
REALISM

AND THE

LIBERAL TRADITION

The
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORY
of
WHITTLE JOHNSTON

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Edited by

DAVID CLINTON

and

STEPHEN SIMS



Realism and the Liberal Tradition

Whittle Johnston
David Clinton • Stephen Sims
Editors

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The International Relations Theory
of Whittle Johnston

palgrave
macmillan

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ISBN 978-1-137-57763-4 ISBN 978-1-137-57764-1 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-57764-1

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016944031

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Dedicated to the memory of Whittle Johnston

PREFACE

THE MISSING MAN

Reading the manuscript of *Realism and the Liberal Tradition* brings back to all of us who had the good fortune of studying with Professor Whittle Johnston the breadth of his learning and the clarity of his insights. Just as in these pages, we heard in the classroom the easy command of the works of all the masters of Western political thought, the effortless employment of illustrations from history ancient and modern, and the evocation of the wisdom or folly of statesmen throughout the ages and throughout the world, all flowing in an unbroken stream of careful argument and exposition. Professor Johnston—"Mr. Johnston" to all who encountered him during the years of his final academic appointment at "Mr. Jefferson's University"—was a superb lecturer, not only because of the care that he had obviously devoted to the preparation of his remarks to us but also because of the commitment to the academic enterprise that he brought to his task. He was, as the colleagues noted who authored their tribute to him following his untimely death, unfailingly courteous and even gentle toward those of any political point of view, and especially toward students, but he nevertheless brought to his teaching a passion for truth, justice, and liberty—all goods that were as essential, in his view, to scholarly life as to political life.¹ He could in fact become highly animated in the course of his exposition (balling his fists, his face reddening), because he was convinced of the deep importance of the issues he saw at stake. While never employing the lectern as a place to launch partisan political comments, he was always clear in advocating freedom over tyranny, prudence over both

undue combativeness and dangerous sloth, and clarity of thought over oleaginous phraseology, no matter how superficially appealing the latter might seem.

Johnston saw himself, correctly, as a sympathetic critic—or perhaps more accurately a critical admirer—of both the liberal tradition of political thought and the realist tradition of international thought. As someone who treasured the achievements of individual liberty, constitutional government, and the rule of law, he believed that the modern world owed much to liberalism, even as he feared that in the hands of some of its adherents that tradition could become foolishly confident of the goodness of human nature and blind to the frequent harshness of the political world. As someone who, influenced by those cautionary objections to the excesses of liberalism, was alive to the ever-present element of power in politics, particularly in international relations, and therefore appreciated the realist critique of the errors of liberalism, he nevertheless thought that realists sometimes went too far in dismissing the intellectual accomplishments of liberalism and the beneficent consequences of institutions founded on a conviction of the worth of freedom.

Johnston therefore gives us a carefully nuanced view of both liberalism and realism. In these pages, we find John Locke praised more than Thomas Paine as a political thinker, while liberal practitioners of politics such as Thomas Jefferson and William Gladstone receive distinctly mixed reviews. Sometimes in Johnston's words one has the sense that the liberal tradition has been fortunate in seemingly surmounting the inadequacies of every one of its practical adherents. Likewise, in his treatment of three great twentieth-century international relations thinkers associated with the realist reaction against a shallow liberalism, he made distinctions. His critique of Edward Hallett Carr remains perhaps his best-known work, and he rarely misses an opportunity to remind his reader of the flaw that he insisted lay at the heart of Carr's work—a recognition of the role of power untethered to any system of moral thought that could justify restraints on or criticisms of the use of power.² As Stephen Sims' introductory essay makes clear, Johnston was fully alive to the immense contribution made to our theoretical understanding of international politics by Hans Morgenthau, recognizing Morgenthau as a formative thinker who transformed the intellectual environment within which every subsequent analyst had to work. Yet he contended that Morgenthau's rejection of the excessive confidence of the liberal tradition was often phrased in terms too absolute and uncompromising, so that characteristics that differentiated better regimes from worse faded into a universal contest for power

in which the individual contestants could not be readily distinguished. His fullest respect seemed given to Reinhold Niebuhr, perhaps because in Niebuhr Johnston recognized that grounding that Johnston feared Carr lacked. In Niebuhr's Augustinian Christianity, Johnston believed that he discerned a clear-eyed recognition of the potency of the will in turning seeming selflessness to self-interested ends, coupled with an insistence on the ultimate worth of each individual human being and the capacity of men and women to recognize and curb their delight in exercising power over others.

All of these evaluations will be familiar to those who encountered Johnston in the seminar room or the lecture hall; one can almost hear him voicing the formulations found in these pages. Yet one immense figure in international relations theory to whom Johnston often referred as a source of wisdom seems to make relatively few appearances in the manuscript, at least at the stage to which Johnston had brought it by the point when his advancing illness made it impossible for him to continue his work. That missing figure is Raymond Aron. My recollection, confirmed by conversations with others who studied with Johnston at roughly the same time, is that he cited Aron (and "Aronian" thinkers such as Stanley Hoffmann) perhaps more than any other single thinker.³

This reliance on Aron is not surprising when one recalls that Aron, as with Johnston, saw himself as an inheritor of the liberal tradition, but one with no illusions. For decades, Aron defended liberalism and liberal institutions when that stance was a lonely one to take among French intellectuals; he criticized the USA when he thought it was mistaken or ill intentioned in its foreign policy, but he left no doubt that in the contest between liberal and socialist democracy he stood with the former. Yet he claimed the mantle of "realist" for himself, not least because he recognized that, for all the achievements of "diplomacy," the world of "strategy" in which war remained a real possibility among the participants in international politics always loomed in the background.⁴ Even within this realm of power, however, Aron—and Johnston—insisted that the character of specific regimes led them to behave differently in confronting the demands of security and the lure of predominance. Some tended to behave in ways that were more moderate, respectful, and constructive than others, and these tended to be the liberal democratic countries; such was the insight of liberalism that Aron and Johnston shared. The dual nature of the international conduct of states, combining a necessary determination to acquire and maintain sufficient power to remain secure

in a dangerous world, on one hand, with a readiness to attempt all the softening effects of diplomacy, international law, and a general attitude of restraint and respect for others, on the other—this complex view of the world was something that Johnston admired in Aron. Yet for neither man could restraint alone keep this complex mechanism going. Johnston, like Aron, suspected that Carr was correct in contending that an imbalance of power in favor of a benevolent regime committed to the preservation of the whole was necessary to its survival. The belief that power was necessary to the continuance of an international order that operated not simply according to power, and that this power would be best exercised by a liberal democratic regime, was summed up in the title of another work of Aron, *The Imperial Republic*.⁵ It was a view fully endorsed by Johnston.

Drawing, then, upon both the progressive contributions of liberalism and the cautionary contributions of realism, Johnston takes his place alongside Aron as an acute observer and theoretician of international relations. His extended treatment of the intertwining of these two intellectual traditions has long been denied to the world. It is fortunate that it now sees the light of day.

David Clinton

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Our first and greatest debt must naturally go to Whittle Johnston, whose clarity of thought and expression launched a great ship of scholarly study on the decks of which we have spent a bit of time polishing the brass and inspecting the lines. We shall be forever grateful to him for leaving us this admirable work of study, thought, and exposition. Our second debt is to his widow, Martha Johnston, and to the Johnstons' children and their spouses, for allowing us to assist a significant contribution to knowledge, which its author had brought within sight of completion, in those last few steps that would carry it over the finish line. Without the support of the Johnston family to their husband and father, Whittle Johnston, we are certain, would never have exhibited the calm judgment and broad reading that distinguish this important work. Without their generous confidence in us, we would never have had the opportunity to read this manuscript, much less edit it for publication.

David Clinton wishes to thank all of the graduate students who have worked on this manuscript since it was entrusted to the care of the Political Science Department at Baylor University. As a group, they are brilliant, conscientious, and—perhaps of greatest importance to him—tolerant of the foibles of their professor. His most heartfelt appreciation must go to his coeditor, Stephen Sims, who somehow managed to write a brilliant dissertation and earn a PhD while chasing after innumerable citations and determining the author's intent from handwritten notes added at widely varying times. It has been a distinct privilege to work with him, and it will be a great pleasure to watch his ascent to the prominence to which his high character, his rare intelligence, and his constant collegiality entitle him.

Stephen Sims thanks his mentor and coeditor, Dr. David Clinton, for the opportunity and privilege to work on this manuscript. Dr. Clinton's nobility of soul and gentleness of character remain polestars for a young man setting out on his career. He would also like to thank his family and wife. They made the labor over this manuscript much lighter than it could have been.

NOTES

1. See David Jordan, Jonathan Rice, Robert Turner, Michael Cairo, and Christina Smith, "Stafford Gorman Whittle Johnston," in *PS: Political Science & Politics* (March 1997): 89–91.
2. See Whittle Johnston, "E. H. Carr's Theory of International Relations: A Critique," *Journal of Politics* (November 1967).
3. Hoffmann is in fact extensively quoted throughout the work.
4. Raymond Aron, *Peace and War: A Theory of International Relations*, trans. Richard Howard and Annette Baker Fox (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1966), 21–46.
5. Raymond Aron, *The Imperial Republic: The United States and the World 1945–1973*, trans. Frank Jellinek (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1974).

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Introduction

The condition of international politics in the 1960s was not conducive to optimism. The state system witnessed increasing antagonism between the two great powers of the time, the USA and the Soviet Union. Kennedy's pugnacious responses to the aggressive intrusions of his Soviet counterparts, especially signified by the Cuban Missile Crisis, caused many to worry that the world might yet end in fire, and by mankind's own hands at that. In this unsettled time, when measured words were often exchanged for hyperbole, calm for anxiety, Whittle Johnston, Professor of Government and Foreign Affairs at the University of Virginia, taught a series of courses and wrote a number of essays on this remarkable turn in human history. The coolness of his writing and teaching bespeaks a moderation and intellectual clear-sightedness which is all too rare in periods of fear and crisis. This volume is a collection of his writings, either adapted from lectures or specifically written for publication.

OVERVIEW OF THE WORK

Whittle Johnston's main concern in the following essays is the development of a theory for the study of international politics and how that theory might address the relation between liberalism and realism. Johnston saw the contribution of realists, such as Morgenthau or Niebuhr, as necessary and welcome—an important advance in theoretical understanding of international politics. Nonetheless, he also believed it was an advance only

and that further work was yet to be done. He was particularly interested in what realism could say to a liberal democracy like the USA or Great Britain, if anything at all.

It says a great deal about his conception of international relations theory that Johnston considered realism too abstract and ahistorical to be of much use as a guide for foreign policy. Ironically, this was the same critique made by Hans Morgenthau about liberalism and idealism in *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*, that liberals mistook the contingent for the eternal and the historically conditioned for the natural. Johnston believed that change, and accounting for change, was an essential part of any theory, and thus it was not enough simply to study the international system as a collection of forces or powers. One must also study how the international system came to be, its growth and alteration, and even the possibility of its death. Thus, for Johnston, the idea of a parsimonious theory and its abstractions, simply based on consideration of power, was not only unrealistic and unhelpful but also symbolized a refusal by international relations theorists to take seriously what the other sciences had long ago realized: the importance of the dynamic as well as the static.

It was the desire to uncover the international system's dynamism that led Johnston to believe that international relations had to be studied historically rather than abstractly. This did not mean abandoning the abstractions of theory, but rather, using them as a framework and way of organizing concepts. As Johnston understood it, the purpose of theory was to analyze and predict human behavior. Practically speaking, however, a theory had to be applied to particular facts, and when one speaks of particular facts, he is talking about beings with particular histories. This is especially the case for international politics, which deals with particular political communities, each with its own "historic image" of itself. It was this very historic image that Johnston thought had shaped the idealistic theories in the early part of the twentieth century, for most theorizing had been done in the USA and Great Britain. He understood such theories to be a "projection" of the archetypal liberal experience onto the stage of world politics. As such, it was no surprise that idealistic theories based on the unique Anglo-American political experience should be the product of the English-speaking democracies. That made the realist critique of idealism all the more pressing for Johnston, while it also raised the question of whether realism could offer anything substantive to the liberal democracies.¹

Without realism, Johnston argued, international relations theory at best could only remain in an immature state. As the science of chemistry arose out of the alchemist's search for gold from baser elements, so the theory of international relations arose out of the idealist's desire to achieve peace from anarchy. As they were for the advancement of chemistry, so rationalism and empiricism would be necessary for the advancement of international relations. The theory could not rest with realism, however; indeed, Johnston saw certain elements of the old idealism in the new forms of realism, especially in the concept of the balance of power. He saw realism as an essential step down the road of theory, but a step that must be followed by another. Realism's static abstractions of power had to face the critique of the dynamics of history; it was only in this way, Johnston argued, that we would be able to move to something more like a science of international politics. It was important for Johnston that we understand history to be truly dynamic; as he saw it, "theories of progress" took the smooth route of establishing an intelligible purpose to history, making history too easily comprehensible. Such theories, Johnston argued, smuggle static concepts into a supposed science of change to do away with the difficulty of understanding motion. Progressive history in general, Johnston argued, both gutted history as an art and tended to make human beings inhumane. It is not surprising, then, that Johnston preferred Ludwig Dehio's *The Precarious Balance* to the histories of E.H. Carr. Whereas Carr saw history as progressive, Dehio explained the path of history and international politics in terms of competing values, tensions, or antinomies. These antinomies showed the true depth and complexity of the changes wrought in the international system and showed that there is little that is inevitable in international politics. Human choice still dominated supposed impersonal forces. Included in the following volume, then, is Johnston's consideration of the relations of science to history, the place of motion and values in scientific investigations, and, perhaps most importantly, his history of liberalism and the state system.

The argument of these essays is more or less a consideration of the prospects for liberalism as a genuine ordering principle for the state system. Johnston understood that it was difficult to say precisely what "liberalism" is; historical contingencies could lead us to identify liberalism with individual liberty in the form of rights, a powerful or extensive state, or whatever else a liberal may claim to profess. Johnston studied liberalism through the analytic device he calls "the problem of community"—or how to deal with the disintegrative effects of individualism and the tyrannical

effects of coercive order. Although the problem of community is latent in every collective body, Johnston shrewdly saw Europe dealing with it in a very particular way. He notes that medieval Europe, through its common Christian religion, had what he called a “metaphysical unity” that allowed for a surprising amount of individual freedom. The effect of the Protestant Reformation and the rise of scientific rationalism did much to destroy this metaphysical unity, and so the stage was set for what Johnston called the dreadful “oscillation” between fissiparous individualism and coerced uniformity, captured so well in the experience of France. Johnston believed this cycle of order and chaos was endemic in many European states, but, notably, not in Great Britain and its child, the USA. What was it about these two English-speaking states that allowed them to mitigate the effects of the problem of community?

Drawing on Dehio, Johnston saw the same oscillation occurring in the state system. A tendency toward unity that can be observed particularly during the medieval experience but also in post-World War I Europe was counteracted by pulls toward diversity, especially during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Often particular forces act against the grain, as when Louis XIV attempted universal monarchy in the seventeenth century. Nonetheless, Johnston thought it possible to descry patterns of behavior cast broadly over centuries. His worry was that both poles of the oscillation that shook the international system had a good to promise—in the one case freedom, in the other case peace. This oscillation became particularly troubling in the late twentieth century due to the progress of technology, which produced a hitherto unknown ability to unify and liberate, to tyrannize over all or destroy all. This made the problem of community for the state system all the more urgent for Johnston and thus made political and historical analyses of Great Britain and the USA a matter of the first order for scholars of international relations.

Johnston believed that the secret to success for Great Britain and the USA lay in liberalism. As liberalism evolved in the historical experience of these countries, it dampened harmful effects of the oscillation between individualism and uniformity. It accomplished this harmonization by making freedom the goal of the political order: the maximization of individual freedom and the ability of the individual to pursue “self-fulfillment.” At the same time, the liberal recognizes the need for strong and coercive government and the uniformity that government entails. Without energetic government, there can be no self-fulfilled individual, and yet the individual must not be absorbed into the artificial being of the state. According

to Johnston, it was Britain's connection to its medieval past and the refusal of the British people to allow any monarch to arrogate absolute power to himself or herself that permitted the individual to flourish in a genuine way under the gentle coercion of the British state. Emphasizing the values of toleration, freedom of speech and trade, and most importantly, a constitutionalism that ultimately had its roots in medieval political thought and experience, Johnston saw Great Britain as a unique state in the international system and one that held out unique promise. America, as far as Johnston was concerned, was heir to the British experience and thus the system's last best hope. Without the USA, the prospects for liberalism as an ordering principle of the state system were very dim indeed.

Thus the USA plays the central role in Johnston's consideration for the future of the international system. The USA did not simply have a preponderance of power, although it was important that it did. It also was the heir to liberalism and the Anglo-Saxon way of politics that, as far as Johnston was concerned, made it successful where others were not.² Nonetheless, power in the hands of a truly liberal state still left the problem of community for the state system unsolved. Under the shadow of nuclear weapons, within a heterogeneous system, where were to be found the forces of uniformity that might allow the international system to survive? What was the answer beside world domination of a tyrannical state? Johnston had no clear-cut answer for these questions other than that the USA must not be afraid to acknowledge its preponderance and play the part of true leader, as Great Britain had before it. A preponderance of power does not in itself create the uniformity needed to mitigate the problem of community, but rather it provides the conditions necessary for such uniformity to come into being at some point in time. As far as Johnston was concerned, power precedes freedom. In this vein, Johnston thought that "pluralism" with its diversity of centers of power was undesirable; the world could no longer afford the freewheeling state system of centuries past. For states to split infinitive maximize their freedom, they must be able to act without fear of nuclear annihilation. For the international system to become truly liberal, a preponderance of liberal power in some form is necessary.

JOHNSTON AND REALISM

A persistent subject for Johnston was the question of realism as a way of studying international politics, rather than as an abstract theory. While it is clear that he did not consider himself a realist in the usual sense of the

term, his intellectual debt to the great realist thinkers reveals a complicated intellectual foundation. To advance our thinking about international politics, one had to “internalize” the image of international relations bequeathed by the realists, especially Morgenthau, Niebuhr, and Carr. But one also had to observe the deficiencies of their theories and move toward a truer theory. Understanding Johnston’s relationship with realist thinkers, and his relationship to “realism” as a mode of thinking, is challenging but necessary. In what follows, I shall attempt to characterize this complex relationship, showing Johnston’s debt to realism, his criticisms of realists, and how precisely he went beyond realism.

As many have noted, “realism” is not a monolithic set of ideas, nor is it even a theory in itself. It is more accurately described as a stance or attitude through which one considers the world of international politics. Johnston was aware of this, perhaps more than most students of international relations. He knew that “realism” most properly meant a wariness of utopian thinking and the mental preparation to be consistently disappointed by the intractable, and often brutal, characteristics that mark international relations. Thus “realism” for Johnston was primarily a kind of intellectual fortitude to see the world for what it is and not to be dismayed by it.

If realism is a kind of intellectual fortitude, then there were three thinkers in particular who either discovered this fortitude or displayed it particularly well. These thinkers were those who later became known as the “classical realists,” namely, Carr, Morgenthau, and Niebuhr. From each of these thinkers, Johnston took valuable insights, and yet none of them did Johnston think sufficient in his own right.

CARR

E.H. Carr could be considered a founder of realism and to a certain extent seems to have coined the use of the word with regard to international relations. Thus it is no surprise that Johnston took particular care in considering Carr’s work, especially *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*, and the philosophic approach Carr outlined there. Johnston points out the significance of that approach in the way Carr “discovered” the “phenomena of power.” Carr “discovered” power through “the recognition of the conditioned character of our perspectives,” especially in “the historically conditioned” nature of supposedly “absolute” or “a priori” principles.³ In particular, Carr aimed his destructive realist perspective at liberal thinkers of the nineteenth and early twentieth century who believed in a “harmony of interests” wherein,

if each agent pursued his own self-interest in a rational manner, each agent would also unconsciously bring about the common good of the whole. Rather than attacking the idea of something like Smith's "invisible hand" which undergirded such a rosy portrait of international politics, Carr attacked the rationality that liberal thinkers like Smith, Locke, or Cobden exemplified, in particular their penchant for taking their own historical experience and universalizing it, making absolute principles out of historical contingencies. In response, Carr states that the absolute is beyond reach because all the human mind can do is observe its own historical circumstances—reality, in Carr's view, is neither self-evident nor intelligible, and so the human mind must *interpret* reality rather than *understand* it. The insight into the conditioned nature of human experience led to Carr's theory of historical work, wherein he claimed that there were no simple facts to which the historian could point as the simple truth. "The historian gets the facts he *wants*" and consequently "history means *interpretation*," as Carr claims in his work on history.⁴ The line between facts and values does not really exist for Carr, because our values govern what we take to be facts. Thus, was the fall of the USSR the destruction of an evil empire or "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century?" It depends a great deal on what one's values are, and it only stands to reason that an American and a Russian will have two very different answers regarding the "fact" of the USSR's collapse.

Johnston thought that Carr's view of the historically conditioned nature of human perspectives was a valuable insight. He accepted Carr's critique of Enlightenment rationality and his insistence that human beings understand "facts" in light of "values." Johnston nevertheless departed from Carr in what he saw as Carr's "simple faith in the flux itself as a benevolent absolute," a "harmonic monism" that propelled the progress of history. Johnston, by rejecting Carr's theory of historical progress, saw himself as a better exponent of Carr's historical insight than Carr himself. The conditioning of human thought by social and historical circumstances lies at the root of Johnston's thinking about international relations. For him, values, whether given to us by society or tradition, will always color the way the world, especially the social world, appears. That Johnston gives a kind of preeminence to values over facts allows him to avoid the supposed "fact/value" distinction so common in the political and moral philosophies of Enlightenment thinkers, such as Hume.

Rejecting Enlightenment rationalism, and its distinction between facts and values, might lead to postmodernism and critical theory. Indeed,

some scholars have turned to Carr as if to a prophet and claim his realism is nothing other than the approach that was later taken by critical theorists.⁵ Another way of dealing with the rejection of Enlightenment rationality, however, is to return to the ancients, those whom Enlightenment thinkers themselves rejected. The Aristotelian tradition held that certain virtues and qualities of soul are necessary before one can truly understand the “facts” of human experience, that is, the human soul must be educated before it can grasp truth.⁶ True judgment of political things belongs to the prudent man and thus the properly virtuous man; without prudence, we cannot grasp the “facts” of political existence except incidentally.

There is some ambiguity about which direction away from Enlightenment rationalism Johnston took. Although his insistence on the radically subjective character of knowledge and questioning of the “perspectiveless” attitude of Enlightenment rationalist thought seems to undermine the possibility of truth, several things should give us pause. Johnston does point to Aristotle as a preeminent political philosopher who understood that virtue is not correlative to knowledge, which is more or less the error of the Enlightenment, in Johnston’s mind. Johnston argues that what makes the “liberal” different from the “relativist” is his understanding of the political nature of the human being and the radical dependence that the liberal *must* place on tradition, because political existence depends on “enduring” relationships between “the past and the present.” And here, the thinker that Johnston turns to is none other than Edmund Burke, the political liberal *par excellence*. As many have noted the similarities between Aristotle and Burke, it is not surprising that Johnston has a preference for Aristotle over Plato. It is also not surprising that we see a kind of apparent ambiguity in Johnston’s attitude toward truth and relativism, as he prefers to take his orientation from “what works” in politics. In this preference for practical achievement rather than philosophic subtlety, Johnston’s thought is like Burke’s, who himself is not easy to pin down on the issues of nature and history, being and becoming, or philosophy and law.⁷ For while Johnston admits that all “facts” are interpretations of reality filtered through the categories of our values, he also believes that political liberalism presumes a truth independent from the determination of government. Philosophy, and the possibility of truth that its quest for wisdom implies, addresses the need of political liberalism.

Thus, the debt that Johnston owes Carr is in fact immense, even if Johnston was more true to Carr than Carr was to himself. But this does not mean that Johnston was overcome by “normless relativism.” One could

say that Johnston's commitment to the "political things," which Carr himself denigrated, was the source of both his norms and his political thought. For as Carr preferred to think of international relations in pseudo-Marxist categories, thus revealing *his* values, Johnston understood the significance and importance of constitutional government as the preeminent gift of the liberal tradition to political science. And so when Carr characterized the question as to who would rule the planners of his utopian socialist society as "a mere debating point," Johnston replied in the spirit of Churchill, "Some debate! Some point!"⁸ For Johnston, the significance of constitutionalism and rule of law could not be lost, for they were in fact the very political things that formed the starting points for political philosophy and were also its fruits. Thus Carr, contrary to his own intentions, pointed Johnston back to Aristotle and Burke rather than Marx, Nietzsche, or Foucault. For as Johnston saw it, the very strength in political liberalism lay in its pessimistic view of human nature and the need for institutions and laws to preclude the possibility of tyranny. Carr's rejection of constitutional liberty for the sake of socialized planning was nothing more than a rejection of the very realist mind-set that Carr had been so influential in bringing about. This tough-minded approach of liberalism to politics, not placing too much faith in reason and in the virtue of fallible human beings, is ably, though not consistently, captured by Carr. And thus, in a sense, Carr's political philosophy, far from pointing us away from political liberalism, points back toward it. And this is the second great influence of Carr we see in Johnston's work, a firm acknowledgement of human vices and the need for the rule of law.

MORGENTHAU

This unwavering acceptance of the fragility of human nature leads to the second great realist with whom Johnston deals, Morgenthau. For while Carr rejected Enlightenment rationality in a manner reminiscent of the pessimistic attitude of the liberal, Morgenthau both deepened this insight and showed what the implications were for international politics. Morgenthau, unlike Carr, did not see the international realm according to the dichotomy of have and have-not and thus did not equate international morality with heroic sacrifice of the haves for the sake of the have-nots.⁹ Morgenthau understood the international system to be the scene of a perpetual struggle for power among all states, regardless of whether they were haves or have-nots. At the same time, however, Johnston noted

that Morgenthau seemed to have no explanation for, nor even interest in, the radical differences among the regimes that made up the international system. As Carr, in abandoning his critique of Enlightenment rationality and accepting the “harmonious monism” of inevitable rational progress in history, ended up supporting a centralized socialist authority unfettered by law, so Morgenthau, making similar critiques of Enlightenment rationality, failed to see the immense political difference between the American republic and the Soviet republic.

Morgenthau arguably made Carr’s critique of Enlightenment rationality even more radical. While Carr ended up giving a quasi-Marxist theory of international relations, which as Johnston understood it, constituted one of the most philosophic Marxist views of the international system, Morgenthau rejected the entire notion of a political “science” which took its bearings from mathematics or the natural sciences. For Morgenthau, political existence is not a “problem” to be “solved,” but rather a mystery which must be understood, if at all, by philosophic wisdom. Thus while Carr always carried the epitome of Enlightenment rationality through his at least partial adherence to Marx, Morgenthau rejected the entire tradition of thought that produced Marxist economics and politics, arguing that it was of a piece with laissez-faire rationalism in trying to reduce human existence to something like the “laws” of gravity. This total rejection of the Enlightenment did not jeopardize the possibility of truth for Morgenthau, for while there are no “eternal verities” to be found in Enlightenment political philosophy, those eternal verities could indeed be found in older, wiser thinkers like Plato, Aristotle, and Hobbes. Thus truth was a possibility for those who study international relations and it is possible for statesmen to act according to truth, but to do so for Morgenthau meant jettisoning the inheritance of the Enlightenment. For Johnston, the most significant distinction between Morgenthau’s mode of theorizing about international affairs and Carr’s lay in Morgenthau’s consistent antipathy to everything the Enlightenment promised, including Marxism, whereas Carr succumbed to Marxist illusions. And thus Johnston himself is much closer to Morgenthau than to Carr in terms of intellectual standpoint.

Yet, if to Johnston it seemed that Carr was not entirely true to himself by his acceptance of historical progress and Marxism, so in Johnston’s view Morgenthau was not true to himself, insofar as he attempted to make timeless verities out of things which were actually the product of historical contingency. Johnston notes that there are two distinct approaches to international relations in Morgenthau’s *Politics among Nations*. On the

one hand, there is the attempt to establish “timeless abstractions” which “underlie international politics,” while on the other there is a historical look at the international system and an attempt to observe the changes it has undergone. Johnston, as he makes clear, does not think that the search for “timeless abstractions” is a bootless task, but he suspects that they are of limited value at best. Moreover, Johnston argues that Morgenthau’s efforts to find the eternal verities led to a warped view of what we could actually know about international politics. This warped view was most easily seen, in Johnston’s mind, by Morgenthau’s distaste for the politics of the twentieth century and his attempts to locate underlying continuities between the modern era and the more elegant politics that existed before modernity, rather than admitting the vast gulf that lay between the two ages of international politics. This in turn, Johnston claims, led Morgenthau to take an earlier kind of international politics as a normative standard—international politics ought to be done in the manner of a Bismarck or a Richelieu—a point from which the twentieth century fell very far indeed. As far as Johnston was concerned, in his reverence for the past and disgust with the present, Morgenthau, far from being a “realist,” was in truth an “escapist.”

But this escape to the past and the attempt to use the past as a standard, while at the same time locating continuities between past and present, led Morgenthau to odd conclusions. In particular, Johnston noted that while Morgenthau admitted that nearly anything could be considered the “national interest,” more often than not Morgenthau solely spoke of it in terms of materialism. Thus Johnston suggested that if Morgenthau meant to say that the objectives of diplomacy and strategy could vary a great deal, his discussions which focused on the national interest seemed to belie that statement and tended to understand interest in terms of material goods. In Johnston’s view, this was a critical error, one that led to a distorted view of the international system. It is no surprise that if we look for continuities in international politics, we will find a consistent concern for the material needs of life. At the same time, this obscures what is different, namely, that the eighteenth century saw an international system dominated by monarchies, while the twentieth century saw the awakening of the masses. This difference was no small matter, for it revealed the importance of “sentiment” and “political values” that are critical to understanding the realities of the international system. In particular for Johnston, it helped explain and unify the Anglo-American preponderance of influence in international affairs for hundreds of years.

The importance of “political values,” which explained a great deal more about strategic and diplomatic behavior of states than mere material necessity could, stemmed from a concern with regimes and domestic politics that was crucial for Johnston. Morgenthau’s quest for timeless abstraction led him to downplay the significance of differences between the regimes which existed in the contemporary international system. Indeed, Morgenthau seemed at times to think of democracy as nothing other than a deficient form of government, at least regarding foreign policy, inferior to government by detached monarchs and aristocrats. Because a detached aristocracy could safely avoid being moved by popular passions, the state could more safely be steered by the lights of rationally understood objective self-interest. Johnston, however, worried that Morgenthau’s looking toward aristocratic governments of yesteryear meant he had no real answer to the pressing questions of his own time, especially in the context of the Cold War. Not only that, but by simply casting all regimes of the twentieth century as democratic, or at least nonaristocratic, Morgenthau obscured vital differences between regimes that he ought to have kept in the light. Particularly in *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*, Morgenthau noted a profound difference between the foundings of the American and French republics. The former was informed by centuries of political experience against the perpetual possibility of despotism. The latter, in contrast, was characterized by a boundless optimism informed by a heady and naïve belief in the possibility of scientific politics and the exaltation of the goddess “Reason” to overcome political problems. Morgenthau himself traced the worship of that barren goddess from the French republic all the way to the Bolshevik revolution. And thus Morgenthau himself saw the American republic as founded through an act of political prudence, the preeminent virtue of statesmen, and the Soviet Union established through the zealous belief in an impotent divinity. This is also the view of Johnston—after all, liberalism for Johnston does not mean belief in the “rights of man” or “autonomy.” Liberalism is not a moral philosophy as much as the culmination of the political wisdom of the West, with that most sublime product of prudence, constitutionalism and the rule of law it embodies.

It is curious, then, that Morgenthau’s understanding of the difference between the American and Soviet experiences plays little role in *Politics among Nations*. There, Morgenthau casts the Cold War as a simple conflict between imperial capitalism and Communism in which each side believes

itself to be in the right, so much so that each embodies the phenomenon of “nationalistic universalism” according to which a particular people wishes to remake the world in its own image. Elsewhere, Morgenthau recognizes the political dimension of the conflict, but again obscures it by calling it a struggle between “democracy and Communism,” each claiming universal validity. What is curious about both these generalizations is how the particularity of each regime becomes obscured, something that Johnston saw as vital. The Cold War was not, primarily, about capitalism and Communism, or democracy and Communism, but about the American regime as ordered by the Constitution, the inheritor of the political wisdom of the West, and the Soviet Union, which embodied and indeed perfected the Enlightenment rationality of which it is the inheritor. And so the struggle was indeed between liberalism and absolutism, but not in the sense of competing catalogues of human rights, say political rights as distinguished from economic rights. It was nothing other than the question of the West: would its future be ruled by the prudence embodied in the American Constitution or the despotic and impotent Enlightenment rationality of the Soviet Union?

Morgenthau’s failure to note the vast political distance between the USA and the Soviet Union seemed to stem from his desire to find universal truths in a science of international politics. And as Johnston points out time and again, this desire simply repeats the errors of Enlightenment rationality to which Morgenthau was so opposed—it made universal truths where there was really historical accident. Furthermore, the desire to universalize made Morgenthau untrue to his own view of the nature of the American Constitution and the origins of the Soviet Union. As Johnston points out, Morgenthau seems to focus entirely on the “first image” of Kenneth Waltz and lets the “second image” drop out entirely.¹⁰ For Johnston, while the structure of the state system and human nature are of vital importance, so too is the interactions between states that arises from similarity or differences between regimes. By ignoring the second image, Morgenthau obscured the significance of liberalism itself. Morgenthau seemed to think the USA and the Soviet Union could be understood as similar entities in the international system, while his very work *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics* revealed that the two were entirely different. Johnston, then, as with Carr, breaks with Morgenthau by being more true to Morgenthau’s insights than Morgenthau himself. Liberalism, not democracy or capitalism, is at stake, and Morgenthau’s realism obscures this.

NIEBUHR

This leads to a consideration of Reinhold Niebuhr, the eminent “Christian realist.” For if Morgenthau strayed from the genuine truth of liberalism and made it simply the mirror image of Communism, Niebuhr himself saw the importance of a sober realism that undergirds traditional liberal thinkers and their preference for democratic institutions. As Niebuhr famously observed, “man’s capacity for justice makes democracy possible; but man’s inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary.” It was from the pithy defense of democracy that Johnston drew inspiration to set forth and defend liberalism against its realist critics.

While Johnston inherited much from Carr and Morgenthau (as Johnston put it, any analysis of international politics had to be “post-Morgenthau”), he inherited even more from Niebuhr. For Niebuhr was the first of the “classical realists” to recognize the strength of liberalism, to realize that its existence was an accomplishment of mankind and one of its greatest benefits, and, perhaps most of all, to contend that it was well worth defending against the totalitarian regime of the Soviet Union.¹¹ Niebuhr was also vital for Johnston’s thesis that any theory of international relations which ignored normative concerns, or the necessary relationship between order and justice, would be at least half-blind. For justice, according to Niebuhr, required the active ordering force of government; there can be no justice within anarchy. At the same time, no order can be long lasting and stable if it does not approximate justice to some extent. Thus, for Niebuhr, the relation between power and justice is always “ambivalent,” in Johnston’s terms. As justice requires the power of government, so the power of government at the same time is a vital threat to justice itself. In this way, Niebuhr landed on what for Johnston was the central insight of liberalism: “the wisdom of political liberalism has lain in the theoretical insight that government is, at the same time, both necessary and dangerous.”¹² This means that government must be established for the sake of justice and peace, but it must have restraints to prevent tyranny—and it was from Niebuhr, again, that we discover that those restraints cannot consist primarily in moral or social pressure. Power must counteract power, and thus, even though there must be a preponderant power that can establish an order which it is to be hoped approximates justice, there must also be a balance of power to prevent tyranny on a world scale.¹³

Johnston took to heart Niebuhr’s famous categorization of theorists and political movements into the “children of light” and the “children

of darkness.” The children of light, as those who emphasized the moral unity of the human species and belief in the power of international organization and reason to disentangle the conflicting aims and purposes of various states, failed to understand the “particularist forces” and “egoism” that stemmed from original sin, clouding man’s judgment and his ability to live according to the “law of love.” The children of darkness, understanding such forces, emphasize only the effect of original sin and the diverse interests that characterize politics, so that liberalism itself becomes an impossibility. While the children of light are tempted to think that there is a universal moral law, easily grasped and submitted to by all, the children of darkness, despairing of the fallen state of human nature, are tempted to slip into moral relativism. Johnston identifies Morgenthau as a child of darkness, at least partly because Morgenthau fails to see the historical significance of constitutional politics.¹⁴ Niebuhr believed that the way forward was to hold the universal belief of a child of light while acknowledging the truths of the children of darkness; Johnston argued that liberalism as a political tradition had long since been pointing out this “middle way.”

Such a middle way was best expressed by the use of the balance of power as a way to prevent the overweening lust for power that filled the human soul from finding a violent outlet on the global stage. The “international community” did not have the “inner cohesive factors” that would have made world government possible. Thus, when describing in 1944 the conditions for a stable peace, Niebuhr emphasized the need for the great powers to work together in some sort of alliance, rather than trying to circumvent great power politics by the establishment of a world political authority. A balance of power, however, is not enough for international stability, because the balance of power is nothing other than a “kind of managed anarchy” which would sooner or later slip out of control. To subdue the inherent chaos of the balance of power, preponderant power was needed. Thus Niebuhr stood as a strange philosopher of power who had little to no faith in the balance of power; as far as Niebuhr was concerned in 1944, a preponderance of either British or American power would be necessary to maintain peace and, indeed, to establish a cohesion in the non-Communist world that had hitherto not existed.

It is not difficult to see the effect of Niebuhr throughout Johnston’s work. Johnston’s emphasis on the ambiguity of power and freedom, as well as the partial truths that all human beings have, his recognition that legitimate complaints may be made on either side of a conflict, and his insight into the prevailing tendency of those who make claims of justice