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## J. A. Hobson and idealism in international relations\*

DAVID LONG

Mr. Wilson . . . has made the very name of idealism a term of derision.

J. A. Hobson on Woodrow Wilson<sup>1</sup>

He was strangely unworldly: some have called him an unrepentant idealist . . .

*The Monthly Record* on J. A. Hobson<sup>2</sup>

J. A. Hobson died on April Fools' Day in the first year of the Second World War. This, and a whimsical anecdote from A. J. P. Taylor, might appear to be enough to justify the portrayal of Hobson as an idealist.<sup>3</sup> This paper critically assesses the work of J. A. Hobson and its relation to idealism as a category of international relations thought. An examination of Hobson's writings on international relations shows that there are three distinct strands of thought, three modes of idealism. These modes of idealist thought differ on fundamental propositions about international relations as well as in their prescriptions for a reformed world order. In short, consideration of Hobson's work destabilizes the monolithic category of idealism in international relations. Put another way, idealism blurs important distinctions in Hobson's work.

The paper is also a contribution to a growing literature on the work of international relations theorists in the inter-war period. Papers on Alfred Zimmern, David Davies and Norman Angell have appeared in the *Review* over the last few years.<sup>4</sup> In considering Hobson as an idealist, the paper deviates from other studies on Hobson in international relations, where he is famous for his theory of economic imperialism. The paper demonstrates that there is more to Hobson and international relations than the theory of imperialism. It passes over Hobson's gloomy prognosis of contemporary world politics to examine his internationalism, the manifestation in international relations of his belief in progress.

The paper first outlines the concept of idealism in international relations. Hobson's rationalist world-view and its implications for his approach to international relations

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<sup>1</sup> Hobson's review of W. E. Dodd, *Woodrow Wilson and His Work*, *The Nation*, 111 (1920), pp. 189–90.

<sup>2</sup> Article commemorating the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of J. A. Hobson, *South Place Monthly Record*, 63 (July 1958).

<sup>3</sup> See Taylor, *The Trouble-Makers* (1957; Harmondsworth, 1985), p. 145–6. Taylor uses Hobson's tumble down the stairs from the 1917 Club as a metaphor for the collapse of idealism in 1931.

<sup>4</sup> D. J. Markwell, 'Sir Alfred Zimmern Revisited: Fifty Years On', *Review of International Studies*, 12 (1986), pp. 279–92; Brian Porter, 'David Davies: A Hunter After Peace', *Review of International Studies*, 15 (1989), pp. 27–36; Cornelia Navari, 'The Great Illusion Revisited: The International Theory of Norman Angell', *Review of International Studies*, 15 (1989), pp. 341–58.

are explored. The second section examines Hobson's idealist-inspired critiques of contemporary international relations. It is concluded from this evidence that Hobson is an idealist. This assessment is challenged in the third section which considers Hobson's prescriptions for an ideal international polity and demonstrates that there are three different approaches within Hobson's writings: traditional idealism, non-interventionism, and new liberal internationalism. The fourth section assesses the significance of the three modes of idealism developed in the third section, first for the consideration of Hobson's writings on international relations, and second, for international relations scholarship on idealism.

### Idealism in international relations

Idealism is the label commonly attached to the well-wishing, optimistic rationalists, particularly of the inter-war period, who believed that progress in human relations is attainable through the application of human reason and that underlying human interaction is a basic harmony of interests. Realism, on the other hand, recognizes the nature of man as an essentially self-interested creature, and that the relations between men are mediated by political power, and, especially in international relations, are based on conflict and the exercise of physical force. This characterization of the opposition of realism and idealism has dominated and, in some respects, has helped to construct the international relations discipline.<sup>5</sup>

It is familiar to hear that idealist international relations was predominant in the inter-war period and that its hopes were dashed by the disasters of the thirties, including the rise of aggressive fascism and the collapse of the League of Nations leading up to the beginning of the Second World War. After a period of normatively-based analyses (for example, the search for 'peace through law'), the discipline saw the errors of its ways and took a more empirically sound approach, centering on the recognition of the supremacy of sovereign states and the requirements of state power.

The tenets of idealism can be stated negatively, in terms of the opposition to realism, as the foolish searching for something beyond current international realities and the hope for change in an unchangingly repetitive realm.<sup>6</sup> For Hedley Bull, idealist writing was 'not at all profound' and 'none is worth reading now except for the light it throws upon the preoccupations and presuppositions of its time and place'.<sup>7</sup> But it can also be defined positively in terms of its claims about the nature of human beings and the world in general. People are rational, there is a harmony of interest between people(s), and there is the possibility—or even inevitability—of progress.<sup>8</sup> This world-view dominated the early years of the international relations

<sup>5</sup> See M. Banks, 'The Inter-Paradigm Debate', in M. Light and A. J. R. Groom (eds.), *International Relations: A Handbook of Current Theory* (London, 1985), pp. 14–15; K. J. Holsti, *The Dividing Discipline* (Boston, 1985), pp. 28–31; and S. Smith, 'International Relations as a Social Science', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 16 (1987), pp. 190–2.

<sup>6</sup> M. Wight, 'Why is there no International Theory?', in H. Butterfield and M. Wight (eds.), *Diplomatic Investigations* (London, 1966).

<sup>7</sup> Hedley Bull, 'The Theory of International Politics 1919–1969', in B. Porter (ed.), *The Aberystwyth Papers* (London, 1972), p. 34.

<sup>8</sup> For various discussions of the liberal, rationalist world-view which underlies idealism in international relations, see B. L. Crowley, *The Individual, Self and Community* (Oxford, 1987), p. 2; J. Gray, *Liberalism* (Milton Keynes, 1986), p. x; M. Oakshott, *Rationalism in Politics* (New York, 1962), p. 11; B. Crick, *In Defence of Politics* (1962, Chicago, 1967), p. 128; and H. Morgenthau, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics* (Chicago, 1943).

discipline. We are told by Carr that '[n]early all popular theories of international politics between the two world wars were reflexions, seen in an American mirror, of nineteenth-century liberal thought'.<sup>9</sup>

According to R. N. Berki, the tendency to dichotomize is central to 'idealist' thought. 'Idealism is born of the endeavour to comprehend political reality in *unitary* terms, in a series of straightforward and precise propositions', but this means that '[t]he world of idealism is the bifurcated abstract world of good and evil, black and white, desirable and undesirable, something to be advocated and justified, something to be relentlessly opposed, rejected'. According to Berki's definition, Carr's dichotomy of realism and utopianism as the opposition of power, relativism and necessity on the one hand, and reason, universalism and choice on the other, is itself a product of idealism.<sup>10</sup> Hobson's work is also full of such bifurcation. His theory of co-operative surplus is opposed, in his writings, to the sectional appropriation of 'unproductive surplus'. This dichotomy produces a series of oppositions, such as wealth and 'illth', most starkly presented in *Democracy After the War*.<sup>11</sup> In each opposition, we find that Hobson condemns present arrangements for failing to come up to the standards of his rational ideal.

Hobson's critique of imperialism, especially its initial formulation, was a modification of the Cobdenite critique.<sup>12</sup> For Hobson, imperialism was the dark reality of modern world politics. Imperialism was the product of a sectional interest, certain financiers and industrial magnates, manipulating the press, public opinion and politicians of industrialized societies in order to attain their self-interested goals. While Cobden blamed aristocratic meddling in the political affairs of nations, Hobson attacked financiers for their economic interest in imperialism and even international conflict. Though it has since been interpreted as economic determinism, Hobson's theory of imperialism simply altered the radical liberal critique of foreign policy in two related ways. First, economics and politics could no longer be regarded as autonomous. Hobson conceived of economic power in a way that would have been meaningless to Cobden. Second, capitalism was no longer a force for peace, but was an incitement to war. Sectionalism at home issued in sectionalism in international relations, as each state strove to protect its nationals' interests in the 'backward countries'. The result was tyranny, both in the imperial country and the conquered territory, and war, both between 'advanced' industrial societies and the 'backward peoples', and between the industrial nations themselves.<sup>13</sup> Contrasting this gloomy view of present politics, Hobson's vision of the alternative to imperialism is a paradigm of idealism. Social reform and redistribution of income for industrial societies, and an international government to monitor nonintervention between

<sup>9</sup> Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis* (1939; London, 1946), p. 27.

<sup>10</sup> R. N. Berki, *On Political Realism* (London, 1981), pp. 193-4; E. H. Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis*, ch. 2. Thus, both Hobson and Carr are idealists in Berki's definition. The difference between Carr and Hobson is that in *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, Carr placed himself on the realist side, while Hobson remains on the utopian, according to Carr's criteria.

<sup>11</sup> *Democracy After the War* (London, 1917), part 2, ch. 1.

<sup>12</sup> The initial formulation of his critique of imperialism appears in the article, 'Free Trade and Foreign Policy', *Contemporary Review*, 74 (1898), pp. 167-80. References to Cobden appear throughout Hobson's work, but one of the most explicit appears in *Morals of Economic Internationalism* (New York, 1920), p. 29.

<sup>13</sup> On the influence of sectional interests, see *Imperialism: A Study* (1902, 1905, 1938; London, 1988), part 1, chs. 4 and 6. For the connection of imperialism and tyranny, see part 2, ch. 1.

nations would bring peace, prosperity and the reign of reason, justice and humanity to the world.<sup>14</sup>

Hobson believed in man's rationality, despite the setbacks of the Boer War and the First World War.<sup>15</sup> While developments in philosophy and in science created some doubt as to the certainty of the claims of nineteenth-century determinists, Hobson stoutly defended the rationalist tradition. For Hobson, '[t]he wide significance of rationalism surely demands a reasonable explanation of every course of human thought and conduct, especially in that great area, or arena, of political, social, and economic reconstruction which confronts every reasonable man or woman as essential to the salvation of a civilized world'.<sup>16</sup> He modified but still accepted the idea of a basic harmony of interests between people. Rather than being a natural law, though, harmony was, for Hobson, the result of a conscious collective application of reason. Finally, he believed in progress, despite his criticisms of nineteenth-century complacency in this regard.<sup>17</sup> The First World War and the rise of fascism was certainly a setback to the progress of democracy, civilization and justice, but this was expected to be temporary. Just as important, Hobson believed that some notion of progress motivates human action: 'If we really disbelieved in any process of betterment of ourselves and for humanity, every human activity would be sapped at the source . . .'.<sup>18</sup> At the level of his general view of the world, then, we might expect Hobson to be what is now labelled an idealist in international relations.

### Hobson's idealist critique of contemporary international relations

Hobson's concern with international affairs began with the worsening international outlook at the end of the nineteenth century, and particularly the conduct of British foreign policy leading up to the Boer War. This is the period during which he wrote *Imperialism: A Study*. Influenced by Cobden, he believed in the benefits of free trade. His participation in various peace groups during the First World War prompted him to write more on international relations. He wrote between the wars supporting the League of Nations, and believed that 'functional cooperation' was the route to peace and global welfare. He was an advocate of collective security.

This section discusses Hobson's dissatisfaction with contemporary international relations. It examines Hobson's critique of some of the elements of international theory: sovereignty, international law, diplomacy and the balance of power. Hobson's assessment of these elements of international theory differ from realist analysis. In each case, his critique of the 'old', 'traditional' or 'obsolete' concepts can be identified with a rationalist, idealist, liberal conscience.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup> *Imperialism*, pp. 86–90, 360.

<sup>15</sup> *The Modern State* (London, 1931), p. 30; *Confessions of an Economic Heretic* (1938; Brighton, 1976), p. 96, 104; *Rationalism and Humanism* (London, 1933), p. 31.

<sup>16</sup> *Rationalism and Humanism*, p. 10, 34–46.

<sup>17</sup> *Rationalism and Humanism*, pp. 20–1; *Democracy and a Changing Civilisation* (London, 1934), pp. 17–18.

<sup>18</sup> *The Recording Angel: A Report from Earth* (London, 1932), p. 75.

<sup>19</sup> M. Howard, *War and the Liberal Conscience* (1978; Oxford, 1981).

### Sovereignty

Hobson saw state sovereignty as individualism or separatism in international relations, a failure to acknowledge the increasing connectedness and interdependence of the society of nations. Following a conventional liberal argument, Hobson opposed the construct of states as persons in international relations as both holist and empirically inaccurate.<sup>20</sup> He criticized sovereignty because it was an outdated concept no longer reflecting of the true interests of the several national elements of mankind; indeed, it was an obstruction to civilization as it educated habits of thought opposed to the developing cooperation of humanity. He believed that sovereignty was associated with a power-oriented view of the world that had contributed to the creation of international anarchy.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, sovereignty was increasingly being tempered by obligations under international law and because of the growth of interdependence nations brought on by trade, travel, etc.<sup>22</sup> Sovereign independence was undercut by the increasing contacts of nations despite governments' attempts to control national economies. Attempts at economic planning and control were hampered by the cross-national links of the world economy.<sup>23</sup> Finally, sovereignty was an obstruction to the ultimate construction of an international government and cooperation between nations because of its emphasis on separate national interests; 'being the judge in your own cause' was the root problem of sovereignty, as it privileged national interests over the global common good.<sup>24</sup>

Sovereignty, as understood in much of the international relations literature today, is a category of legal status, a badge needed to participate in international relations.<sup>25</sup> According to this perspective, Hobson's critique based on the facts of interdependence are an idealist critique of the consequences of sovereign statehood and not of the concept *per se*.

### International law

Hobson believed that domestic law was the model for all law. In so far as international law failed to measure up to the standard of domestic law, it was not law at all. For Hobson, the absence of a central enforceable sanction renders it 'a loose code' of 'so-called international law'.<sup>26</sup> In common with much contemporary

<sup>20</sup> Hobson objected to what he saw as the absolutism of sovereignty. The state draws under one authority the right to decide policy on social, political and economic issues, according to Hobson, without recourse to reason or even to reasonable discussion. Such actions taken by sovereign right were likely to be irrational from the point of view of human welfare, Hobson's preferred standard. See *Free Thought in the Social Sciences* (London, 1926), pp. 50–1, 234, 259; *Incentives in the New Industrial Order* (London, 1922), pp. 150–1. For a recent example of this argument, see Roy E. Jones, 'The English School of International Relations', *Review of International Studies*, 7 (1981), and 'The Myth of the Special Problem in International Relations', *Review of International Studies*, 14 (1988).

<sup>21</sup> *Free Thought in the Social Sciences*, p. 257.

<sup>22</sup> On international law limiting sovereignty, see *The Case for Arbitration* (London, 1911), p. 7; *Towards International Government* (London, 1915), pp. 33, 124–5.

<sup>23</sup> *Democracy and a Changing Civilisation*, pp. 134–5; *Towards International Government*, p. 180.

<sup>24</sup> *Towards International Government*, pp. 81, 86–7, 178.

<sup>25</sup> See Alan James, *Sovereign Statehood: The Basis of International Society* (London, 1986).

<sup>26</sup> *Democracy and a Changing Civilisation*, p. 139.

opinion, Hobson believed that international law was at a primitive stage of development. Its progress could be measured by its increasing similarity to domestic law, through the growth of universal rather than bilateral treaties, conferences on international legal matters, an international judiciary, and the strengthening of sanctions. While international law was feeble, Hobson was hopeful that the mechanisms of peaceful settlement and of functional cooperation set up in the latter part of the nineteenth and the early part of the twentieth centuries would be a basis for future development, paralleling the supersession of the priority of individual over social interests domestically.<sup>27</sup>

Peace and justice in international relations, according to Hobson, relied on the extension and strengthening of international law, so that nations could no longer plead 'vital interests' or 'honour' to evade their obligations. International law could no longer be merely 'voluntary' for states.<sup>28</sup> The lawlessness (as he saw it) of contemporary international relations prompted him to offer suggestions in terms of backing up law with sufficient force. This might appear to be a realist proposition: only force could compel nations to behave in terms of the international interest rather than their own narrow self-interest. However, though the logic is realist, the prescriptions are unlikely to be sanctioned by realists.

Hobson's analysis is flawed in its conception of law. International law is usually considered distinct from domestic law by virtue of its different enforcement measures and the structure of the society within which it is placed. Nevertheless, international law is law, not just a primitive set of rules. Hobson neglected the difference between civil and criminal law in the British system, and the different approaches to law in other parts of the world. Nor did he conceive international law as reflecting the interests of the Great Powers, as did Carr, but rather believed that the weakness of law showed that powerful states sought a free hand in their dealings with weaker states.

### *Diplomacy*

Hobson's critique of traditional diplomacy first appeared in the period before the Boer War. Hobson was appalled by the conduct of British foreign policy at the end of the nineteenth century. The First World War confirmed him in his view of the conduct of diplomacy and the making of foreign policy. Hobson was for a long time chairman of the Union of Democratic Control of Foreign Policy. This both reflected and reinforced his strong opinions on foreign policy.<sup>29</sup> He believed that popular control of foreign policy would make it more pacific. Also, for any international arrangement to work effectively, claimed Hobson, it would be necessary for nations to have control over their foreign policies. Hobson's argument derived from the radical critique of foreign policy by nineteenth-century Radicals, particularly Richard Cobden. Hobson did not wish, though, for the end of foreign policy, the logical

<sup>27</sup> *Notes on Law and Order* (London, 1926), pp. 24–5; *The Case for Arbitration*, p. 7; on functional cooperation, see *A League of Nations* (London, 1915), p. 2, *Towards International Government*, p. 177; *Imperialism*, p. 167.

<sup>28</sup> *Democracy and a Changing Civilisation*, p. 139, 145; *The Case for Arbitration*, p. 4.

<sup>29</sup> Established during World War I, this was a group of intellectuals and politicians that criticized the foreign policy of the Great Powers that it claimed had led to the war. See Marvin Swartz, *The Union of Democratic Control in British Politics During the First World War* (Oxford, 1971).

conclusion of the Radical critique. Rather, he looked forward to government representing and defending the true interests of society, both national and international. For Hobson, the establishment of new methods of diplomacy and diplomatic representation according with the interests of the people as a whole, was essential to the new international order to be set up after the First World War.

According to Hobson, the first problem with traditional diplomacy was class bias. Diplomats were drawn from the ranks of and propounded the viewpoints of the rich and powerful; they were 'unrepresentative types of men, with . . . false, antiquated conceptions of States and statecraft'. These conceptions were opposed to the interests of society as a whole and to the interests of the international society. Instead, modern diplomacy required 'able, broad-minded men of large personal experience of the people and the popular activities of the people, experience amplified by contact with the peoples and activities of other countries, men accustomed in large, free intercourse to test and assimilate new facts and valuations and to practise arts of mediation and of arrangements'.<sup>30</sup> If the old diplomatic and foreign ministry officials could be removed and replaced by people who more truly represented the interests of society, then the relations of states would cease to be competitive and the relations of peoples, thus freed up, would be a harmonious pursuit of welfare.<sup>31</sup>

The structure of traditional diplomacy also bred international antagonism. The cult of secrecy, distrust of foreigners, calculations of your rival's power and unprincipled compromise, multiplied the problems of class bias in the embassies and foreign ministries.

Drawn from this narrow section of society, they [recruits to the diplomatic corps] enter a calling strongly stamped with the traditions of an even less enlightened and more autocratically ordered past, in which the normal relations of States and Governments are envisaged in terms of suspicion, hostility, and jealousy.<sup>32</sup>

Diplomacy reflected and reinforced the militarist attitude engendered by the competition of sovereign states with one another. Hobson also thought that multilateral diplomacy was preferable to bilateral negotiation.<sup>33</sup> Hobson criticized traditional diplomacy for its class bias and its formal structure of diplomacy, and criticized the formulation and evaluation of foreign policy. If, Hobson claimed, the whole process of foreign policy making were public and open to debate, different, more pacific, foreign policies would emerge, as the pacific nature of the people gained expression.<sup>34</sup>

In summary, the necessary reforms were, first, opening the foreign office and diplomatic corps to all qualified people; second, public discussion and Parliamentary sanction of treaties, including the establishment of a Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs; third, representatives to the International Council that Hobson had proposed should be directly elected rather than appointed diplomats.<sup>35</sup> On diplomatic negoti-

<sup>30</sup> *Towards International Government*, pp. 65, 67–8, and see also p. 7, 70, 169; *A League of Nations*, p. 15, 20.

<sup>31</sup> *Free Thought in the Social Sciences*, p. 217; *Richard Cobden: The International Man* (London, 1918), p. 10, 408; *Democracy After the War* (London, 1919 [1917]), p. 210; *The Case for Arbitration*, p. 1; *The German Panic* (London, 1913), p. 23.

<sup>32</sup> *Towards International Government*, pp. 67–8.

<sup>33</sup> *Richard Cobden*, p. 388; *Democracy After the War*, p. 210; *The German Panic*, p. 27; *A League of Nations*, pp. 15–6; *Towards International Government*, pp. 66–8, 70.

<sup>34</sup> *Free Thought in the Social Sciences*, p. 259; *The Crisis of Liberalism* (London, 1909), p. 9; *Towards International Government*, p. 184–6, 203–6, 211; *Confessions of an Economic Heretic*, p. 104.

<sup>35</sup> *A League of Nations*, p. 20. See also *Towards International Government*, pp. 200–1, 209.



ations, Hobson's view was similar to the Wilsonian call for 'open covenants, openly arrived at'. He summarized his approach as follows: 'Different men, different methods, different motives and ideals are required'.

Hobson's proposals are, of course, open to numerous objections. He countered the suggestion that the people could not be trusted with diplomacy and foreign policy because they were too ignorant of international affairs or as bellicose as their representatives. Hobson retorted that the ignorance and bellicosity of peoples was a function of their being kept in the dark about international affairs. Publicity and openness would at least mitigate against these factors, if not end them altogether. Hobson's response to this challenge highlights his idealist critique of traditional diplomacy and foreign policy. Hobson's involvement in the UDC, however, tempered his radical views, though only marginally. By the end of his life, he was admitting that it was difficult to be specific about the precise meaning of 'democratic control' and how it might be implemented.<sup>36</sup>

Hobson claimed that the formulation, execution and evaluation of foreign policy are significant issues for international relations. Hobson's views deviate from mainstream international relations literature which says little about the personnel of diplomacy, other than to suggest that skill and tact are useful characteristics. The structure of diplomacy, as the formal communication of states, is accepted as a reflection of the structure of international society, within which diplomacy is beneficial in so far as it is an alternative mode of communication between states to physical force.<sup>37</sup>

### *The balance of power*

For Hobson, the balance of power was the 'core of diplomatic falsehood'.<sup>38</sup> His views owed something to Cobden's critique of Palmerstonian foreign policy, and were also influenced by the impact of the First World War. More importantly, Hobson criticized the disorganized and decentralized nature of the balance of power.

Following Cobden and Bright, Hobson saw the balance of power as the doctrine of a self-aggrandizing foreign office keen to interfere in foreign affairs and a government which distracted their electors from domestic social reform with foreign quarrels. The root cause of international discord was the balance of power. Each state had sought this 'vile idol', competing for security through arms races and psychological warfare. World War I was a result of the secret treaties, covert diplomacy and competitive foreign policies of the Great Powers, especially outside Europe. The international balance of power was, then, a war-system. Its operation rested on military force.<sup>39</sup>

Underlying Hobson's rejection of the international balance of power was his attack on *laissez-faire*. Hobson rejected *all* balances of power, whether domestic or international, because they failed to provide justice: 'the term Balance of Power resolves itself into a policy of Pulls, distribution alike of effort and of product being

<sup>36</sup> *Confessions of an Economic Heretic*, pp. 104-5.

<sup>37</sup> For an example, see K. J. Holsti, *International Politics: A Framework for Analysis* (1967; Englewood Cliffs, 1977), ch. 7.

<sup>38</sup> *Towards International Government*, p. 182.

<sup>39</sup> *Towards International Government*, p. 181.

determined by the relative strength of the parties or groups'. The inequitable distribution of income he so fiercely attacked in the domestic context was, for him, the result of the logic of a balance of power. To start with, balance did not mean equilibrium.<sup>40</sup> Further, in a *laissez-faire* system, force is the ultimate means of settling disputes; in the resolution of conflicts, more goes to the more powerful. Hobson opposed this as unjust and fraught with potential for future conflict, as can be seen in his criticisms of *ad hoc* resolution in industrial disputes, which he interpreted as the struggle over 'cooperative surplus' in the capitalist system.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, he opposed the balance of power in international relations: 'It presents no true harmony of interest and no organic policy.'<sup>42</sup>

Hobson's suggested reform was to centralize and rationalize authority. Balance of power was to be replaced by an international government with a policy for collective security and the common good. This is at variance with realist prescriptions for international relations, where the balance of power is the ordering mechanism for international relations in the absence of a central authority. While it might not prevent war, the balance of power is said to preserve the system of states or order within that system, and thus to be of value. Balance of power, then, means neither anarchy nor war. Hobson could not accept this complacent viewpoint and challenged the necessity of the balance of power system and policy in international relations, claiming that his reforms were the only way to ensure a lasting peace.

### Three modes of idealism in Hobson's international relations

So far, the label of idealist attached to Hobson also seems quite appropriate. There are idealist tendencies in Hobson's general approach to social and political life, including international relations, and in his criticisms of contemporary international relations. It is the burden of the rest of the paper, however, to qualify this assessment, giving a more sophisticated interpretation of his writings on international relations. The qualifications emerge from Hobson's discussion of the ideal international polity.

This section examines Hobson's ideal for future world order, as it appears both implicitly and explicitly in his writings on international relations. There are, however, no less than three contending visions, or modes of idealism, in his work: traditional idealism, noninterventionism and new liberal internationalism. These terms are descriptive; they are not the terms used during Hobson's lifetime. New liberal internationalism is the conjunction of the New Liberal approach to social and political affair, attributed to Hobson by Michael Freedon, with Hobson's internationalism.<sup>43</sup> Noninterventionism is a 'tidied' version of 'noninterventionism', used by Hobson to describe Cobden's internationalism.<sup>44</sup> Traditional idealism is a phrase used by Michael Banks to refer to inter-war progressive thought in international relations.<sup>45</sup> The three modes of idealism differ, first, on the fundamental goal

<sup>40</sup> Hobson denied that there would be equilibrium, see *Towards International Government*, p. 182.

<sup>41</sup> *Incentives in the New Industrial Order*, pp. 147-8; see also *Democracy After the War*, pp. 175-6.

<sup>42</sup> *Incentives in the New Industrial Order*, p. 147-8.

<sup>43</sup> Michael Freedon, *New Liberalism: An Ideology of Social Reform* (Oxford, 1978). See also John Allett, *New Liberalism: The Political Economy of J. A. Hobson* (Toronto, 1981).

<sup>44</sup> See *Richard Cobden*, p. 406.

<sup>45</sup> Banks, 'The Inter-paradigm Debate', p. 15.

of the international polity (global order or global welfare), and, second, on whether or not it is necessary to establish some form of international government to attain that goal. The modes of idealism are sketched in abstract, with examples from Hobson's writings. The discussion is primarily thematic rather than historical in order to highlight the differences between the three modes.

### *Traditional idealism*

Traditional idealism is the projection of a need of a centralized world state with a monopoly of legitimate force so that peace and order in international relations can be maintained. While traditional idealists 'advocate progressive reform, via such devices as disarmament, collective security, strengthened law, sanctions against aggressors, and even—potentially a world government', the most important feature is the use of force internationally in order to discipline deviant members of the international community.<sup>46</sup> Traditional idealism is an attempt to create international order through the establishment of a world state that abolishes the anarchy of inter-state relations. The perspective follows Hobbesian logic but applies it to inter-state relations. Following a domestic analogy, it stresses the importance of the state control over society in enforcing justice, peace and order.

Traditional idealism is idealist in its belief that the abolition of anarchical state relations by the centralized power of a world state is possible and that it can be achieved quite soon and relatively painlessly. The idealism of this perspective is not its neglect of the importance of power and the security dilemma between states. In fact, issues of power are central. It accepts the overriding importance of power in an analysis that stresses the need for centralizing power, thus distinguishing traditional idealism from the rationalism and liberalism of the other two modes.

Traditional idealism appears in Hobson's writings during the First World War and during the crises of the thirties. Hobson supported collective security, the need for military sanctions to back up international arbitration and the call for an international police force.<sup>47</sup> Hobson proposed a strong League of Nations, in effect an international government with a Court, Executive and Legislature to which states would bring their disputes; and a collective security system whereby the use of legitimate force was concentrated in the hands of the society of states' representative, the international government. This League would have to be as inclusive and as powerful as possible in order to avoid the possible reinstatement of the balance of power within the League and between the League and outside powers.<sup>48</sup> For Hobson, the balance of power in contemporary international relations had failed to maintain peace and, given this inadequacy, international government was preferable to anarchy and the constant menace of war. If there was no such international government set up, disarmament would fail and the balance of power be re-

<sup>46</sup> Banks, 'The Inter-paradigm Debate', p. 15.

<sup>47</sup> *Democracy and a Changing Civilisation*, p. 145; *Confessions of an Economic Heretic*, p. 112–3; *Notes on Law and Order*, p. 24; *The Case for Arbitration*, p. 8; *A League of Nations*, p. 14; *Towards International Government*, p. 21, 77. On an international police force, see 'Force Necessary to Government', *Hibbert Journal*, 33 (1935), pp. 338–42.

<sup>48</sup> *A League of Nations*, p. 18; *Towards International Government*, pp. 3–6, 86–7.

established. Hobson's main concern in this work is the anarchy of inter-state relations.<sup>49</sup>

Hobson felt that the centralized force of an international government would reduce the aggregate use of force in the international system, especially the illegitimate use of force.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, he conceded that, initially at least, there was a probability that the power of an international government would be abused. However, he optimistically assumed that to the extent that the international government was made up of democratic states and was itself democratic and truly international, this would not be a serious or permanent problem. He also assumed that nations would learn the value of international government through the experience of its operation. Mistakes would be made, for sure, but the experience of international government was essential; that is, that possible abuse should not be made an excuse for avoiding the imperative of establishing an international government. The centralization of force was, then, a necessary measure to counter the anarchy of international relations. In the long-term, however, the success of the international government rested on an informed world public.<sup>51</sup> This belief in the importance of public opinion brings us to the second mode of idealism.

### *Noninterventionism*

Noninterventionism advocates a policy of political nonintervention, domestically as well as internationally. Noninterventionism also stresses national self-determination as the realization of political maturity. It advances the doctrine of free trade for the international economy. All of these, as Carr pointed out, are derived from an analogy with nineteenth-century liberal ideas. For example, Richard Cobden believed that governments should as far as possible stay out of the affairs of their people. It was still worse, following this line of argument, for governments to interfere in the affairs of foreign peoples.<sup>52</sup> In the absence of government interference, the hidden hand of the market would conjure up not only the greatest possible welfare, but also social order and security. In international relations, this meant the removal of all arbitrary political restrictions to trade and travel.

A noninterventionist could propose an international government, but it would be a 'the night-watchman state' of *laissez-faire* liberalism writ large. The role of government nationally and internationally is conceived to be that of maintaining the rule of law only. The international government would fulfil a function analogous to the domestic minimal state in maintaining the rule of law to prevent interference by states in the affairs of individuals. The international government does not so much maintain law and order between states as prevent interference of states in both foreign people's

<sup>49</sup> With regard to anarchy in international relations being based in national sovereignty, see *Confessions of an Economic Heretic*, p. 111; *Free Thought in the Social Sciences*, p. 257. For the inadequacy of noninterventionism in the face of the international anarchy, see *Confessions of an Economic Heretic*, p. 112; *Towards International Government*, p. 6, 86. For Hobson's preference of an international government over a return to anarchy, see *Democracy and a Changing Civilisation*, pp. 150-1; *Towards International Government*, pp. 86-7.

<sup>50</sup> *Notes on Law and Order*, p. 25; *Towards International Government*, pp. 84-8.

<sup>51</sup> *Towards International Government*, pp. 210-1.

<sup>52</sup> See R. J. Vincent, *Nonintervention and International Order* (Princeton, 1974), pp. 45-54.

and their nationals' affairs.<sup>53</sup> Competition and the free market is protected by preventing states from having other than noninterventionist constitutions.

Noninterventionism commonly relies on the operation of world public opinion and the rule of law in the settlement of disputes in international relations.<sup>54</sup> It is believed that free trade will lead to the maximum possible global welfare. Noninterventionism is idealist because it assumes a 'natural' harmony of interests between people(s) in the achievement of global common welfare. It also presumes that order will be established 'naturally'. In short, it presumes that liberty will lead to welfare and social order.

Hobson's Cobdenite defence of free trade and proposals for the open door to trade and investment are noninterventionist arguments. He believed that free trade and the mobility of capital and labour would be a force for peace and prosperity. In discussions of international trade especially, Hobson emphasized the 'negative' aspects of liberalism—the removal of obstacles to free exchange of ideas and goods.<sup>55</sup>

Many of Hobson's writings deal with economics and economic issues.<sup>56</sup> On domestic social and economic matters, Hobson refuted Cobdenism. He called for increased governmental intervention to alleviate poverty and unemployment. At the same time, he propounded political nonintervention in international relations. Nonintervention was central to the distinction that Hobson made between inclusive and exclusive nationalism. Inclusive nationalism, for Hobson, was the basis for the construction of an international order of self-governing nations with minimal relations between their governments and internationalism based purely on enlightened individual self-interest; exclusive nationalism, on the other hand, promoted aggressive imperialism and national self-glorification. Hobson opposed the interference of governments in the affairs of other nations.<sup>57</sup>

Hobson's noninterventionism is his restatement of the radical liberal perspective on foreign policy, as his involvement in the UDC demonstrates.<sup>58</sup> Noninterventionism appears in Hobson's earlier work particularly, in his optimistic hopes for economic internationalism in the decade before the First World War and in some of his UDC work. Hobson's interventionist proposals in the domestic context, however, increasingly came into conflict with his defence of free trade internationally. The doctrine of *laissez-faire* underlaid free trade, yet Hobson had rejected this in his call for state intervention in the national economy. Hobson's reaction to the rise of imperialism and the First World War was to question the adequacy of noninterventionism as a route to peace and global welfare. In the first place, it failed to address the question of how the inequities in the international economy were a source of conflict (both

<sup>53</sup> An example of this argument appears in F. A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (1944; London, 1986), ch. 15.

<sup>54</sup> See F. H. Hinsley, *Power and the Pursuit of Peace* (Cambridge, 1967), ch. 5.

<sup>55</sup> *Democracy and a Changing Civilisation*, pp. 22–3; *Wealth and Life* (London, 1929), p. 187; *The Morals of Economic Internationalism*, p. 29; *The New Protectionism* (London, 1916), p. 116; *Economic Interpretation of Investment* (London, 1911), pp. 110–12, 117; *The German Panic*, p. 26; *Towards International Government*, pp. 134–7.

<sup>56</sup> Hobson's major works in economics are *The Evolution of Modern Capitalism* (London, 1894), *The Economics of Distribution* (New York, 1900), *The Industrial System* (London, 1909), *Work and Wealth* (London, 1914), and *Wealth and Life*.

<sup>57</sup> *Richard Cobden*, pp. 9–10, 34–6, 74, 388–9; *Democracy After the War*, p. 85–6; *Imperialism*, p. 356, 360; *The German Panic*, p. 26. On the distinction of inclusive and exclusive nationalism, see *Imperialism*, p. 10–12. For Hobson's future perplexity on this issue of economic internationalism and rising political nationalism, see *Democracy and a Changing Civilisation*, p. 22.

<sup>58</sup> See, e.g. Peter Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats* (Cambridge, 1978), p. 178.

between Great Powers, and between the 'advanced' nations and the 'backward' peoples). Secondly, Hobson acknowledged that, contrary to the free trade argument, economic interdependence could breed tensions and conflict.<sup>59</sup> This brings us to the third mode of internationalism.

### *New Liberal internationalism*

New Liberal internationalism follows much of the logic and prescriptions of non-interventionism. However, in New Liberal internationalism, there is no 'natural' harmony: global welfare is only achievable through the application, i.e., intervention, of conscious human reason. Social order is not 'natural' or spontaneous, but can only be achieved through collective action. It seeks to remedy the failings of non-interventionism with elements of control and planning by the state. However, this intervention is premised not on the supreme requirement of order as in traditional idealism, but on the importance of human welfare. Likewise, New Liberal internationalist proposals for the future governance of the world do not derive from the imperatives of law enforcement. Instead, they range from establishing the conditions under which noninterventionism can operate, to a federal international government to control and direct global welfare policies. The logic of this mode of idealism is close to the functionalist perspective of David Mitrany in its emphasis of the provision of welfare needs through increasing international functional organization.<sup>60</sup>

New Liberal internationalism is idealist in its belief that a harmony of interests can be found in the conscious application of human reason through planning and organization. Harmony is manifested in and expressed through social and, in this case, international institutions. There is in the functionalist aspect of New Liberal internationalism a strong element of idealism, particularly in the assumption that 'form follows function'. Such a criterion for international organization excludes considerations other than that of the felt need and concentrates on an economic conception of social welfare that can be discussed without reference to political power, which might oppose it and is probably needed to achieve it.<sup>61</sup>

Hobson claimed that '[j]ust as in the course of recent centuries, mainly through improvements of communications, nationalism has come more and more to displace provincialism and localism for most purposes of human co-operation, so the direct conscious activities and needs of mankind will displace nationalism'.<sup>62</sup> He also

<sup>59</sup> *Towards International Government*, p. 127–8, though he did not make much advance with regard to the unequal benefits of international exchange. Indeed, his position from *Imperialism to the First World War* and to some extent beyond, was a more orthodox free trade argument. See P. J. Cain, 'J. A. Hobson, Cobdenism, and the Radical Theory of Imperialism, 1898–1914', *Economic History Review*, 31 (1978), pp. 565–84.

<sup>60</sup> This position is similar to that of McKinlay and Little's 'compensatory liberalism' and Suganami's 'welfare internationalism'. See R. D. McKinlay and R. Little, *Global Problems and World Order* (London, 1986), ch. 2; and H. Suganami, *Domestic Analogy and World Order Proposals* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 101–11.

<sup>61</sup> Another area where the idealism of new liberal internationalism is betrayed is in Hobson's paternalist suggestions for international development of 'backward countries', which was to be guided by an impartial international council in the interests of both the local peoples and the world at large without succumbing to the sectional interests of the capitalist Great Powers. On this issue, see, for instance, *Democracy and a Changing Civilisation*, p. 134, 145; *The Modern State*, p. 36; *Poverty in Plenty* (London, 1931), p. 81; *Wealth and Life*, p. 403–4.

<sup>62</sup> *From Capitalism to Socialism* (London, 1932) p. 49. See also *Free Thought in the Social Sciences*, p. 260.

believed that '[t]he rudiments of political internationalism, judicial, legislative, even administrative, already exist, weak, fragmentary, circumscribed in area, no doubt, but genuine beginnings of government'.<sup>63</sup> Unlike the functionalism of Mitrany, however, Hobson believed that overall governmental coordination of the functional organizations was an essential prerequisite for the enhancement of human welfare. None the less, Hobson is something of a functionalist in his discussions of the growing links of nations through the increasing numbers and power of inter-governmental regulatory bodies, and of 'transnational relations'.<sup>64</sup>

For Hobson, the growing interdependence of nations was a condition for the existence of an international society; it permitted the establishment of an international organization in order to maximize human welfare. With the revolution in communications in the nineteenth century, a true international society was a possibility. The revolution in communications and industrial organization meant that 'the policy of independent sovereign States, that was compatible with some limited measure of peace and security so long as governments kept their economic functions within narrow limits, is no longer possible when every government is committed to a planning and control of all essential business processes, including the regulation of foreign trade and the money that finances it'.<sup>65</sup>

Hobson's New Liberal internationalism is not only an acknowledgement of growing interdependence, but also a product of his criticisms of *laissez-faire* as the basis of noninterventionism. For Hobson, '[m]odern internationalists are no longer mere non-interventionists, for the same reason that modern Radicals are no longer philosophic individualists'.<sup>66</sup> While he accepted the benefits of free exchange of ideas and goods, he claimed that the present system resulted in uneven distribution of wealth because of the sectional interests of a powerful business class. Only institutions could remedy this inequity, and Hobson believed this to be as true for international relations as it was in the domestic context: 'In other words, the ideal "natural harmony" of interests to which economic idealists of a century ago looked for the cooperation of the world, must become a conscious calculated policy of modern internationalism'.<sup>67</sup>

Hobson argued that free trade had to be supplemented with institutions for its effective operation:

If the Free Trade policy is to fulfil its mission as a civilizing, pacifying agency, it must adapt itself to the larger needs of [the] modern situation . . . This fuller doctrine of the Open Door, or equality of economic opportunity, cannot, however, be applied without definite co-operative action on the part of nations and their Governments.<sup>68</sup>

Hobson's proposal for international government along New Liberal internationalist lines is founded on his social philosophy. For Hobson,

[t]he time has come for man to make his supreme effort at the task of conscious collective self-control . . . enlarging the orderly political government of the single city or the nation state to that society of nations which comprises mankind . . . Reason plainly endorses the substitution of industrial cooperation between industries and nations for a conflict seen to be

<sup>63</sup> *A League of Nations*, p. 4; see also *Imperialism*, p. 7; *The Case for Arbitration*, p. 2.

<sup>64</sup> See *The Modern State*, p. 31; *A League of Nations*, p. 12.

<sup>65</sup> *Democracy and a Changing Civilisation*, pp. 134-5.

<sup>66</sup> *Richard Cobden*, p. 406. See also p. 408.

<sup>67</sup> *Wealth and Life*, p. 404.

<sup>68</sup> *The New Protectionism*, pp. 121-2.

ever more wasteful and disastrous: reason equally favours the substitution of law for war among nations as among individuals, and the active union of all Governments for health, trade, travel, culture, and all ingredients of human welfare.<sup>69</sup>

Unfortunately, Hobson only sketches in outline what sort of rearrangement of international relations or world society New Liberal internationalism would require. Indeed, Hobson's New Liberal internationalist writings are not so much the forerunner of functionalism as the working out of the theory on which functionalism is premised. For Hobson, the exploitative and wasteful nature of the present economic system mean that 'nothing less than the establishment of . . . a super-national federation can in the long run satisfy the equities and economies of the world in which we live, and secure the moral and material welfare of humanity'. In tones that are striking reminiscent of the functionalists, Hobson predicted that

[t]he gravest social-economic problems will be found insoluble except by international arrangement. An era of free conferences and of more or less loose agreements between States will lay the foundation for what in time must amount to international regulation of industry. In other words, the economic internationalism . . . will weave for itself the necessary apparel of political institutions'.<sup>70</sup>

Hobson's New Liberal internationalism appears in his work during and after the First World War. He was most optimistic about the prospects of the League of Nations and of large-scale change in international relations in this period. By the thirties, Hobson's hopes for the League had all but disappeared and his New Liberal internationalism becomes more of a pious hope than an expectation of imminent reform.

### **Hobson and idealism in international relations: an assessment**

The previous section set up three different positions within idealism. It showed how they differed, why they might be labelled idealist, and indicated some of Hobson's arguments along these lines. This section examines the implications of the three modes, in the development of Hobson's thought on international relations, and for the international relations category, idealism.

#### *Hobson and the three modes of idealism*

Recent studies of Hobson's work have considered Hobson a Cobdenite free trader, neglecting his proposals for international government or treating them as a separate issue.<sup>71</sup> Throughout his long writing career, Hobson argued along the lines of all three modes of idealism at different times and in different contexts. However, different modes predominate in his writings at certain times. For instance, Hobson's

<sup>69</sup> *The Recording Angel*, pp. 111–2. See also *Democracy and a Changing Civilisation*, p. 23.

<sup>70</sup> *Wealth and Life*, pp. 405–6; *Work and Wealth*, pp. 280–1. See also *Wealth and Life*, p. 399; *Towards International Government*, p. 196.

<sup>71</sup> See, for example, P. F. Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats*, p. 177; and also J. Townshend, 'Introduction' to the 1988 paperback edition of *Imperialism*, pp. 20–22.



Cobdenite noninterventionist phase more or less ends with the First World War. From his earliest consideration of international issues until the War, Hobson's arguments remained largely within the classical liberal tradition on foreign policy. This applies to his Cobdenite critique of the spirited foreign policy that led to the Boer War and to his Angellite pronouncements on the internationalization of capital in the decade before the War.<sup>72</sup> Despite his involvement in the UDC, during the War, Hobson turned away from the noninterventionist solutions of Cobden and the nineteenth-century Radicals and towards institutional reform in international relations.<sup>73</sup> Thus, during the War and into the 1920s, Hobson propounded his New Liberal internationalist ideas on international economic government. However, during the War, he was also putting forward proposals for the strengthening of international law through the imposition of sanctions on aggressors and the creation of an international force. While his New Liberal internationalism was more prominent in his writings after the War, the call for an international force never goes away entirely and traditional idealism resurfaces in his writings in the 1930s. By the end of the thirties, Hobson was quite disillusioned with the League of Nations and indeed the prospects of internationalism in general.

Hobson's shifts in position over the years are his attempt to come to terms with the rapidly changing international scene. The three modes of idealism rest on different assumptions. It might be said that he was merely inconsistent. This would not be surprising. Hobson wrote an enormous amount over a period of over fifty years, spanning the late Victorian era to the beginning of the Second World War.<sup>74</sup> However, considering Hobson's writings on politics, economics and ethics, the major premises of his approach to international relations can be surmised: as with domestic issues, Hobson made the transition from *laissez-faire* to a New Liberalism. Hobson modified the radical critique of foreign policy in his theory of imperialism. The three modes of idealism reflect Hobson's modification of liberal internationalism as well as his estimation of the condition of international relations at the time.

For Hobson, the central issue for international relations was the same as that for any social realm, that is, welfare.<sup>75</sup> Questions of human welfare predominated in his work. Along with the classical economists, he claimed that cooperation was integral to human welfare: cooperation produces 'surplus value' beyond individual contributions. However, in Hobson's work, we find a criticism of *laissez-faire*. Hobson was one of a group of Left-leaning New Liberals who attacked nineteenth-century liberalism for its individualistic bias and 'negative' conception of liberty, as well as the classical economists' assumptions of perfect competition and naturally equilibrating economy through the 'hidden hand' of the market.<sup>76</sup> Hobson's analysis suggested that organization and an appropriate distribution of the cooperative surplus would give the highest level of human welfare. Organization in the shape of concentration and combination of industry were increasingly predominant. Though he opposed the powerful business interests so created, Hobson supported the transition to a more

<sup>72</sup> For the critique of imperialism as a spirited foreign policy, see 'Free Trade and Foreign Policy'. On the internationalisation of capital, see *Economic Interpretation of Investment*.

<sup>73</sup> This applies in particular *Richard Cobden* and *The Morals of Economic Internationalism*, that might superficially appear to be straightforward tributes to Cobden.

<sup>74</sup> See the extensive bibliography of Hobson's work provided in A. J. F. Lee, 'The Social and Economic Thought of J. A. Hobson', unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 1970.

<sup>75</sup> See *Confessions of an Economic Heretic*, ch. 16.

<sup>76</sup> See Michael Freedman, *New Liberalism*; P. F. Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats*; and Peter Weiler, *The New Liberalism* (New York, 1982).

organized social life as beneficial in welfare terms. The anarchy of *laissez-faire* was no longer functional.<sup>77</sup>

Hobson extended the logic of this argument to international relations. However, Hobson was guarded in his estimation of international relations. He believed that international society was a backward but developing social realm.<sup>78</sup> Thus, Hobson could not transfer New Liberal prescriptions wholesale onto international relations. His New Liberal internationalism was an ideal towards which international relations was evolving rather than an established fact.

For the time being, Hobson was content to encourage peaceful relations between peoples through the minimal measures of noninterventionism, with ameliorative measures taken to remedy the defects in the system, for example, the mandate system and international arbitration. Hobson's defence of free trade did not rely on a dogmatic adherence to the doctrine of *laissez-faire*. Free-trade policies were simply a bulwark against economic nationalism and attempts at autarky, and were preliminaries to New Liberal internationalism. With economic processes in the vanguard, however, international cooperation was advancing. The imperative was to organize international relations to attain the greatest human welfare. The main, though not exclusive, form of the organization of international relations was, as domestically, a beneficent government. Shortly before and after the Great War, Hobson believed that the time was ripe for New Liberal internationalism.

The smooth progress from noninterventionism to New Liberal internationalism was disrupted, however, by the First World War. Traditional idealism appears in Hobson's writings during periods of crisis, for example, his proposals for international government during and shortly after World War I. It also reflects Hobson's increasing disillusionment with the League of Nations in the thirties, with the failure to deal with the rise of aggression by the fascist states. During these periods, international relations had, in Hobson's eyes, regressed to its primitive state, and thus coercive measures, inappropriate to developed society, were now necessary.

In summary, New Liberal internationalism is Hobson's ideal, which he sometimes felt to be close at hand. More often, however, his New Liberal internationalist ideals took a back seat to more modest reforms in his concrete proposals. Non-interventionist policies such as the open door to trade are minimal requirements for international cooperation. On the other hand, traditional idealist suggestions such as an international police force are an extreme reaction to what was perceived as an extreme challenge to peace and security of the emerging international society.

### *Idealism and international relations*

While a resolution of the three modes in Hobson's writings may be possible, the modes of idealism conflict on basic assumptions, on their analysis of the problems of international relations, and on their prescriptions for dealing with those problems.

<sup>77</sup> This transition is explored at length in my 'J. A. Hobson on International Economic Relations: Surplus Value, Free Trade and International Government', in D. Long and P. Wilson (eds.), *Thinkers of the Twenty Years' Crisis* (forthcoming).

<sup>78</sup> This is spelled out most clearly in 'The Morality of Nations', in *The Crisis of Liberalism and The Morals of Economic Internationalism*.

Traditional idealism aims for a World State, centralizing power to provide international peace and order. Noninterventionism aims for international maintenance of the rule of law between states to ensure the individual liberty and welfare through the survival of 'minimal states' domestically. New Liberal internationalism ranges in its various forms from being a functionalist approach to international organization to proposals for an international federation to achieve maximum social welfare. Idealism is the category under which these diverse approaches have been gathered in international relations.

Idealism is not only a category, however. It is also a means by which much of the progressive writing has been fixed in time. Today, those who advocate change towards a just and peaceful world politics are subjected to the derogatory label, idealists. Idealism is associated with the disciplinary immaturity of the inter-war period. While idealism and realism were in common currency during the inter-war period, however, the current understanding of idealism is anachronistic. The category 'idealism' emerged as a staple of international relations scholarship following the realist critiques of the two decades around the Second World War.<sup>79</sup> Revealingly, William Olson claims that Carr's critique 'both focused and ended the debate' between realism and idealism. Indeed, '[i]n retrospect, one sometimes wonders, though, just how much of a debate it ever really was'.<sup>80</sup> In short, the three modes have been conflated in the monolithic category of idealism. An understanding of the actual debates conducted in the inter-war period is made difficult by the conflation of different arguments into the dichotomy of idealism and realism.

The classic distinction between idealism and realism has been made in terms of their contrasting attitudes to political power, especially the military power of states. The concentration on power as physical force wielded by the state in realist international relations permitted a reasonably straightforward distinction of realists and idealists: the former acknowledge its central role in politics, the latter neglect it. The distinction was central to the realist challenge to the so-called idealist politics of the inter-war period.

The emphasis on power as the basis and legitimization of realism (and delegitimization of idealism) has reduced the meaning of politics in international relations. This reduction is the most significant factor in the realist/idealist debate. According to the realist critiques, idealism is rooted in a rationalism that is fundamentally apolitical. International theory passed from an idealist rationalisation of politics to a discussion of the importance of power as a mediating principle of inter-state relations and the centrality of the security dilemma. Yet realism retained idealism's opposition of reason and politics. However, what Carr and Morgenthau achieved was merely an inverted preference for power in the dichotomy of power and reason (or justice or peace or welfare).<sup>81</sup> Realism reinforced rather than challenged the defective con-

<sup>79</sup> These are now among the classics of the discipline: E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*; H. Morgenthau, *Scientific man vs. Power Politics*; J. Herz, *Political Realism and Political Idealism* (1951; Chicago, 1959). While Carr refers to utopianism, Morgenthau to liberalism and rationalism, and Herz to idealism, these writers identify a particular body of thought now labelled idealist.

<sup>80</sup> William C. Olson, 'The Growth of a Discipline', in B. Porter (ed.), *The Aberystwyth Papers*, p. 23.

<sup>81</sup> A similar conclusion can be drawn from R. Niebuhr, 'Introduction', *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (New York, 1932). See, particularly, the way in which Morgenthau's critique of rationalism becomes a set of rigid rules in H. Morgenthau, *Power Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 3rd edn (New York, 1965).

ception of politics in idealism.<sup>82</sup>

The three modes of idealism even differ on power, however. The liberal distinction of the state and civil society highlights the differences between the modes of idealism;<sup>83</sup> traditional idealism, noninterventionism and New Liberal internationalism can be distinguished by the attitude to the role of the state that they project onto international relations. Traditional idealism embraces the need for centralized government and the monopoly of legitimate force in a way that trumps the realists. Accepting the logic that peace and order are achievable only through enforcement by the state, traditional idealists turn to the establishment of a super-state to overcome the competition for power among national states. On the other hand, non-interventionists neglect or seek to minimize the importance of power in international relations (and in politics generally). In short, they take a power configuration as given, without questioning how it was established. They assume the beneficence or neutrality of the power of a minimal state 'holding the ring' and defending individual rights. Power wielded other than by legitimate states according to the rule of law is irrational and unjust to noninterventionists. The position of New Liberal internationalists on power is confused compared to these two extremes. Power of the state is used to improve the welfare of society. The state is conceived as an instrument for improving social conditions and therefore its power should be limited to those areas and issues where it can affect welfare positively. However, the functionalist logic of organization implicit in New Liberal internationalism tends to expand state functions. As opposed to the 'peace through law' of noninterventionism, and the 'peace through power' of traditional idealism, then, New Liberal internationalism proposes what might be termed 'peace through organization'.

The aggregation of the different arguments into one idealism has led to a conflation of New Liberal internationalist and traditional idealist proposals for international government.<sup>84</sup> The premises for the establishment of such an institution within traditional idealism and new liberal internationalism are not only not consonant, but are diametrically opposed. While traditional idealism founds its claim for international government on the establishment of order through the super-sovereignty of a unitary world state, New Liberal internationalism hopes for the dissolution of sovereignty through the progressive allocation of functions to relevant organs—not only international but national and sub-national.<sup>85</sup> The international federation of New Liberal internationalism is not a global Leviathan or Great Power concert inexorably seeking power for power's sake.

The monolithic category of idealism as one side of the realism/idealism dichotomy also takes the politics out of international relations thought in the inter-war period.

<sup>82</sup> In the haste to reinstate power (or the passions) alongside or over reason in politics, realism itself became an apolitical theory of international politics. The best example of this is K. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA, 1979). Thus, international theory under the hegemony of realism has been emptied of politics; the choice is between an ideal polity where the common good is administered and an international balance of power operating according to the logic of micro-economics.

<sup>83</sup> The implications of this division for the study of international relations in general are considered in Fred Halliday, 'State and Society in International Relations: A Second Agenda', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 16 (1987).

<sup>84</sup> For examples of the conflation, see Inis Claude, *Power in International Relations* (New York, 1962) and J. Herz, *Political Realism and Political Idealism*.

<sup>85</sup> For example, see Mitrany's critique of Clarence Streit's proposals in *A Working Peace System*, p. 13–16.

The debate was not simply between realists and idealists, but between socialists, liberals and conservatives, internationalists, nationalists, pacifists, and so on. For example, among the so-called idealists, there were important differences between the supporters of an international force (such as David Davies), unreconstructed Cobdenites (such as Norman Angell), Gladstonian Liberals (such as Gilbert Murray), and the Radicals and Socialists (such as Harold Laski). Furthermore, the founding texts of realist international relations, such as Carr's *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, are also effectively depoliticized. After his realist critique of noninterventionism in *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, Carr advocated international planning in *Conditions of Peace*. The collectivist aspect of Carr's critique and proposal for reconstruction is lost in his own realist/utopian dichotomy. Indeed, Carr's collectivist scheme for international planning and his attacks on *laissez-faire* liberalism owed much to writers such as Hobson.<sup>86</sup>

### Conclusion

This paper has examined the category of idealism in the work of J. A. Hobson. To summarize, an analysis of Hobson's critiques of international relations reveals him to be an idealist, according to the usual categorization. However, three distinct approaches underlaid his proposals for world order. Differences among the three modes of idealism render a simple dichotomy of realism and idealism problematic.

Renewed attention to the writings of the so-called idealists of the inter-war period, such as Hobson, would bring a clearer understanding of the development of international theory. The aggregation of 'idealist' writings hinders understanding of the diversity of opinions that during the twenties and thirties. The three modes are a more appropriate starting point for such an inquiry. They are derived from the writings of one of the idealists and reflect some of the different approaches to international issues of the period.

There is more than historical revision at stake, though. The three modes rescue idealist writings from the dustbin of history by highlighting continuities with current international theory. The concepts and concerns of idealist writers remain relevant today. Many idealist proposals are prevalent in current alternatives to realist international theory. Idealist writings can be a resource for international theorists to rediscover the roots of a particular approach or theory, such as functionalism. They can be a way of challenging the claim to a classical tradition of international relations, be that some variant on *realpolitik*, or economic liberalism in current international political economy. Inter-war studies of the relationship of international politics and economics in the inter-war period merit attention. Finally, we live in a rapidly changing world where the dogmas of realism appear inadequate and dated. The progressive, reformist aspects of idealist writings can be of renewed relevance for students of international relations, not only for what was erroneous, but for what was prescient.

<sup>86</sup> Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, ch. 14. Carr's approach is probably too collectivist for the label New Liberal internationalist. None the less, the influence of New Liberal internationalism is clear. For an exploration of Carr's 'idealism', see H. Suganami, *Domestic Analogy and World Order Proposals*, pp. 101–5. Similarly, Morgenthau, in his introduction to the 1966 edition of Mitrany's *A Working Peace System* (Chicago, 1966), advocates functionalism as a route to peace.