

CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

---

Sir Alfred Zimmern Revisited: Fifty Years On

Author(s): D. J. Markwell

Source: *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (Oct., 1986), pp. 279-292

Published by: [Cambridge University Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20097090>

Accessed: 10/08/2011 10:49

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at  
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Cambridge University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Review of International Studies*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

## Sir Alfred Zimmern revisited: fifty years on

D. J. MARKWELL

The publication in 1936 of Sir Alfred Zimmern's *The League of Nations and the Rule of Law* is now, fifty years on, little mentioned. It was 'perhaps . . . the most polished work of the "idealist" writers' who dominated the academic study of international politics in Britain and America for most of the inter-war years;<sup>1</sup> and Zimmern (then Montague Burton Professor of International Relations in Oxford) was 'the most influential representative of our field' in that period.<sup>2</sup>

It is largely because of the failure of the experiment in international co-operation, especially the League, in which Zimmern and others had placed so much transparent hope, that the idealist writings of that era do not demand more of our attention today. Their simplicity and innocence was savaged, and their influence destroyed, by writers of the self-proclaimed 'realist' school whose stress on power politics seemed more attuned to the times. Most importantly, E. H. Carr's *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, first published in 1939, was a direct assault on Zimmern and his ilk.

The few biographical sketches of Zimmern that exist are invariably short. It is thus necessary, first, to provide an account of his life. Because *The League of Nations and the Rule of Law* was both Zimmern's most important work on international relations and one of the outstanding works in this field in the inter-war years, the second part of the article will draw out five themes from it, illustrating them with some reference to Zimmern's other writings. The concluding section will comment on Zimmern's approach to the academic study of international relations.

### The life of Sir Alfred Zimmern<sup>3</sup>

Zimmern was born in Surbiton in 1879. His father was of German–Jewish parentage, his mother of Huguenot ancestry; his interest in international affairs, especially nationality issues, and his liberal tendencies are therefore not surprising. Though Jewish by paternal ancestry and with an early interest in Zionism, Zimmern grew up a Christian.<sup>4</sup> Some of his writings stress Christian values, and he took an active interest in the World Council of Churches in the 1940s. In 1931 he disregarded a plea from Lewis Namier that he should remember 'the Jews and your own Zionist past' by taking 'charge of the Zionist movement at Oxford'.<sup>5</sup>

In 1898, Zimmern went as a scholar from Winchester to New College, Oxford, and read classics, taking a first in 1902. He stayed on at New College, for a year as lecturer in ancient history, and from 1904 to 1909 as fellow and tutor. A brilliant and stimulating teacher, Zimmern became involved, from 1907, in 'working class education'.<sup>6</sup>

Wanting more time to write and to broaden his range of activities, he left New College in 1909. Financed by his father, he travelled to Greece, where he wrote *The Greek Commonwealth* (1911). This study of 5th century Athens 'quickly won a world-wide reputation'<sup>7</sup> and is still widely known. In 1928, Marcus N. Tod wrote that 'few writers, if any, have more effectively interpreted to the present generation the

charm and value of Hellenic studies than Mr. Zimmern'.<sup>8</sup> This was, in part, through drawing parallels between the ancient and modern worlds, and Zimmern's later writings contain many classical metaphors and illustrations.

After a brief lectureship in sociology at the London School of Economics, and some months in the United States, Zimmern served from 1912 to 1915 as an inspector of the Board of Education. Already evident was his inability to devote himself for a long period to one task. After the success of *The Greek Commonwealth* he embarked on a parallel work, *The Modern Commonwealth*, and began reading Erasmus. But Zimmern gave up the project more than once and, in fact, never completed it.

By the First World War, Zimmern was a part of 'the Labour intelligentsia'.<sup>9</sup> Late in 1914, he and four others prepared a citizens' guide to 'the underlying causes and issues of the war' which declared that 'all that is worth living for depends upon the outcome of this war'.<sup>10</sup> One of Zimmern's co-authors was R. W. Seton-Watson. Zimmern contributed to his weekly, *The New Europe* (1916–1920), which advocated national self-determination and 'a League of Nations to prevent future wars'.<sup>11</sup> Zimmern was also involved with *The Round Table*, which advocated federation of 'the British Commonwealth'.<sup>12</sup>

Zimmern spent part of the war working in the Ministry of Reconstruction and, in 1918–19, in the Political Intelligence Department (P.I.D.) of the Foreign Office, where he influenced 'policy towards the liberation of subject peoples and persecuted minorities' in Europe,<sup>13</sup> and also influenced British thinking on the League of Nations.

At the first annual meeting of the League of Nations Society in July 1917, Zimmern advocated 'a treaty that made war a crime in any circumstances'.<sup>14</sup> Before the Armistice he served (with, amongst others, H. G. Wells) on a League of Nations Union research committee.<sup>15</sup> But, above all, in late 1918 Zimmern wrote 'a Foreign Office memorandum' on the League of Nations. It was this draft which laid the basis of the so-called 'Cecil draft'—the 'brief conspectus on [the] League of Nations organisation' which the British took to Paris.<sup>16</sup> In February 1919 the head of P.I.D., James (later Sir James) Headlam-Morley, wrote from Paris:

The League of Nations scheme, which is now public, derives all the merit which is in it from our people, starting with Zimmern and Percy, and carried on with great energy by Cecil.<sup>17</sup>

Zimmern was one of the members of P.I.D. who went to the Paris Peace Conference 'for short periods when special questions came up'.<sup>18</sup> Like Keynes, he urged the lifting of the blockade of Germany and he was also very critical of the reparations provisions of the peace. But Zimmern believed that 'the political clauses, on the whole, were very good and "pretty defensible"'.<sup>19</sup> H. G. Wells was bewildered that Gilbert Murray and Zimmern, who had sought so much more, because 'eager apologists' for what he regarded as the 'powerless', 'sham' League created at Paris.<sup>20</sup>

In 1919, Zimmern was appointed to be the first Wilson professor of international politics at Aberystwyth.<sup>21</sup> During his time at Aberystwyth, Zimmern helped to found the Institute (later Royal Institute) of International Affairs in London and his links with it were continued over many years. In 1921, a political commentator named him as 'the ideal Prime Minister'; journalists sometimes recycled this label.<sup>22</sup>

At Aberystwyth, Zimmern was a popular lecturer; but, as Brian Porter put it, 'during his two years [there] Zimmern succeeded both in learning Welsh and in marrying the wife of another professor. But the distinction of having acquired the language was more than outweighed by the opprobrium of having acquired the lady, and so he was prevailed upon to resign.'<sup>23</sup>

After attending the September 1921 sessions of the League at Geneva, Zimmern and his wife went to America, spending 1922–23 at Cornell. While in the USA, Zimmern completed *Europe in Convalescence* (1922), which was, in part, conceived as an attack on Lloyd George. During the Labour Government of 1924, he joined the Labour Party, and unsuccessfully contested the October 1924 election as Labour's candidate against Lloyd George himself.<sup>24</sup>

For the rest of the decade, Zimmern's work was principally in Paris and Geneva. From 1926 to 1930, he served as deputy director of the League's Institute of Intellectual Co-operation in Paris, which 'dedicated much of its work to the discussion of international relations as an academic discipline'.<sup>25</sup> From 1924 on, Zimmern and his wife conducted a summer school of international studies in Geneva, which sought to instil in graduates from around the world an 'attitude of mind' and 'personality' attuned to 'international co-operation'.<sup>26</sup> These immensely popular schools continued until 1939 and gave Zimmern the occasion to watch closely session after session of the League.

Zimmern also watched closely the evolution of the British Empire into the (British) Commonwealth of Nations.<sup>27</sup> J. D. B. Miller suggests that Zimmern's ideas had some influence on the Imperial Conference of 1926.<sup>28</sup> In the 1930s, Zimmern attended at least two major, though unofficial, conferences on Commonwealth relations, in 1933 and 1938.

By this time, Zimmern was (the first) Montague Burton professor of international relations at Oxford. Montague Burton, knighted in 1931, was a Lithuanian Jew who, coming to England at the age of 14 or 15, built from nothing 'the largest men's clothing organization in the world'.<sup>29</sup> With a passion for industrial and international peace, Burton endowed chairs in industrial and in international relations, the latter in Jerusalem, Oxford, Edinburgh and, on a different financial basis, London. In August 1930 Zimmern was appointed to the Oxford chair. Reginald (later Sir Reginald) Coupland wrote: 'It was a foregone conclusion when you decided to stand'.<sup>30</sup>

In Oxford, Zimmern introduced a (very popular) course in 'international politics' as an 'optional special subject in P.P.E.'.<sup>31</sup> In March 1933 Zimmern condemned the Oxford Union's 'King and Country' motion, which he believed 'helped to intensify the reign of terrorism in Germany'.<sup>32</sup> I can find in Zimmern's correspondence nothing to corroborate Sir Maurice Bowra's recollection that Zimmern 'welcomed Hitler's advent to power because it would reveal his incapacity to the world and finally discredit him'.<sup>33</sup>

Though very active in Chatham House affairs, Zimmern failed to produce *The Modern Commonwealth* for which he had received much help and encouragement from Arnold Toynbee. But he did publish *The League of Nations and the Rule of Law*—completed late in 1935, published early in 1936 (shortly after the announcement of his knighthood) and with a second edition in 1939. He also published in 1939 *Spiritual Values in World Affairs*. During World War II, when Chatham House moved to Balliol, Zimmern worked in its foreign research and press service, which did much work for the Foreign Office. In 1943, this service was moved to London and became the Foreign Office Research Department; Zimmern served from 1943 to 1945 as its Deputy Director (under Toynbee).<sup>34</sup> In 1944, he retired as Montague Burton professor and was succeeded by the diplomatic historian E. L. (later Sir Llewellyn) Woodward.<sup>35</sup>

In 1945 Zimmern was secretary-general of the constituent conference of UNESCO and served also as adviser on information and external relations to the Ministry of Education in London. In 1945–46, he served as the first executive secretary,

afterwards adviser, to the Preparatory Commission for UNESCO. Zimmern advocated a long-term programme of help in literacy education to 'the under-privileged countries'.<sup>36</sup>

In 1947, Zimmern went to Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut as visiting professor. He had long had close links with the USA and after World War II strongly supported its international mission. Zimmern lived in the US until his death a decade later.<sup>37</sup> In 1948 he became director of the Hartford Study Centre for World Affairs; he was a driving force behind a local council for UNESCO, and played a role in the U.S. National Commission for UNESCO. From 1950, when he took a post at the American International College at Springfield, Massachusetts, he shared his time between Hartford and Springfield. It was in this small-town New England environment that Zimmern wrote his last book, *The American Road to World Peace* (1953), in which he argued that the US was the world's first *free* great power, that the future lay in her hands, and that she should give the lead to the creation of a powerful United Nations with a strong executive.

### The League of Nations and the Rule of Law

After describing the major elements of the pre-1914 system of international relations, *The League of Nations and the Rule of Law* gives an account of how the Covenant was written, drawing out 'five strands' in it:

1. An improved and enlarged Concert of the Powers, using the method of regular Conference.
2. . . . all-round mutual guarantees of territorial integrity and independence.
3. An improved Hague Conference system of Mediation, Conciliation and Inquiry . . .
4. An improvement and co-ordination of the Universal Postal Union and other similar arrangements for the carrying on of world services and the administration of world public utilities . . .
5. An agency for the mobilisation of the Hue and Cry against war as a matter of universal concern and a crime against the world community.<sup>38</sup>

Zimmern's 'Foreign Office memorandum' attached great importance to two of these 'elements of the covenant'.<sup>39</sup> First, there would be a 'standing inter[national] Conference'—an improved Concert of Europe. Second, there would be 'a *guarantee of peace* or . . . the principle of the Hue and Cry', that is, that all the states must share 'in the task of ensuring peace and restraining resort to violence'. However, the covenant as settled at Paris got both these two essentials wrong: the Council of the League was to include lesser powers, and there was no *guarantee* of peace but a gap left open for war.

Seeing that the League was 'the maximum of co-operation between governments at any given moment',<sup>40</sup> Zimmern declares:

. . . the Covenant *assumes* . . . a transformation of Power-politics into Responsibility-politics, or, at the very least, a sincere and consistent effort on the part of the Great Powers to begin to face the innumerable tasks of adjustment which such a transformation would carry with it.<sup>41</sup>

After the League's unhappy beginning, Zimmern saw the Locarno diplomacy as restoring it as 'a centre for a standing conference between the powers' in 'a spirit of co-operation', and 'the moral ascendancy of the League' at its zenith with the settlement of the Graeco-Bulgarian dispute of 1925.<sup>42</sup> Alongside this improved Concert of Europe came Zimmern's long-sought 'guarantee of peace'—the Kellogg-Briand Pact.

But Zimmern argued that, with the onset of the depression, the League failed to meet the challenges of the Manchurian crisis, the Chaco War and, as he wrote, the Abyssinian crisis. He urged Britain and France to raise a 'hue and cry' against Italian aggression:

If not, then the sense of community, in reliance on which the League was established, has been tried and found wanting and . . . Force still reigns supreme.<sup>43</sup>

*The League of Nations and the Rule of Law* remains worth reading as a history of the League. But 'all discussions of international politics . . . proceed upon theoretical assumptions';<sup>44</sup> and this work is no exception. There are five aspects I wish to highlight: first, Zimmern's belief in progress; second, his assumption of latent harmony of interest between states; third, his understanding of the rule of law and its dependence on international society; fourth, his notion of international society; and fifth, the remedies he proposes.

What is most striking about *The League of Nations and the Rule of Law* is the underlying belief that progress is possible in international relations and might already be far advanced. (Zimmern had intended to call the book *Towards the Rule of Law: A Study of the League of Nations*.)<sup>45</sup> There is an 'old order' and a new one; the present is 'a period of transition'<sup>46</sup> towards a future 'the possibilities of which were not limited by the test of previous experience but were deducible from the needs of progress'.<sup>47</sup> These needs were to establish 'the rule of law, as we understand the term in this country, . . . in the sphere of international relations';<sup>48</sup> and to replace 'power-politics' with 'responsibility-politics', that is, to replace conflict with co-operation between states. 'Power politics' was not the natural and inevitable condition of international politics, and the 'great powers' could and should become the 'great responsables'.<sup>49</sup>

Aside from the denigration of the past involved in this approach, it assumes that through human thinking and will future politics can be made very different from that of the past, and that the present is or should be a transition between them. This progressivist assumption is not just that certain aspects of international relations can be improved, but that the very nature of international relations can be changed from conflict to co-operation. In 1919 Zimmern told a League of Nations Union meeting that 'the cause which they were met to promote was in harmony with the nature of things, and whether in the long run or the short run it would prevail'.<sup>50</sup>

Because the future is unknown, it is not possible to show that progress in international politics is, in the strictest sense of the word, impossible. In this narrow sense, Zimmern was right to quote Herodotus's assertion that 'anything might happen in the immensity of time'.<sup>51</sup> But it is, and long has been, plausible to argue that there has been no such progress in the past, and so the probability of progress in the future is so small that it must, for all practical purposes, be discounted. Certainly the disinterested scholar must assess the possibility and probability of progress in the light of what has proven possible in the past, and it is surely folly to base policy prescriptions on belief in the likelihood of something that it has not proven possible to achieve before.

Yet Zimmern does not subject his faith in the possibility and probability of progress to any rigorous demand for evidence or proof. Indeed, at times he declares it brazenly in the face of all the evidence: he described 1924 to 1929 as 'the most successful period—*let us be bold and say the most normal period*—which the League has yet passed through. They were marked by a spirit of co-operation between the European Great Powers, . . . cemented by a happy personal relationship'.<sup>52</sup>

Zimmern had written in 1928 that, whereas 'Machiavelli could cast his eye over the troubled record of history . . . and dogmatize on the futility of dreams of universal peace', 'the modern student of history . . . has learnt enough of the past to know that the present is totally unlike it'.<sup>53</sup> As Dr Johnson said of second marriages: 'This is the triumph of hope over experience.'

Although Leonard Woolf and others argue that 'realism' also has 'utopian' aspects,<sup>54</sup> it is this progressivist assumption that qualifies Zimmern and others for the label 'idealist'. Zimmern, it seems, did not reject it.<sup>55</sup> He did, however, dismiss much of the 'League of Nations movement' as utopian;<sup>56</sup> and to Leonard Woolf, reviewing *The League of Nations and the Rule of Law* (with much acerbity) in 1936, 'its main object seem[ed] to be to prove that the League has been a failure, that it was bound to be so, and that anyone who "believes in" or "supports" it is one of the "discordant congregation" of impossible "idealists"'. But Woolf himself acknowledged that they both believed 'that unless the Great States exchange their power politics for a system of international law and order . . ., international society, as we know it, and with it civilisation will be destroyed'.<sup>57</sup> It is the belief that this 'exchange' was a practical possibility that marks both Zimmern and Woolf as 'idealists', whose differences in 1936 seem, fifty years on, far less important than their similarities; and so they seemed to such as E. H. Carr at the time.

The second aspect of Zimmern's approach to consider is his understanding of the forces at work in international politics. Focusing on the solution rather than the problem, Zimmern does not subject the causes of conflict to much scrutiny; this is dispensed with by equating 'power politics' with the past and with some 'old-fashioned' states, and equating 'responsibility politics' (or co-operation) with the future and with other states.

Zimmern is enabled to do this by the assumption that there is no natural or necessary conflict of interests between states. Though he explicitly deprecated what he called 'the wicked theory of the mutual incompatibility of nations',<sup>58</sup> the classical liberal assumption of latent harmony is more usually implicit in his writings. 'There is always a sensible way of dealing with public matters [including 'international problems'] if statesmen and peoples will be sensible enough to look for it'.<sup>59</sup> Though stressing economic causes of conflict (a common theme in the 1930s), Zimmern believed that co-operative solutions could be found to economic problems.<sup>60</sup> In this, as in so many ways, his thought ran parallel to Keynes's. In *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, Carr takes up this point:

If mankind in its international relations has signally failed to achieve the rational good, it must either have been too stupid to understand that good, or too wicked to pursue it. Professor Zimmern leans to the hypothesis of stupidity . . . Professor Toynbee, on the other hand, sees the causes of the breakdown in human wickedness.<sup>61</sup>

But Carr responds that 'it is not true . . . that we have been living in an exceptionally wicked age', nor, 'as Professor Zimmern implies, . . . in an exceptionally stupid one'.

For Zimmern, the objective and test of all 'schemes or suggestions for dealing with' international problems was establishing 'the rule of law . . . in . . . international relations'.<sup>62</sup> This is the third aspect of his approach that warrants attention. By 'the rule of law' Zimmern means that there will be established internationally the same sense of 'community interest in preventing and punishing breaches of the peace' which exists domestically.<sup>63</sup> This is to be brought about by states accepting an obligation not to settle their disputes by force, and by the principle of the 'hue and

cry'. Zimmern saw these commitments as being imperfectly embodied in the covenant, but being strengthened by the Washington and Locarno Treaties, and by the Kellogg–Briand Pact. The question in the 1930s was whether they were to be enforced, for without such enforcement there was no rule of law. (Thus 'idealists', like Zimmern and Keynes, who favoured the 'appeasement' of Germany in the 1920s, especially on economic issues, opposed 'appeasement' in the 1930s.)

In *The League of Nations and the Rule of Law*,<sup>64</sup> Zimmern stressed that a 'hue and cry' assumed 'a sense of solidarity, of common interest in the restraint of violence, transcending the boundaries of states great and small'. In the late 1920s, Zimmern says, there was a 'dawning sense of the social solidarity of mankind'. But, as the vision failed, he concluded that 'the general cause for the breakdown of the new international system was the absence of any real sense of social solidarity between the leading peoples of the world'.

Allied to this is Zimmern's recurrent theme that the rule of law in international relations depends on the existence of an international society. In contrast to the view of law as the command of a sovereign, Zimmern sees it as 'the formulation of the will of the community'.<sup>65</sup> He argues that 'if there is no international society there cannot, except by a very forced and artificial use of the word, be a system of international law'. Zimmern argued in 1934 that the failure of the League over Manchuria 'revealed that there does not yet exist anything worthy of being described as a world-wide social consciousness'. Thus he later declared that 'positive international law, so-called, has no claim to the name of law'.<sup>66</sup> In essence, his scepticism about international law derives from doubting 'the will of the [international] community behind the law',<sup>67</sup> and indeed the existence of such a community at all.

If the existence of a community will is the true test of law, then clearly much of the municipal law of many countries—for example, relating to industrial relations—is not law. Zimmern's colleague, J. L. Brierly, responded in 1944:

The best evidence for the existence of international law is that every actual state recognizes that it does exist and that it is itself under an obligation to observe it. States may often violate international law, just as individuals often violate municipal law; but no more than individuals do states defend their violations by claiming that they are above the law.<sup>68</sup>

Brierly points to the 'very important' matters of difference between states settled through 'the processes of law'. This, he says, is possible because 'experience shows' that it can 'be assumed that states do generally' observe treaties and acknowledge rules of law and judicial decisions. It is, on this view, possible for international law to exist and operate—with much effectiveness in matters of 'low politics' and some in matters of 'high politics'—without the existence of a world community and a community will as much developed as Zimmern requires.

This leads us to our fourth point: Zimmern's notion of international society. Zimmern did not see as important the distinction Bull has made between 'international society' in the sense of 'a group of *states* . . . [which] conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules . . .' and a 'world community' of *individuals* or 'great society of all mankind'.<sup>69</sup> What enabled him to place so little stress on this distinction was his belief that foreign policy is under popular control.<sup>70</sup>

In the 1930s, Zimmern denied the existence of a universal 'international society', saying that 'the first thing that any sociologist, landing on this globe from another planet, would note is that when men use the first person plural about political or social matters, . . . they are never speaking of mankind as a whole'.<sup>71</sup> By this test, one could not talk of an international society today; and yet we do, and we argue that



there are important elements of 'society' in contemporary international relations. In placing such emphasis on the consciousness of individuals—and on attempting to change that consciousness—Zimmern avoided close study of the other factors (such as international law and the balance of power) which might promote a sense of society between *states* or which might, even in the absence of that sense of society, promote order.

If there is not a world or international society, then what does Zimmern find? He saw the world of the 1930s as divided into two blocs—on the one hand, the 'welfare states' (which 'think of government in terms of responsibility') and, on the other, the 'power states' (which think of it 'in terms of force').<sup>72</sup> (There is a clear parallel with Keynes's 1936 distinction between the 'pacific powers' and 'the brigand powers',<sup>73</sup> and with Kant's 'idea that the constitutional state . . . is capable of international virtue in a way in which the absolutist state is not'.<sup>74</sup>)

In 1934, Zimmern declared:

. . . we cannot at present hope to establish stability for the world's life or a permanent foundation for world-order by means of an association between states of these two fundamentally different types . . . . The welfare state is co-operative by its very nature . . . . But the power state, which represses co-operation at home, can have little desire or facility for practising it beyond its own sovereign border. Power politics, in fact, are not co-operative but fiercely competitive . . . . In the play between power politics and welfare politics at Geneva, . . . power politics have prevailed . . .<sup>75</sup>

In short, Zimmern saw the forces of 'power politics', no longer distributed among all the nations as in the 19th century, but concentrated in the revisionist states—especially Germany, Italy and Japan—and 'the hopes for the forward march of mankind [resting] with the fortunes of Britain and France' and, especially later, the USA.<sup>76</sup>

Carr takes up this point:

Having divided existing states . . . into those which pursue 'welfare' and those which pursue 'power', Professor Zimmern revealingly adds that 'the welfare states, taken together, enjoy a preponderance of power and resources over the power states', thereby leading us infallibly to the correct conclusion that 'welfare states' are states which, already enjoying a preponderance of power, are not primarily concerned to increase it, and can therefore afford butter, and 'power states' those which, being inferior in power, are primarily concerned to increase it, and devote the major part of their resources to this end.<sup>77</sup>

Where Zimmern chastises revisionist states for not accepting the rule of the League and of international law, Carr ridicules the expectation that such states should accept what it is not in their national interest to accept. What Zimmern fails to understand, in the Carr view, is that his notion of 'the rule of law' is not the virtue in itself which Zimmern believes, but is in fact the special interest of the status quo powers.

In this view, international law in the inter-war years expressed the interests of the major victorious allies of 1918, and the interests of other states lay in revision of this political outcome embodied in 'law'. To Zimmern, the First World War, though a catastrophic breakdown of 'the old order', was a just war, especially for peaceful and democratic values and national self-determination; the peace that followed it was, in its territorial aspects, just and defensible (and the injustice of the reparations provisions was overcome in the 1920s). Thus, to Zimmern, the post-war order was legitimate and just; and the law must be upheld and peace preserved.<sup>78</sup>

Carr is surely right to highlight Zimmern's breezy association of the interests of certain states (Britain and France) with the interests of all (or vice versa). But, of course, an international order erected by the revisionist powers would also be 'tainted with their own purposes', and there is good reason to prefer the hegemony of Zimmern's 'welfare states' to that of the 'power states'.<sup>79</sup>

The fifth question we must consider is this: What is Zimmern's remedy to this absence of world society and the division of the world into these two blocs? For, despite his disappointment, tinged with bitterness, he did not abandon hope. There are three key elements to his thinking: first, resistance to the 'power states' ('the hue and cry'); second, the creation of international society (bringing with it the rule of law); and, third, the abolition of war.

With the rise of Hitler, Zimmern wrote: 'it was no longer a question of [the League] adopting common measures for the welfare of Europe and of the world, but of' choosing appeasement or resistance.<sup>80</sup> Zimmern favoured firm resistance to violators of the peace (though he found merit in the Munich settlement, in that Britain was now committed 'in favour of the post-[Great] war set-up in Central Europe'.<sup>81</sup>)

Zimmern wanted 'an order arising out of co-operation between welfare states',<sup>82</sup> and he saw a nascent international society between them. It was this that had to be promoted, through promoting the world consciousness of individuals. Zimmern said in 1937:

. . . it is the common man who counts in international relations . . . [and] who decides the issues of peace and war . . . . It is to the common man that we must address ourselves if we would make progress towards the establishment of the Rule of Law in world-affairs . . .<sup>83</sup>

What the 'common man' needed was education in international affairs, so that he was able to exert control in the right direction on his country's foreign policy. In the short-term, an ignorant British public (which was slow to understand the need to resist the 'power states') was, through its great influence on foreign policy, having an adverse effect. As 'each of the peoples, in its ignorance, generally desires peace *on its own terms*', popular control of foreign policy in various countries 'has had the immediate effect of intensifying existing differences and creating new areas of friction'.<sup>84</sup> Zimmern sometimes believed that what was needed was education, not just of the mind, but also of the heart, to produce a 'spiritual revolution'.<sup>85</sup> Zimmern's belief that education in mental attitudes attuned to co-operation could overcome power politics seems far-fetched. It was unlikely that such exhortations to virtue would succeed anywhere. Yet, even if successful in the welfare states, what good could be done in the power states, where the common man has no voice?

Zimmern hoped that out of the social solidarity of the welfare states (especially the British Commonwealth) would grow, over time, a social solidarity of the whole world.<sup>86</sup> In this, Zimmern was but a successor to many idealists of peace of earlier centuries. Thus, there is some echo of Kant's idea of 'a pacific federation . . . , extending gradually to encompass all states and thus leading to perpetual peace'.<sup>87</sup> This is also echoed in Zimmern's recurrent theme that it is both necessary and possible to abolish war. As early as 1905, Coupland wrote to him:

. . . as you say, it does look as if there is no room for war now that the world has been finally divided up; and I *suppose* our alliance with Japan is really a safeguard of peace. Anyhow I agree *warmly* when you say that [the] XXth. cent[ury] *must* witness the abolition of war.<sup>88</sup>

A 1934 newspaper report of comments by Zimmern says:

How could we get the interdependent but chaotic world to work together? . . . the first step . . . was to get assured peace—an absolute certainty that there would be no more wars. The next step was to secure respect for law as law; and then, when every one was assured that treaties would be rigidly observed, means would be discovered for changing treaties peacefully where necessary.<sup>89</sup>

This surely puts the cart before the horse: abolishing war without first having removed the causes of war. His insistence that treaties 'be rigidly enforced', like his notion that 'order precedes justice',<sup>90</sup> is the doctrine of the satisfied. Zimmern does not clearly explain the 'peaceful change' that he envisages: 'a system of cooperation' in which the representatives of states 'negotiate freely about their rights, in a spirit of mutual confidence and respect'.<sup>91</sup> Nor does he clarify the contradiction between, on the one hand, wanting the immediate and permanent end to war and, on the other hand, wanting to resist (by force if need be) breaches of the peace by the 'power states'.

In the war of ideas, the triumph of the 'realists' was resounding. It seems that Zimmern made no reply to *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, though Sir Norman Angell did.<sup>92</sup> Angell conceded that Carr 'may, of course, be right', but he condemned the defeatism of the realist position as harmful to Britain's war effort. As Martin Wight said, 'it is not a good argument for a theory of international politics that we shall be driven to despair if we do not accept it'.<sup>93</sup>

The idealism of the inter-war years has had echoes in the post-war world. Above all, 'in the 1940s and 1950s the United States became heir to the tendency to identify its own interests with those of the world at large', and provided impetus to the creation and early operation of the United Nations.<sup>94</sup> The intention to create a 'rule of law' in international relations, enforced by the Security Council, is clearly evident in many (now largely neglected) provisions of the U.N. Charter; and the Security Council was intended to be that Concert of Powers Zimmern thought the League needed.

Zimmern, who, as we have seen, lived in the United States from 1947 until his death in 1957, fully identified himself with this American utopianism. He regarded the Soviet Union as a 'non-cooperative' power, 'working to sabotage the United Nations'.<sup>95</sup> He strongly supported the USA in the cold war. He believed, for instance, that the USA/UN forces in Korea were fighting for 'the rule of law in the Far East and the rest of the world'.<sup>96</sup> And he believed that 'World Order under the Rule of Law will be established'.<sup>97</sup> He wanted this done by the promotion by the USA of the development of the UN into a constitutional instrument with a powerful executive of its own.<sup>98</sup> Zimmern believed that this would be promoted by the atomic bomb because, 'with a common fear of destruction which will omit no one, the psychological block to a world law is removed'.<sup>99</sup>

Despite the failure of Zimmern's own visions, the progressivist assumption is apparent today in the continuing stream of utopian internationalism, including those who seek to promote the 'rule of law' in world affairs. Furthermore, there are clear parallels between Zimmern and what Bull called the 'neo-idealist' school; such diverse writers as Richard Falk, Joseph Nye and Robert Keohane, Raymond Vernon, Richard Cooper and Miriam Camps<sup>100</sup> have in common certain assumptions which they share with Zimmern—a stress on the growth of international interdependence, an emphasis on economic factors in world politics, a questioning or denigration of the utility of force in international relations, and a commitment to the global spread of western liberal values. Yet hardly more than the inter-war years do the post-war

decades offer evidence that it is possible to replace the conflictual element in international politics with global co-operation.

### Sir Alfred Zimmern and the academic study of international relations

That Zimmern was unable to detach himself from the interests and values of his own place and time is evident, on the one hand, in his reference to 'the rule of law, as we understand the term in this country';<sup>101</sup> and, on the other, in his declaration (in his inaugural lecture) that 'the international relations with which we are concerned are . . . the relations between peoples at the present time'.<sup>102</sup> *The League of Nations and the Rule of Law* reflects this preoccupation with the present, but it may also reflect the danger in such an approach: it is time-bound, dominated by the events and spirit of its day; and Zimmern's preoccupation with the present clearly led him to exaggerate its uniqueness.

It might well be asked how it was that a noted scholar of ancient Greece, such as Zimmern was, could (as it seems to us now) fail so badly to see his own time in the context of history. In Zimmern's case, part of the answer is that he carried his own values too much to the study of ancient Greece just as he did to the study of his own day, and that he idealized the achievement of the former and the opportunities of the latter. Certainly some classicists regard *The Greek Commonwealth* in that light. For instance, one suggests that Zimmern obscured the 'uglier side to slavery in Greece', and wrote too 'enthusiastically' of the generosity of the rich 'to do honour to their city': 'the reality [of such generosity] was somewhat different and the bright picture decidedly tarnished'.<sup>103</sup>

C. A. W. Manning once referred to the good fortune of Zimmern's students that 'it seems never to have occurred to him to try to make his subject look like economic theory'<sup>104</sup> (and Zimmern was Hedley Bull's first example of the 'classical', rather than the 'scientific', approach in action).<sup>105</sup> Yet Zimmern described himself as a 'political scientist', and frequently referred to his approach as 'scientific'.<sup>106</sup> In the early 1930s, he wrote:

. . . that politics can be studied in Universities, in as scientific a spirit as any other subject of study, whether human or natural, is a proposition which does not admit of discussion in a University such as Oxford, which has been a home of such studies since the days of Occam in the thirteenth century . . .<sup>107</sup>

This reflects a much broader tendency of scholars, most notably historians, of that and some earlier generations to believe that 'scientific' accounts and analyses of human affairs were possible.<sup>108</sup> To the extent that Zimmern was advocating a *scholarly* approach, with high standards of precision and proof, his words are to be applauded (though his own approach is open to much criticism on these grounds). But if Zimmern wished it to be believed (as one sometimes suspects he did) that international relations was amenable to rigour of the order possible in the natural sciences (so that *his* views as an 'expert' in it carried special authority), his words are empty pretension.

Zimmern's approach is not that of the detached scholar aiming at an objective analysis of what is, but of the politically committed academic aiming to help bring about what he thinks should be. This is the very essence of his approach—to bring about that 'international mind' or 'world consciousness' which, in his view, is the key to instituting the rule of law and peace ever after.

In his inaugural lecture in February 1931 Zimmern spoke of 'a Chair for the preaching of International Relations'.<sup>109</sup> On Zimmern's retirement as professor and

his replacement by the diplomatic historian, E. L. Woodward, Gilbert Murray wrote to Zimmern:

It is a sad thought, to think that your professorship is over and that your chair will be filled by an ordinary scholarly historian without any special faith or inspiration or even interest in the League of Nations movement . . . Well, I suppose we must say it is the end of an epoch: the age of the Apostles superseded by that of the Church Historians. You had genius and faith, and those qualities cannot be got in the ordinary market.<sup>110</sup>

This faith may have seemed admirable to many in its day; but it is not scholarship. If only in its unquestioning faith in the possibility of progress, Zimmern's work reflects the danger to academic inquiry of the pursuit of extraneous purposes.

### Summary

Zimmern was an important figure in establishing international relations as a subject for academic study, above all in Oxford. His writings are still of value as a guide to the events and thought of their time. They contributed much to the clash of ideas—the remorseless dialectic—through which the theory of international relations has been evolving (though this was more by expounding a position that was subject to devastating attack than by raising great questions of continuing importance).

Zimmern's thinking was not especially deep or distinctive. Its lack of depth is reflected in his inability (or refusal) to stand back from his own aspirations for his own times. His assumptions—above all, the belief in progress—were shared by many others, before and since. Indeed, it is as one of the most polished academic exponents of the 'idealist' vision of the inter-war years, and as an important 20th century example of the idealist tradition of thought about international relations, that Zimmern should be remembered; but it is, perhaps, as a warning against exaggerating the uniqueness of *our* times that his work has its greatest value today.

### References and notes

1. Brian Porter (ed.), *The Aberystwyth Papers: International Politics 1919–1969* (Oxford, 1972) p. 34.
2. Hans Morgenthau and Kenneth Thompson (eds.), *Principles and Problems of International Politics: Selected Readings* (New York, 1950) p. 18.
3. As well as the Zimmern papers in the Bodleian Library, Oxford (hereafter MS Zimmern), see *Dictionary of National Biography (DNB)*, 1951–1960; *The Times*, 25 November 1957 p. 12; Arnold Toynbee, *Acquaintances* (Oxford, 1967); *Who Was Who*, 1951–1960, p. 1206; Sir James Headlam-Morley, *A Memoir of the Paris Peace Conference 1919* (London, 1972) p. 214.
4. MS Zimmern 10 fol. 130; MS Zimmern 11 fol. 95–6; MS Zimmern 15 fol. 146; MS Zimmern 169, passim; MS Zimmern 147 fol. 228.
5. MS Zimmern 25 fol. 35.
6. See, e.g., Albert Mansbridge, *Fellow Men* (London, 1948) pp. 44, 73.
7. *DNB*, 1951–1960, p. 1096.
8. *The Classical Review*, xliii (1929) p. 128.
9. Maurice Cowling, *The Impact of Labour 1920–1924* (Cambridge, 1971) p. 27.
10. R. W. Seton-Watson et al., *The War and Democracy* (London, 1915) p. vii–viii.
11. Porter, op. cit. note 1, pp. 216, 373–4.
12. Toynbee, op. cit. note 3, pp. 129–30.
13. *DNB*, 1951–1960, p. 1096.
14. Henry R. Winkler, *The League of Nations Movement in Great Britain 1914–1919* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1952) pp. 65–6.
15. See *ibid.*, p. 80.
16. See A. E. Zimmern, *The League of Nations and the Rule of Law 1918–1935* (henceforth *The League*) (London, 1936) pp. 189–208. MS Zimmern 114 fol. 84ff. MS Zimmern 72 fol. 138–43.

17. Headlam-Morley, *op. cit.* note 3, p. 31.
18. *Ibid.*, p. xlii.
19. *South Wales Argus*, 5 March 1921 (clipping in MS Zimmern 179).
20. H. G. Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography* (London, 1934) p. 715.
21. See E. L. Ellis, *The University College of Wales Aberystwyth 1872-1972* (Cardiff, 1972) pp. 197-8, 208, 217, 221. Porter, *op. cit.* note 1, pp. 86-7, 361-2.
22. See, e.g., *The Star* (Toronto), 9 March 1925 (clipping in MS Zimmern 179).
23. Porter, *op. cit.* note 1, p. 362.
24. Peter Rowland, *Lloyd George* (London, 1975) pp. 607, 614.
25. Hans Morgenthau, *Dilemmas of Politics* (Chicago, 1958) pp. 89-90.
26. MS Zimmern 117 fol. 22ff. On the Geneva Institute of International Relations, see S. H. Bailey, *International Studies in Modern Education* (Oxford, 1938) p. 247, and the series, *Problems of Peace*.
27. See, esp., A. E. Zimmern, *The Third British Empire* (Oxford, 1926).
28. Roger Morgan (ed.), *The Study of International Affairs* (Oxford, 1972) p. 142.
29. *DNB*, 1951-1960, pp. 164-5.
30. MS Zimmern 24 fol. 30; see also fol. 34, 94.
31. MS Zimmern 116 fol. 48-9; MS Zimmern 117 fol. 52.
32. MS Zimmern 32 fol. 124, 128-9, 133; Martin Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain 1914-1945: The Defining of a Faith* (Oxford, 1980), p. 133.
33. C. M. Bowra, *Memories 1898-1939* (London, 1966) p. 285. For Zimmern's concern, see, e.g., *Birmingham Post*, 3 March 1933 (clipping in MS Zimmern 179).
34. P. A. Reynolds and E. J. Hughes, *The Historian as Diplomat: Charles Kingsley Webster and the United Nations 1939-1946* (London, 1976) pp. 13, 17.
35. See MS Zimmern fol. 37.
36. Robert W. Cox (ed.), *International Organization: World Politics* (London, 1969) pp. 107-8n.
37. See, e.g., MS Zimmern 104; MS Zimmern 114.
38. Zimmern, *The League*, *op. cit.* note 16, p. 265. H. G. Nicholas uses Zimmern's taxonomy in *The United Nations as a Political Institution* (Oxford, 1979) pp. 18ff.
39. Zimmern, *The League*, *op. cit.* note 16, pp. 191-2.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 285.
42. *Ibid.*, pp. 352-3, 373.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 445.
44. Porter, *op. cit.* note 1, p. 32.
45. MS Zimmern 36 fol. 39-40, 41.
46. Zimmern, *The League*, *op. cit.* note 16, p. 482.
47. Porter, *op. cit.* note 1, p. 35.
48. Zimmern, *The League*, *op. cit.* note 16, p. vii.
49. This phrase has been much used; see, e.g. Alan James (ed.), *The Bases of International Order* (Oxford, 1973) p. 159.
50. Clipping in MS Zimmern 179.
51. A. E. Zimmern, *Solon and Croesus* (Oxford, 1928) p. 44.
52. Zimmern, *The League*, *op. cit.* note 16, p. 353; emphasis added.
53. Zimmern, *Solon and Croesus*, *op. cit.* note 51, p. 44.
54. Leonard Woolf, 'Utopia and Reality', *Political Quarterly*, ix (1938) pp. 167-182.
55. Zimmern, *The League*, *op. cit.* note 16, p. 382; *Manitoba Free Press*, 1 October 1924 (clipping in MS Zimmern 179); MS Zimmern 114 fol. 100. See also MS Zimmern 15 fol. 60b-61b. Cf. *The Elmira Advertiser* (New York), 20 November 1947 (clipping in MS Zimmern 179).
56. Zimmern, *The League*, *op. cit.* note 16, p. 485.
57. Leonard Woolf, book review, *Political Quarterly*, vii (1936) pp. 290-1.
58. Ian Clark, *Reform and Resistance in the International Order* (Cambridge, 1980) p. 35.
59. Zimmern, *The League*, *op. cit.* note 16, p. 495.
60. See *ibid.*, p. 402; *Inquirer*, 28 November 1931 (clipping in MS Zimmern 179).
61. E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis 1919-1939* (London, 1946) pp. 39-40.
62. Zimmern, *The League*, *op. cit.* note 16, p. vii.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 231.
64. *Ibid.*, pp. 177, 192-3, 402, 418.
65. A. E. Zimmern, 'International Law and Social Consciousness', *Transactions of the Gratius Society*, xx (1934) (henceforth 'International Law') pp. 27, 40, 26.
66. Sir Alfred Zimmern, 'The Decline of International Standards', *International Affairs*, xvii (1938) (henceforth 'The Decline') p. 12. See also Zimmern, *The League*, *op. cit.* note 16, Part I Chapter IX.
67. Zimmern, 'International Law', *op. cit.* note 65, p. 41.

68. J. L. Brierly, *The Outlook for International Law* (Oxford, 1944) pp. 5, 14–15.
69. Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (London, 1977) pp. 13, 23.
70. See, e.g. Zimmern, *The League*, op. cit. note 16, pp. 483–7; Zimmern, 'The Decline', op. cit. note 66, pp. 18–21.
71. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
72. A. E. Zimmern, *Quo Vadimus?* (Oxford, 1934) p. 31.
73. *Collected Writings of John Maynard Keynes* (London, 1971– ), vol. 28 pp. 47–8.
74. Bull, op. cit. note 69, p. 110; Hans Reiss (ed.), *Kant's Political Writings* (Cambridge, 1970) p. 100.
75. Zimmern, *Quo Vadimus?*, op. cit. note 72, pp. 32–4.
76. Porter, op. cit. note 1, p. 35.
77. Carr, op. cit. note 61, p. 120.
78. See: *South Wales Argus*, 5 March 1921, *The West Australian*, 10 October 1938 (clippings in MS Zimmern 179); Sir Alfred Zimmern, *Spiritual Values and World Affairs* (henceforth *Spiritual Values*) (Oxford, 1939) p. 44.
79. Hedley Bull, 'The Twenty Years' Crisis Thirty Years On', *International Journal*, xxiv (1969) p. 629.
80. Zimmern, *The League*, op. cit. note 16, p. 407.
81. *The West Australian*, 10 October 1938 (clipping in MS Zimmern 179).
82. Zimmern, *Quo Vadimus?*, op. cit. note 72, p. 36.
83. Zimmern, 'The Decline', op. cit. note 66, p. 20.
84. Zimmern, *The League*, op. cit. note 16, pp. 291–2; emphasis added.
85. *South Wales Argus*, 5 March 1921 (clipping in MS Zimmern 179).
86. See, e.g., Arnold Toynbee (ed.), *British Commonwealth Relations* (Oxford, 1934) p. 178; *International Affairs*, xv (1936) p. 504.
87. Reiss, op. cit. note 74, p. 104; italics removed.
88. MS Zimmern 11 fol. 124–6.
89. *Hackney Gazette*, 22 January 1934 (clipping in MS Zimmern 179).
90. Zimmern, *Spiritual Values*, op. cit. note 78, p. 44.
91. Zimmern, *The League*, op. cit. note 16, p. 350; see also p. 240.
92. Norman Angell, *Why Freedom Matters* (London, 1940) esp. pp. 42, 47–9. See also MS Zimmern 45 fol. 96.
93. Quoted from Hedley Bull, 'Martin Wight and the theory of international relations', *British Journal of International Studies*, ii (1976) p. 109.
94. Bull, 'The Twenty Years' Crisis Thirty Years On', op. cit. note 79, p. 631.
95. *The Elmira Advertiser* (New York), 20 November 1947 (clipping in MS Zimmern 179).
96. Newspaper article, 27 April 1951, in MS Zimmern 179.
97. *Oxford Magazine* 20 November 1946 (clipping in MS Zimmern 179).
98. See Zimmern, *The American Road to World Peace* (New York, 1953).
99. See note 95.
100. Bull referred to Richard Falk, *This Endangered Planet* (1971); Joseph Nye and Robert Keohane, *Transnational Relations and World Politics* (1972) and *Power and Interdependence* (1977); Raymond Vernon, *Sovereignty at Bay* (1971); Richard Cooper, *The Economics of Interdependence* (1968); and Miriam Camps, *Collective Management* (1981).
101. Zimmern, *The League*, op. cit. note 16, p. vii.
102. A. E. Zimmern, *The Study of International Relations: An Inaugural Lecture* (Oxford, 1931) (hereafter *The Study*) p. 5.
103. H. Michell, *The Economics of Ancient Greece* (Cambridge, 1940) pp. 154–5, 380n. I am grateful to Robin Lane Fox and Professor Antony Andrewes for their opinions of *The Greek Commonwealth*.
104. C. A. W. Manning, *The Nature of International Society* (London, 1962) p. 206.
105. Hedley Bull, 'International Theory: The Case for a Classical Approach', *World Politics*, xviii (1966) p. 361.
106. See, e.g., Zimmern, *The League*, op. cit. note 16, pp. 161, 277, 278, 485.
107. MS Zimmern 117 fol. 50. This quotation appears by kind permission of Mr Alexander Murray.
108. See, e.g., R. C. K. Ensor, *England 1870–1914* (Oxford, 1936) p. v.
109. Zimmern, *The Study*, op. cit. note 102, p. 4.
110. MS Zimmern 48 fol. 27. This quotation appears by kind permission of Mrs Edith Stonequist.