

Lecture 4

Realism

Some of you may have read Graham Greene's classic novel, *The Quiet American*. It deals with the early stages of the war in Indo-China, just before the United States took over from the French. Greene (1904-1991) pits his narrator, a middle-aged English journalist named Fowler, against a young American called Pyle. Fowler is contemptuous of the seeming idealism of Pyle, who arrives in Saigon claiming to have answers to the political and economic problems of Vietnam. The young American has been reading the books of a political scientist, York Harding, of whom Fowler has heard nothing and cares less. Following Pyle's death, Fowler recalls, dismissively, that he had taken 'a good degree in – well, one of those subjects Americans can take degrees in: perhaps public relations or theatre-craft, perhaps even Far Eastern studies (he had read a lot of books).' (Viking Critical Library edition of *The Quiet American*, 21).

But neither man is quite what he seems. To hold on to his mistress, Phuong, Fowler has been willing to distort his reporting of the war and so avoid being recalled to London and a loveless

but inescapable relationship with his wife. Pyle's medical work is a front. As a CIA agent he encourages a local warlord, General Thé, to form a third force that may be able to restrain the Communists when the French withdraw. Pyle supplies General Thé with explosives, and a subsequent incident, witnessed by an appalled Fowler, causes many casualties to innocent civilians. But when Fowler responds by betraying Pyle to the Communists, he does not allow himself to realise that this entails the American's death. His motives are mixed, for Pyle's removal will prompt the return of Phuong, whom Pyle had seduced with the promise of life in the USA. Greene allows Fowler, as narrator, to undermine Pyle, but at the same time he shows us enough, as author, to undermine Fowler. It is a sombre little tale.

In terms of conventional International Relations, Fowler is the realist who believes himself to have acquired a little practical wisdom or *nous* from experience and immersion in the local culture; Pyle, the idealist who 'never saw anything he hadn't heard in a lecture-hall' (31). (Note that Fowler is the dove and Pyle the hawk.) In Aristotle's terms. Fowler represents practical reason and Pyle theoretic, and this is why Fowler is left standing at the end to tell the story in the way he chooses, and to get the girl, while Pyle

becomes, all too literally, the quiet American: 'too innocent to live' (31). (On Greene's politics see Anthony Burgess, 'Politics in the Novels of Graham Greene' *Journal of Contemporary History* 2:2 (1967).)

I open this lecture on realism with Greene because he captures a number of facets of mid-twentieth-century political realism that are important and that help draw the contrast with the more idealistic variants of liberalism. Greene's Catholicism and his gloomy emphasis on the corruption, even of seemingly well-intentioned action, are not shared by all realists, but suggest a kinship with Niebuhr in the United States or Butterfield in Britain. By contrast Carr, like most neo-realists of the following generation, had scarcely a religious bone in his body. Second, Greene is dismissive of closure or happy endings. The wished-for future will never come, whether it be a satisfactory political solution in Vietnam or a happy marriage for Phuong. Third, Greene reminds us of the realist emphasis on rhetoric and the always already implicated character of language, which stands in sharp relief against liberal faith in the possibility of innocent and transparent representation and the force of enlightened public opinion as a guide to and pressure upon decision-making.

To trace modern political realism back to Machiavelli, let alone to Thucydides, seems a step too far for reasons I explained in lecture 2. The further into the past the expedition for the pure source of realism trudges, the more extended its lines of communication, the more vulnerable to deviation, desertion and ambush.

Indeed, with realism, justification for going back even as far as the eighteenth century is far from clear, and I will attempt only a quick reconnaissance of this territory by beginning this lecture with some remarks about two figures who, far from being clear-cut classical realists, nicely demonstrate the difficulty of identifying coherent traditions of thought, being later claimed by both Left and Right as founding spirits. I refer to Jean Jacques Rousseau and Edmund Burke. I will then move on to the twentieth century, touching lightly on Carl Schmitt, before turning to some generally acknowledged classical realists. Because of the religious strand in classical realism, I will be unable to avoid a detour into late-classical antiquity to introduce the political theology of St Augustine. However I will pass by E. H. Carr and the early Kenneth Waltz very quickly indeed, since each is to receive considerable attention later in the course. Nor will I drive the story through to neorealism and

neo-classical realism today, since ample time has been allowed for that in the Lent term.

I start with Rousseau because, writing before Kant, he is in some ways startlingly more modern or radical than the German. Seen as a forerunner of Communism because of his attack on private property and as subverter of his own arguments for popular sovereignty and individual liberty through his emphasis on government's right to enforce the general will, Rousseau offers one vital insight into the problem of relations between states. He contrasts the position of men in a state of nature with their position in political society. Very much in the manner of Lord Rochester, he envisages the noble savage living a life in which he kills for food and other basic needs, not out of fear or envy. It is only within the political context that what Rochester called 'false reason' corrupts human nature. Consistent with this is Rousseau's view that the progress of knowledge, while seeming to bring general enlightenment, had in fact empowered states and suppressed individual liberty.

The central insight lurking in this account is that while individual humans, even when corrupted by society, are natural creatures,

the state is not. Men and women may vary in strength and other capabilities, but only within quite narrow bounds. States, on the other hand, were unnatural (and it is not coincidental that Rousseau was born and brought up in the micro-state of Geneva). Not only could they grow without limit, they were pretty much bound to do so, because they could never experience the security that individual humans found in physical maturity. Instead, their measures of power and security were always relative to the power and security of other states. War, in this account, did not arise from natural human aggression but was a profoundly political contest between states. 'We see men united by artificial bonds, but united to destroy each other – Rousseau wrote. '[A]nd all the horrors of war take birth from the precautions they have taken in order to prevent them' (Hinsley p.51). (This reading of Rousseau is at variance with that of Kenneth N. Waltz in *Man, the State and War* (1959).)

It followed from this statement of the security dilemma that 'since the international system was the automatic consequence of the international system, nothing less than a federation of all states would eliminate war; but nothing less than the international system prevented the conclusion of a federation' (Hinsley 52). This was

the circle that Kant would later try to square. Kant's contribution was, to adopt Kierkegaard's phrase, a typical instance of 'both...and'. Rousseau's statement had had about it much more of 'either...or'. Harry Hinsley, founder of the Cambridge Centre of International Studies, summed it up: Rousseau's view was that 'even a world composed of good states would be a world in a state of war,' but not, as Hans Morgenthau seemed to think, because men are wicked, but because it is a *world of states* (Hinsley 52, citing Morgenthau?)

At a stroke, Rousseau had torpedoed the so-called domestic analogy, whereby states in an anarchic system could be compared to individuals in a state of nature, before the formation of the state through the social contract. Reasoning of this sort relied, ultimately, on the natural law tradition. Examining the thought of Aquinas, we encountered the idea of the perfect, autarkic or self-sufficient state, large enough to allow individuals to live the good life. Not itself natural, it was held to be consistent with nature. By asserting the unnatural character of the state, Rousseau caused massive damage to arguments about the possibility, desirability, practicability and logical coherence of a world-state. The good ship 'Domestic Analogy' was holed below the waterline. It might yet be

saved by judicious closing of hatches and bulkheads, but it had fatally lost way and direction. Modern realists, privileging the pursuit of national interest or *raison d'état*, had now either to declare themselves out-and-out relativists or nihilists, or else justify why this nation or that particular state merited salvation.

The answer came in various forms, all more or less communitarian, some of which Rousseau himself anticipates. Pursuit of national interest was legitimate because the nation, following Hegel, was the community within which values emerged and the contemporary vehicle of the dialectic as the world moved toward realisation of the world spirit. Others, regarding nations as a Romantic delusion and states as mere conveniences, developed political ontologies based in a wider civilization (Europe or, later, the West). To a neo-Thomist like Jacques Maritain, who figures in your reading list for seminars 6 and 13, the only viable community remaining in the modern world was the Church, following the hijacking of nation by state and of the state by one or other of the secular ideologies of liberalism, fascism and communism. What is clear is that Humpty-Dumpty was in pretty bad shape after Rousseau, and all the king's horses and all the king's men had quite a job on their hands.

His bald statement of the impossibility of overcoming anarchy, when taken together with his demolition of the domestic analogy on which liberals were wont to rely, might seem to qualify Rousseau as a political realist. To the extent that he failed to crack the security dilemma, Rousseau's prescription for its alleviation may be thought to have rested on the hope that congeries of small states, interacting informally or in loose confederations, would at least minimize the horrors of war and maintain political equilibria. But history was against this solution, and the predicament of twentieth-century realism was instead to be set by extreme concentration of power in the hands of a small and decreasing number of states.

To turn to Edmund Burke (1729-1797) is to encounter a man who, in some ways, seems to anticipate this growth in the size of the state by his insistence on the political unity of a European Commonwealth. Burke was also very clearly opposed to liberals of his day, and most of all to Thomas Paine, whose ideas we considered last week. Reading Rousseau we might entertain the question, whether the heart of realism lies in its emphasis on anarchy and the insurmountable security dilemma. Reading Burke,

we are led to consider whether the heart of political realism is conservatism and, possibly, some form of communitarianism. This is the belief, born out of scepticism about the very possibility of a pre-social autonomous human at the heart of liberalism, which holds that value systems, personality and full humanity only arise within communities.

Burke, every bit as much as Rousseau, was shot through with inconsistencies and has therefore been claimed as an antecedent by later thinkers of quite varied kinds. Here I want to deal only with one aspect of his international thought which might be thought to have earned him a rather odd place in the realist tradition. This is his implied response to Rousseau's emphasis on the unnatural character of the state.

Burke would surely have accepted Rousseau's view on this point. His solution was to drive a wedge between state and political community, claiming that there was a commonwealth of Europe, bound together by shared customs, values and norms, which was divided into separate states for administrative convenience. When the French Revolution of 1789 attacked not simply a monarch, but the institutions of monarchy and dynasticism; when the

revolutionaries moved to displace the Church from political life; the threat – in Burke’s view – was not simply to France, but to the whole of Europe, because an attack had been launched on principles that underlay all European states (with the exception of Switzerland). He therefore judged that there had not been so much a change of control over the French state, as a suspension of the state, so that invasion to restore Church and monarch was not merely justifiable, but fell as a duty upon France’s neighbours, much as neighbours would have a duty as well as an interest in quenching a fire in one of the houses in their town or village.

This view contrasts starkly with the later views on intervention of John Stuart Mill, who pointed out that intervention was self-defeating, because it was almost bound to undermine the parties and principles on behalf of which it was undertaken. But while Mill was undoubtedly a liberal and Burke was not, it has been Burke’s view that has dominated the foreign policy of the United States and its satellites in recent years, justifying regime change where the regime in question has been felt to be disruptively inconsistent with prevailing liberal and democratic values.

Yet if Mill seems more realist than Burke in his insistence on state sovereignty, non-intervention and the logical impossibility of imposing freedom, then it is only because Mill accepted a political ontology grounded in a multiplicity of sovereign states, while Burke inclined to reduce European international relations to the domestic affairs of a single extensive political community. So if we take state-centrism to be central to realism, then it is the liberal, Mill, and not the conservative, Burke, who is the more consistent realist. But Mill is only able to adopt this stance because, good liberal that he is, he believes in a providential history that will, in good time, see the triumph of liberty. Burke, in spite of his virtual abolition of international relations by a process of domestication, can still be read as a realist, who does not so much eliminate anarchy as insist that, in an irreducibly anarchic system, the shared norms and values of international society make possible legitimate action by coalitions of the willing to stabilize the system and protect shared interests of states.

Thus far I have argued that it is hard to make a convincing case for counting Rousseau or Burke as a realist, and that the attempt to sort eighteenth-century thinkers neatly into two camps, proto-realist and proto-liberal, founders even on an indisputably liberal

thinker like Mill. In doing so I have questioned just what the central tenets of political realism may be and exposed tensions between them. Is the core of realism state sovereignty (Mill), the anarchic structure of the international system (Rousseau), or a conservative insistence on established principles of legitimacy (Burke). My purpose has been to suggest that twentieth-century so-called classical political realism, far from being the established and dominant orthodoxy since time immemorial, is better thought of as one of many challenges to the hegemonic and considerably more coherent ideological position of liberalism in the English-speaking world, which I outlined in lecture 3.

Coming to the mid-twentieth century, the central drama of political realism is located in Central Europe and the still-German thought-world of German emigrés in the United States. Even the Englishman, E. H. Carr, can be seen as an offshoot of this complex performance, steeped as he was in Russian and German literature and politics. Next door, in the studio theatre, the 'Mousetrap' of Christian realist political thought continued to be staged, now in its eighteenth glorious century, though naturally with a much-changed cast. For reasons of space, I will examine this through the Englishman, Herbert Butterfield (1900-1979),

though I might equally well have chosen his United States contemporary, Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971).

Turning first to Germany, one of the most celebrated and effective non-Marxist attacks on political liberalism came from Carl Schmitt (1888-1985). Though not a standard chapter in the litany of IR theory, Schmitt's thought has attracted increasing attention over the past twenty years. This has been in part because of the excavation of a complex relationship between the German jurist and a younger man, Hans Morgenthau (1904-1980), who fled Germany in 1937.¹ Morgenthau went on, in exile in the United States during the early post-war years, to write what would remain, for thirty years and more, the single most influential text-book on International Relations: *Politics Among Nations* (1948).² Also contributing to the rise in Schmitt's stock, notwithstanding his connections with the Nazi Party, has been the recent search of a demoralized post-Cold War European Left for allies, dead or alive,

¹ . The literature is substantial and growing. See Kenneth Thompson and Robert J. Myers (eds.) *Truth and Tragedy: A Tribute to Hans J. Morgenthau* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Books, 1984); Christoph Frei, *Hans J. Morgenthau: An Intellectual Biography* (Louisiana State University Press, 2001); Michael Williams (ed.) *Realism Reconsidered: Hans J. Morgenthau and International Relations* (Oxford University Press, 2007); William E. Sheuerman, 'Was Morgenthau a Realist? Revisiting Scientific Man v. Power Politics' *Constellations* 14:4 (2007) 506-530; William E. Sheuerman, 'Realism and the Left: the case of Hans J. Morgenthau' *Review of International Studies* 34 (2008) 29-51; Hans-Karl Pichler, 'The Godfather of "truth": Max Weber and Carl Schmitt in Morgenthau's theory of power politics' *Review of International Studies* 24 (1998); Campbell Craig, *Glimmer of a New Leviathan: Total War in the Realism of Niebuhr, Morgenthau, and Waltz* (Columbia University Press, 2003); Jonathan Haslam, *No Virtue Like Necessity: Realist Thought in International Relations since Machiavelli* (Yale University Press, 2002), chapter 5.

² . Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations* (1948).

against triumphalist liberalism. In this quest, the most salient figures have been Chantal Mouffe and Giorgio Agamben. Finally, Schmitt has been seen as one influence, among many, acting through Leo Strauss, on United States neo-conservatives and their advocacy of unconstitutional measures in the so-called War on Terror. A final stimulus to renewed interest in classical realism and its antecedents has been the urgent need, over the past decade, to understand and respond to the role of neo-conservatives in the formulation of United States foreign policy. Paul Wolfowitz and his generation can only be fully understood through the reading of an intellectual lineage stretching back through Morgenthau and Strauss to the German thought-world of the early twentieth century.³

Schmitt was already an established author when Hitler came to power in Germany and had been a trenchant critic of the Weimar regime. On his appointment as professor at the University of Berlin in 1933 he joined the Party, seeming the model of a Nazi thinker and anti-Semite over the next few years. But in 1937 he was attacked in an SS publication for views that he had expressed in earlier works, and which were now judged inconsistent with the

³ . Anne Norton, *Leo Strauss and the Politics of American Empire* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004).

party line. He retained his chair only through the good offices of Hermann Göring. In spite of this reverse, Schmitt remained a party member through to the end of the war.

Schmitt offered a profound critique of liberalism at the moment of its seeming triumph, following the First World War. His objection was to what another realist, the Englishman E. H. Carr, was to refer to as the 'harmony of interests,' which liberals supposed could be discovered by constitutional and democratic procedures. He argued that the very core of politics was the relationship between friend and enemy, just as morality was concerned with good and evil. Liberalism was a façade because its vision of normal politics was a denial of this core relationship of enmity. In practical terms, it denied the ways in which back-room deals and manoeuvrings underlay the merely procedural democracy of liberal states. (One is reminded of Carr's insistence on the need for the major victors to have veto power in the Security Council of the newly created United Nations Organization, lest they simply go into another room and do business there!) Exceptional circumstances or 'states of exception' would surely arise; sovereignty and arbitrary power were inextinguishable.

It was in response to Schmitt's 'Concept of the Political' (*Der Begriff des Politischen*), first published in 1927, that a young Hans Morgenthau wrote his doctoral thesis. Morgenthau had felt that, in his anxiety to establish the distinctiveness of politics as a separate realm of inquiry, Schmitt had unduly restricted the scope of politics, neglecting the possibility that all and any aspects of social life might become politicised, as we would now say: that is, characterized by a high level of intensity. Schmitt subsequently adopted some of Morgenthau's core arguments without acknowledgment, but the younger man was never in a position to protest, first of all because of Schmitt's powerful position in Germany and, subsequently, for fear of being tainted with Naziism were he to disclose the closeness of his intellectual engagement with Schmitt, refugee and Jew though he was. Not until 1978 did Morgenthau openly claim to have influenced Schmitt.⁴

What research into Hans Morgenthau's education and early work has shown is the extent to which classical realism in the United States was an offshoot of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century German thought, and a chapter in the long intellectual struggle between British empiricism and liberalism and German idealism,

⁴ . William E. Scheuerman, 'Carl Schmitt and Hans Morgenthau: Realism and Beyond' (www.scholarworks.iu.edu/dspace/handle/2022/804).

pursued first by the intellectual fifth column of Bradley, Green and the British neo-Hegelians and later through German influences within the United States academy. Not only Schmitt, but Weber and even Nietzsche lay behind the most celebrated United States realist of the 1950s and '60s.⁵

Standard accounts of Morgenthau's views on international politics stress his concern with human nature, rationality, national interest, prudence, moral scepticism, and the autonomy of politics. Some years ago, James Dougherty and Robert Pflatzgraff astutely observed that some aspects of Morgenthau's approach resemble the thought of Reinhold Niebuhr and, in turn, the theology of St Augustine. This may be so, but on a superficial reading, at least, and theological groundwork seems entirely latent, and Morgenthau's account appears somewhat rootless and thin. The law-like or regular character of political behaviour, which for Morgenthau makes possible the scientific study of international relations, is rooted in human nature and, above all, in a lust for power, but Morgenthau does not rely on natural law to account for this, and Campbell Craig observes that the universality of this claim evaporates in Morgenthau's 1950s writings, as he comes to

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the view that the foreign policies of different countries reflect their values.⁶

Statesmen act rationally, but rationality is summarily defined as the pursuit of national interest, and this, in the long term, consists in the maximization of state power or perhaps, more broadly, national capabilities. Yet this is clearly at odds with Morgenthau's injunction that there should be no confusion between the 'moral aspirations of a particular nation [and] the moral laws that govern the universe' (and where, one asks, did these pop up from, if not from the natural law tradition?). The gap between rational pursuit of interest and national moral aspiration yawns. Why is it rational to pursue national interest unless one is assured of the value of the national community? Why is it rational to seek to maximize power in an anarchic system where relative power is more important than absolute power? The way in which Morgenthau charges policymakers to interpret and apply universal and abstract moral principles in specific circumstances bears a superficial resemblance to the virtue of princely prudence in Thomistic theology, but the resemblance can be no more than superficial

⁶. Campbell Craig, *Glimmer of a New Leviathan: Total War in the Realism of Niebuhr, Morgenthau and Waltz* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003) 93.

once wrenched from its natural law context.⁷ Finally, the prospect of thermo-nuclear war persuaded Morgenthau of the need for a world state, but what is most interesting in this proposal for the abandonment international relations is that the fundamental drive – lust for power – now turns out to have been displaced by the universal desire for security. It is not that Morgenthau changed his mind, but that he came to believe, so it would seem, that human nature is malleable and can adapt to technological change. Yet this is to compromise one of the pillars of realism, namely the continuity of the predicament of anarchy.

I have to confess at this point that I have read only some of the shorter works of Morgenthau and a smattering of commentaries, and have never felt enticed to read further. The reasons for this are two. First of all, Morgenthau's claim that his is a scientific approach is unsatisfactory, and cannot adequately answer the objections of either the behaviouralists or Waltz and the structural realists. The second is that, for sheer intellectual rigour and consistency, the Christian realists – above all Niebuhr and

⁷ . Charles Jones 'Prudence' *Social Epistemology* 1:3 (Fall, 1987). (Always insist on seeing proofs of anything you publish. It may well be that the crass error by which several instances of 'prudence' in this paper were rendered as 'produce' stemmed from a typist's (it was a long time ago) misreading of my manuscript, but the inexperienced editors of this recently established journal ought to have spotted the mistake, and I certainly would have done had they done me the courtesy of sending proofs. In spite of this, the essay is, just about, worth reading, as a first attempt to show the pitfalls of lifting parts of St Thomas's system out of context for contemporary application.)

Buterfield – win hands down, while for dirty-hands entanglement in politics and a rich blend of analysis and rhetoric, truth and lies, it is hard to beat Carr.

Ontologically, Morgenthau was very far from Niebuhr and the tradition of Christian realism; ideologically, he was distant from Carr. Perhaps what makes them all realists is their emphasis on gradual change. Pursuit of power and conceptions of national interest are modulated to accommodate the interests of others. Morgenthau opposed United States adventurism in East Asia, for example, because he defined core national interest in such a way as to make this region peripheral. He tended toward an international-society position in his emphasis on the way in which the balance of power 'kept in check the limitless desire for power' and accepted that this worked only because of states' willed acceptance of 'the system of the balance of power as the common framework of their endeavours' (quoted in Dougherty and Pflatzgraff, 1990, 99). He showed the same mildly nostalgic disposition in his preference for traditional diplomacy over summitry.

In lecture 2 I cheated a little by offering a thirty-minute complete history of Western philosophy before starting as late as 1250 CE with Aquinas. The major figure I excluded at that point, for merely tactical and expeditious reasons, was St Augustine (354-430 CE). It makes sense to turn to him now because the dominant influence of St Thomas on Catholic thought since the late-nineteenth century has been matched by the central position of St Augustine in the predominantly Protestant Christian realist movement on both sides of the Atlantic, which is grounded in his teachings on sin, salvation, and divine grace. No account of classical realism that confined itself to secular thinkers like Morgenthau or Carr would be complete if it were not balanced by some consideration of Christian realists like Niebuhr and Butterfield. Augustine will also make a further cameo appearance in lecture 8.

Augustine lived in the last days of the Western Roman Empire. Born in what is now Algeria, he was educated in North Africa and Italy. After some years as a Manichean he was converted to Roman Catholic Christianity in 386.⁸ From 396 until his death he served as Bishop of Hippo (present-day Annaba), a city of many

⁸ . On Manichaeism as a world religion, and Augustine as Manichee, see Sam Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985).

communities and faiths not far from the current frontier between Algeria and Tunisia.

At the time of Augustine's death in 430, the city of Hippo was under siege by the Vandals, an East German or trans-Danubian tribe who had already overrun most of Roman North Africa. Twenty years before, Rome itself had been sacked by another trans-Danubian people, the Visigoths, bringing an end to almost 800 years in which the city had been inviolate. It was to fall again, this time to the Vandals, in 455.⁹

Christians of Augustine's day asked why God would permit the Roman Empire to be defeated notwithstanding its official adoption of Christianity. Pagans claimed the defeat stemmed precisely from the adoption of Christianity and a consequent neglect of Jove and the deity of the emperor. Augustine reasoned that each and every civilization, past and present, pagan and Christian, was bound to suffer similar catastrophes, and argued that all history of the earthly or post-lapsarian world (the *civitas terrena*) was a process of human suffering which, in turn, was part of a divine plan through

⁹ . On the Danubian crisis that presaged the fall of the Western Empire see Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire* (Penguin 1986). Alessandro Barbero, *The Day of the Barbarians: the Battle that Led to the Fall of the Roman Empire* (xxxx) is a readable modern account.

which redemption from original sin might finally be achieved. More recent and enthusiastic Augustinians have been less patient in the face of defeat and it is not difficult to develop a plausible interpretation supportive of a more aggressive Augustinianism.

The *civitas terrena* was inhabited by two kinds of people, the elect and the reprobate. Both were sinful, but the elect received from God what Augustine called efficacious grace, while the reprobate were motivated entirely by self-love or cupidity. While no one could avoid sin, some could *try* to avoid it. The elect, because of efficacious grace, were motivated by unselfish love and were therefore able to use their free will to choose the lesser of any two evils. They would be judged by God on the sincerity of this attempt, not its outcome. The terms for these two sorts of love – *cupiditas* and *caritas* or cupidity and charity — link nicely to the earlier Greek terms used in the Christian epistles – *eros* and *agape*.

Taken together with Augustine's radically deontological belief that the entire moral worth of action rests in intention, not in outcome or consequences, the distinction between reprobates and elect might lead to the conclusion that even defeat in war will be a source of

purification and strength to the elect while even victory will turn the reprobate to further sin by making them proud and arrogant. War – whatever its outcome – is an instrument of divine providence.¹⁰

So while condemning violence in private affairs, even in self-defence, Augustine conceded that a war declared with right intention by the Christian prince of a relatively uncorrupted political community could be a just war, and ‘rulers and official acting in the line of duty were able to kill without giving vent to hatred and other sinful passions’.¹¹ Indeed, where war consisted in the punishment of aggressive behaviour by other states, Christian princes had a duty to act by choosing the lesser evil of a war fought with the intention of achieving a just peace.¹² In this way men might will peace while engaging in war and, provided the intention was pure, no amount of incidental harm would outweigh it. Fought ‘with love in one’s heart,’ war might be conducted without restraint and was likely to prove ‘a grim and horrible necessity,’ bringing unavoidable harm to non-combatants.¹³ Augustine himself summed it up in the

¹⁰ . For an interesting recent treatment of Augustine which develops into a resounding attack on modern variants of the just war tradition, see Phillip W. Gray, *Being in the Just War: Ontology and the Decline of the Just War Tradition* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2007)

¹¹ Frederick H. Russell, *The Just War in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1975, p.18.

¹² Herbert A. Deane, *The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine*, New York and London, Columbia University Press, 1963, p.159.

¹³ Deane, *Ideas of St. Augustine*, p.156.

injunction, quoted by Herbert Butterfield, to 'love God and do what you like'.¹⁴

Butterfield, sometime Master of Peterhouse and Vice-Chancellor of this University, was also the convenor of the British Committee on the Theory of International Relations, out of which developed the so-called English School of International Relations. The reason I have sketched the political thought of St Augustine is because neither Butterfield, nor his influential United States contemporary Reinhold Niebuhr, can be understood outside this mental frame.

Butterfield might at first glance seem to be arguing in Thomistic terms in his 1951 essay on 'Christianity and Human Relationships'. At the outset he seemed to accept the idea of extrapolating second- and third-order rules from self-evident principles of natural law. He writes:

If all our ordinary rules and precepts are to be referred in the last resort to one ultimate law which regulates the conduct of life and applies to all circumstances and stands as the final measure of all action, then that law must be much more flexible than our ordinary formulas and regulations, and indeed must be in a certain sense almost a definition of elasticity itself. At the same time, if it is to provide us with a genuine standard for the judgment of human conduct, that law must not be merely cloudy and amorphous It must be

¹⁴ Herbert Butterfield, 'Christianity and Human Relations,' in *History and Human Relations*, p.43.

capable of operating effectively on people and showing perceptible and even measurable results.¹⁵

The stage seems set for a discussion of prudence, *synderis*, *gnome*, casuistry, and the whole Thomistic apparatus, by which deliberate and reasonable public processes may be engaged in, yet which – at the same time – might constrain sovereign powers. Instead, the argument takes a quite different and less rational turn. For according to Butterfield ‘the ultimate principle in question is that law of Christian love which comprises amongst other things all that we know of charity or charitable-mindedness’.¹⁶ Suddenly we find ourselves in the thought-world of St Augustine, not St Thomas.

To the radical deontology or disregard for consequences that we noted in Augustine’s account of the just war must now be added predicament, and the very different solutions to predicament proposed by secular and religious minds. Butterfield used this mildly eccentric term to refer to the kind of social situation in which even those of goodwill might be unable to avoid conflict because the structure of relations made trust and cooperation difficult to achieve. He had in mind circumstances containing ‘the elements of

¹⁵ Butterfield, ‘Christianity and Human Relationships’, in *History and Human Relations*, p.41.

¹⁶ Loc. cit.

conflict irrespective of any special wickedness of any of the parties concerned'.¹⁷ The most familiar of such situations in international relations is the security dilemma, in which one state cannot risk interpreting the military preparations of another state as defensive and therefore arms itself, so justifying and reinforcing its neighbour's first suspicions and prompting a further cycle of mistrust.

Butterfield viewed the Cold War, conceived of as a situation in which neither superpower could consent to the defection of a potential or actual ally, as just such a predicament: 'a grand dialectical jam of a kind ... that makes ordinary human beings even a little more wilful than they ordinarily are' and might, in consequence, produce 'the greatest war in history ... without the intervention of any great criminals'.¹⁸

In recognizing that problems of this kind lay at the heart of international relations, Butterfield might at first seem to have been an early structural realist — an English uncle for the young Kenneth Waltz. However Butterfield would probably have rejected the later claims of Kenneth Waltz or Robert Gilpin that the

¹⁷ Butterfield, 'The Tragic Element in Modern Conflict', in *History and Human Relations*, p.15.

¹⁸ Butterfield, 'The Tragic Element,' in *History and Human Relations*, p.19.

international system could be stabilized by bipolarity or hegemony, just as much as the later and more inventive game-theoretic solutions to anarchy proposed by Axelrod or Keohane. In the first place, predicament arose from human sinfulness. It would not exist 'if human nature in general were not streaked with cupidities'.¹⁹ In the second place, escape from structural predicament lay in personality rather than economic interdependence or clever institutions. To be more specific, it was to be looked for in the ability of the historical mind to transcend contemporary predicaments. This appears to constitute a specific instance of the more general ability of the elect Christian partly to overcome sinfulness by the exercise of free will with the help of efficacious grace. Indeed, going further, there are strong hints that historiography itself, in its complexity and its struggle with unavoidable error, is an instantiation the larger working out of Butterfield's ultimate law of charity.

Concluding his essay on 'The Christian and Historical Study,' Butterfield wrote 'that when Christians are teaching even the strictly technical kind of history, they ... would remember the limits of the science, the importance of getting inside human beings, the

¹⁹ Butterfield, 'The Tragic Element,' in *History and Human Relations*, p.22.

call for charity ...' ²⁰ The historian who gained a perspective on the past and developed compassion for all of those men and women caught up in its dilemmas could find 'new truths to which both sides were blind'. It was even possible for the historically minded to glimpse the 'future verdict of historical science' on their own predicament. In short, history was first of all a science, as Butterfield repeatedly affirmed, but it nothing at all if it was not also a form of wisdom arising out of charity.²¹

Deontology, predicament, and personality: the three characteristics of Augustinianism and Christian realism touched on here are in many ways inseparable one from another. The freedom that defined a Christian concept of personality for Butterfield was grounded in the disregard for the world and trust in Providence associated with the radical deontology of St. Augustine. At the same time it was this freedom, when guided by charity and assisted by efficacious grace, that might allow the Christian to overcome predicaments to which the secular mind could not conceive of an effective solution. When to this was added an arbitrariness of individual freedom to interpret the rule of Christian love, the Christian realist view became, as Butterfield pointed out,

²⁰ Butterfield, 'The Christian and Historical Study,' in *History and Human Relations*, p.156

²¹ Butterfield, 'The Tragic Element,' in *History and Human Relations*, pp.13 and 16.

‘a principle calculated to carry a human being to unpredictable readjustments of conduct or of attitude’.²²

Such readjustments might easily be suicidally hawkish, yet the same logic might just as easily lead to unworldly resignation, renunciation of the false righteousness of moralistic politics, and trust that God and the Church must outlast tyranny. This seems rather to have been Butterfield’s attitude. ‘When power is at its most implacable and self-righteousness is at its stiffest there is an extreme point where only Love can still fight and its can only fight with the weapons of non-resistance. ... [A]fter whatever delays and sufferings, sooner or later the same magic would come into operation again, provided Christians were faithful’.²³ Still, this humane individual interpretation cannot entirely erase the irrationalist possibilities in Augustinian Christianity that arise from its emphasis on free will and deontological ethics. The salient point is that Augustinian Christianity appears to be more mercurial than Thomism and less easily reconcilable with secular liberalism.

It is hard to conceive of mentalities further removed from all this than those of E. H. Carr or Kenneth Waltz. The first of these,

²² Butterfield, ‘Christianity and Human Relationships,’ in *History and Human Relations*, p.42.

²³ Butterfield, ‘Christianity and Human Relationships,’ in *History and Human Relations*, p.53/4.

though present in Cambridge as a fellow of Trinity from 1955 to his death in 1982, was never a member of Butterfield's British Committee. It is hard to imagine a secular progressive liberal and self-styled crypto-Marxist like Carr having much time for Augustine or Aquinas and no wonder that his infamous 1961 lecture series, *What Is History*, should have irritated many historians beyond measure. Here, after all, was a career diplomat turned journalist, down on his political luck and out of a job, repaying the generosity of Trinity College by lashing out at a profession for which he had scant credentials in a glib polemic written literally at sea, many miles from any scholarly library.

As for Waltz, by the 1970s his target was not Christian realism but what he regarded as the false science of Morton Kaplan and systems theory, and where Carr's response was to fall back on history as the bedrock of any understanding of international relations, Waltz's was to pare the international system down to its barest essentials. For the former, the policy prescription had been to try to remain the third of a triumvirate of great powers, alongside the Soviet Union and the USA; for the latter, to maintain bipolarity because it was the most stable possible condition of an anarchic system. Each, in his own day, was one power behind in his

analysis of the condition of a system that was to turn bipolar on Carr and unipolar on Waltz.

This brings the story neatly to the 1990s, and the response of realists – offensive, defensive and neoclassical – to the end of the Cold War. But they will have to wait until weeks 3 and 4 of Lent, when we consider the democratic peace and balancing: the first of these seemingly ruled out of court by Waltz's denial of any decisive role for regime type or ideology within an anarchic structure and the second regarded as a basic law of any anarchic system but, until the recent financial crisis, looking decidedly slow respond to the unrivalled ascendancy of the United States.

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