The Twilight of International Morality

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A DISCUSSION of international ethics must guard against the two extremes either of overrating the influence of ethics upon international politics or else of denying that statesmen and diplomats are moved by anything else but considerations of material power. On the one hand, there is the dual error of confounding the ethical rules which people actually observe with those they pretend to observe as well as with those which writers declare they ought to observe. "On no subject of human interest, except theology," said Professor John Chipman Gray, "has there been so much loose writing and nebulous speculation as on international law."[2] The same must be said of international ethics. Writers have put forward moral precepts which statesmen and diplomats ought to take to heart in order to make relations between nations more peaceful and less anarchical, such as keeping of promises, trust in the other's word, fair dealing, respect for international law, protection of minorities, repudiation of war as an instrument of national policy; but they have rarely

asked themselves whether and to what extent such precepts, however desirable in themselves, actually determine the actions of men. Since, furthermore, statesmen and diplomats are wont to justify their actions and objectives in moral terms, regardless of their actual motives, it would be equally erroneous to take those protestations of selfless and peaceful intentions, of humanitarian purposes and international ideals at their face value, without raising the question as to whether they are mere ideologies concealing the true motives of action or whether they express a genuine concern for the compliance of international policies with ethical standards.

On the other hand, there is the misconception, which usually is associated with the general depreciation and moral condemnation of power politics prevalent in our culture, that international politics is immoral, if not amoral, through and through and in any case so thoroughly evil that it is no use looking for ethical limitations of the aspirations for power on the international scene. Yet, if we ask ourselves what statesmen and diplomats are capable of doing in furtherance of the power objectives of their respective nations and what they actually do, we realize that they do less than they might be able to do and less than they actually did

[2] *Nature and Sources of the Law* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1927), p. 127.

in other periods of history. They refuse to consider certain ends and to use certain means, either altogether or under certain conditions, not because of considerations of expediency in the light of which a certain policy appears to be impractical or unwise, but by virtue of certain moral rules of conduct which interpose an absolute barrier against a certain policy and which do not permit it to be considered at all from the point of view of expediency. Such ethical inhibitions operate in our time on different levels with different effectiveness. Their restraining function is most obvious and most effective in so far as the sacredness of human life in times of peace is concerned.

I. THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN LIFE

International politics can be defined as a continuing effort to maintain and to increase the power of one's own nation and to keep in check or reduce the power of other nations. The relative power of nations depends, however, among other factors, upon the quantity and quality of human beings in terms of size and quality of population, size and quality of military establishment, quality of government, and, more particularly, of diplomacy. Viewed as a series of technical tasks into which ethical considerations do not enter, international politics would then have to consider as one of its legitimate tasks the drastic reduction or even the elimination of the population of a rival nation, of its most prominent military and political leaders, and of its ablest diplomats. And when international politics was considered exclusively as a technique, without ethical significance, for the purpose of maintaining and gaining power, such methods were used without moral scruples and as a matter of course. According to its official records, the republic of Venice, from 1415

to 1525, planned or attempted about two hundred assassinations for purposes of international politics. Among the prospective victims were two emperors, two kings of France, and three sultans. The documents record virtually no offer of assassination to have been rejected by the Venetian government. From 1456 to 1472 it accepted twenty offers to kill the Sultan Mahomet II, the main antagonist of Venice during that period. In 1514 John of Ragusa offered to poison anybody selected by the government of Venice for an annual salary of fifteen hundred ducats; the Venetian government hired the man "on trial," as we would say today, and asked him to show what he could do with the emperor Maximilian. In the same period of history the cardinals brought to a papal coronation dinner their own butlers and wine, for fear they might otherwise be poisoned. This custom is reported to have been general in Rome without the host's taking offense at it.

Obviously, such methods to attain political ends are no longer practiced today, yet the political motives for practicing them exist today as they existed when practices of this kind actually prevailed. For there can be no doubt that it is not a matter of indifference for the nations engaged in the competition for power whether or not their competitor can avail itself of the services of outstanding military and political leaders. Thus they may hope that an outstanding leader or governing group will be compelled to give up the reigns of power, either through a political upheaval or through infirmity and death. We know now that during World War II speculations as to how long Hitler and Mussolini would stay alive, or at least in power, formed an important part of the power calculations of the United Nations and

that the news of President Roosevelt's death revived Hitler's hopes in victory. While these lines are being written, one of the major factors in American policy toward Russia seems to be the expectation that the group governing Russia will be unable to keep itself in power. Nor are the technical difficulties of engineering such removals from power by violent means greater today than they were in previous periods of history; rather the contrary is likely to be the case. Such removals are still as desirable and feasible as they always were. What has changed is the influence of civilization which makes what is desirable and feasible ethically reprehensible and, hence, normally impossible of execution.

Ethical limitations of the same kind protect in times of peace the lives not only of outstanding individuals but also of large groups, even of whole nations whose destruction would be both politically desirable and feasible. Modern history provides in the problem of Germany, as seen both by the Germans and by the rest of the world, a striking illustration of the influence of ethics upon international politics. The fundamental fact of international politics from the German point of view has been from Bismarck to Hitler the "encirclement" of Germany by powerful nations in the East and in the West. Bismarck, however ruthless and immoral his particular moves on the chessboard of international politics may have been, rarely deviated from the basic rules of the game which had prevailed in the society of Christian princes of the eighteenth century. It was a fraudulent and treacherous game, but there were a few things which no member of that aristocratic society would stoop to do. Thus Bismarck, confronted with the fundamental fact of Germany's political existence, that is, the neighbor-hood of Russia and France, accepted the inevitability of that fact and endeavored to turn it to Germany's advantage by maintaining close relations with Russia and by isolating France. Hitler, on the other hand, did not recognize the social framework within whose limitations international politics had operated from the end of the Thirty Years' War to his own ascent to power, and he was free of the moral scruples which had compelled Bismarck to accept the existence of France and Russia as the inescapable fact upon which to build a German foreign policy. Hitler undertook to change that fact itself by destroying physically Germany's eastern and western neighbors. Considered as a mere problem of political technique devoid of ethical significance, Hitler's solution was much more thorough and politically expedient than Bismarck's, for it promised to solve the problem of Germany's international position once and for all and irrevocably, as far as the eastern and western neighbors of Germany were concerned. Furthermore, in itself, Hitler's solution, when he tried it, was as feasible as it would have been in Bismarck's time and might have succeeded had it not been for certain errors in overall judgment, which, however, the political genius of Bismarck might well have avoided.

The German problem, as it presents itself to the non-German world and especially to the nations threatened with German hegemony, was formulated with brutal frankness by Clemenceau when he declared that there were twenty million Germans too many. This statement points to the inescapable fact, which has confronted Europe and the world since the Franco-German War of 1870, that Germany is by virtue of size and quality of population the most powerful nation of Europe. To reconcile this

fact with the security of the other European nations and of the rest of the world is the task of political reconstruction which faced the world after the first World War and which confronts it again after the second. That, since Clemenceau, the German problem has always been posed in terms which take the existence of "twenty million Germans too many" for granted reveals the same ethical limitations on the pursuit of power which we found in Bismarck's foreign policy and which we did not find in Hitler's. For there are indeed two ways of dealing with a problem of international politics, such as the German. One is the method by which the Romans solved the Carthaginian problem once and for all and irrevocably, that is, the method of solving a technical political problem by the appropriate means without regard for any transcendent ethical considerations. Since there were too many Carthaginians from the point of view of the power aspirations of Rome, Cato would end his every speech by proclaiming: "Ceterum censeo Carthaginem esse delendam" ("As for the rest, I am of the opinion that Carthage must be destroyed"). With her destruction the Carthaginian problem, as seen by Rome, was solved forever, and no threat to Rome's security and ambition was ever again to rise from that desolate place that once was Carthage. Similarly, if the Germans had been successful in their overall plans and if their concentration and extermination camps could have finished their tasks, the "nightmare of coalitions," at least in the form in which it haunted Bismarck, would have been forever banished from the minds of German statesmen.

A foreign policy, however, which does not admit mass extermination as a means to its end imposes upon itself this limitation, not because of considerations of political expediency which, on the contrary, would counsel such a thorough and effective operation, but by virtue of an absolute moral principle the violation of which no consideration of national advantage can justify. A foreign policy of this kind, therefore, actually sacrifices the national interest where its consistent pursuit would necessitate the violation of an ethical principle, such as the prohibition of mass killing in times of peace. This point cannot be too strongly made; for frequently the opinion is advanced that this respect for human life is the outgrowth of "the obligation not to inflict *unnecessary* death or suffering on other human beings, i.e., death or suffering not necessary for the attainment of some higher purpose which is held, rightly or wrongly, to justify a derogation from the general obligation."[3] On the contrary, the fact of the matter is that nations recognize a moral obligation to refrain from the infliction of death and suffering under certain conditions despite the possibility of justifying such conduct in the light of a higher purpose, such as the national interest.

Similar ethical limitations are placed upon international policies in times of war. They concern civilians and combatants unable or unwilling to fight. From the beginning of history through the better part of the Middle Ages belligerents were held to be free, according to ethics as well as law, to kill all enemies regardless of whether or not they were members of the armed forces, or else to treat them in any way they saw fit. Men, women, and children were often put to the sword or sold into slavery by the victor without any adverse moral reactions taking place. In chapter iv of Book III of

[3] E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years Crisis, 1919-1939,* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1940), p. 196.

On the Law of War and Peace under the heading "On the Right of Killing Enemies in a Public War and on Other Violence against the Person," Hugo Grotius presents an impressive catalogue of acts of violence committed in ancient history against enemy persons without any discrimination, most of which Grotius himself, writing in the third decade of the seventeenth century, still regarded as justified in law and ethics, provided the war was waged for a just cause.

This absence of moral restraints upon killing in war resulted from the nature of war itself, which in those times was considered a contest between all the inhabitants of the territories of the belligerent states. The enemy was less a state in the modern sense of a legal abstraction than all the individuals owing allegiance to a certain lord or living within a certain territory, and thus every individual citizen of the enemy state became an enemy of every individual citizen of the other side. Since the end of the Thirty Years' War the conception has become prevalent that war is not a contest between whole populations but only between the armies of the belligerent states, and, in consequence, the distinction between combatants and noncombatants has become one of the fundamental legal and moral principles governing the actions of belligerents. War is considered to be a contest between the armed forces of the belligerent states, and, since the civilian populations do not participate actively in the armed contest, they are not to be made its object. Consequently, it is considered to be a moral and legal duty not to attack, wound, or kill noncombatant civilians purposely. Injuries and death suffered by them as incidents of military operations, such as the bombardment of a town or a battle taking place in an inhabited area, are regretted as some-times unavoidable concomitants of war, which, however, to avoid to the utmost is again considered a moral and legal duty. The Hague conventions with respect to the laws and customs of war on land of 1899 and 1907 gave express and virtually universal legal sanction to that principle.

A corresponding development has taken place with regard to members of the armed forces unwilling or unable to fight. It follows from the conception of war prevailing in antiquity and in the better part of the Middle Ages that no exception to the moral and legal right to kill all enemies could be made for certain categories of disabled combatants. Thus Grotius could still state as the prevailing moral and legal conviction of his time: "The right to inflict injury extends even over captives, and without limitation of time. . . . . The right to inflict injury extends even over those who wish to surrender, but whose surrender is not accepted." Yet, as the logical outgrowth of the conception of war as a contest between armed forces, the idea developed that only those who are actually able and willing to participate actively in warfare ought to be the object of deliberate armed action. Those who were no longer engaged in actual warfare because of sickness, wounds, or because they had been made prisoners or were willing to be made prisoners ought not to be harmed. This tendency toward the humanization of warfare started in the sixteenth century and culminated in the great multilateral treaties of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, to which practically all civilized nations have adhered. Between 1581 and 1864, 291 international agreements were concluded for the purpose of protecting the lives of the wounded and sick, and the Geneva Convention of 1864, superseded by those of

1906 and 1929, translated into concrete and detailed legal obligations the moral convictions of the age as to the treatment to be accorded to the wounded, the sick, and the medical persons in charge of them. The International Red Cross is both the symbol and the outstanding institutional realization of those moral convictions.

As concerns prisoners of war, their lot was still miserable even in the eighteenth century, although they were as a rule no longer killed but were treated only as criminals and used as objects of exploitation by being freed only for ransom. Article 24 of the Treaty of Friendship, concluded in 1785 between the United States and Prussia, for the first time clearly indicates a change in the moral convictions on that matter by prohibiting the confinement of prisoners of war in convict prisons as well as the use of irons and by stipulating their treatment as military personnel. The Hague conventions of 1899 and 1907 as well as the Geneva Convention of 1929 laid down a detailed system of legal rules intended to assure humane treatment to prisoners of war.

From the same humanitarian concern with the life and sufferings of human beings exposed to the destructiveness of war emanate all the international treaties concluded since the mid-nineteenth century for the purpose of humanizing warfare by prohibiting the use of certain weapons, limiting the use of others, defining the rights and duties of neutrals—in short, trying to infuse into warfare a spirit of decency and of respect for the common humanity of all its prospective victims and to restrict violence to the minimum compatible with the goal of war, that is, the breaking of the enemy's will to resist. The Declaration of Paris of

1856 limiting maritime warfare; the Declaration of St. Petersburg of 1868 prohibiting the use of lightweight projectiles charged with explosives or inflammable substances; the Hague Declaration of 1899 prohibiting the use of expanding (dumdum) bullets; a number of international conventions prohibiting gas, chemical, and bacteriological warfare; the Hague conventions of 1899 and 1907 concerning the laws of war on land and sea and the rights and duties of neutrals; the London Protocol of 1936 limiting the use of submarines against merchant vessels; and, in our time, the attempts at outlawing atomic warfare—they all bear witness to a virtually universal growth of a moral reluctance to use violence without limitation as an instrument of international politics. There may be legal arguments against the validity or effectiveness of these international treaties, derived from the wholesale disregard or violations of their prohibitions. Yet this is no argument against the existence of a moral conscience which feels ill at ease in the presence of violence or, at least, certain kinds of it on the international scene. The existence of such a conscience is attested to, on the one hand, by the attempts at bringing the practice of states into harmony with ethical principles through international agreements and, on the other hand, by the universal justifications of, and excuses for, alleged violations of these agreements in ethical terms. The universal adherence to legal agreements of the kind referred to, and the attempts to live up to them at least in a certain measure, point to the fact that the protestations of innocence or of moral justification by which accusations in such matters are uniformly met are more than mere ideologies. They are the indirect recognition of

certain ethical limitations which most nations frequently violate while feeling they ought not to violate them.

Finally, there is the attitude toward war itself which has reflected since the turn of the century an ever increasing awareness on the part of most statesmen of certain ethical limitations restricting the use of war as an instrument of international politics. While statesmen have decried the ravages of war and have justified their own participation in them in terms of self-defense or religious duty since the beginning of history, the avoidance of war itself, that is, of any war, has become an aim of statecraft only in the last half-century. The two Hague peace conferences of 1899 and 1907, the League of Nations of 1919, the Briand-Kellogg Pact of 1928 outlawing aggressive war, and the United Nations in our day all have the avoidance of war as such as their ultimate objective. At the foundation of these and other legal instruments and organizations there is the conviction that war, and especially modern war, is not only a terrible thing to be avoided for reasons of expediency but also an evil thing to be shunned on moral grounds. The student of the different collections of diplomatic documents concerning the origins of the first World War is struck by the hesitancy on the part of almost all responsible statesmen, with the exception perhaps of those of Vienna and St. Petersburg, to take steps which might irrevocably lead to war. This hesitancy and the almost general dismay among the statesmen when war finally proved to be inevitable contrasts sharply with the deliberate care with which, as late as the nineteenth century, wars were planned and incidents fabricated for the purpose of making war inevitable—and of placing the blame for starting it on the other side. In the years preceding the second World War the policies of the Western powers were animated, to their great political and military disadvantage, by the desire, overriding all other considerations of national policy, to avoid war at any price. It is especially in the refusal to consider seriously the possibility of preventive war, regardless of its expediency from the point of view of the national interest, that the ethical condemnation of war as such has manifested itself in recent times in the Western world. When war comes, it must come as a natural catastrophe or as the evil deed of another nation, not as a foreseen and planned culmination of one's own foreign policy. Only thus might the moral scruples, rising from the violated ethical norm which holds that there ought to be no war at all, be stilled, if they can be stilled at all.

While thus the modern age, in contrast to antiquity and the better part of the Middle Ages, places ethical limitations upon the conduct of foreign affairs in so far as the latter might affect the lives of individuals or groups of individuals, there are, however, factors in the present condition of mankind which point toward a definite weakening of those moral limitations. Let us remember that the absence of ethical limitations with regard to the destruction of life was concomitant with the total character of warfare in which whole populations faced each other as personal enemies, and that the gradual limitation of killing in war to certain groups and its subjection to certain conditions coincided with the gradual development of limited war in which only armies faced each other as active opponents. With war taking on in recent times, more and more and in different respects, a total character, not

only are the ethical limitations upon killing observed to an ever lessening degree, but their very existence in the consciences of political and military leaders as well as of the common people becomes ever more precarious and is threatened with extinction.

War in our time has become total in four different respects: with regard to the fraction of the population engaged in activities essential for the conduct of the war; with regard to the fraction of the population affected by the conduct of the war; with respect to the fraction of the population completely identified in its convictions and emotions with the conduct of the war; and, finally, with respect to the objective of the war.

Mass armies supported by the productive effort of the majority of the civilian population have replaced the relatively small armies of previous centuries whose support consumed but a small portion of the national product. Since the success of the civilian population in keeping the armed forces supplied may be as important for the outcome of the war as the military effort itself, the defeat of the civilian population, that is, the breaking of its ability and will to produce, may be as important as the defeat of the armed forces, that is, the breaking of their ability and will to resist. Thus the character of modern war, drawing its weapons from a vast industrial machine, blurs the distinction between soldier and civilian. The industrial worker, the farmer, the railroad engineer, and the scientist are not innocent bystanders cheering on the armed forces from the sidelines; they are as intrinsic and indispensable a part of the military organization as the soldiers, sailors, and airmen. While thus a modern nation at war must wish to disrupt and destroy the productive proc-

esses of its enemy, the modern technology of war provides the means for the realization of that desire. The importance of civilian production for modern war and the interest in affecting it adversely were already generally recognized in the first World War. While then, however, the technological means of affecting the civilian productive processes directly were only in their infancy, the belligerents had to resort to indirect means, such as blockades and submarine warfare, and attempted to interfere directly with civilian life through air attacks and long-range bombardment only sporadically and with indifferent results.

The second World War has made the latter methods of direct interference the most effective instrument for the destruction of a nation's productive capacity, and the combination of interest in, and ability for, the mass destruction of civilian life and property has been too strong for the moral convictions of the modern world to resist. Voicing the moral convictions of the first decades of the century, Secretary of State Cordell Hull declared on June 11, 1938, with reference to the bombardment of Canton by Japan, that the administration disapproved of the sale of aircraft and aircraft armaments to countries which had engaged in the bombing of civilian populations; and in his speech of December 2, 1939, President Roosevelt declared a similar moral embargo against Russia in view of her military operations against Finnish civilians. Only a few years later all belligerents engaged in practices of this kind on a scale dwarfing those which American statesmen had condemned on moral grounds. Warsaw and Rotterdam, London and Coventry, Cologne and Nuremberg, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, are stepping stones, not only in the development

of the modern technology of war, but also in the development of the modern morality of warfare.

The deteriorating effect which the national interest, as created by the character of modern war, and the possibility of satisfying it, as presented by the modern technology of warfare, have had upon the moral limitations of international policies is further accentuated by the emotional involvement of the great masses of the warring populations in modern war. As the religious wars of the latter sixteenth and of the first half of the seventeenth centuries were followed by the dynastic wars of the latter seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and as the latter yielded to the national wars of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, so war in our time tends to revert to the religious type by becoming ideological in character. That is to say that the citizen of a modern warring nation, in contrast to his ancestors of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, does not fight for the glory of his prince or the unity and greatness of his nation but for an "ideal," a set of "principles," a "way of life," for which he claims a monopoly of truth and virtue. In consequence he fights to the death or "unconditional surrender" all those who adhere to another, a false and evil, "ideal" and "way of life," and, since it is the latter which he fights in whatever persons they manifest themselves, the distinctions between fighting and disabled soldiers, combatants and civilians, if they are not eliminated altogether, are subordinated to the one distinction which really matters: the one between the representatives of the right and the wrong philosophy and way of life. The moral duty to spare the wounded, the sick, the surrendering and unarmed enemy, and to respect him as a

human being who was an enemy only by virtue of being found on the other side of the fence is superseded by the moral duty to punish and to wipe off the face of the earth the professors and practitioners of evil. Under the impact of this fundamental change in the conception of war not only were the moral limitations upon killing in war, to which we have referred above, extensively violated during the second World War as a matter of fact, but there has developed a tendency to justify on moral grounds the refusal to make prisoners, the killing of prisoners, and the indiscriminate killing of members of the armed forces and of civilians, and thus to assuage one's moral scruples, if not to shake them off altogether. Thus, while the moral limitations upon killing in times of peace in support of international policies remain intact today, the moral limitations upon killing in war have proven to be largely ineffective in our time and, what is more important for the purposes of our present discussion, have shown a tendency to weaken and disappear altogether as rules of conduct under the impact of a fundamentally altered conception of war.

More than half a century ago, in an era of general optimism, a great scholar clearly foresaw the possibility of this development and analyzed its elements. John Westlake, Whewell Professor of International Law at the University of Cambridge, wrote in 1894:

It is almost a truism to say that the mitigation of war must depend on the parties to it feeling that they belong to a larger whole than their respective tribes or states, a whole in which the enemy too is comprised, so that duties arising out of that larger citizenship are owed even to him. This sentiment has never been wholly wanting in Europe since the commencement of historical times, but there have been great variations in the nature and extent of the

whole to which the wider attachment was felt. .... In our own time there is a cosmopolitan sentiment, a belief in a commonwealth of mankind similar to that of the Stoics, but stronger because the soil has been prepared by Christianity, and by the mutual respect which great states tolerably equal in power and similar in civilisation cannot help feeling for one another. .... There have been periods during which the level has fallen, and one such period it belongs to our subject to notice. The wars of religion which followed the Reformation were among the most terrible in which the beast in man ever broke loose, and yet they occurred in an age of comparative enlightenment. Zeal for a cause, however worthy the cause may be, is one of the strongest and most dangerous irritants to which human passion is subject; and the tie of Protestant to Protestant and of Catholic to Catholic, cutting across the state tie instead of embracing it unweakened in a more comprehensive one, enfeebled the ordinary checks to passion when they were most wanted. Such a degradation of war would tend to recur if socialism attained to the consistency and power of a militant creed, and met the present idea of the state on the field of battle. It is possible that we might then see in war a license equal to that which anarchism shows us in peace![4]

II. UNIVERSAL ETHICS VERSUS NATIONALISTIC UNIVERSALISM

The deterioriation of moral limitations of international politics which has occurred in recent years with regard to the protection of life is only a special instance of a general and, for the purposes of this discussion, much more far-reaching dissolution of an ethical system which in the past imposed its restraints upon the day-by-day operation of the foreign offices, but which does so no longer. Two factors have brought this dissolution about: the substitution of democratic for aristocratic responsibility in foreign affairs and the substitution of nationalistic standards of action for universal ones.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth cen-

[4] *Chapters on the Principles of International Law* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1894), pp. 267 ff.

turies, and to a lessening degree up to the first World War, international morality addressed itself to a personal sovereign, that is, an individually determined prince and his successors and to a relatively small, cohesive, and homogeneous group of aristocratic rulers. The prince and the aristocratic rulers of a particular nation were in constant intimate contact with the princes and aristocratic rulers of other nations through family ties, a common language (which was French), common cultural values, a common style of life, and common moral convictions as to what a gentleman was and was not allowed to do in his relations with another gentleman, whether of his own or of a foreign nation. As the princes competing for power considered themselves to be competitors in a game whose rules were accepted by all the other competitors, so the members of their diplomatic and military services looked upon themselves, as it were, as employees who served their employer either by virtue of the accident of birth, reinforced often, but by no means always, by a sense of personal loyalty to the monarch or because of the promise of pay, influence, and glory, which he held out to them.

It was especially the desire for material gain which provided for the members of this aristocratic society a common bond which was stronger than the ties of dynastic or national loyalty. Thus it was proper and common for a government to pay the foreign minister or diplomat of another country a pension; Lord Robert Cecil, the minister of Elizabeth, received one from Spain; Sir Henry Wotton, British ambassador to Venice in the seventeenth century, accepted one from Savoy while applying for one from Spain. The documents which the French revolutionary government published in 1793 show that France subsidized Austrian

statesmen between 1757 and 1769 to the tune of 82,652,479 livres with the Austrian chancellor, Kaunitz, receiving 100,000. Nor was it regarded any less proper and usual for a government to compensate foreign statesmen for their co-operation in the conclusion of treaties. In 1716 the French Cardinal Dubois offered the British minister, Stanhope, 600,000 livres for an alliance with France and reports that the latter, while not accepting the proposition at that time, "listened graciously without being displeased." After the conclusion of the Treaty of Basel (1795), by which Prussia withdrew from the war against France, the Prussian minister, Hardenberg, received from the French government valuables worth 30,000 francs and complained of the insignificance of the gift. The Margrave of Baden spent, in 1801, 500,000 francs in the form of "diplomatic presents," of which the French foreign minister, Talleyrand, received 150,000; originally it was intended to give him only 100,000, but the amount was increased after it had become known that he had received from Prussia a snuffbox worth 66,000 francs as well as 100,000 francs in cash.

The Prussian ambassador in Paris sums up well the main rule of this game when he reports to his government in 1802: "Experience has taught everybody who is here on diplomatic business that one ought never to give anything before the deal is definitely closed, but it has also proved that the allurement of gain will often work wonders." However much transactions of this kind were lacking in nobility, those participating in them could not be passionately devoted to the cause of the countries whose interests were in their care, and they had obviously loyalties besides and above the one to the country which employed them. Furthermore, the expectation of material gain at the conclusion of a treaty could not fail to act as a powerful incentive for coming speedily to an understanding with the other side. Stalemates, adjournments *sine die*, and long-drawn-out wars were not likely to find favor with statesmen who had a very personal stake in the conclusion of treaties. In these two respects the commercialization of statecraft in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was bound to blunt the edge of international controversies and confine the aspirations for power of individual nations within relatively narrow limits.

In that period of history the Austrian ambassador to France felt more at home at the court of Versailles than among his own nonaristocratic compatriots, and he had closer social and moral ties with the members of the French aristocracy and the other aristocratic members of the diplomatic corps than with the Austrians of humble origin. Consequently, the diplomatic and military personnel fluctuated to a not inconsiderable degree from one monarchical employer to another, and it was not rare that a French diplomat or officer, for some reason of self-interest, would enter the services of the king of Prussia and would further the international objectives of Prussia, or fight in the Prussian army, against France. During the eighteenth century there was, for instance, an enormous influx of Germans into all branches of the Russian government, many of whom were dismissed in a kind of purge and returned to their countries of origin. In 1756, shortly before the outbreak of the Seven Years' War, Frederick the Great sent the Scottish Earl Marischall as his ambassador to Spain in order to get information about the Spanish intentions. The Scottish ambassador of Prussia had a friend in Spain, an Irish-

man by the name of Wall, who happened to be Spanish foreign minister and who told him what he wanted to know. The Scot transmitted this information to the British prime minister who, in turn, passed it on to the king of Prussia. As late as 1792, shortly before the outbreak of the War of the First Coalition against France, the French government offered the supreme command of the French forces to the Duke of Brunswick, who, however, decided to accept a similar offer from the king of Prussia and led the Prussian army against France.

It is significant for the persistence of this international cohesion of the aristocracy that as late as 1862, when Bismarck, on the occasion of his recall as Prussian ambassador to Russia, expressed to the czar his regret at the necessity of leaving St. Petersburg, the czar, misunderstanding this remark, asked Bismarck whether he was inclined to enter the Russian diplomatic service. Bismarck reports in his memoirs that he declined the offer "courteously." What is important and significant for the purposes of our discussion is not that Bismarck declined the offer—many such offers have certainly been declined before and perhaps a few even after—but that he did so "courteously," and that even his report, written more than thirty years after the event, shows no trace of moral indignation. Only half a century ago the offer to an ambassador, who had just been appointed prime minister, to transfer his loyalties from one country to another was considered by the recipient as a sort of business proposition which did not at all insinuate the violation of moral standards. Let us imagine that a similar offer were being made in our time by Mr. Stalin to the American ambassador or by an American president to any diplomat accredited in Washing-

ton, and let us visualize the private embarrassment of the individual concerned and the public indignation following the incident, and we have the measure of the profundity of the change which has transformed the ethics of international politics in recent times. Today such an offer would be regarded as an invitation to treason, that is, the violation of the most fundamental of all moral obligations in international affairs: loyalty to one's own country. When it was made and even when it was reported shortly before the close of the nineteenth century, it was a proposition to be accepted or rejected on its merits and without any lack of moral propriety attaching to it.

The moral standards of conduct with which the international aristocracy complied were of necessity of a supranational character. They applied not to all Prussians, Austrians, or Frenchmen but to all men who by virtue of their birth and education were able to comprehend them and to act in accordance with them. It was in the concept and the rules of natural law that this cosmopolitan society found the source of its precepts of morality. It was, therefore, not by accident that the individual members of this society felt themselves to be personally responsible for compliance with those moral rules of conduct; for it was to them as rational human beings, as individuals, that this moral code was addressed. When it was suggested to Louis XV that he counterfeit the bills of the Bank of England, the king rejected such a proposition which "could be considered here only with all the indignation and all the horror which it deserves." When a similar proposition was made in 1792 with respect to the French currency in order to save Louis XVI, the Austrian emperor Francis II declared that "such an infamous project is not to be accepted."

This sense of a highly personal moral obligation to be met by those in charge of foreign affairs with regard to their colleagues in other countries explains the emphasis with which the writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries counseled the monarch to safeguard his "honor" and his "reputation" as his most precious possessions. Any action which Louis XV undertook on the international scene was his personal act in which his personal sense of moral obligation revealed itself and in which, therefore, his personal honor was engaged. A violation of his moral obligations, as they were recognized by his fellow-monarchs for themselves, would call into action not only his own conscience but also the spontaneous reactions of the supranational aristocratic society which would make him pay for the violation of its mores with a loss of prestige, that is, a loss of power.

When in the course of the nineteenth century democratic selection and responsibility of government officials replaced the aristocratic one, the structure of international society and, with it, of international morality underwent a fundamental change. In the new age the place of the aristocratic rulers, who virtually until the end of the nineteenth century were responsible for the conduct of foreign affairs in most countries, has been taken by officials elected or appointed regardless of class distinctions. These officials are legally and morally responsible for their official acts, not to a monarch, that is, a specific individual, but to a collectivity, that is, a parliamentary majority, or the people as a whole. An important shift in public opinion may easily call for a change in the personnel making foreign policy, who will be replaced by another group of individuals taken from whatever group of the population prevails at the moment. Government of-

ficials are no longer exclusively recruited from aristocratic groups but from virtually the whole population. The present American secretary of state is a former general, the French foreign minister is a former college professor, the former general secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union has taken the place of the British secretary of state for foreign affairs, and a former professional revolutionary is responsible for Russian foreign policy. In countries such as Great Britain, France, or Italy, where the government needs for its continuation in office the support of a majority of parliament, any change in the parliamentary majority necessitates a change in the composition of the government. Even in a country such as the United States, where not Congress but only general elections can put an administration into office or remove it, the turnover of the policy-makers in the State Department is considerable enough. Within eighteen months, from July, 1945, to January, 1947, the United States has had three secretaries of state, and of all the policy-making officials of the State Department, that is, under- and assistant secretaries, who held office in October, 1945, none was still in office two years later. The fluctuation of the policy-makers in international affairs and their responsibility to an indefinite collective entity has far-reaching consequences for the effectiveness, nay, for the very existence of an international moral order.

In one word, this transformation within the individual nations changed international morality as a system of moral restraints from a reality into a mere figure of speech. When we say that George III of England was subject to certain moral restraints in his dealings with Louis XVI of France or Catherine the

Great of Russia, we are referring to something real, something which can be identified with the conscience and the actions of certain specific individuals. When we say that the British Commonwealth of Nations or even Great Britain alone has moral obligations toward the United States or France, we are making use of a fiction, by virtue of which international law deals with nations as though they were individual personalities, but to which nothing in the sphere of moral obligations corresponds. Whatever the conscience of George VI as the constitutional head of the British Commonwealth and of Great Britain demands of the conduct of the foreign affairs of Great Britain and of the Commonwealth is irrelevant for the actual conduct of those affairs; for George VI is not responsible for, and has no actual influence upon, those affairs. What of the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of Great Britain and of the Dominions? They are but members of the cabinet, which as a collective body determines foreign policy, as any other policy, by majority decision. The cabinet as a whole is politically responsible to the majority party whose political preferences it is supposed to translate into political action, and it is legally responsible to parliament of which it is, constitutionally speaking, only a committee. Parliament, however, is responsible to the electorate from which it has received the mandate to govern and from which its individual members hope to receive another mandate at the next general election.

The individual members of the electorate, finally, may have no moral convictions of a supernational character at all which determine their actions on election day and in between, or, if they have such convictions, they will be most heterogeneous in content. In other words, there will be those who act according to the moral maxim, "Right or wrong—my country"; there will be those who apply to their own actions with regard to international affairs as well as to the actions of the government the standard of Christian ethics; there will be those who apply the standard of the United Nations or of world government or of humanitarian ethics. The fluctuating members of the policy-making group or of the permanent bureaucracy of the foreign office may or may not reflect these and similar divisions of opinion. In any case, the reference to a moral rule of conduct requires an individual conscience from which it emanates, and there is no individual conscience from which what we call the international morality of Great Britain or of any other nation could emanate.

An individual statesman may follow with regard to international affairs the dictates of his own conscience, yet it is then to him as an individual that these moral convictions are attributed and not to the nation to which he belongs and in whose name he may even actually speak. Thus, when Lord Morley and John Burns felt that the participation of Great Britain in the first World War was incompatible with their moral convictions, they resigned from the British cabinet, and this was their personal act and those were their personal convictions. When at the same moment the German chancellor admitted as head of the German government the illegality and immorality of the violation of Belgium's neutrality, justified only by a state of necessity, he spoke for himself only, and the voice of his conscience could not be and was not identified with the conscience of the collectivity called Germany. The moral principles which guided Laval as French minister of foreign affairs and prime minister were

his, not those of France, and nobody pretended the latter to be the case. Ethical rules have their seat in the consciences of individual men. Government by clearly identifiable men, who can be held personally accountable for their acts, is therefore the precondition for the existence of an effective system of international ethics. Where responsibility for government is widely distributed among a great number of individuals with different conceptions as to what is morally required in international affairs, or with no such conceptions at all, international morality as an effective system of restraints upon international policy becomes impossible. It is for this reason that Dean Roscoe Pound could say as far back as 1923: "It might be maintained plausibly, that a moral . . . . order among states, was nearer attainment in the middle of the eighteenth century than it is today."[5]

While the democratic selection and responsibility of the government officials destroyed international morality as an effective system of restraints, nationalism destroyed the international society itself within which that morality had operated. The French Revolution of 1789 marks the beginning of the new epoch of history which witnesses the gradual decline of the cosmopolitan aristocratic society and of the restraining influence of its morality upon international politics. Says Professor G. P. Gooch:

While patriotism is as old as the instinct of human association, nationalism as an articulate creed issued from the volcanic fires of the French Revolution. The tide of battle turned at Valmy; and on the evening after the skirmish Goethe . . . . replied to a request for his opinion in the historic words, "From to-day begins a

new era, and you will be able to say that you were present at its birth."[6]

It was a slow process of corrosion with the old order resisting valiantly, as proven by the Holy Alliance and incidents such as the one discussed above when as late as 1862 the Russian czar invited Bismarck to enter the Russian diplomatic service. Yet the decline of the international society and its morality, which had united the monarchs and the nobility of Christendom, is unmistakable toward the end of the nineteenth century. It has nowhere become more painfully patent than in the theatrical hollowness of William II's verbal attempts at reviving it. He wrote to the Russian czar in 1895, with regard to the French:

The Republicans are revolutionists de natura. The blood of Their Majesties is still on that country. Has it since then ever been happy or quiet again? Has it not staggered from bloodshed to bloodshed? Nicky, take my word on it, the curse of God has stricken that people forever. We Christian Kings and Emperors have one holy duty imposed on us by Heaven, that is to uphold the principle of By the Grace of God.

And the anachronism of William II's plan, conceived on the eve of the Spanish-American War, to unite the European powers in support of the Spanish monarchy against the American republic, dismayed his advisers.

But even in 1914, at the eve of the first World War, there is in many of the statements and dispatches of statesmen and diplomats a melancholy undertone of regret that individuals who had so much in common should now be compelled to separate and identify themselves with the warring groups on the different sides of the frontiers. This, however, was only a feeble reminiscence which

[5] *Philosophical Theory and International Law* ("Bibliotheca Visseriana," Vol. I [Leyden, 1923]), p. 74.

[6] *Studies in Diplomacy and Statecraft* (London, New York and Toronto: Longmans, Green & Co., 1942), pp. 300, 301.

had no longer the power to influence the actions of men. By then, these men had naturally less in common with each other than they had with the respective peoples from which they had risen to the heights of power and whose will and interests they represented in their relations with other nations. What separated the French foreign minister from his opposite number in Berlin was much more important than what united them, and, conversely, what united the French foreign minister with the French nation was much more important than anything which might set him apart from her. In other words, the place of the one international society to which all members of the different governing groups belonged and which provided a common framework for the different national societies had been taken by the national societies themselves giving to their representatives on the international scene the standards of conduct which the international society had formerly supplied.

When, in the course of the nineteenth century, this fragmentation of the aristocratic international society into its national segments was well on its way to consummation, the protagonists of nationalism were convinced that this development would strengthen the bonds of international morality rather than weaken them. For they believed that, once the national aspirations of the liberated peoples were satisfied and aristocratic rule replaced by popular government, nothing could separate the nations of the earth and, conscious of being members of the same humanity and inspired by the same ideals of freedom, tolerance, and peace, they would pursue their national destinies in harmony. Actually, the spirit of nationalism, once it had materialized in national states, proved to be not universalistic and humanitarian but particularistic and exclusive. When the international society of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was destroyed, it became obvious that there was nothing to take the place of that unifying and restraining element which had been a real society superimposed upon the particular national societies. The international solidarity of the working class under the banner of socialism proved to be an illusion, and organized religion tended to identify itself with the national state rather than to transcend it. Thus the nation became the ultimate point of reference for the allegiance of the individual, and the members of the different nations all had their own particular object of allegiance. We have in Lord Keynes's portrait of Clemenceau a vivid sketch of this new morality of nationalism.

He felt about France what Pericles felt of Athens—unique value in her, nothing else mattering. . . . . He had one illusion—France; and one disillusion—mankind, including Frenchmen, and his colleagues not least. . . . . Nations are real things, of whom you love one and feel for the rest indifference—or hatred. The glory of the nation you love is a desirable end, but generally to be obtained at your neighbor's expense. Prudence required some measure of lip-service to the "ideals" of foolish Americans and hypocritical Englishmen, but it would be stupid to believe that there is much room in the world, as it really is, for such affairs as the League of Nations, or any sense in the principle of self-determination except as an ingenious formula for rearranging the balance of power in one's own interests.[7]

This fragmentation of a formerly cohesive international society into a multiplicity of morally self-sufficient national communities which have ceased to operate within a common framework of moral precepts is but the outward symptom of the profound change which in recent

[7] *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1920), pp. 32, 33.

times has transformed the relations be-
tween universal ethical precepts and the
particular systems of national ethics.
This transformation has proceeded in
two different ways. It has weakened, to
the point of ineffectiveness, the univer-
sal, supranational moral rules of conduct,
which before the age of nationalism had
imposed a system—however precarious
and wide-meshed—of limitations upon
the international policies of individual
nations, and it has finally endowed in the
minds and aspirations of individual na-
tions their particular national systems of
ethics with universal validity.

The crucial test of the vitality of an
ethical system occurs when its control of
the consciences and actions of men is
challenged by another system of moral-
ity. Thus the relative strength of the
ethics of humility and self-denial of the
Sermon on the Mount and of the ethics
of self-advancement and power of mod-
ern Western society is determined by the
extent to which either system of morality
is able to mold the actions or at least the
consciences of men in accordance with its
precepts. Every human being, in so far as
he is responsive to ethical appeals at all,
is from time to time confronted with such
a conflict of conscience, which tests the
relative strength of conflicting moral
commands. A similar test must deter-
mine the respective strength, with regard
to the conduct of foreign affairs, of the
supranational ethics, composed of Chris-
tian, cosmopolitan, and humanitarian
elements to which the diplomatic lan-
guage of the time pays its tribute and
which is postulated by many individual
writers, and the ethics of nationalism
which have been on the ascendancy
throughout the world for the last century
and a half.

Now it is indeed true that national
ethics, as formulated in the philosophy of

reason of state of the seventeenth and
eighteenth centuries or in the concept of
the national interest of the nineteenth
and twentieth, has in most conflict situa-
tions proved itself to be superior to uni-
versal moral rules of conduct. This is ob-
vious from a consideration of the most
elemental and also the most important
conflict situation of this kind, the one
between the universal ethical precept,
"Thou shalt not kill," and the command
of a particular national ethics, "Thou
shalt kill under certain conditions the
enemies of thy country." The individual
to whom these two moral rules of con-
duct are addressed is confronted with a
conflict between his allegiance to human-
ity as a whole, manifesting itself in the
respect for human life as such irrespec-
tive of nationality or any other particular
characteristic, and his loyalty to a par-
ticular nation whose interests he is called
upon to promote at the price of the lives
of the members of another nation. This
conflict is resolved today and has been
resolved during all modern history by
most individuals in favor of loyalty to
the nation. Three factors distinguish,
however, in this respect, the present age
from previous ones.

First, there is the enormously in-
creased ability of the nation-state to ex-
ert moral compulsion upon its members,
which is the result partly of the almost
divine prestige which the nation enjoys in
our time, partly of the control over the
instruments molding public opinion
which technological developments have
put at the disposal of the state.

Second, there is the extent to which
loyalty to the nation requires the individ-
ual to disregard universal moral rules of
conduct. The modern technology of war
has given the individual opportunities
for mass destruction unknown to pre-
vious ages. Today a nation may ask one

single individual to destroy the lives of hundreds of thousands of people by dropping one atomic bomb, and the compliance with a demand of such enormous consequences demonstrates the weakness of supranational ethics more impressively than the limited violations of universal standards, committed in pre-atomic times, were able to.

Finally, there is today, in consequence of the two other factors, much less chance for the individual to be loyal to supranational ethics when they are in conflict with the moral demands of the nation. The individual, faced with the enormity of the deeds which he is asked to commit in the name of the nation, and with the overwhelming weight of moral pressure which the nation exerts upon him, would require almost superhuman moral strength to resist those demands. The magnitude of the infractions of universal ethics committed on behalf of the nation and of the moral compulsion exerted in favor of them affect the qualitative relationship of the two systems of ethics. It puts in bold relief the desperate weakness of universal ethics in its conflict with the morality of the nation and decides the conflict in favor of the nation before it has really started.

It is at this point that this hopeless impotence of universal ethics becomes an important factor in bringing about a significant and far-reaching change in the relations between supranational and national systems of morality. It is one of the factors which lead to the identification of both. The individual comes to realize that the flouting of universal standards of morality is not the handiwork of a few wicked men but the inevitable outgrowth of the conditions under which nations exist and pursue their aims. He experiences in his own conscience the feebleness of universal stand-ards and the preponderance of national ethics as forces motivating the actions of men on the international scene, and his conscience does not cease being ill at ease. While, on the one hand, the continuous discomfort of a perpetually uneasy conscience is too much for him to bear, he is too strongly attached to the concept of universal ethics to give it up altogether. Thus he identifies the morality of his own nation with the commands of supranational ethics; he pours, as it were, the contents of his national ethics into the now almost empty bottle of universal ethics. So each nation comes to know again a universal morality, that is, its own national one which is taken to be the one which all the other nations ought to accept as their own. Instead of the universality of an ethics to which all nations adhere, we have in the end the particularity of national ethics which claims the right to, and aspires toward, universal recognition. There are then as many ethical codes claiming universality as there are politically active nations.

Nations no longer oppose each other, as they did from the Treaty of Westphalia to the Napoleonic Wars and then again from the end of the latter to the first World War, within a framework of shared beliefs and common values which imposes effective limitations upon the ends and means of their struggle for power. They oppose each other now as the standard-bearers of ethical systems, each of them of national origin and each of them claiming and aspiring to provide a supranational framework of moral standards which all the other nations ought to accept and within which their international policies ought to operate. The moral code of one nation flings the challenge of its universal claim into the face of another which reciprocates in kind. Compromise, the

virtue of the old diplomacy, becomes the treason of the new; for the mutual accommodation of conflicting claims, possible or legitimate within a common framework of moral standards, amounts to surrender when the moral standards themselves are the stakes of the conflict. Thus, the stage is set for a contest among nations whose stakes are no longer their relative positions within a political and moral system accepted by all but the ability to impose upon the other contestants a new universal political and moral system recreated in the image of the victorious nation's political and moral convictions.

The first inkling of this development from one genuinely universal to a multiplicity of particular moral systems claiming and competing for universality can be detected in the contest between Napoleon and the nations allied against him. On both sides the contest was fought in the name of particular principles claiming universal validity: here the principles of the French Revolution, there the principle of legitimacy. However, with the defeat of Napoleon and the failure of the Holy Alliance to uphold its principles in competition with the rising movement of nationalism, this attempt at erecting a particular code of ethics into a universal one came to an end and thus remained a mere historic interlude.

The present period of history in which generally and, as it seems, permanently universal moral rules of conduct are replaced by particular ones claiming universality was ushered in by Woodrow Wilson's war "to make the world safe for democracy." It is not by accident and it has deep significance that those who shared Wilson's philosophy called that war also a "crusade" for democracy; for the first World War, as seen from Wilson's perspective, has indeed this in common with the crusades of the Middle Ages: that it was waged for the purpose of making one moral system, held by one group, prevail in the rest of the world. A few months after the democratic crusade had gotten under way, in October, 1917, the foundations were laid in Russia for another moral and political structure which on its part, while accepted only by a fraction of humanity, was claimed to provide the common roof under which all humankind would once live together in justice and in peace. While in the twenties this latter claim was supported by insufficient power and, hence, was little more than a theoretical postulate, the democratic universalism retired from the scene of active politics and isolationism took its place. It was only in the theoretical challenge which the priests of the new Marxian universalism flung in the face of the democratic world and in the moral, political, and economic ostracism with which the latter met the challenge that the conflict between the two universalisms made itself felt at that time in the field of international politics. In the thirties the philosophy of naziism, grown in the soil of a particular nation, proclaimed itself the new moral code which would replace the vicious creed of bolshevism and the decadent morality of democracy and would impose itself upon mankind. The second World War, viewed in the light of our present discussion, tested in the form of an armed conflict the validity of this claim of naziism to universality, and naziism lost the test. Yet in the minds of many on the side of the United Nations, the principles of the Atlantic Charter and of the Declaration of Yalta had made the second World War also a contest for universal democracy, and democracy, too, lost the test. With the termination of the second World War the two remaining moral and political sys-

tems claiming universal validity, democracy and communism, entered into active competition for the dominance of the world, and that is the situation in which we find ourselves today.

It would be the most dangerous of illusions to overlook or even to belittle the depth of the difference which exists, in view of the moral limitations of international politics, between that situation and the condition of the modern state system from the end of the religious wars to the entrance of the United States into the first World War. One needs only to pick at random any conflict which occurred in that latter period, with the exception of the Napoleonic Wars, and compare it with the conflicts which have torn the world apart in the last three decades in order to realize the importance of that difference. Let us compare the issues which brought France and the Hapsburgs into almost continual conflict from the beginning of the sixteenth to the middle of the eighteenth century, or which pitted Great Britain and Prussia against France in the eighteenth century, with the international issues of our time. The former were of territorial aggrandizement and dynastic competition; what was at stake was the more or less of glory, wealth, and power. Neither the Austrian nor the British nor the French nor the Prussian "way of life," that is, their system of beliefs and ethical convictions, was at stake. This is exactly what is at stake today. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries none of the contestants on the international scene aspired to impose his own particular system of ethics, provided he had one, upon the others. The very possibility of such an aspiration never occurred to them, since they were aware only of one universal moral code to which they all gave unquestioning allegiance. This was the world which Gibbon, in a celebrated passage of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, suggested be considered

as one great republic, whose various inhabitants have attained almost the same level of politeness and cultivation. The balance of power will continue to fluctuate, and the prosperity of our own or the neighboring kingdoms may be alternately exalted or depressed: but these events cannot essentially injure our general state of happiness, the system of arts, and laws, and manners, which so advantageously distinguish, above the rest of mankind, the Europeans and their colonies. . . . . The abuses of tyranny are restrained by the mutual influence of fear and shame; republics have acquired order and stability; monarchies have imbibed the principles of freedom, or, at least, of moderation; and some sense of honour and justice is introduced into the most defective constitutions by the general manners of the times. In peace, the progress of knowledge and industry is accelerated by the emulation of so many active rivals: in war, the European forces are exercised by temperate and undecisive contests.[8]

That common "system of arts, and laws, and manners," "the same level of politeness and cultivation," and the "sense of honour and justice," which Gibbon had detected in "the general manners of the times" and which for the state systems of the eighteenth century were a lived and living reality, have today in the main become a historic reminiscence, lingering on in learned treatises, utopian tracts, and diplomatic documents, but no longer capable of moving men to action.

Only shreds and fragments survive of this system of supranational ethics which exerts its restraining influence upon international politics, as we have seen, only in isolated instances, such as killing in peacetime and preventive war. As for the influence of that system of supranational ethics upon the conscience of the actors on the international scene, it is

[8] *Op. cit.* (Modern Library ed.), II, 93 ff.

rather like the feeble rays, barely visible above the horizon of consciousness, of a sun which has already set. Since the first World War, with ever increasing intensity and generality, each of the contestants in the international arena claims in his "way of life" to possess the whole truth of morality and politics which the others may reject only at their peril. With fierce exclusiveness all contestants equate their national conceptions of morality with what all mankind must and will ultimately accept and live by. In this, the ethics of international politics reverts to the politics and morality of tribalism, of the crusades, and of the religious wars.

However much the content and objectives of today's nationalistic ethics may differ from those of primitive tribes or of the Thirty Years' War, they do not differ in the function which they fulfil for international politics, and in the moral climate which they create. The morality of the particular group, far from limiting the struggle for power on the international scene, gives that struggle a ferociousness and intensity not known to other ages. For the claim to universality which inspires the moral code of one particular group is incompatible with the identical claim of another group; the world has room for only one, and the other must yield or be destroyed. Thus, carrying their idols before them, the nationalistic masses of our time meet in the international arena, each group convinced that it executes the mandate of history, that it does for humanity what it seems to do for itself, and that it fulfils a sacred mission ordained by providence, however defined.

Little do they know that they meet under an empty sky from which the gods have departed.

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