power and in thought, the planning and organization of life on our planet and outside it, will not be able to exceed a measure which perhaps no one knows and to which, nevertheless, all are subject.⁸⁸

In both cases, what is involved is the exploration of limits. Insofar as politics generally is understood as the exploration of not just any limits but the limits of the civil condition, world politics may be understood as an activity of 'traditional' self-enacted individuals thinking and speaking about the overall conditions of international society as it exists alongside international system, that is, as it exists as a constitutive part of world order. Here everyone 'must learn to speak for himself and in the process establish his own history. And, should even the most farfetched mechanization of society be successful, man will not lose this uniqueness. The age of *post-history* into which we are now proceeding will find its limits in this distinctiveness of man'.⁸⁹

Tradition and neotraditionalism

World order, then, can be understood in terms of two ideal characters similar to Oakeshott's enterprise and civil associations. The former does not have to be a co-operative association of states, just as the latter does not have to be a global association of individuals. What matters rather is the terms of association. A transactional association of states as *universitates* would be similar in its postulates and characteristics to the international system of neorealism, while civil association of the same states as *societates* would closely match the international society of the classical approach. However, both *universitas* and *societas* exist only in the self-understandings of human beings (and that only in the specific context of modernity) and no world order could ever exist without some idea of world society. If the difference between international system and international society may be understood in terms of the distinction between policy and politics, then international society and world society are related to each other as the system of *lex* and a manifold of the moral-legal self-understandings of human beings as members of particular associations. Each of these self-understandings is always ridden with internal contradictions, always 'more stable in its style of deliberation than in its conclusions'.

There is no such style of deliberation that is common to the whole of mankind. Yet, even in the most closed associations, humans may be said to 'believe they are free and open to the universal; their differential character makes the narrowest cultural fields seem exhaustible from within', whereas difference, which 'exists outside the system is terrifying, because it reveals the truth of the system, its relativity, its fragility, its mortality'.⁹⁰ By referring to world society as 'tradition', I do not mean its content or boundaries but the recurrence of the disposition, characteristic perhaps of all specific traditions, to make sense of the world while mediating the ever-shifting balance of differences within and across specific associations. No

⁸⁸ Ibid.: 589.

⁸⁹ Ibid.: 587.

⁹⁰ René Girard, *The Scapegoat* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1986): 21, 22.

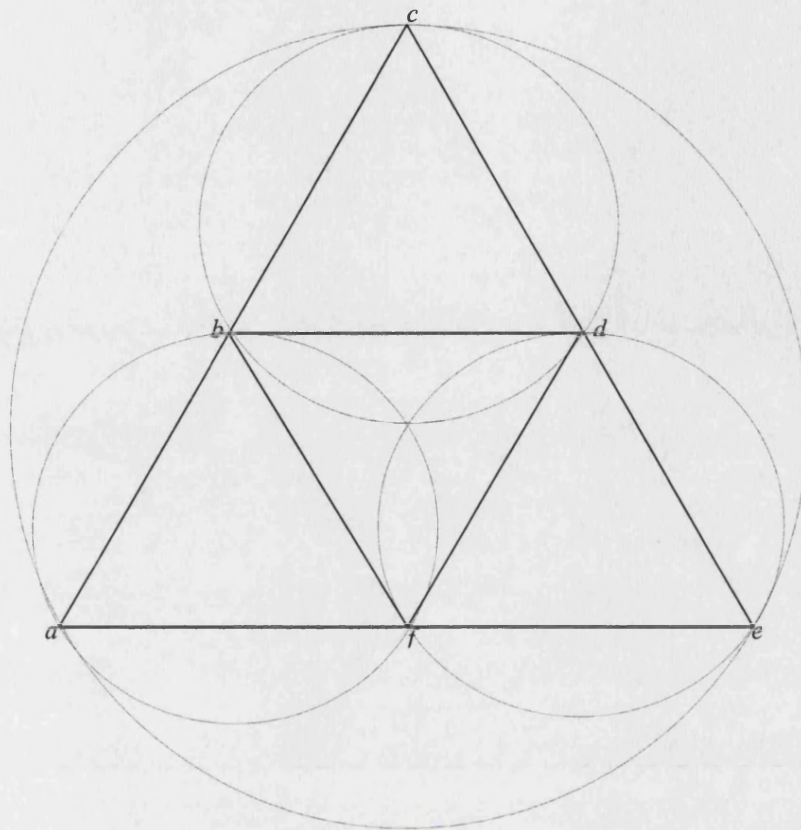


Table 6.1. A 'dry wall' image of world order

world, certainly no social world, may be said to exist apart from this ongoing attempt to make sense of it. International society is at once a contingent outcome of the interactions of states and a public concern of those inclined to make sense of the world politically. World politics, then, is persons without authority negotiating their views of international society with holders of offices of authority within it. It is 'conservative' insofar as the authority of international society itself remains unquestioned. Insofar as the authority in question is not that of the actually-existing states, it is necessarily 'critical' towards these states and their claims to represent what they are not and cannot possibly be – actually-existing *respublicum*, even less so the embodiments of tradition.

All this can be presented through a simplified image (Fig. 6.1). Triangles *abf*, *bcd* and *fde* represent the *universitates* that, together with the entrepreneurial, be it transactional or co-operative, global practice *ace*, compose international system. Each of the *universitates* is joined by a *societas* presented in the shape of a circle. These *societates*, together with the global civil practice (*ace*-circle), compose international society. World society may be said to exist at 'the points where circles intersect' which, of course, cannot be found on any map or drawing but exist only in the interactions of individuals who, in their 'traditional' ways, try

the best they can to make sense of their lives, their immediate life-worlds, but also the world which all of them could inhabit.⁹¹

Still, maps and drawings have their circumstantial value. The value of the one I have just presented consists in the possibility of showing how the same image may be located at the heart of contemporary International Relations, rather than 'beyond' it, where various critical approaches are locating their understanding of politics. The point is to show how International Relations, with its initial claim to make a difference by being a discipline separate from political theory, can be anatomized on its own terms and then re-assembled into an International Political Theory, that is, a mode of inquiry which is congruent with its subject-matter. To be sure, this would be just one possible perspective from which to examine the field. In the next chapter I shall outline it as 'neotraditionalism'.

⁹¹ Cf.: Toni Erskine, "'Citizen of Nowhere" or "The Point Where Circles Intersect"? Impartialist and Embedded Cosmopolitanisms', *Review of International Studies*, 2002, 3: 457-478; William Connolly, "Speed, Concentric Circles and Cosmopolitanism", *Political Theory*, 2000, 5: 596-618. Note, that Erskine's and Connolly's ideas of individual identity are significantly different. Without going into detail, it may be said that Erskine is drawing on O'Neill's account of the possibility of multiple identities, whereas Connolly is exploring the possibilities of identities negotiated under the conditions of difference.

Neotraditionalism in International Relations

What has been presented so far is the neotraditionalist idea of world politics based on Collingwood's and Oakeshott's approaches to knowledge and politics. What was promised in the beginning was a point of conditional unity between this idea of world politics, the way of political theorizing by which it was arrived at, and contemporary International Relations. So an account of International Relations is due.

Needless to say, this can be only a very limited account centred around three closely related themes explored in the following order: the shortcomings of the rationalist-reflectivist debate, neotraditionalism as a way out of this debate, the place of international political theory as seen from the neotraditionalist perspective. Collingwood and Oakeshott are hardly mentioned now. The task, to employ one of Collingwood's metaphors, is to dig out a tunnel through contemporary discourse in hope that it will lead to the same point as did the exploration of Collingwood's and Oakeshott's writings, that is, to the same understanding of politics and theorizing. This hope is not unfounded, the major premise of this account is the same as in the previous discussion: in theorizing, as in conduct, practice always precedes reflection. Accordingly, discussion will proceed by way of reordering the images of the discipline already presented from within existing approaches. These images, to use Erik Ringmar's metaphor, will be attended to as still-pictures, taken at various stages in the rationalist-reflectivist debate, and put into motion by a story about its rise and fall. The metaphor of the rise and fall itself is borrowed for this occasion from Ole Wæver on whose account of the fortunes of the inter-paradigm debate my story is closely modelled, beginning, by way of introduction, at the crossroad at which a turn from philosophic interpretation to scientific explanation was taken, or at least suggested.¹

¹ Ole Wæver, 'The Rise and Fall of the Interparadigm Debate', in *Positivism and Beyond*: 149-85.

The 1980s was a decade of extensive metatheorizing. One reason for that was given by Kenneth Waltz: 'Nothing seems to accumulate, not even criticism'.² The discipline was in need of a holding operation. Despite the variety of conceptualizations offered at that time, there was a certain degree of consensus about the overall triadic configuration of both the world of practice and the field of theory. Competing positions were referred to as realist, pluralist and Marxist. Realists saw the world as composed of self-seeking states, pluralists added to this a web of institutional arrangements, Marxists emphasized the role of global structures in fostering the distributions of resources across the system.³

The structure of Waltz's *Theory* reflects this. Waltz outlines his own position by arguing on two fronts, against both Marxists and traditionalists/behaviourists, and three points need to be noticed about this strategy. First, Waltz's 'borrowing' from all three principal approaches. Marxian emphasis on the economic structure is off-set by the pluralist view of the world as divided into autonomous political units, which, however, in accordance with the realist reading of the situation, are states and states only. Second, Waltz positions himself so as to be able to gloss over the various divisions within each of his rivals' camp by claiming that traditionalists and behaviourists are cast from the same mould and so are the various Marxists. The former reduce the workings of the international system to the properties of its units, the latter reduce the operation of the system to economics. Finally, although similar attempts at providing a comprehensive account of the field were undertaken by both Marxists and pluralists, Waltzian was the only one that supplemented such an account with a corresponding conception of science.⁴

However, it was this conception of science that facilitated the rapid disintegration of the two theoretical poles – Marxist and traditionalist/behaviourist – constructed by Waltz. Behaviourists accepted the new conception of science since it offered a resolution of the unsettled issues in their own polemics with traditionalists while not obliging them to subscribe to a uniform political position: Waltzian structuralism left enough space for a debate on the role of international institutions. Traditionalists were slow in responding to this sudden realignment brought about by someone whom they considered to be one of them in the previous debates. Yet the arguments in their defence were advanced by those Marxists who, in response to the Waltzian treatment of them as the unimaginative successors of Hobson and Lenin, displayed such diversity and richness of their intellectual inheritance that

² Waltz, *Theory*: 18.

³ Cf.: Michael Banks, 'The Inter-Paradigm Debate', in *International Relations: A Handbook of Current Theory*, eds Margot Light and A.J.R. Groom (London: Pinter Publishers, 1985): 7-26.

⁴ See Immanuel Wallerstein, *Modern World-System* (San Diego: Academic Press, 1974), for the Marxist position and Stanley Hoffmann, *Primacy or World Order: American Foreign Policy Since the Cold War* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978), for the pluralist one.

it seemed no longer meaningful to refer to them as 'Marxists'. The new challengers came from all sorts of dialectical quarters and shared with traditionalists their abhorrence of the 'scientific man' who did not begin to look more attractive once he embraced power-politics.

What was at stake, for the new critics, was not merely a conception of structure different from those of Wallerstein or Waltz, for example. They problematized any totality, in terms of the possibility of a co-existence of differently construed contexts, or in terms of the possibility of such contexts' evolutionary succession, and invariably in view of its relation to agency. From these concerns followed the distinction between problem-solving and critical theories.⁵ The goal of the former consisted in the management of the system taken as a value-free fact, the latter was supposed to uncover the political and normative underpinnings of such a system and to promote human emancipation from the structural constraints thus imposed upon human agency, which implied a move beyond *International Relations*.

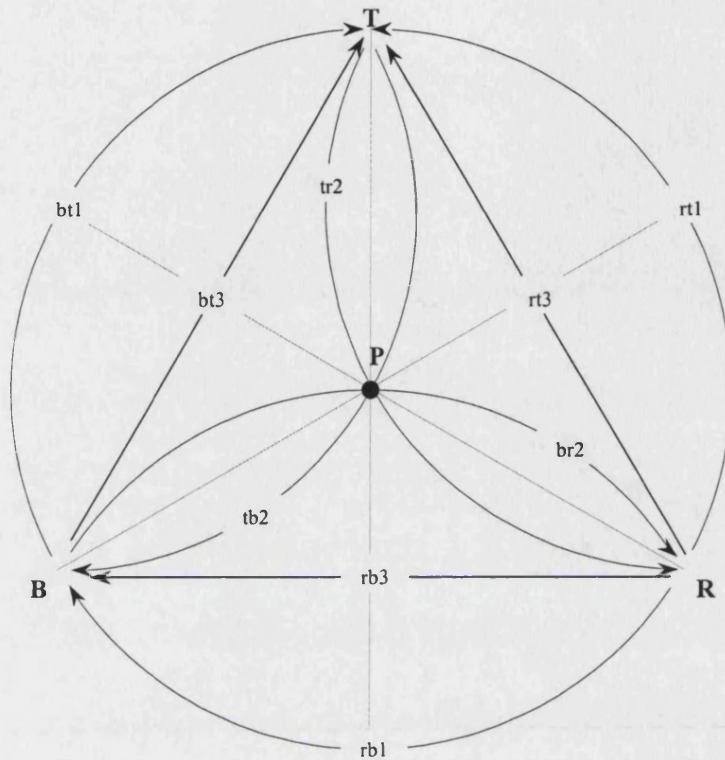
The latter approach yielded an account of the theoretical field different from Waltz's. The discipline was constituted by the three poles again – traditionalist, behaviourist and radical-dialectical – each sustained by a dialectical opposition within itself and with its neighbours. Emancipation, practical and theoretical, would have consisted in reaching the intersection of the three hypothetical approaches which, originating within each of the three initial poles, addressed both of their rivals with ideal impartiality. This intersection marked the point of 'complete cosmopolitanism' or 'perfect pluralism' embodying, on a higher level, the same opposition between universalism and particularism as all the individual poles (Fig. 7.1).⁶

For such an ideal point to be reached, two conditions had to be met. Firstly, each pole should be assigned equal theoretical value. Secondly, higher value should be assigned to communication between them. This hierarchy of values, however, presupposes the possibility of judging the individual approaches in accordance with their willingness and ability to practice impartial communication, but, as the analysis conducted by the authors of this account, Hayward Alker and Thomas Biersteker, demonstrated, traditionalism, behaviourism and radicalism were far from being equal in this regard, either in the university curriculum or in the international arena.

Not surprisingly, three alternative accounts followed. The first came from the pluralist camp. If competing approaches, or paradigms, could not be assumed to be impartial, why not assume them as being reasonably indifferent, so that each is just 'passing by, to engage in a

⁵ Cox, 'Social Forces'.

⁶ Hayward Alker and Thomas Biersteker, 'The Dialectics of World Order: Notes for the Future Archeologist of International *Savoir Faire*', *International Studies Quarterly*, 1984, 28: 121-42. Fig. 7.1 puts together three diagrams of Alker and Biersteker. This does not alter the substance of their image of the discipline but highlights a particular shape of the field, to be conceptualized further in Fig. 7.4, which in the original analysis remained mostly implicit.



	Major approaches and oppositions within them	Politics	Method
T	Traditional (realism/idealism)	Conservative	Traditional/historical
B	Behavioural (neorealism/neoliberalism)	Liberal	Analytical/empirical
R	Radical-dialectical (contextualism/internationalism)	Radical	Dialectical
P	The point of "complete cosmopolitanism" or "perfect pluralism" in relations among various theoretical approaches		
	Major theoretical moves		
rt1	Marxian critique		
tr2	Traditionalist counter-attack		
rt3	Neo-Marxian reformulations		
bt1	Behaviourist critique of the balance of power		
tb2	Improved formulations and counter-critique by traditionalists		
bt3	Behaviourist reformulations of traditionalist theory		
rb1	Soviet, Latin-American dependency theory, West European critiques		
br2	Behaviourist counter-critique		
rb3	Post-positivist defence of dialectics		

Fig. 7.1. *The image of the discipline at the end of the inter-paradigm debate (Alker-Biersteker, 1984).*

separate conversation with the subject-matter'? Yet, on the same account, different paradigms were supposed to constitute a totality of 'discourse about choice of analytic frameworks' from which all smaller 'islands of theory' derived their meaning.⁷ This relaxed attitude towards the standards of choice could only result in the proliferation of frameworks without any increase in one's capacity for choosing the right thing, and so another response from the radical pole followed, stating that 'there is no longer any clear sense of what the discipline is

⁷ Banks, 'The Inter-Paradigm Debate'.

about, what its core concepts are, what its methodology should be, what central issues and questions it should be addressing'.⁸ This response did not stop at the level of critique but suggested an alternative. Ideals were stated clearly and various approaches ranked accordingly. Their number remained the same, Wight's 'realism', 'rationalism' and 'revolutionism' were taken as a starting point for further re-arrangement, but the triangular image gave way to the linear, evolutionary one: 'realism, rationalism and revolutionism (for which now critical international theory will be substituted...) form a sequence of progressively more adequate approaches to world politics'.⁹ A search for the diplomatic consensus constitutes an advance beyond a theory of the balance of material capabilities, and it is no longer a middle-ground but a middle-station on the way to human emancipation.

The pluralist case was restated, this time in radical terms, forming at least two distinct streams. One was sceptical about emancipation, insofar as it was presented as a foundation of a sort, and highlighted the incommensurability of different contexts.¹⁰ Another radicalized this position further by arguing that no framework can be sustained without coercion. Emancipation should be sought, but without any assurances of success, and might consist in exposing, through relentless questioning, the actual thinness of any claim to authority until all such claims were thinned out to reveal either nothing or some unsought expression of individuality.¹¹ Inasmuch as this argument applied to any authority claims, it applied to both states and academic disciplines. That much was granted to the radicals by critical theorists who accepted that, 'since states and the state system are, in themselves, systems of inclusion and exclusion', no emancipation can be achieved, either in world politics or in International Relations, without emulating the radicals' analysis of such systems.¹² However, the radical argument extended further, presenting the whole of the Western tradition of political thought as one such system and thus denying the possibility of progressive knowledge, in any institutionalized form, from within this tradition.¹³

⁸ Mark Hoffman, 'Critical Theory and the Inter-Paradigm Debate', *Millennium*, 1987, 2: 231.

⁹ Andrew Linklater, *Beyond Realism and Marxism: Critical Theory and International Relations* (London: Macmillan, 1990): 10.

¹⁰ Nicholas J. Rengger, 'Going Critical? A Response to Hoffman', *Millennium*, 1988, 1, 81-9.

¹¹ Richard K. Ashley and R.B.J. Walker, 'Reading Dissidence/Writing the Discipline: Crisis and the Question of Sovereignty in International Studies', *International Studies Quarterly*, 1990, 34: 367-416.

¹² Linklater, 'The Question of the Next Stage in International Relations Theory: A Critical-Theoretical Perspective', *Millennium*, 1992, 1: 77-98. Here Linklater begins to extend 'critical' towards all reflectivist approaches. I am following a more narrow reading of critical theory based on the distinctions outlined in the Hoffman-Rengger exchange. Extensive arguments in support of both readings can be found in *Critical Theory and World Politics*, ed. Richard Wyn Jones (Boulder: Lynn Reinner, 2001).

¹³ Cf.: Ashley, 'Living on Border Lines'. What is referred to below as 'postmodernism' is limited to this, radical perspectivist, position, meaningful as an ideal characterization.

Critical theorists argued that the postmodern case still implied universality, on the level at which the dialogue between various approaches was unfolding, and maintained that 'reaching an understanding captures the most important respect in which critical theory, postmodernism, feminism and also philosophical hermeneutics are involved in a common project'.¹⁴ There was also a somewhat different group of reflectivists who were not convinced by, or not interested in, the radical critique of modernity and saw the relation between theory and practice somewhat differently from the various 'critics'. On this view, modernity still offered powerful frameworks for the analysis of the central issues of world politics, but the task of theory consisted not in 'solving' these issues, either in positivist or emancipatory sense, but in clarifying them 'to the point at which... disagreements... reflect not confusion but differences of values and priorities'.¹⁵ This group saw its achievement in restating the central problems of world politics in terms offered by traditional political philosophy, and its members tended to accept the pluralist conception of political practices, more often than not accepting the state as part and parcel of this uneasy deal with modernity.¹⁶

Thus, by the beginning of the 1990s, there appeared to be three 'political' streams within the reflectivist movement. Postmodernists questioned both the tradition of Western political thought and Western political practices. Critical theorists attempted to reinvigorate the tradition of thought with a view to escaping from the tradition of conduct. 'Modernists' reflected on existing political practices from within the Western tradition of political thought. The boundaries between these approaches were never watertight, each approach hosted its own dissidents and its own replay of the universalism/particularism opposition. Important crossovers occurred in all possible directions, and one such attempt deserves a pause in view of what is to follow.

Heikki Patomäki examined the polemics between critical and 'modernist' theorists as an instance of a broader universalism/particularism opposition.¹⁷ While focusing on one particular expression of it, the opposition between state-centrism and cosmopolitanism, he claimed that its poles represented differently construed utopias treated in separation from the plurality of concrete contexts in which various practical issues may call for the exercise of

¹⁴ Linklater, 'The Achievement of Critical Theory', in *Positivism and Beyond*: 293.

¹⁵ Chris Brown, *International Relations Theory: New Normative Approaches* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992): 183.

¹⁶ Cf.: Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations* (New York: Basic Books, 1977); Charles R. Beitz, *Political Theory and International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979); Mervyn Frost, *Towards Normative Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) for the early formulations.

¹⁷ Heikki Patomäki, 'From Normative Utopias to Political Dialectics: Beyond a Deconstruction of the Brown-Hoffman Debate', *Millennium*, 1992, 1: 53-75.

human judgement. At the same time, by allowing for the existence of reflective human agency, he distanced himself from those radical contextualists whose world consisted only of structures, however construed.¹⁸ Yet innovation, although not ruled out, should not jeopardize conditions which ensure the continuation of a dialogue within existing socially conditioned discourses. Arguments and counter-arguments are valid only inasmuch as they refer to commitments already expressed, or presupposed in a way which makes the public discussion of their presuppositions possible; include an account of the context in which they are advanced, from which they are derived, or to which they are expected to be applied.¹⁹

Thus, the new arrangement resembled both Alker-Biersteker's and Banks' triangles, but neither the complete impartiality of the former nor the relaxed indifference of the latter were held as ideals in which to ground the overall constellation. Rather, all three approaches touched upon the acceptance of incommensurability, taken not as a value-free factual description of a clash between different value-systems but as a paradox, itself normative through and through, central to political reality as construed by reflectivists with all their disagreements.

To sum up, the last of the theoretical moves registered by Alker and Biersteker, the reflectivist 'defence of dialectics' against the rationalist attack on both Marxism and traditionalism, transformed the inter-paradigm debate into the rationalist-reflectivist one by propelling the overall discussion into the regions of philosophy. The problem was that the reflectivist view of political reality was rejected by rationalists, and it was difficult, if not impossible, to extend any of the reflectivist conceptions of the dialogue to the whole of the discipline. The demise of traditionalism, under the blows from both rationalism and reflectivism, was symptomatic of the overall transformation of the field into yet another binary opposition.

What was wrong with the rationalist-reflectivist debate?

In 1989, Robert Keohane described the discipline as being divided between rationalists who 'believe that there is an international political reality that can be partly understood, even if it always remains to some extent veiled' and reflectivists who are 'content with interpreting texts'.²⁰ As all blanket characterizations, this one did full justice to no one, but nor was it meant to. It focused on the bigger divide and in so doing captured at least two important characteristics of the new situation. First, the discipline was yet again presented in the image of a binary opposition. Second, this opposition testified to the failure of the holding operation

¹⁸ Ibid.: 53-5, especially note 3 on p. 54.

¹⁹ Ibid.: 71.

initiated by Waltz' *Theory*: a conception of science meant to consolidate the field fostered new and deeper divisions. There was a possibility of a more optimistic assessment though. After all, Waltz not only succeeded in facilitating important agreements among rationalists, but also provided a clear focal point for the reflectivist critique. Yet, even on this reading, the net-result was still disquieting, at least for those who, like Keohane, assumed the existence of a single discipline, however divided.

These two characteristics were related to each other and the relationship was not an easy one. If, in the absence of an undisputed subject-matter or methodology, the discipline's identity was to be upheld by yet another binary opposition, the rationalist-reflectivist debate could not possibly perform this function because in some of its modifications reflectivism denied, or questioned, any separate disciplinary identity by claiming all disciplines for philosophy. Philosophy, again, in some of its modifications, recognized this threat posed by its own totalizing character and suggested that any 'unity or synthesis can no longer be presupposed a priori or postulated "from on high", but can only emerge (if at all) from the travail of multiple and criss-crossing particular experiences "on the ground"'.²¹ The discipline, having escaped one calamity, that of being swallowed by philosophy, faced another one, that of fragmentation, unless there was a criterion independent from the terms of the rationalist-reflectivist debate. Before stating such a criterion positively, I shall outline it negatively: rationalists and reflectivists were cast from the same mould, both rejected disciplinary history as a criterion for assessing the discipline's achievements.

In the case of reflectivists, this was hardly surprising. Postmodernist identification of both disciplines and states with the practices of coercive exclusion entailed a rejection of the possibility of any achievement within such practices to begin with. 'Modernists' objected to one particular kind of exclusion, the self-exclusion of International Relations from political theory, and held that 'as a free-standing academic discipline international relations has not been able to provide an adequate account of how things hang together'.²² Critical theorists agreed with postmodernists that there was 'no meaning in the history of international relations, at least not in the Hegelian sense of an inevitable and unilinear development of ideas about world politics' but claimed that by 'considering what different perspectives claim to achieve and what others accuse them of overlooking, it may be easier to understand what should be preserved within a more encompassing approach', provided that this new larger

²⁰ Keohane, *International Institutions and State Power: Essays in International Relations Theory* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989): 8.

²¹ Dallmayr, 'Conversation Across Boundaries: Political Theory and Global Diversity. *Millennium*, 2001, 30: 342.

²² Brown, *Normative Approaches*: 77.

whole would satisfy the practical ideal of critical theory, that of the re-ordering and transcendence of diversity.²³

The rationalist attitude towards history was less clearly defined. On the one hand, appeals to 'traditional' theoretical lineage were routinely made. On the other, the credibility of the theoretical conclusions themselves was tested not against history but against 'international political reality' which was assumed to be relatively unchanging.²⁴ This ambivalence is as persistent within rationalism as the disagreements among reflectivists and can be illustrated by two recent examples.

Jeffrey Legro and Andrew Moravcsik provided a comprehensive account of the rationalist field focused on the justification procedures specific to it.²⁵ For them, the possibility of progressive scientific research implies a move towards multicausal explanations of long-term change which will coherently integrate the whole of the rationalist field which is currently divided into four paradigmatic domains: realism, institutionalism, liberalism, and epistemic theories. These reflect a more profound distinction between power, information, preferences and beliefs in turn corresponding to the long-standing generic concern of rationalist social theory with resources, institutions, tastes and beliefs. For any future synthesis to be possible, each individual paradigm should remain intrinsically coherent and theoretically distinct, a condition to be met only if each of them is driven by its own set of assumptions of which it is preferable to have three as a reflection of yet another long-standing and generic understanding of behaviour in terms of actors, agency and structural constraints. Currently existing paradigms do not adhere to these strict criteria and continuously infringe upon rival territories compromising their own coherence or distinctiveness. Since Legro and Moravcsik are mostly concerned with the aggressive stance of realism, they attempt to remedy this situation by articulating realism's core assumptions. In accordance with the overall design, these are as follows: actors are rational, unitary political units in anarchy, their goals are fixed and uniformly conflictual, international structure is determined by the distribution of material capabilities.

Everyone who accepts this conception of scientific inquiry can no longer seek refuge from its rigour in the notion that intellectual practice is its own justification and in related appeals to intellectual history or traditions: 'appeals to traditional authorities insulate traditional

²³ Linklater, 'The Next Stage': 90.

²⁴ The ambiguity of the rationalist, and in particular neorealist, position on this issue is outlined by Andreas Osiander, 'History and International Relations Theory', in *War, Peace and World Orders in European History*, eds Anja V. Hartmann and Beatrice Heuser (London: Routledge, 2001): 14-24.

²⁵ Jeffrey W. Legro and Andrew Moravcsik, 'Is Anybody Still a Realist?', *International Security*, 1999, 2: 5-55

authorities from criticism and thereby perpetuate internal contradictions within traditions'.²⁶ Implied in this is a much stronger claim: there is no way of not accepting this conception of scientific inquiry since even those who, on philosophical grounds, reject any objective content to paradigms, still insist on somehow identifiable content of traditions, and since traditions thus construed (as intrinsically coherent and distinct) are merely imperfect paradigms, same standards of rational justification apply.²⁷

In fact, this is how it should be from the rationalist standpoint, for, apart from the criteria of coherence and distinctiveness, there is an unnamed, because taken for granted, criterion without which coherence and distinctiveness, when taken together, cannot be maintained, that is, the criterion of correspondence to 'an international political reality'. Coherence, taken on its own, as a necessary condition of the truth of a system of propositions, cannot be sufficient. It is possible to imagine a coherent system of propositions none of which are believed to be true by anyone, and then the question of why this particular system is distinguished from all possible others cannot be settled unless coherence, as a criterion of truth, is supplemented either with that of correspondence to reality or that of comprehensiveness. In the latter case, only that system of propositions is true which is at once coherent and comprehensive, that is, it includes all possible propositions and refers to a single reality, unbreakable into distinct 'international political', scientific, historic, or any other 'realities'.²⁸

The latter route is closed for Legro and Moravcsik because, if their initial question – Is anyone still a realist? – is pushed onto the metatheoretical level, where the discussion is actually taking place, the answer would be a plain yes, Legro and Moravcsik are, inasmuch as their conception of 'rational social theory' is underpinned by a set of assumptions identified by themselves as realist. Actors are rational, unified theoretical units in anarchy (paradigms), their goals are fixed and conflictual, the structure of such theorizing is determined by the distribution of 'resources' (power, institutions, preferences, beliefs) which can be unproblematically carved out of some objectively given reality. The last of these assumptions is of primary importance (as with materialism in the case of neorealism). The moment it is challenged the neat underlying distinction between resources, institutions, tastes and beliefs is in trouble and with it the criteria of distinctiveness and coherence. This is not to say that this distinction has neither meaning nor theoretical utility for rationalists themselves. However, when pressed on the issue of its authority, rationalists will have to concede that it

²⁶ Peter D. Feaver, Günther Hellman, Randall L. Schweller, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, William C. Wohlforth, Jeffrey W. Legro and Andrew Moravcsik, 'Correspondence: Brother, Can You Spare a Paradigm? (Or Was Anybody Ever a Realist?)', *International Security*, 2000, 1: 190.

²⁷ Ibid.: 191-2.

²⁸ For a detailed discussion of this point see Bertrand Russell, *Philosophical Essays* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1910): 156.

rests on little else but a long-standing intellectual tradition in no way insulated either from criticism or incoherence, yet this is precisely what they are not willing to admit. To put it differently, rationalism in theorizing, as rationalism in politics, is an intellectual tradition which cannot accept its own traditionalist nature. Being out of character is the major trend in rationalism's character.

The second, 'historicist', trend in rationalist thinking is present in Richard Little's investigation of the English school.²⁹ Now comprehensiveness (under the name of 'pluralism') is given priority over distinctiveness, and history over theoretical policy-making. Little argues that the school cannot be exclusively associated either with the notion of 'international society', as opposed to 'international system' and 'world society', or post-positivism, as a mode of inquiry appropriate to it. All of Wight's three traditions should be considered together, albeit in a substantially reworked form. Once this is done, the English school may be seen as yielding three distinct but coexisting ontologies: international system, international society and world society. This broad reformed church could accommodate the wide range of established theoretical approaches, from international political economy and various positivist projects, appropriate for the study of international system, to critical theory, as a mode of inquiry specific to the study of world society.

The problem with this initial take is its incoherence which Little seems to take as a necessary trade-off for pluralism. However, pluralism is not meaningfully theorized either. Thus Little rejects, for example, Linklater's rendition of the three traditions while attempting to retain its conclusions insofar as these refer only to one 'ontological sector', world society. What is not clear, is how what Little believes to be the best account of world society can operate when divorced from its universalist and evolutionist assumptions, in accordance with which thus coexisting ontologies are the product of distinct, and conflicting, cognitive interests.

Clarifications soon followed, this time in collaboration with Barry Buzan.³⁰ Now the net is cast even wider and the English school is seen as a nucleus of a discipline reassessed in its relation to the whole of social inquiry. After painting a rather gloomy picture of International Relations as a failed intellectual project which, as it were, fell into the cracks between other social sciences, Buzan and Little attribute this failure to the natal trauma caused by a self-imposed Westphalian straightjacket: the discipline 'was born with its gaze fixed firmly

²⁹ Richard Little, 'Neorealism and the English School: A Methodological, Ontological and Theoretical Reassessment', *European Journal of International Relations*, 1995, 1: 9-34; and 'The English School's Contribution to the Study of International Relations', *European Journal of International Relations*, 2000, 6: 395-422.

³⁰ Buzan and Little, 'Why International Relations has Failed as an Intellectual Project and What to Do about It', *Millennium*, 2001, 30: 19-39.

forward.... This orientation towards the policy issues of the present and near future... has been reinforced, especially in the US, by the dominance of an economistic, natural science based understanding of the social world, which contained its own antihistoricist bias'.³¹

So after decades of sustained critical engagement with Waltzian theory, itself an epitome of Westphalian thinking, Buzan and Little shift their attention to Wallerstein's theory (which is not to say that the concern as such is novel for them). What attracts them is not Wallerstein's conclusions but the mode of analysis which blends theory with history and cuts through existing disciplinary boundaries. Similarly, they call for thinking 'big and wide' in order to question not just the established ontologies within the discipline but also the discipline's place within the universe of social research. What is needed is not a decisive victory of one approach, one sector, one academic discourse over the rest but a better understanding of how the world composed of all of them hangs together. International Relations has 'the potential, and arguably the obligation, to become a kind of meta-discipline, systematically linking together the macro-sides of the social sciences and history', its role in the academic division of labour is 'to build bridges and establish a common ground in ways that transcend disciplinary boundaries'.³² This requires theoretical pluralism, as a rejection of the 'habit of assuming incommensurability', and a revival of the 'pluralist [pre-Waltzian] tradition without losing sight of the more self-conscious rigour introduced by Waltz'.³³

Thus reinvigorated, the English school, as Buzan suggests in his separate contribution, may 'form a complete and interlinked picture of the International Relations universe'.³⁴ This universe is divided between three theoretical approaches which bear close resemblance to Wight's traditions. Each has its distinct methodology, each explores its own view of the world, each blurs into the other two at the boundaries (Fig. 7.2).

This, and not any uncritical allegiance to 'traditional authorities', is what justifies the English school's emphasis on having three approaches. 'Rationalism' is interesting not because it offers superior ontological or methodological insights, or provides a reasonable middle-way, but because its interplay with the two other approaches highlights certain realities of world politics which are either neglected or obscured by more rigid binary oppositions. Thus, concentrating on the interplay of 'rationalism' with both 'realism' and 'revolutionism', one can better see the dualistic character of 'rationalism' itself, divided into pluralist and solidarist streams. The former advocates the plurality of states and their primacy as actors on the international arena while emphasizing the conventional nature of their

³¹ Ibid.: 24-25.

³² Ibid.: 22.

³³ Ibid.: 34-5.

³⁴ Barry Buzan, 'The English School: An Underexploited Resource in IR', *Review of International Studies*, 2001, 27: 476.

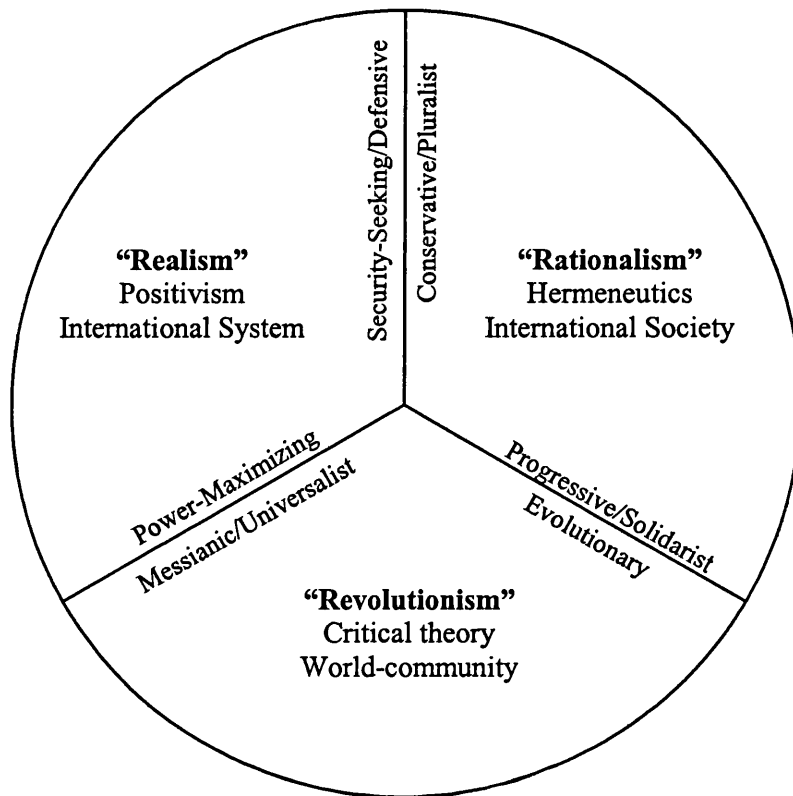


Fig. 7.2 Reinvented English school as a nucleus of International Relations (Buzan-Little, 2001)

interaction. The latter argues for changing existing conventions so as to secure more solid and stable observance of the individual human rights while entrusting this task to the society of states rather than a single global political community. In this manner, 'rationalism', in both of its manifestations, appears to be distinct from both 'realism', which downplays the importance of the rules of interstate conduct, and 'revolutionism', which argues against the plurality of states as primary actors in world politics.

Buzan acknowledges that pluralism and solidarism, as in fact the other distinctions thus emphasized, may simply 'reproduce within the rationalist "via media" a version of the polarization between realism and liberalism that splits IR theory more generally', in which case, the distinction would lose any independent theoretical value and merge into the broader universalism/particularism one.³⁵ However, he refuses to follow his own suggestion thoroughly. Meanwhile, if examined, as in the case of Legro and Moravcsik's construction, on the metatheoretical level, Buzan and Little's position oscillates between two not really compatible views of the field. On the one hand, it advocates theoretical pluralism as yielding

‘multiple rather than competing paradigms’, on the other, it sees the virtue of such pluralism in that it allows examination of the question ‘how strong [these paradigms] are in relation to each other’.³⁶ Contrary to their renunciation of the inter-paradigm debate, Buzan and Little suggest a choice between two versions of this particular mode of adjudication: a ‘leaner and meaner’ one of Legro and Moravcsik, and a more relaxed, but also less rigorous methodologically, formulation of Banks in which coexisting, and not necessarily competing, paradigms are passing each other by ‘to engage in a separate conversation with the subject-matter’.

However, on Buzan and Little’s own logic and definitions, these are just two different versions of ‘realism’ (power-maximizing and security-seeking). While calling for abandoning the Westphalian conception of international relations, Buzan and Little do not go beyond a rather Westphalian conception of ‘academic relations’, in fact, never really explore the connection between the two. Meanwhile, one of the virtues of the rationalist-reflectivist debate consisted in making this particular connection explicit and presenting it as being fostered by the rise of a single mode of rationality (as when states possess given interests and develop ways of pursuing them, and academic disciplines have given subjects and work out the best strategies for understanding them). Buzan and Little’s diversified metatheoretical ‘realism’ may indeed possess the virtue of verging onto other approaches and thus granting recognition to modes of inquiry other than its own, but it does not possess the philosophical resources needed to comprehend them fully. The ‘unambitious optimism’ of its relaxed version of the inter-paradigm debate comes back when a given subject-matter, and therefore the separate routes leading to it, can no longer be assumed or taken for granted.³⁷

This points towards what went wrong with the rationalist-reflectivist debate when it was still at the peak of its intensity. The point is best seen when Buzan-Little’s image of the discipline is compared to Alker-Biersteker’s. Both accounts begin with empirical observation, that of competing theoretical claims and counter-claims. In Alker-Biersteker’s case, it is the multiple lines of contention between such claims, sustained by dialectical tensions within themselves, that shape the discipline, providing it with its dynamic, intrinsically contested boundary. The character of the discipline is the outcome of inquiry, not its starting point. In Buzan-Little’s, what is offered is more like a snap-shot made in the present. The discipline is presented as a complex, self-contained system interacting with other such systems, which corresponds to the image of the world of empirical fact where the discipline’s subject-matter is located. All three levels, empirical reality, the discipline and the universe of social

³⁵ Ibid.: 479.

³⁶ Ibid.: 476.

research, are in need of proper management, and one particular mode of management is explored as being particularly proper. It is recognized that the system and the modes of its management have histories. It is further argued that these histories matter. What is meant by history is a succession of discernable phases of relative stability, a succession which itself necessarily exhibits some comprehensible order.³⁸ The implication of this view is that history supplies neither criteria for academic progress nor other justifications of existing academic or political practices. It merely widens the scope of data under examination, and the data in question is located in the world of empirical fact.

Thus, as far as the criteria for the evaluation of practices are concerned, Buzan and Little, their insistence on comprehensiveness and 'historicism' notwithstanding, are closer to rationalists than they are to reflectivists. This is often obscured by rationalists' routine disclaimer that neither of them is 'committed to the naïve notion that reality can be objectively known'.³⁹ The question, however, is not whether there is a reality that can be objectively known, but whether there is a reality which remains unmodified by reflection. Or more precisely, whether it makes sense to postulate such a reality in whatever form and for whatever reason. For, in a sense, such 'external reality' is postulated also by Alker and Biersteker, in the form of the ideal point of 'complete cosmopolitanism' or 'perfect pluralism'.

The implications of this were thus stated as early as 1969:

Kant believed in Reason and Hegel believed in History, and for both this was a form of a belief in external reality. Modern thinkers who believe in neither, but who remain within [this] tradition, are left with a denuded self whose only virtues are freedom, or at best sincerity, or, in the case of British philosophers, an everyday reasonableness. Philosophy, on its other fronts, has been busy dismantling the old substantial picture of the 'self', and ethics has not proved able to rethink this concept for moral purposes. The moral agent then is pictured as an isolated principle of will, or burrowing pinpoint of consciousness, inside, or beside, a lump of being which has been handed over to other disciplines, such as psychology or sociology.⁴⁰

Further implications of such a 'handing over' to other 'departments' were, again, foreseen at the time of this particular discipline's birth: 'Analytic psychology... can do little except produce monsters; for it is attempting to produce unified individuals in a world without unity; the social, political, and economic sciences can do little, for they are attempting to produce the great society with an aggregation of human beings who are not units but merely bundles

³⁷ 'Unambitious optimism' is Iris Murdoch's description of what she saw as a predominant attitude of the Anglo-American liberal theorizing; *Existentialists and Mystics*: 340.

³⁸ Although Buzan and Little's concern with history is of long standing, they had not stated their methodological views on the matter until the publication of *International Systems in World History: Remaking the Study of International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000): 30-2.

³⁹ Keohane, *Essays*: 8.

⁴⁰ Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics*: 338.

of incoherent impulses and beliefs'.⁴¹ Reflectivists charged rationalists with forcing the discipline into precisely this dead-end. However, inasmuch as, according to reflectivists, both the discipline and the world were dominated by rationalism, the radical reflectivist critique aimed at transcending this world and this discipline and thus reinforced the same dichotomy: 'On the one hand a Luciferian philosophy of the adventures of the will, on the other natural science'.⁴²

Thus conclusion happens to be the same as in the previous section: the rationalist-reflectivist debate, with its rejection of tradition, or inability to reaffirm it, manifested in the extinction of traditionalism, is one of the reasons why the triadic conception of the discipline, which at the time of Alker and Biersteker's writing, was taken for granted by almost everyone, was in need of revival by the end of the 1990s. In this sense, Buzan and Little's contribution was indicative, but to be really successful, it had to be stated differently.

How did it end?

In search for a third metatheoretical position, different from both rationalism and reflectivism, one need not go 'beyond' Buzan-Little's attempt so much as 'behind' it, returning to what underpins its rejection of the inter-paradigm debate. Such underpinnings are to be found in Wæver's account of the rise and fall of the inter-paradigm debate in which the notion of critical return is intimated as one possible interpretation of the reflectivist undertaking. In 1996, when Wæver's case was presented, this was mostly a hint. By the end of the decade the contours of the alternative position acquired more solid shape(s). This marked the end of the rationalist-reflectivist debate by suggesting a more complex, triadic, constellation at the heart of which was an attempt to reconsider the discipline not in terms of its analytic constructions but in the idiom of the history of ideas.

To appreciate the starting point of this development it is interesting to notice where Buzan and Little depart from Wæver. Firstly, whereas they call for *methodological* pluralism, one of Wæver's main points is that already the inter-paradigm debate was not a debate on methodology, and the rationalist-reflectivist one was even less so. This is seen clearer once the whole of Wæver's argument and the corresponding image of the discipline are understood in terms of their own underlying dialectics.

Wæver's construction does not rest upon the opposition of universalism and particularism but arrives at it through what may be described as a dialectics of subject and method, the interplay of two kinds of overarching question that the discipline was addressing itself to in

⁴¹ Eliot, 'Religion Without Humanism', in *Humanism and America*, ed. Norman Foerster (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1930): 112.

⁴² Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics*: 338.

the course of its first three major debates. The first was a 'what' debate, centred around the question of what was the nature of international politics. Insofar as the character of politics had to be carved out of the whole of human experience, and insofar as politics was believed to be taking place among certain entities, such as nations, for example, the debate's major concerns were with politics, philosophy (as a general map of experience) and ontology, with neither epistemology nor methodology being at the forefront of attention. Once a certain consensus on this question was reached (or enforced by realism), the discipline moved into its second debate, a 'how' one, concerned mainly with methodology, epistemology and ontology (in this particular order). The third debate reshuffled the order of priorities again. Now it was ontology, politics, methodology, with politics re-entering the picture because of the different conceptions of it held by the advocates of different – pluralist, realist, Marxist – ontologies. More importantly, this debate brought 'how' and 'what' questions into a qualitatively different relationship with each other. Now it was impossible to separate the two, not only did what one saw depend on how one looked at it, but how one looked at the world depended on what kind of a world of ideas one was situated in to begin with, that is, what fundamental philosophical assumptions shaped one's world-view.⁴³

This bringing of philosophy, and not just epistemology, back into the focus of attention is what led, according to Wæver, to the gradual transformation of the inter-paradigm debate into the twofold fourth one, with its neo-neo and rationalist-reflectivist lines of contention. The difference between the two brings in the second point on which Buzan and Little differ from Wæver, when they refer to his call for abandoning the habit of assuming incommensurability. Wæver indeed suggests that 'there is no reason to assume (radical) incommensurability (specifically) among paradigms', but this suggestion has a proviso: this habit can be abandoned only by those who have deconstructed already the image of 'walls encircling crowds who are forced to communicate meaningfully only within their throng, and replaced it by a general image of difficult, incomplete, partial "communication" which might exhibit variations in density and thus patterns of groupings, but no fixed, ultimate distinctions of an inside/outside nature'.⁴⁴ To be able to abandon the assumption of incommensurability one, first, has to stop assuming perfect commensurability. For example, the 'neo-neo synthesis', a rapprochement between neorealists and neoliberals, became possible after Waltz deconstructed all previous divisions by means of a particular conception of science and only against the background of the acceptance of this particular conception of science by both neorealists and neoliberals. However, as there are limits to such acceptances so there are limits to such agreements.

⁴³ Wæver, 'The Rise and Fall': 156-7.

The most profound of such limitations undermines both Legro-Moravcsik's and Buzan-Little's analyses. Both constructions rest on 'heroic assumptions' about different theories' relation to reality.⁴⁵ The most 'heroic' of these is the belief in 'an international political reality', this time not only because such a reality is assumed to be unmodified by reflection, but also because it is assumed as *a* reality whose singularity presupposes that different theories are competing for, or co-existing while explaining 'the same', however divided, or different sectors of this 'same', however arranged. Not that some sameness cannot be achieved or extended beyond the rationalist-reflectivist divide, but such an extension cannot be achieved by the sympathetic advancement of the rationalist argument into the 'realities' already cultivated by reflectivists, and still less by keeping the paradigms within the boundaries which can be meaningfully drawn only from the rationalist standpoint. Synthesis is only possible (if at all) from a reflectivist position, precisely because reflectivism is more prepared to accept, and in some of its modifications to celebrate, the plurality of paradigms and corresponding 'realities'.⁴⁶

Now the familiar interplay of universality and particularism reappears, and at this stage, Wæver's argument forks into two somewhat different directions. One line of it, in keeping with the theoretical realities of the mid-1990s, suggests the emergence of post-radical reflectivism which will attempt to occupy a middle-ground in-between the extremes.⁴⁷ This option was later criticized from all possible directions, but one of the most interesting criticisms, presented as an extension of Wæver's argument, was advanced from a metatheoretical perspective informed by yet another post-positivist philosophical position, distinct from those mentioned so far: scientific realism.⁴⁸

For the authors of this particular critique, Heikki Patomäki and Colin Wight, any middle-ground in-between rationalism and reflectivism is indefensible because two wrongs do not make a right, and what makes both rationalism and reflectivism wrong is their anti-realism: both positivist and post-positivist 'realities', understood as what is being experienced or as what is being expressed, are not 'realities' enough since both bear 'the mark, or insignia, of some human artifice'.⁴⁹ This anti-realism underpins both approaches' conceptions of the problem-field of the discipline and the possibility for science generally. What critical realism offers instead is deeper commitment to the existence of a multilayered reality not reducible to

⁴⁴ Ibid.: 172.

⁴⁵ Ibid.: 173-4.

⁴⁶ Ibid.: 174.

⁴⁷ Ibid.: 166, 174-5.

⁴⁸ Patomäki and Wight, 'After Postpositivism? The Promises of Critical Realism', *International Studies Quarterly*, 2000, 44: 213-37. Following Patomäki and Wight's self-identification, this approach will be referred to henceforth as 'critical realism' to distinguish it from other modes of scientific realism.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 217.

either discourse or sense-data, reality which is constituted by the ‘underlying structures, powers, and tendencies that exist, whether or not detected or known through experience and/or discourse’, reality which ‘provides the conditions of possibility for actual events and perceived and/or experienced phenomena’. This, radically non-anthropocentric, understanding of reality offers a possibility for a science which is no longer content with describing various constant conjunctions but aims at ‘identifying and illuminating the structures, powers, and tendencies that structure the course of events’.⁵⁰

Critical realism shares with positivism the correspondence theory of truth, where ‘truth as correspondence to the world is a regulative metaphor guiding scientific and other practices’. What it shares with post-positivism is a comprehensive view of reality as being ‘differentiated yet interconnected’. What separates it from both is its claim that, just as facts are value-laden, so values are factually embedded, which introduces ‘a genuinely critical moment... that depends at once upon values being factually explained and facts being subject to evaluation’. Accordingly, Patomäki and Wight promise, on behalf of critical realism, to uphold the emancipatory thrust of reflectivism, but to realize it through the reinvigoration of the rationalist belief in the possibilities of science.⁵¹ Because critical realism’s reality is differentiated, it shares with both rationalism and reflectivism their commitment to inter-paradigmatic pluralism, but because it is also interconnected, and in a much more radical and complicated manner than rationalist ‘resources, institutions, tastes and beliefs’ are, the critical realist view of the interplay between paradigms is closer to that of Wæver than it is to Legro-Moravcsik’s.⁵²

Yet, this very interconnectedness makes the critical realist position problematic once it is applied to a particular discipline. Scientific realism, as a philosophical position investigating relations between agents and structures, causes and effects writ large, may well hold a promise of reconciling humans with their environment while treating both as interconnected parts of a single ‘this world not another’.⁵³ But how is critical realism to isolate one layer of such a reality, world politics, from all possible others in view of investigating it in its relation to the rest of ‘this world’, especially so if this layer is constituted, although perhaps not exhausted, by human artifice? Perhaps it is possible. Certainly this task does not need to be more difficult for critical realism than it is for any other approach with strong holistic yearnings. But all this does not make it less of a problem. Or maybe, after all, the promises of

⁵⁰ Ibid., 223.

⁵¹ Ibid., 234.

⁵² Ibid., 225-7.

⁵³ The phrase is Patomäki and Wight’s and is meant to differentiate their position from those of positivists (with its ‘world out there’) and post-positivists (whose world is limited to whatever is ‘in here’, that is, expressed through discourse); Ibid., 234.

critical realism *are* more difficult to fulfil. Some post-positivists may say that the fact of the discipline's existence is an outcome of contingent attempts at the realization of certain values and leave it at that. Critical realists cannot be content with contingency and will have to search for the facts in which this particular set of values is embedded, and these facts will have to be found outside their immediate field of research.

Again, critical realists may well have a solution to this problem and will be ready to recognize this solution's imperfection and conditionality. What matters, however, is the tendency. Critical realism's aversion to anthropocentrism inclines it towards a conception of the self which fades into its natural environment ('Old clothes upon old sticks to scare a bird') just as much as postmodernism's abhorrence of anthropomorphism draws it towards an agonistic self played into the mist of human artifice ('O body swayed to music, O brightening glance'); and the question confronting both would be the same: 'How can we know the dancer from the dance?'⁵⁴ One can add to this picture a rationalist self that 'acquires a "current" value in the world' by learning 'the latest steps in the *danse macabre* of wants and satisfactions' (Oakeshott V 104). Still these three selves taken together would not make it possible to answer the question which Wæver asks about all attempts to understand International Relations as a mere reflection of some grand philosophical or ideological constellations: Why *this* discipline then?

Wæver's own answer constitutes his second response to the rationalist-reflectivist debate. Its starting point is similar to Patomäki's earlier case for political dialectics: 'Paradigms have to be applied first of all as sociological concepts for discipline *internal* developments', and, in accordance with the same *self*-referential logic, within a discipline different theories or paradigms 'can only be linked externally, when one theory reaches out on its own terms for another to exploit it, which it can then only do by grasping the inner logic of this other theory and its material'.⁵⁵ Paradigms are bound to be cautiously 'expansionist', for the task of each consists in absorbing the 'material' and the logic of its neighbours. However, this logic itself is acceptable only on the reflectivist side of the debate. On the rationalist side, as Legro and Moravcsik's account of it demonstrates, such expansionism is inadmissible. Insofar as both rationalism and reflectivism were locked in the same debate, in the same discipline and in the same problem-field, the simultaneous running of two opposing, narrowing and widening, logics of inquiry led to an interesting development, thus presented by Wæver:

In their work to reshape themselves in scientific form, [neo]realism as well as [neo]liberalism had to leave behind some of their traditional fields, political statesman in the case of realism, and ethics in the case of liberalism. Reflectivists attempted to

⁵⁴ All three lines are from Yeats, 'Among School Children', in *Poems*: 184-5.

⁵⁵ Wæver, 'Inter-paradigm debate': 172, emphasis added.

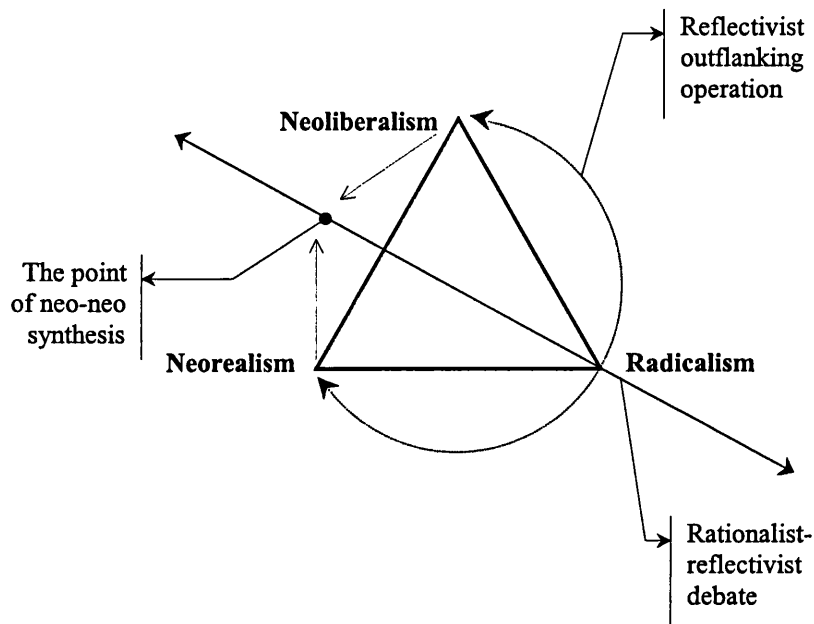


Fig. 7.3 *The image of the discipline in the beginning of the end of the rationalist-reflectivist debate (Wæver, 1996).*

articulate these classical issues against the two neo-schools, who have become too scientific for such matters.⁵⁶

This double-movement intimates a critical return, and not to ontology, as in Patomäki and Wight, but to politics as a central concern of the first debate. The return itself is conceived not as a grand undoing of a centuries-long practice of anti-realism (Patomäki and Wight) or an even more grandiose unmasking of modernity (postmodernism), but as a much more modest, and yet no less subversive, reassessment of the beginnings of this discipline not another (Fig. 7.3).

The beginning of this movement, registered by Wæver, intimated the fall of the rationalist-reflectivist debate insofar as it marked the rise of a metatheoretical position alternative to both rationalism and reflectivism. What I want to show next, is that such movement actually took place and developed into an account which ties together an interpretation of the discipline's history, a conception of world politics, and a comprehensive image of the discipline in its relation to philosophy.

⁵⁶ Ibid.: 155, 165. Wæver's diagram is slightly modified to highlight the encirclement implied in the 'reflectivist outflanking operation'. Also, Wæver's 'radicalism' is preferable to 'revolutionism' meaningful only in conjunction with Wight's own 'realism' and 'rationalism', different from their namesakes elsewhere. Characteristically, Dunne, when confronted with the necessity of bringing together the English school and various metatheoretical approaches, reverts from 'rationalism' to 'legitimism'; 'Sociological Investigations'. Henceforth radicalism and legitimism will be used to denote what in Linklater or Buzan and Little is presented as 'revolutionism' and 'rationalism'.

Neotraditionalism in International Relations

Throughout the debates discussed so far, such terms as 'tradition', 'framework' or 'paradigm' were used interchangeably or in conjunction with each other, as if one word could be explained by reference to the other, as in 'paradigms or traditions'. Thus, while differences in the understanding of 'paradigms or traditions' in part constituted the rationalist-reflectivist divide, the difference between 'traditions' and 'paradigms' remained undertheorized. By the end of the 1990s, this started to change, and the authors of at least two contributions, both framed in the idiom of the contextualist history of ideas, offered various distinctions between 'tradition' and other modes of inquiry.

Brian Schmidt draws his distinction between historical tradition, as 'a preconstituted and self-constituted pattern of conventional practice through which ideas are conveyed within a recognizably established and specified discursive framework', and analytical tradition, 'a retrospectively created construct determined by present criteria and concerns' which a community of scholars addresses by stipulating 'certain ideas, themes, genres, or texts as functionally similar'.⁵⁷ Once the two are disentangled, the discipline's achievement can be ascertained, not in relation to some abstract intellectual construction, but against the background of its own evolution, understood historically. What is needed is a 'critical internal discursive history' in which the discipline would be taken on its own terms set, according to Schmidt, by the problematique of international anarchy articulated, not by the great debate of the interwar period as the 'analytical' reading maintains, but through the scholarly conversations of the mid-nineteenth century.⁵⁸

Schmidt's conclusions, however, defeat his own assumptions. The whole point of conducting an inquiry which is at once critical, internal and discursive is to escape the opposition of reflectivist and rationalist interpretations of history and identity. Admitting that the writing of history cannot be devoid of presentism, Schmidt maintains that it is legitimate to start a historical inquiry with a present practical concern, as it is understood within a discipline, and then trace the evolution of the theoretical attempts at elucidating it. However, one ought not to write history in view of fostering or unmasking identities.⁵⁹ In other words, one has to assume a relatively stable, discursively constituted identity so as to be able to locate within it all the criteria needed for its critical evaluation. Yet Schmidt's history goes far beyond the investigation of the discourse of anarchy and amounts to a rather radical redefinition of the discipline's identity. This is hardly surprising, for from the outset he takes

⁵⁷ Brian Schmidt, *The Political Discourse of Anarchy: A Disciplinary History of International Relations* (Albany: State University of New York, 1998): 25.

⁵⁸ Ibid.: 37-9, 227-9.

⁵⁹ Ibid.: 20.

this identity to be constructed 'analytically' and intends to supplant it with a truly 'historical' one. His history appears to be 'critical' to the point of emptying the 'internal' of almost any stable meaning. Paradoxically, the major reason for this lies in Schmidt's understanding of the 'discursive', which is hardly critical enough.

Rather than claiming that there is no reality independent from the academic conversations he is interested in, or that this reality is sufficiently well absorbed in these conversations, Schmidt maintains that some 'external context' exists, but it is difficult to ascertain any direct connection between it and the discursive practices he isolates as 'internal'. This, however, is merely a replay of the rationalist dualism of subject and object. Accordingly, there are reasons to suspect that the needs of colonial administration in the nineteenth century are given their due while the impact of World War I is downplayed not least because, once traced in this particular manner, the 'political discourse of anarchy' starts more or less where Schmidt wants it to, or at least does not start where he does not want it to, in the great debate of the interwar period.

In this respect, David Boucher's approach is almost the exact opposite of Schmidt's.⁶⁰ Whereas Schmidt's inquiry starts by assuming a separate disciplinary identity and the dualism of 'internal' and 'external', Boucher's begins with a denial of such separation and is rooted in a different understanding of the relationship between texts and contexts or theory and practice. For him, dramatic disillusionments of the interwar period reinforced the view "that faith in human reason for the deliverance of world peace was misplaced" thus contributing to the injection of 'a new realism into perceptions of international relations', and into the university curriculum, in the form of an independent discipline 'unreceptive to political theory'.⁶¹ That was a false-start, for there is nothing else to place faith into rather than reason, only the nature of reason and its relation to events have to be understood properly:

Instead of the thought illuminating the events... the events illuminate the thought which is intended to transcend them. Thus, for a theory of the human predicament that the English Civil War betrays, we look not to Oliver Cromwell or Charles II but to Thomas Hobbes, and for the general principles of international relations to emerge out of the Thirty Years War and the Napoleonic Wars we look... to Pufendorf, Wolff, Vattel, and Hegel, whose theories extrapolate from these events the growing importance, autonomy, and integrity of the state as an actor, or even a personality, in international relations, and present in a different way the dilemma of one's loyalty to humanity and one's obligations to one's *patria*.⁶²

This is not to deny the importance of events or participants to them. Philosophical discourse does not exhaust the whole of experience but in it one can find everything one

⁶⁰ Boucher, *Political Theories*.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*: 6-8.

needs to know as to *how* to think about this or that subject. Now we are looking over the heads, as it were, of most of the contributors to the twentieth-century rationalism in International Relations, but then not all conversations incite desire to join them, and *how* one thinks about various subjects in human sciences does not change from one academic department to the other.

In his next move Boucher criticizes most of the reflectivist characterizations of the field for their excessive focus 'upon the substantive ends, such as a specific type of order'. What is needed instead is a better understanding of 'the criteria invoked to guide, justify, or recommend state conduct', and these can be characterized in terms of the identifiable styles of thinking. In accordance with the style of their thinking, rather than their conclusions, individual philosophers can be grouped into distinct traditions of thought. Unlike Schmidt, Boucher does not claim traditions to be actual historic occurrences. They are intellectual abstractions coexisting in a dialectical relation to each other. He identifies three such traditions: Empirical Realism, Universal Moral Order and Historical Reason. For the exponents of the first, actors are guided by their desires and aversions. The second postulates a set of universal principles as the only legitimate standard for action. The third attempts to synthesize the first two by stating that criteria for state-conduct, independent from the immediate interests of states, are to be found in the historical process of inter-state relations.

This taxonomy is an abstraction, a starting point, meaningful only in its dialectical interplay with the investigation of a wide range of philosophers whose individual thinking never fits neatly into any of the three traditions but continuously questions their boundaries and the overall constellation. The problem lies with the limits of such questioning. While denying a separate identity to International Relations, Boucher assumes such an identity in the case of Politics. This starting point may indeed be better supported by what evidence obliges us to believe than Schmidt's similar assumption of the stable identity of International Relations. Still, this support is also conditional. In Boucher's case, it is conditioned by the evolutionist conception of human reason and a corresponding idea of human history. This has implications for the understanding of politics. Politics has to be either transcended by thought or identified with the process of historical conversion brought about by reason. In this way or another, the identity of the activity of politics is thrown into question while the ultimate criterion for its evaluation is located outside politics.

Boucher recognizes the challenge but downplays its gravity by presenting the most radical critics, postmodernists, as merely asking for suspension of judgement. This implies their acceptance of the criteria of conduct which characterize the tradition of Historical Reason

⁶² Ibid.: 9-10.

despite possible misgivings as to the final destination of history. Thus Boucher's own historical analysis culminates in the exposition of the political theories of international relations of Hegel and Marx. The postmodern critique, however, may be more damaging, suggesting that 'History may be neither servitude nor freedom, but unavoidably Disney' which discloses neither meaning nor reflective individual agency.⁶³ Not that one necessarily has to acquiesce to this critique, but it certainly has to be addressed in an account which aims at comprehensiveness, however conditional.

This is how the story is told by N.J. Rengger in whose account the relation between the discipline and its context is even more dynamic than in Boucher's.⁶⁴ Rengger does not use the word 'tradition', still, as Schmidt, he begins by identifying a practical concern which, however, is not a puzzle addressed by a localized community of scholars but, as in Boucher, the historically evolving problem of both political theory and practice, the problem of political order. This he traces up to its post-Hegelian formulation by Nietzsche and Weber: the break-up of the 'natural' wholeness of the world into the 'iron cage' of sovereign associations of disenchanted instrumental reasoners. What Buzan and Little present as the discipline's Westphalian straightjacket, for Rengger, is one mode of responding to the problem of order: by *managing* it. Another response consists in attempts to *end* the current order, either by transcending it through deliberate emancipation or by exposing its limits. These responses, as in Boucher, are two identifiable styles of understanding and conduct, but, as in Schmidt, they are identified through the critical internal discursive investigation of contemporary International Relations.

Here Rengger's story departs from both Schmidt's and Boucher's since history now is not a solution but part of a problem: how three particular 'things' – science, construed as instrumental problem-solving, society, built around the negative morality of rules, and history, which undermines them both by bringing in contingency – hang together? Correspondingly, Rengger's initial dualistic, managing/ending, conception of the discipline transforms into a triadic one. Rationalism, dominated by the neo-neos and characterized by the managing style of responding to the problem of order, and radicalism, shared between critical and postmodern theorists responding to the problem of order by attempting to end it, are joined by critically renarrated International Relations traditionalism.

The reassessment of traditionalism consists in highlighting its understanding of politics but also in problematizing state-sovereignty. The problem is not with any intrinsic unworthiness of the state but with the impossibility of judging any particular association

⁶³ Sharratt, 'Modernism, Postmodernism, and after': 230. The remark, an allusion to a line in Eliot, itself an allusion, is a tongue-in-cheek affirmation of the 'death of the author'.

⁶⁴ Rengger, *The Problem of Order*.

independently from the particularity of the context. Rengger proposes to accept the fact of particularity while refusing to assign any intrinsic moral value to it. One has to live both with or within particular associations and through them, transgressing their boundaries as situation requires. This calls for the exercise of political judgement which is cosmopolitan but not universal, always context-specific, and 'can never be sloughed off to anyone, friend or family, local or ethnic community, state or international society'.⁶⁵ The problem of order is now seen not as one overarching problem but as a '*series* of multiple and overlapping questions, which map onto the various different issues as they arise in world politics, *together with* a more general question about what ends the variously complex institutions and agents involved in these issues and questions should serve and how they should serve them'. Political order becomes the

continuous process of *ordering (and reordering) ends* which are specific to particular situations and actors but still embedded into an overarching view of the 'natural' wholeness of human beings. And if our sense of 'naturalness' is different from that of Nietzsche and Weber we may not feel quite so 'disenchanted' with the world as they seemed to, even if we also feel that, in many respects, it is a hellish place and mostly, in most places, always has been.⁶⁶

Ironically, here the wording gets the better of Rengger. By naming his alternative the 'ordering of ends', a mirror-image of the 'ending of order', Rengger indicates which of the other two approaches, managing or ending, he considers to be the most interesting interlocutor. But 'ends' also belong to the 'managing' side with its ends-means rationality. One could play with this further, suggesting that this is how all three poles are linked together, but at this point clarity is more important and in more than one way.

If, however, 'dispositions' are substituted for Rengger's 'ends', his 'order' can be provisionally described as 'tradition', as this was defined in the previous chapter. This requires further clarification, but already at this point allows for some reordering. Thus Schmidt's distinction between 'historical' and 'analytical' traditions turns into that between practices construed and attended to historically or analytically. The former are traditions, the latter paradigms as understood by Legro and Moravcsik. Contrary to their understanding, tradition is not an imperfect paradigm, which is ideally supposed to be coherent and distinct. A perfect tradition ought to be coherent and comprehensive. Since comprehensiveness is an ideal, a 'perfect tradition' is a contradiction in terms. Tradition is alive insofar as it is in the making, aware of its incompleteness and vulnerability by virtue of being responsive to the 'material' and logic of its rivals.

⁶⁵ Ibid.: 202.

⁶⁶ Ibid.: 202-3.

No tradition is free from its own problems recognized by its own practitioners, there is always a possibility that 'it is the limitations imposed by [one's] own conceptual and argumentative framework which both generate... incoherencies and prevent their resolution'.⁶⁷ If no resolution can be found within a given tradition, its inhabitants have to turn to its rivals for possible insights. Since such rivals are involved in the similar cultivation of coherent and comprehensive frameworks, any insights from them can be gained only by means of fluency in their conceptual language and an exercise of philosophical and practical imagination. If such translatability and imagination are possible, so is the adjudication between the claims of rival traditions.

Such adjudication would consist in attempts by the practitioners of a given tradition at providing a coherent and comprehensive account of their own tradition, all its known rivals, and their accounts of the tradition in question. This overall account would be narrated as a story of continuous achievement which does not have to be equated with progress and under certain conditions may consist in securing survival.⁶⁸ If rival accounts highlight the existence of the phenomena recognizable from within a given tradition as relevant, these can no longer be excluded from consideration even if 'traditionally' they were. Distinctiveness remains, but as an unintended consequence of tradition's internal history of recognized and remedied incoherencies, and not as a means for some premeditated synthesis.⁶⁹

This account of tradition is compatible with Wæver's or Patomäki and Wight's understanding of paradigms. Does this mean that one can still refer to conceptual frameworks as 'paradigms or traditions'? Not from the traditionalist standpoint, not in the context of International Relations, not at this particular juncture in the discipline's development. There may be situations in which emphasizing a single, 'practical', streak in the character of such activities as science or politics would be of considerable value. If, however, one is interested in a particular way of returning to a particular point in the history of a particular discipline, a point at which scientific explanation was opposed to philosophical interpretation, highlighting the difference between various practices may be more important. In this particular situation, the difference that makes a difference is that between getting one's politics (Wæver) or one's science (Patomäki-Wight) right.

⁶⁷ MacIntyre, 'Moral Relativism, Truth and Justification', in *Moral Truth and Moral Tradition: Essays in Honour of Peter Geach and Elizabeth Anscombe*, ed. Luke Gormally (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1994): 22.

⁶⁸ The point is not to oppose Wight's unconditional claim that, whereas political theory tells the story of the 'good life', international theory rehearses that of 'survival', in the same absolute terms, but to recognize its conditionality.

⁶⁹ Cf.: MacIntyre, 'Are Philosophical Problems Insoluble? The Relevance of System and History', in *Philosophical Imagination and Cultural Memory: Appropriating Historical Traditions*, ed. Patricia Cook (London: Duke University Press, 1993): 65-82.

Perhaps both politics and science rest on little more than ‘regulative metaphors’, such as correspondence or coherence. Still there remains a difference between the self-referential practices advocated by Wæver (and, in fact, Patomäki in his ‘political’ contribution) and an outward-looking quest for ‘going beyond’ – currently held values, currently practiced discourses, currently inhabited associations – suggested by most of the reflectivists discussed here (including Rengger, as far as his call for an international political theory as a move *beyond* International Relations is concerned). This difference constitutes a dialectics of its own, that of the ‘hermeneutics of faith’ and the ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’. Neither science nor politics would be possible without this opposition and none can be completely devoid of the presence of each of its poles. Yet, on the traditionalist view, the ‘hermeneutics of faith’ may be more appropriate for politics: ‘It is only when wilfully or negligently we forget the resources of understanding and initiative which belong to our tradition that, like actors who have forgotten their part, we are obliged to gag’, but even in times of such crises, ‘the only knowledge worth having about the politics of another society is the same kind of knowledge as we seek of our own tradition’(Oakeshott R 64).

This implies the universality of tradition as a *kind* of experience. This is contestable, not least because historicism and the resulting awareness of being ‘traditional’, do not need to be present in the self-understandings of all humans as members of associations which, from the standpoint of traditionalism, may indeed represent the diverse expressions of tradition. If one retreats, however, from the position of universalism to that of cosmopolitanism, as an aspiration for the unity of the *political* practice of ordering and reordering human associations, the matter may look different, provided one can distinguish political practices from the rest of what may be going on in the world.

To restate the issue in Rengger’s terms, ‘an overarching view of the “natural” wholeness of human beings’, as a context for the continuous ordering and reordering of dispositions for living well, is tradition. The procedure of ordering and reordering itself is politics, as a quest for such ‘naturalness’ which, of course, continuously exposes the conditionality of any naturalness through the deliberation of the ‘conditions of naturalness’ (another, less technical and more evidently paradoxical, expression for the ‘hermeneutics of faith’). Tradition, in this reading, is only another ‘regulative metaphor’, and the traditionalist quarrel with critical realists comes down to the question of whether there is, and whether there ought to be, a passage leading from metaphor to the idiom of ontology. But this is a meaningful quarrel, in the concrete context of International Relations, where, with all the endless talking about balancing, the balance between science and politics is so often tipped in favour of the former.

So, in its abstract function in the academic inquiry, ‘tradition’ may be similar to the ‘discourse’ of postmodernism, the ‘reality’ of critical realism or the ‘universal pragmatics’ of

critical theory; but only for the 'scientific man' of rationalism will this warrant the conclusion that all these approaches are cast from the same mould. The rest may appreciate the difference which International Relations, as an association with a history of its own, makes. In this context, traditionalism becomes neotraditionalism, as an attempt at striking a balance in the discipline's dispositions by drawing attention to the place of politics in human experience. If this returns the discipline to its first debate, this is not 'to ring the bell backward', but to

think, again, of this place,
And of people, not wholly commendable,
Of no immediate kin or kindness,
But some of peculiar genius,
All touched by a common genius,
United in the strife which divided them;⁷⁰

that is, to think about one's immediate field of action, even if it happens to be the field of theoretical reflection, in the manner appropriate for human associations, finding within it the resources for learning how to live well in a disordered world of our own making.

A place for politics

So far I have deliberately abstained from associating international political theory either with any of the individual approaches or with International Relations as such. If the distinctiveness of politics is to be preserved, the study of the relations among various associations, even if conducted on the global scale, cannot be reduced to that of world politics. If the conversational character of politics is to be preserved, no single approach to world politics can claim the sole possession of political truth. What I want to indicate by way of conclusion, is a place for international political theory within contemporary International Relations, as this space is constituted by the conversation among various discourses.

For this the preceding argument can be summarized by means of a diagram which puts together the various images of the discipline into a new pattern (Fig. 7.4). At the centre of this new constellation is the rationalism-radicalism-legitimism triangle which represents the Westphalian identity of the discipline. This is transformed into a larger rationalism-radicalism-neotraditionalism one by different theorists exploring the dangers and the possibilities of the postinternationalist Frontier, 'a new and wide political space', where domestic and foreign issues converge and intermesh.⁷¹ The major lines of contention between all three approaches can be located on the three axes marked *o*, *m* and *e* (to indicate some affinity with the standard distinction between ontological, methodological and

⁷⁰ Eliot, 'Little Gidding': 220.

⁷¹ James N. Rosenau, *Along the Domestic-Foreign Frontier: Exploring Governance in a Turbulent World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997): 4-9.

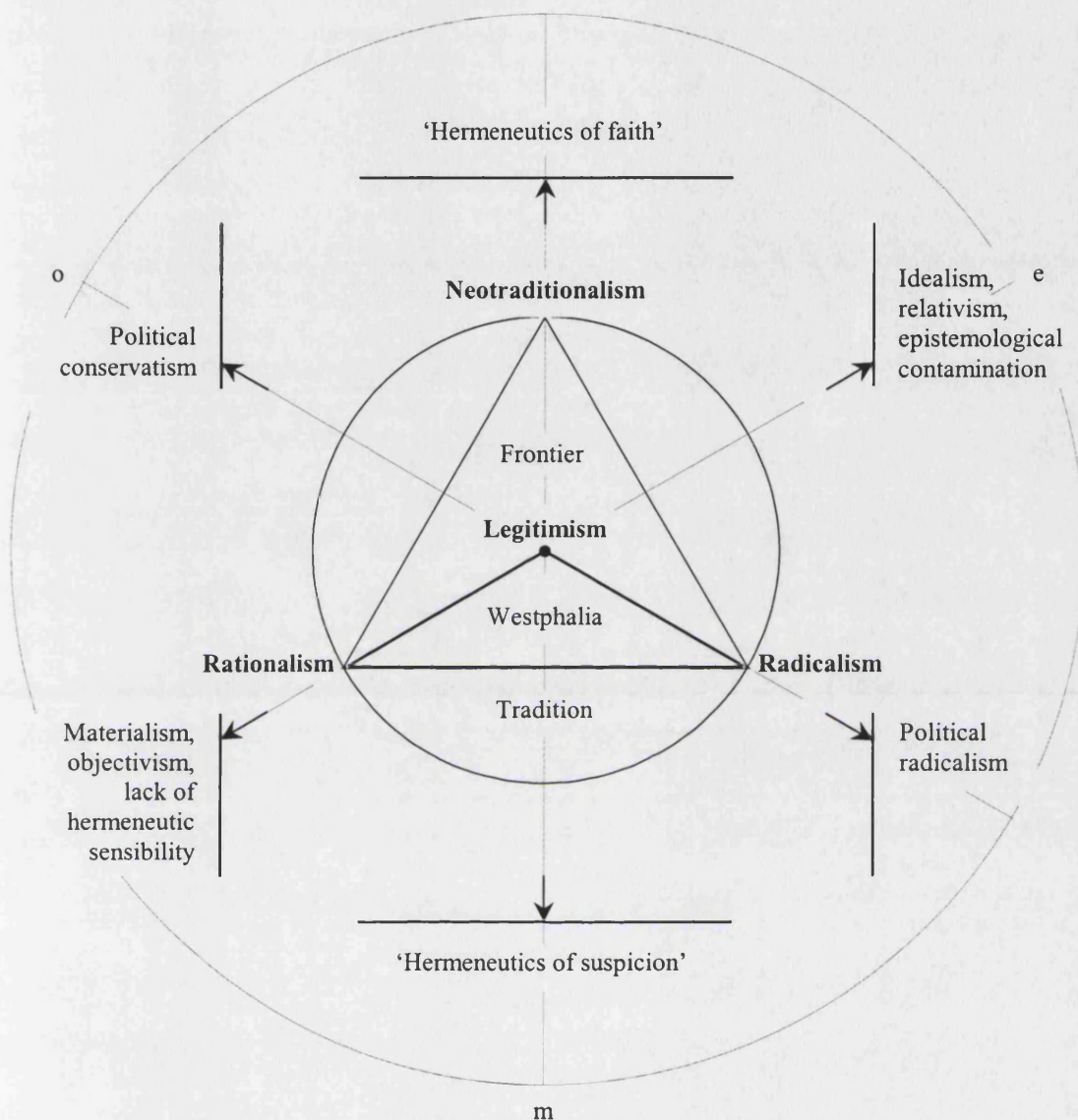


Fig. 7.4. The 'mill race' image of the discipline.

epistemological questions without pushing it too far). The way each axis runs through one pole and then through the line connecting two rival approaches is similar to both Alker-Biersteker's and Wæver's presentations but with some important differences. As in Alker and Biersteker, or Patomäki and Wight, an alternative to both radicalism and rationalism is sought not in the middle-ground between the two but in the independent metatheoretical position. As in Wæver, the location of this third position and its relation to the other two is conditioned not by the hypothetical point of perfect impartiality or correspondence to the hypothetical reality but by the discursive encirclement of the field, an outcome of the concurrent historical enactment of two opposing tactics: the scientific 'narrowing' of rationalism and reflectivist

‘widening’, facilitated by the renewal of interest in the traditionalist understanding of politics.

The task is to stay within the limits of the conversation while moving beyond mere representations of the self-images of the participants. This is met by marking on each axis the major objections raised against each pole by its rivals. Thus, for example, a charge levelled by radicals against both rationalists and neotraditionalists is ‘political conservatism’, whereas neotraditionalists and radicals are joined against rationalists on the interrelated issues of materialism, objectivism and hermeneutic sensibility. That conceptual scheme which provides the most comprehensive and adequate account of its rivals which includes its rivals’ accounts of itself thus upholds the disposition of its own inquiry. An inquiry thus ordered may claim conditional superiority over its rivals if it accounts for the widest possible range of phenomena recognized as relevant not only by itself but also by its rivals who, in their turn, failed to account for these phenomena comprehensively and coherently enough.

No superiority can be granted once and for all because comprehensiveness is an ideal and there is always a possibility of surprises. The quest for superiority is accompanied by the recognition of one’s vulnerability, a combination not dissimilar to the Waltzian understanding of states as striving for security as minimum and world-domination as maximum. What is missing from the Waltzian account is the historical and discursive dimensions of such conduct. Once this quest for security and superiority is metaphorically understood as an attempt to narrate the total collection of stories told by us and about ourselves, what emerges as a circle uniting all three poles is tradition, both as a mode of inquiry and a concrete instance of such inquiry.

The virtue of this encirclement is that it matches Buzan and Little’s call for a reinvigorated ‘classical approach’. One possible vice consists in its monistic yearnings and the corresponding tendency for locating the ultimate criteria of understanding and conduct outside International Relations, in the yet larger philosophical triangle of ‘encyclopaedia’, ‘genealogy’ and ‘tradition’. One way of allaying this disposition is by presenting the pluralist image of the same conversation among rationalism, radicalism and neotraditionalism so that intrinsic tensions within each of these three poles are given their due (Fig. 7.5).

Now neotraditionalism, for example, is seen as constituted by the interplay of critical realism, philosophical hermeneutics and ‘modernist’ political theory. The last two approaches differ not only in their attitude towards distributionist and procedural conceptions of justice, but also in their receptiveness to the post-Hegelian forswearing of metaphysics. Philosophical hermeneutics and critical realism, while agreeing on these two points, still differ in their attitude towards the latter challenge: whereas the critical realist objection to it amounts to the affirmation of *something* which is always beyond any socially conditioned discourse,

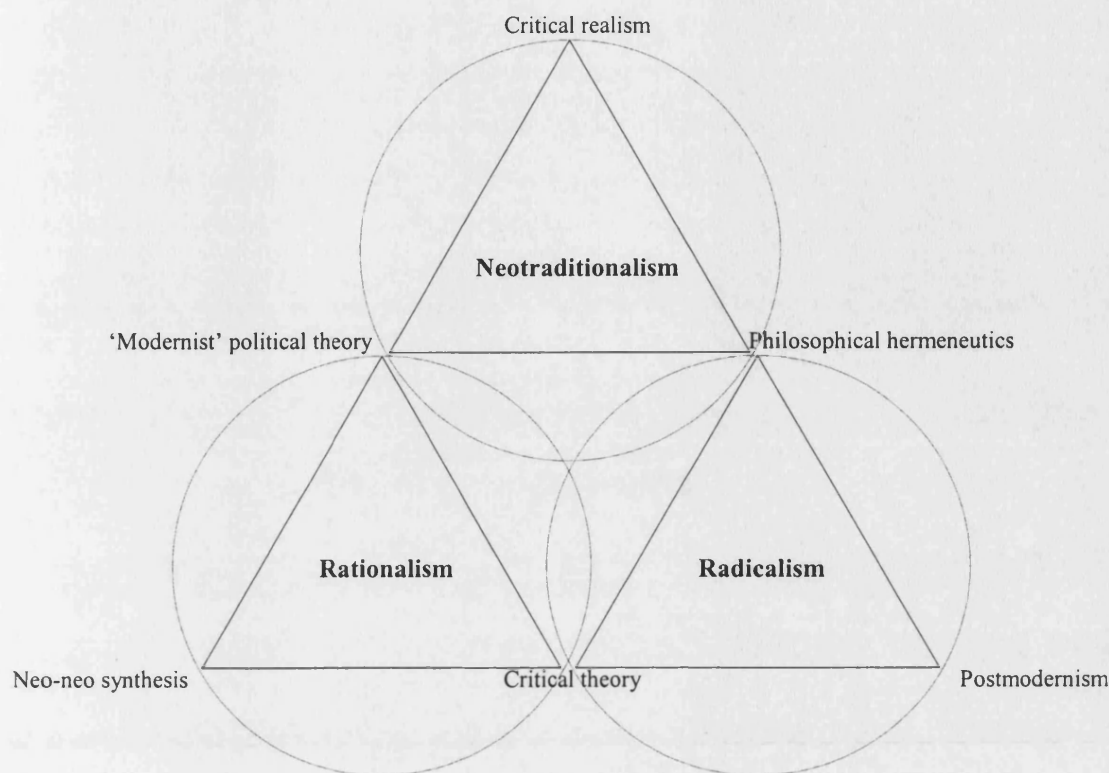


Fig. 7.5 The 'dry-wall' image of the discipline

philosophical hermeneutics asserts the existence of *someone* who can exercise his or her conditional freedom by endowing various social constructions with meaning. Yet, on the whole, this pole is more holistic in its disposition than the other two, and, as the example of Patomäki demonstrates, its conception of politics may be a shared one indeed.

The issue of politics draws attention to the interplay of critical theory, 'modernist' political theory and philosophical hermeneutics. Although these three approaches constitute the possible points of agreement between the adjacent peaks of the overall triangle, neither of them is a middle-ground in-between these peaks. The relation between rationalism, radicalism and neotraditionalism is best understood through the Oakeshottian metaphor of the 'dry wall', where building blocks are joined and held together not by any premeditated design, but by the shapes given to the them by numerous, not always exceptionally cooperative or skilful, builders. The possibility of politics as a conversation among thus constituted discourses lies in the existence of the ineliminable chinks in the overall construction through which different voices speak to each other. The space constituted by critical theory, 'modernist' political theory and philosophical hermeneutics, as these were contingently appropriated in International Relations through various attempts at mapping them onto the world of human associations, represents one such possibility, better seen in yet another, explicitly political, dimension of the overall picture (Fig. 7.6).

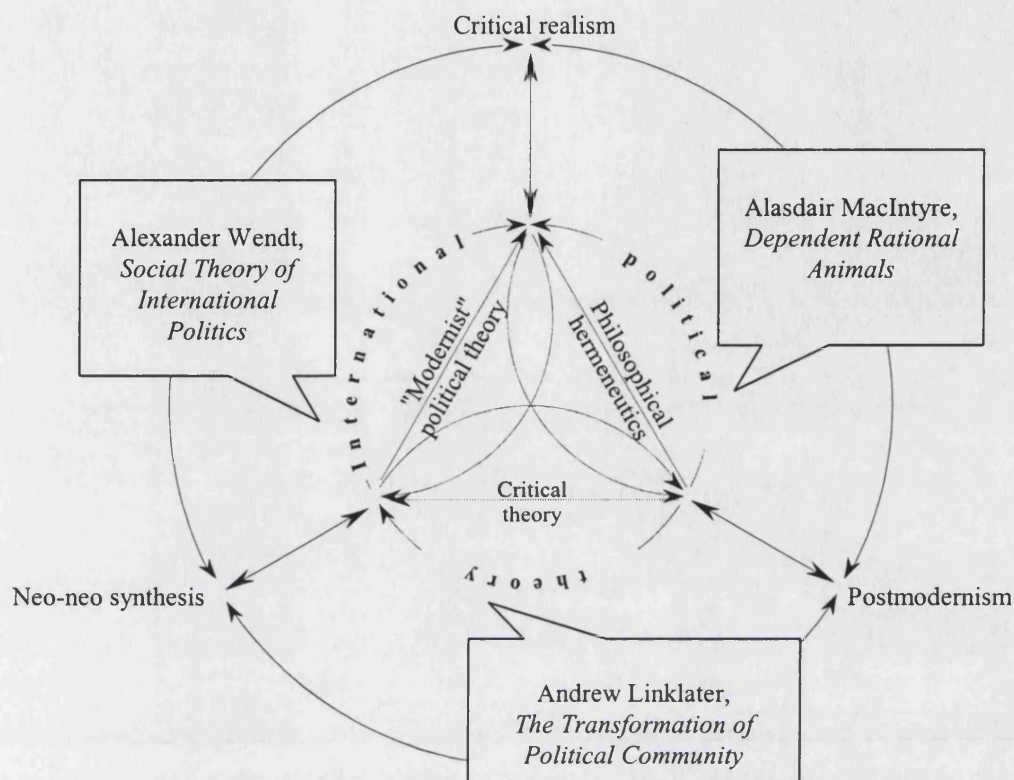


Fig. 7.6. *A place for international political theory*

In the focus of this projection is the ongoing conversation between critical theory, 'modernist' political theory and philosophical hermeneutics, which proceeds in the same dialectical manner as in Alker-Biersteker's account and constitutes the field of international political theory. No ideal point is postulated or needed now, for international political theory itself constitutes an actually existing point of intersection located within, and upheld by, the broader field of International Relations. The latter is shaped by the concrete, historically contingent attempts at applying established modes of inquiry to the investigation of a particular subject which was neither given *a priori*, nor could be always found in the focus of attention of the modes of inquiry thus applied. In this sense, the neo-neo synthesis is the only point in the overall picture which belongs exclusively to International Relations due to the route taken by the discipline in the twentieth century. Although there is some virtue in dispensing of the unnecessary idiosyncrasies which, by proliferating underdefined 'rationalisms', 'realisms' or 'idealisms', obscure understanding, this in itself does not make any of the approaches inferior or superior to others. Neither the ingenuity nor the pedigree of a style of theorizing ensures its successful application. What decides the matter is the possibility of the individual creativity in bringing together style and subject, and what concludes an inquiry is the expression of concrete individuality conditionally achieved in this unity of style and subject.

The task of this chapter consisted in establishing the individuality of international political theory and locating it within contemporary International Relations as the major internal resource of the individuality of the discipline. This does not make International Relations and international political theory identical, nor does it present International Relations as evolving into international political theory. The distinctiveness of both is underpinned by the neotraditionalist understanding of politics as an activity reducible neither to the instrumental pursuit of premeditated ends nor to the wilful transcendence of existing social order. In turn, international relations are not reducible to world politics. Therefore, an 'inside' (that is, included into the orbit of international political theory) conception of politics exists within each of the three imperfect sectors which, as in Buzan and Little's account, make up International Relations, while they host an 'outside' version as well: a nod towards such kinds of experience as economics, natural science, theology, aesthetics or, last but not least, war.

Perhaps some of the sectors can be turned around or opened up further to exhibit the location of smaller 'islands of theory', such as security studies, historical sociology, international political economy, foreign policy analysis, etc. However, the three concluding images, once taken together, are multi-dimensional enough to allow for such placement, while, from the neotraditionalist standpoint, closing the theory-metattheory gap is interesting, first and foremost, as an exemplar of the individual intelligence at work. Thus the three sectors of the final image are best represented by the individual contributions (not necessarily the ones listed here) which break out of the confines of particular theories and in so doing assert their individuality, each becoming 'the still centre of a whirlpool of ideas which has drawn into itself numberless currents of thought, contemporary and historic, and by its centripetal force has shaped and compressed them into a momentary significance before they are flung off again into the future' (Oakeshott HCA 8).

Epilogue

The image of the discipline presented in the previous chapter may appear to be unduly self-contained and self-obsessed. Is it a case of drawing yet another boundary and, what is worse, the one which is irrelevant for the understanding of world politics, let alone for political activity itself? The identity of International Relations may well be the least of the public concerns of the theorists discussed. Some of them struggle with questions that do not belong to, or have little direct bearing on, any isolated discipline. Others have long abandoned whatever interest they once had in the meta-theoretical discussions that animated the disciplinary discourse throughout the 1990s, often to the detriment of empirical research, and concentrate instead on the specific problems of international relations. What, then, was the point in making an abstraction I labelled ‘neotraditionalism’ from whatever else may be going on in the field?

The idea was to locate an explicitly ‘political’ inquiry on the map of what constitutes today a broader field of inquiry, namely, philosophy. In Collingwood’s words, ‘we here claim no more than to be following and working out the tradition, ... anxious above all not to pose as repositories of a new revelation, or vendors of any new-fangled philosophical patent-medicine, but to say once more, in words suited to our generation, something that everybody has always known’ (SM 38). Since this concern with thinking about politics philosophically marked the point from which the exploration of Collingwood’s and Oakeshott’s theorizing started, it may be appropriate at this point to rehearse briefly the rest of the argument.

Having identified the place of politics on the map of human activity more generally, the argument moved to the discussion of the possible standpoints from which the appropriation of politics by the modern European state could be examined critically. Politics, it was argued, is an activity appropriate for individuals free to make their choices for themselves while subscribing to the conditions of the authoritative practice of civility. Since the authority of such a practice cannot be unconditionally identified with the authority of the modern state, politics, as an activity at once acquiescent and critical, consists in the careful anatomizing of the existing practices of statecraft into those of civility with a view to re-assembling the latter into the moral practices of international society, distinguished from the transactional practices of international system. International society and international system are ideal characterizations in terms of which world order can be understood. World politics, then, is the deliberation of the overall conditions of such order in terms of their desirability. To be possible, this specific activity of 'private' persons has to be conducted in the sentiment identified as 'traditional' and characterized by the disposition to make sense of the world not merely as a world of our making but also as a world in the making, in which others besides ourselves, regardless of their location vis-à-vis this or that territorial boundary, are trying the best they can to make sense of their daily lives.

Thus another task that I set for myself in the discussion of International Relations was to recapture that sentiment in which the founders of the discipline were combining happily 'traditions and theories normally not able to relate to each other'. This was meant not to equate the engagement of theorists with that of the practitioners of politics, but to highlight that disposition which, in spite of the categorial distinctions between their vocations, makes both theorists and politicians inhabitants of a shared world, thus making them relevant for each other.

The exact nature of this relevance, however, is also subject to change. 'The most striking feature of international thought in the twentieth century is not so much any innovation in content', it has been argued recently, 'but rather the change in intellectual context marked by the arrival of "International Relations"... as a discrete field of academic study, perhaps even an academic discipline'.¹ What was involved in this transformation of 'theorists' into 'academics'? For Oakeshott, the upsurge of interest in politics in the universities meant, first and foremost, that those interested in the understanding of this activity in terms of its postulates acquired not a new status but a new home and had to abide by its rules:

It is long since academics began to take an interest in the activity of governing and the instruments of government, and among the circumstances which in England (and perhaps also in America) have, in recent times, promoted this sort of interest is the fact that many academics, seconded during two wars to government offices, have found there a virgin (but not unsuspected) world and have felt the impulse to explore it.... But if every don were to teach undergraduates what he himself is interested in, and if every professional

¹ Chris Brown, *Sovereignty, Rights and Justice: International Political Theory Today* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002): 57.

chair were held to entail or to authorize a counterpart to itself in undergraduate education, there would be little in these days to distinguish a university from a mad house (R 214, n. 6)

The rules of the academic inquiry, like those of any other human activity, receive their character from their place in human experience more generally. Yet despite some familial resemblance with other human activities, 'political education' necessarily has distinctive characteristics of its own, derived, again, not so much from the character of its subject-matter but rather from that of the university as the place of teaching and learning:

The characteristic gift of a university is the gift of an interval. Here is an opportunity to put aside the hot allegiances of youth without the necessity of at once acquiring new loyalties to take their place. Here is a break in the tyrannical course of irreparable events; a period in which to look round upon the world and upon oneself without the sense of an enemy at one's back or the insistent pressure of having to make up one's mind; a moment in which to taste the mystery without the necessity of at once seeking a solution. And all this... neither as a first step in education (for those wholly ignorant of how to behave or think) nor as a final education to fit a man for the day of judgement, but as a middle (V 113-4).

Like poetry in the conversation of mankind, this interval 'is nothing so commonplace as a pause to get one's breath', it is not 'the cessation of activity, but the occasion of a unique kind of activity' (114). The uniqueness of the university consists not merely in the variety of voices in which its inhabitants speak about the world but also in that they do so while learning. If the state, according to Collingwood, is a political unit *par excellence* insofar as it is the only unit the sole task of which is to establish and to maintain the order of human beings, then university, according to Oakeshott, is exemplary in its dedication to the sole task of learning how to participate in the conversation of mankind. This does not mean, of course, that it was designed for this purpose. Rather, it has gradually acquired this character, also acquiring a somewhat rickety shape:

Do we need a map, it may be plausibly asked, a map on which the relations between the parts of the world of learning are clearly displayed? Would not the whole thing be better for a little glue to hold it together? And some who feel most strongly about this are to be found filling in the interstices between the sciences with a sticky mess called 'culture', in the belief that they are supplying a desperate need. But both the diagnosis and the remedy spring from a sad misconception (109).

Nothing can save a university – or a discipline within it – which has fallen out of the magnetic field of the conversation, and no university or discipline can hope to save a conversation by merely imitating the patterns it once enjoyed. What matters is not forestalling the alleged decay or constructing ideal situations but maintaining what is the source of the conversation's vitality; that is, the experience of human freedom rooted in human capacity for learning.

In other words, the relevance of the activity of politics and the understanding of politics for each other cannot be derived from their ability to inform or to support each other. And if there is a sense in which both may be seen as contributing to a single engagement, then this is the 'tiresome engagement' of the conversation of mankind. The gift here is not a piece of valuable information, nor is it a solution of an urgent problem, but the experience of being

'kindled by the presence of the ideas of another order'. Thus, where science guards political discourse from unchecked ambiguity but makes it dangerously uniform, poetry, by bursting out of all routine, upholds the plurality of meaning and the possibility of playing with words rather than just using them, and thus 'preserves, for science itself, an idea of truth according to which what is manifested is not at our disposal, is not manipulable, but remains a surprise, a gift'.²

This, I think, is what was involved in the traditionalist disposition to bring together 'traditions and theories normally not able to relate to each other'. This is why to retain this disposition is as important as to expose a sloppy argument or to attack a hidden assumption. Recognizing this gift also requires a disposition to recognize that ideas of another order are not necessarily located beyond this or that boundary. As Collingwood told his students:

I would say to you, when you look for shelter behind institutions or leaders, don't look for help to things outside you. Look inside yourselves.... In a world where institutions have broken down and leaders have failed, this resource is still open to you; it is the resource men have always had in such times, and it has always been enough. If you can look deeply enough into yourselves, you will find there not only the means of living well in a disordered world, you will find, what you will never find elsewhere, the means of building a new world for your more fortunate children to inhabit (EPP 174).

All in all, to study world politics in the university is not merely to work out solutions which others might later find useful for the betterment of mankind. It is not to defend human freedom against the encroachments of bureaucracy or 'politicians'. Nor is it a disinterested inquiry into the 'nature of things'. It is a unique way of practicing human freedom, valuable in itself and in virtue of this value capable of contributing to the conversation of mankind:

Bureaucratized teaching and learning systems dominate the scene, but nevertheless it is everyone's task to find his free space. The task of our human life in general is to find free spaces and learn to move therein. In research this means finding the question, the genuine question. You all know that as a beginner one comes to find everything questionable, for that is the privilege of youth to seek everywhere the novel and new possibilities. One then learns slowly how a large amount must be excluded in order to finally arrive at the point where one finds the truly open questions and therefore the possibilities that exist. Perhaps the most noble side of the enduring independent position of the university – in political and social life – is that we with youth and they with us learn to discover the possibilities and thereby possible ways of shaping our own lives. There is this chain of generations which pass through an institution, like the university, in which teachers and students meet and lose one another. Students become teachers and from the activity of the teachers grows a new teaching, a living universe, which is certainly more than something known, more than something learnable, but a place where something happens to us. I think this small academic universe still remains one of the few precursors of the grand universe of humanity, of all human beings, who must learn to create with one another new solidarities.³

² Ricoeur, 'The Power of Speech: Science and Poetry', *Philosophy Today*, 1985, 29: 69.

³ Gadamer, 'The Idea of the University – Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow', in *Applied Hermeneutics: Hans Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History*, eds Dieter Misgeld and Graeme Nicholson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992): 47-59.

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