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## Critical Exchange

# *Foundations of modern international theory*

By David Armitage,  
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We brought together a group of scholars to discuss this new work by David Armitage, confident that it would produce a vibrant conversation at the intersection of political theory and International Relations. Contributors include Kimberley Hutchings, Jens Bartelson, Edward Keene, Lea Ypi and Helen Kinsella, with a response by David Armitage.

## **Beyond Traditions in International Thought**

*Foundations of Modern International Thought (FMIT)* brings together a series of David Armitage's previously published essays. In the Introduction to the text, Armitage quotes Hugh Trevor-Roper's 'classical apologia' for sets of collected essays, that they 'receive an underlying unity from the philosophy of the writer' (p. 2). More broadly, he justifies his particular collection as a contribution to the developing field of international intellectual history. In this respect, he claims, they form the third part of a trilogy with his previous works *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (2000) and *The Declaration of Independence: A Global History* (2007). However, unlike the previously published texts, *FMIT* is not a systematic engagement with specific concepts within the history of international thought. It is an eclectic collection of essays, which engages with several different concepts, including the concepts of 'global', 'transnational' and 'international' themselves, as well as with the work of specific thinkers, with essays dedicated to the work of Hobbes, Locke, Burke and Bentham. The book is organised into four parts. Part 1 involves broad-ranging methodological and substantive reflections on international intellectual history. Part 2 interrogates the work of Hobbes and Locke as foundational thinkers for modern international thought. Part 3 focuses on the contributions of eighteenth

century ideas and thinkers. Part 4 turns to the international history of declarations of independence and begins tracing out the fundamental significance of the American Revolution for the origins of contemporary international society and for how we still conceptualise states and international law in theory and in practice. Although some of the essays were already familiar to me, there was also much that I had not read before, and I found the book to be full of erudition and insight. All of the essays provide food for thought for those of us working in the broad field of International Relations theory, or those who teach the history of international political thought, as well as for specialist historians of international thought.

Part 1 focuses on methodological questions that have become much more explicitly central to the history of international thought over the past decade. Of particular interest are Armitage's reflections on the meanings of 'context', if one takes an approach to the history of international thought that is influenced by, but not reducible to, Cambridge School contextualism. Chapter 1 ends with the intriguing question of how one historicises conceptions of space, and comes to an optimistic conclusion as to the possibilities of producing properly contextual international or global histories: 'Here again, the opportunities may be greater than the dangers. Canons of relevance must be defined, routes of active (or at least plausible) transmission mapped and scales of reference calibrated according to contemporaries' conceptions of the international or the global; with such boundaries in place, it should be feasible to construct meaningful spatial contexts for the ideas we trace across borders and bounded discursive communities' (p. 32). Chapter 2 raises the question of whether there is a pre-history of globalisation, and challenges any unitary response by stressing the multiplicity of globalisation's histories and pre-histories. Chapter 3, for me one of the most interesting chapters, traces land-based (elephant) and ocean-based (whale) images of empire in the history of international/global political thought, and the ways in which these images are transmitted and utilised. In this respect, Armitage suggests that Carl Schmitt perceived something central to how we conceptualise world history, with his account of that history as an ongoing battle between land- and sea-based powers in *Nomos of the Earth*: 'It is possible to go even further than Schmitt to argue that the opposition of land powers and sea power, behemoths and leviathans, elephants and whales, is fundamental both chronologically and ontologically to western historiography' (p. 50). In the conclusion to this essay, Armitage suggests that contemporary work in world history that conceives that history in terms of inter-state relations is working with the legacy of land-based (elephant) conceptions of empire, in contrast to accounts of globalisation, that draw on the legacy of oceanic conceptions of imperial power (whale) as fluid and boundless. The argument of the chapter simultaneously pushes scholars to recognise the historicity (and politics) inherent in the vocabulary available for capturing international and global relations, and suggests deep rhetorical continuities in the history of western thought.

Parts 2 and 3 of the book include several essays devoted to particular thinkers, including looking at how their work has been previously interpreted in histories of



international thought. I found the chapters on Locke and Bentham particularly informative and enlightening, although some of the arguments made in these central parts of the book feel rather dated from the point of view of 2013. One of the themes of the volume as a whole, but particularly of Parts 2 and 3, is the critique of International Relations theory and its anachronistic parsing of the history of political thought into three ‘traditions’. This is a charge associated particularly strongly with the work of twentieth century English School theorists, such as Wight and Bull, who identified thinkers and ideas from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with so-called ‘traditions’ of *realism* (stressing anarchic relations between states), *rationalism* (stressing the social character of relations between states) and *revolutionism* (stressing the possibility of the radical transcendence of inter-state relations). Within this three ‘traditions’ account, direct identifications were made between Hobbes and twentieth century realist thinkers such as Morgenthau, between Grotius and twentieth century English School theory, and between Kant and twentieth century liberalisms. This English School account was accompanied by a particular reading of the history of the relation between international law, natural law and legal positivism, which projected the natural law/legal positivism distinction back on to a contrast between the accounts of domestic and international law in Grotius and Hobbes. It is now something of a commonplace, largely because of the work of historians of international thought such as Armitage, that these accounts of traditions of international thought and of the history of international law are flawed in many respects. In particular, this is because they rely on a conflation of nineteenth century appropriations of seventeenth century thinkers, such as Grotius and Hobbes, with the ideas of those thinkers themselves. In this context, the debunking message of Armitage’s essays on Hobbes and Burke, although well-articulated and persuasive, reads now as somewhat superfluous from the point of view of contemporary history of ideas in International Relations, although it does remain pertinent to the ways in which many textbooks and syllabuses are still organised within the discipline.

As well as challenging readings of international thought by International Relations theorists of an English School complexion, Armitage also takes on postcolonial readings of the history of international thought in the chapters on Locke. In recent years, International Relations has begun to be influenced by postcolonial histories of European imperialism and its relation to liberalism. In this context, it has been argued that Locke, widely recognised as a crucial thinker for the pre-history of liberal ideas, was also an early imperialist thinker (p. 114). Armitage takes issue with this account of Locke and argues for a more nuanced reading of the meaning of Locke’s texts in relation to the conceptual vocabulary he was using and the historical context within which he was writing. Although he acknowledges how Locke’s work as a colonial administrator influenced his thought in a variety of respects, Armitage argues that his thought lacks one of the elements that Tully argues is crucial to the meaning of an imperial vision: placing ‘the world’s peoples in a hierarchical order with Europeans at the top of the scale’ (p. 115). In a careful unpacking of Locke’s texts, Armitage points



out the specificity of Locke's imperial concerns (confined to the Atlantic), the ways in which his ideas shifted over time, and the lack of any such hierarchy of peoples in his mature work. He teases out the way in which Locke acknowledged the equal rationality of people, including Amerindians. According to Locke, who was, as Armitage reminds us, a dyed-in-the-wool empiricist who rejected the Cartesian notion of 'innate ideas', differences in productive capacity between peoples were to do with circumstances, and not innate superiority or inferiority. Armitage goes on to point to how Locke's arguments were later utilised to legitimate imperial hierarchies, but only by reading Locke's arguments about property in ways that essentialised distinctions that Locke himself had considered as contingent. Armitage concludes that although it is reasonable to see Locke as legitimating a particular kind of settler colonialism, the underlying arguments for this were on a par with his justifications of enclosure at home. This means that to classify him as a liberal imperialist (setting aside the anachronism of the use of the term liberalism in this context), is to occlude major differences between seventeenth century and nineteenth century imperialisms and the conceptual vocabularies through which both were understood and legitimated. To identify Locke with thinkers such as Mill is to distort the histories of both liberalism and imperialism.

Armitage's treatments of eighteenth century international thought in Part 3, in Chapters 8 and 9, again point to problems of anachronism. Chapter 8 explains the anachronism inherent in using concepts of 'identity' and 'nation' to capture collective self-understandings of the state in eighteenth century Britain. It also, interestingly, points to how international law, or the law of nations, increasingly became a reference point in parliamentary debate in the eighteenth century, in particular in the last two decades, paving the way for the recognisably modern distinctions between national and international law that would emerge in the nineteenth century. Chapter 9 again targets the problems with the 'three traditions' approaches to the history of international thought, focusing on Burke's usage of the concept 'reason of state'. As Armitage points out, 'traditions' approaches by contemporary international theorists have struggled to place Burke in any of the available theoretical boxes. Standard interpretations of 'reason of state' in International Relations linked it to classical realism, which was understood as being characterised by a fundamental distinction between approaches to domestic and to foreign policy, mapped onto another clear distinction between morality and politics. As Armitage shows, this is a misrepresentation of a much more subtle and ambiguous Ciceronian conception of reason of state, developed in the thought of Grotius and Vattel, upon which Burke draws in his arguments about imperialism and the French Revolution. As Armitage trenchantly puts it in the conclusion to the chapter: 'Burke's place in the history of international thought should therefore be assimilated more closely to his position in the traditions of political thought, as a standing reproach to procrustean taxonomies and overhasty appropriations' (p. 171). The following chapter, 'Globalising Jeremy Bentham', continues with the theme of contestation and ambiguity over the nature of international law in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. But it does so with



a focus on Bentham's work and the way in which it married an entirely global vision with a rigorous anti-naturalism. This chapter is interesting for the light that it sheds on a thinker who is rarely acknowledged within canonic accounts of international thought, as well as for its broader insights into the history of evolving conceptualisations of international law in Bentham's lifetime.

In the final part of the volume, Armitage points to the significance for the construction of modern state and inter-state relations of the American revolution and the creation of new states in the Americas in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Chapters 11 and 12 make a case for the international legal and political implications of the American Declaration of Independence, including for the success or failure of subsequent declarations of independence up to the present day. Armitage situates the meaning of the Declaration in the 'jurisprudential eclecticism' of late eighteenth century understandings of international law. The declaration appeals to both natural and positive conceptions of international law, but it also marks the transition point in which positivist accounts of the law of nations begin to dominate at the expense of naturalism. And, according to Armitage, it represents a decisive shift from a world of empires, in which the meaning of sovereignty is contested, into a world of states, in which the meaning of sovereignty as autonomy and its coupling to the idea of a 'nation' gradually (over a considerable period of time) become the norm (pp. 230–231). It is in this section of the volume that its most significant takeaway message is articulated. That is, that the legal and political vocabularies being formulated in the late eighteenth/early nineteenth centuries in the western hemisphere are decisively important for understanding the development of the contemporary world of nation-states. In this respect, Armitage joins with other recent commentators in International Relations in seeking to firmly displace Westphalia in the imagined history of international society, and to concentrate instead on the ideological significance of the beginnings of the long nineteenth century outside, as well as inside, of Europe.

To read *FMIT* is to read an intellectual historian at the top of his game. Armitage's work is erudite and thought provoking, and although it is rigorously historical, it is not narrowly so. In contrast to some examples of contextual history of ideas, Armitage is willing to make bold and general claims about the ways in which ideas have travelled, and what does or does not matter from the past for contemporary understandings of the international. Many of the essays speak to the broader agendas of International Relations, as well as to the work of world historians, historical sociologists, globalisation theorists and political theorists. I am not a historian but I found Armitage's work valuable to me as an International Relations theorist and as a teacher in two respects in particular. First, it was useful to be reminded of the dangers of anachronism and over-simplification in theoretical taxonomies. Even if these dangers are now very widely recognised by scholars in the history of international political thought, they are much less well-recognised in textbooks and on syllabuses. Armitage's elegant demolition of the idea that Hobbes could



be thought to be any kind of international theorist should make all of us who teach ‘canonic’ course in the history of international political thought ask ourselves again which thinkers should get onto the syllabus and why. And his insistence on the perils of over-simplification in mainstream and postcolonial theory is also a useful counter to the perpetual production of categorisations in the world of international theory. Second, Armitage’s argument for the centrality of developments outside of Europe for the nature of contemporary international relations is extremely powerful and provides a rather different and potentially very fruitful challenge to the Eurocentrism of International Relations than we find in much revisionist work on the myth of Westphalia.

In two further respects, however, I find Armitage’s account raises certain problems. First, Armitage re-presents rather than resolves or bridges the gap between contemporary theoretical debates in International Relations and intellectual history. We theorists may recognise the misappropriation of the ideas of dead thinkers in the formulation of the tools of analysis in International Relations, but it is not quite clear what this implies for our use of those tools. Or indeed what light this casts on the question of whether international or global conceptual vocabularies are most appropriate for making sense of the contemporary world. Second, at the same time as promising a new, less Eurocentric route for thinking about the development of international society, Armitage’s analysis nevertheless tends to reinscribe a history of international thought in which certain developments in Anglophone international political thinking in particular are predominant. There is a danger that the pluralism promised in Armitage’s reflections on global pre-history may be subsumed in a new master narrative in which the revolution of 1776 comes to occupy a similar status to the 1648 Peace of Westphalia in the historiography of International Relations.

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## **International theory meets intellectual history**

The publication of *Foundations of Modern International Thought (FMIT)* signals a very fortunate convergence of scholarly concerns. During the past decades, academic International Relations has undergone a historical turn that has brought



at least a partial awareness of the contingency of the sovereign state and the mutability of the modern international system. More recently, intellectual historians have begun to take an interest in international thought, sensitising us to how long prevailing ahistorical accounts of International Relations have been supported by anachronistic interpretations of the classics of international thought, as well as conversely. Yet despite these shared concerns, there has not been very much of a dialogue between intellectual historians and international theorists. Since one of the chief virtues of this masterful collection of essays is to create the preconditions for such a dialogue, I shall explore some common points of concern between these fields, as well as some significant tensions that arise from their different views of the task of historical enquiry.

Apart from providing welcome correctives to the received canon of international thought, *FMIT* opens up a series of problems that have largely escaped the attention of contemporary international theory. The first of these concerns the history of globalisation. While much ink has been spilt on the chronology and putative universality of processes of globalisation, Armitage raises the more profound and to my mind more interesting question of when and how it became possible 'to think globally about history and to think historically about the globe' (p. 38). Tracing the origins of global thought to the universalistic aspirations of the Enlightenment, he then describes how the counter-revolution 'laid the foundation for a conception of international law as the law of a specifically Christian civilization rather than as the norms of an emergent global society' (p. 41). For some time now, blaming this outcome on western imperialism and colonialism has been fashionable within critical international theory, something which in turn has licensed the cynical but ultimately solipsistic commonplace that anything resembling a global society is forever out of reach other than as a mirage of western imperialism.

Although most of the canonical figures discussed by Armitage were primarily preoccupied with the relations among bounded and distinct political communities, some of these struggled to make sense of the more encompassing global sphere opened up by European expansion and the intensified interaction between different parts of the world that followed. In one of the most refreshing essays of this volume, Armitage describes how Jeremy Bentham – an author largely neglected by international theorists – sought to comprehend this emergent world in more holistic terms, comprising the totality of peoples and polities. Calling for a wholesale reform of international law, Bentham formulated a universalistic vision of legal order based on the fundamental equality and happiness of all peoples, irrespective of whether they had attained formal sovereignty or happened to belong to the Christian civilisation. Although his proposal was never codified in international law, Bentham was thereby taking important steps towards counteracting the narrowing scope of international law that followed the transition from natural to positive law. Armitage's description of the emergence of a distinctively global realm as well as the



responses this realm provoked is an invitation to international theorists to consider the possibility that the tension between universalistic and particularistic accounts of political order might be historically contingent rather than a perennial feature of international thought.

Second, although both empires and imperial political thought have attracted considerable attention among both intellectual historians and international theorists, a recurrent theme in *FMIT* is the intriguing question of how a world of empires was replaced with a world of states. Addressing this question, Armitage focuses on how declarations of independence and claims to democratic self-determination contributed to the breakup of empires and led to their eventual replacement by an international system of territorially demarcated and formally equal states. This should encourage international theorists to further enquire into the causes of the transition from a world of empires to a world of states, since underneath this account lurks the question of how the prerequisites of political legitimacy shifted during this transition from boundless to bounded forms of political authority. Furthermore, cautioning us against simple dichotomies, ‘a history of competitive but mutually recognizing territorial nation-states’ has long been ‘pitted against and alongside a narrative of globalization ...’ (p. 56), it would follow that international theorists perhaps should explore the ways in which these worlds rather reinforce than counteract each other even in the present.

Situating the American Declaration of Independence in the context of international law and International Relations, Armitage argues that it was ‘a speech-act which not only *communicated* the fact of independence of the United States to the world but by so doing also *performed* the independence it declared’ (p. 198). As such, it ‘arose from a transitional and eclectic moment within the history of international law when both natural law and the positive law of nations could be appealed to equally’ (p. 195). Pursuing this line of enquiry further into the present, Armitage describes how the prescriptions of positive international law and the prevailing norms of the international community have increasingly put restrictions on the possibility of attaining international legal recognition by entities aspiring to independence and statehood. Armitage thereby adds new insights into how complex changes in the edifice of international legal theory have conditioned the practices of international legal recognition, insights that take us beyond standard accounts focused on the role of European imperialism in bringing this change about.

Third, *FMIT* does an excellent job correcting the canon in international thought and dispelling myths that have long been common stock in international theory. International theorists have habitually saddled dead philosophers with views that hardly would have made sense to them in order to support or debunk theoretical or ideological positions in the present. Armitage is gentle enough with those sitting ducks. Challenging the widespread view according to which Hobbes was the first theorist of international anarchy, Armitage describes how his





scattered remarks on the relations between states rested on a conflation of the law of nations with the law of nature, a conflation that had lasting consequences for the reception of his thought until he eventually was co-opted by political realists in the twentieth century. Realizing that Hobbes himself hardly was a Hobbesian, the 'salutary effect of this revision may be to expel Hobbes from the canon of International Relations theory and to admit him instead to the history of international thought' (p. 74).

Where others have failed to find a coherent international theory in the writings of Locke, Armitage reconstructs the outline of such a theory by supplementing the *Two Treatises* with a close reading of his unpublished correspondence and other writings. In contrast to Hobbes, Locke saw the law of nature and the law of nations as categorically distinct, and held that the rights of individuals constituted the only legitimate basis of the rights of nations. Once admitted to the canon of international thought, the next step is to rescue Locke from the kind of criticism that all too easily equates liberalism and imperialism. Although Locke acted as a colonial administrator and was deeply involved in the 1682 revision of the *Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina* – a document that granted the power of life and death to masters over their slaves – he can hardly be construed as a theorist of empire, since 'he did not espouse or elaborate a hierarchical ordering of populations, lest of all one that placed Europeans above or even apart from other groups, because he saw rationality itself as evenly distributed among human populations and the usual markings of civilization as contingent ad fragile' (p. 115). Hence 'we must be aware that there have been different strains of imperial and colonial liberalism and that they have not necessarily been continuous with each other' (pp. 130–131).

The works of Edmund Burke receive a similar careful treatment. For long a contested figure within international theory, Burke has been read either as an advocate or as an opponent of 'reason of state' in international affairs. Armitage shows how this controversy has resulted from definitions and distinctions that would have made no sense to Burke, but which rather reflect the eagerness with which he has been appropriated by modern international theorists. If we take 'reason of state' to mean that the national interest must override all other moral concerns, then Burke certainly cannot be assimilated to this imaginary tradition of thought. But since Burke himself recognised no such disjunction between necessity and morality, he was able to understand 'reason of state' as instrumental in safeguarding fundamental moral principles in both the domestic and international spheres, while providing him with 'the most persuasive analysis of the collapse of the European states-system, the failure of the balance of power and the desperate need for self-preservation compelled by the French Revolution' (p. 170).

The scope and sophistication of *FMIT* make it a very valuable contribution both to the study of international thought as well as to contemporary international theory. In contrast to many other historians of political thought, Armitage has a very good grasp of contemporary international theory, something that allows him to address its



historiographical implications directly and to correct many of the most obvious anachronisms. But even if the busting of disciplinary myths has evolved into a cottage industry within academic International Relations, there is still ample room for tension between these enterprises. When international theorists like myself dabble in intellectual history, we tend to do so less because we are interested in the past for its own sake, but more because we are interested in how those aspects of the present that we perceive as problematic – given the contemporary concerns of international theory – came into being and became taken for granted. And from this difference in purpose follows a difference in perspective. While many international theorists are eager to understand the past, they are likely to regard this as a step towards an enquiry into the constitutive aspects of international thought. Where intellectual historians are content to enquire into the meaning of a concept within a given context, international theorists want to know how the usage of a concept has shaped and transformed international practices and institutions across different contexts. While those tasks certainly are not incompatible – indeed, one could argue that the uncovering of conceptual meaning is a necessary precursor to an enquiry into the constitutive function of concepts – they are bound to generate very different types of accounts as well as a curious division of labour. Whereas professional intellectual historians are busy reconstructing past meanings, international theorists are sampling recklessly from the fruits of their labour while giving very little in return, apart perhaps from additional confusions to clear up.

Finally, if we take as axiomatic – as I think we should do – that theories of International Relations carry strong but implicit historiographical commitments, what about the reverse? What kind of international theory is implicit in and could therefore legitimately be extracted from *FMIT*? Although Armitage traces the emergence of the world of states not to the Peace of Westphalia but to the crumbling of empires, and duly reminds the reader that the modern international system has long been challenged by holistic and universalistic visions of world order, *FMIT* is primarily a study in *international* thought insofar as it focuses mainly on those canonical figures who took the existence of a world of empires and states for granted, rather than on those lesser and sometimes long forgotten names who might have contributed to the actual constitution of that world. As such, his account points in the direction of a fairly conventional and at times conservative view of International Relations, consonant with that of much mainstream international theory yet vary of some of its most entrenched myths. Furthermore, by relying heavily on British sources, *FMIT* – perhaps inadvertently – conveys the impression that international thought first emerged in that context and nowhere else, and then in response to perceived problems in a world populated by states and empires. This dual bias leaves *FMIT* vulnerable to the objection that it propagates a myth of its own about the proper origins of international thought, a myth that not only might be called on to support a rather parochial view of the history of International Relations, but one which also excludes from its purview those parts of prehistory that cannot be made

to fit the master distinction between empires and states, but which nevertheless might have conditioned the possibility of both.

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## Where should we look for modern international thought?

Near the beginning of *Foundations of Modern International Thought (FMIT)*, David Armitage briefly engages with Martin Wight's essay, 'Why is there no international theory?' (1960). As Armitage notes, Wight argued that international theory was morally and intellectually inferior to political theory, offering little more than a 'theory of survival' as opposed to a 'theory of the good life'. But it is somewhat less widely acknowledged that another important part of Wight's argument was the observation that, whereas there was an established body of canonical texts through which the history of political thought could be studied, the same could not be said for international theory: it was 'scattered, unsystematic, and mostly inaccessible to the layman' (Wight, 1960, p. 38). One of the chief problems in the study of international theory, then, was knowing where to find it; and one of the primary tasks of the historian was to put past thinking into order, gathering a huge and eclectic range of scattered material and presenting it in an intelligible manner (Porter, 1978; Wight, 1991).

Armitage's reference to Wight is appropriate because they share a goal of defining and shaping a field of enquiry in intellectual history centred around the question of how people in the past have understood the nature of the international. Moreover, as with Wight's point about the 'scatteredness' of international theory, a similar idea that one has to look hard, and in unusual places, to find international thought occurs several times in *FMIT*. An example can be found in the consideration of John Locke as an international thinker, a discussion that occupies almost a quarter of the book. Armitage begins by noting that Locke has not traditionally been regarded as particularly important to the history of international theory, and lurks in the background of Wight's 'three traditions' of Hobbesianism, Grotianism and Kantianism (p. 77). One early attempt to assess his significance – a series of lectures

given by John Rawls in 1969 – failed even to find a proper international theory in Locke’s work (pp. 86–88). Armitage suggests that the problem is that Rawls and others were looking in the wrong place. They were looking where historians of political thought usually look: namely, the *Second Treatise*. But that is not where Locke’s *international* thought is; it is not to be found in his most celebrated reflections on politics and government, but rather in what one might call his relatively scattered, unsystematic and mostly inaccessible writings on the Carolinas. Armitage’s conclusion is to warn against ‘the apprehension that international thought can only be excavated from within the canon of political thought rather than by supplementing it with other sources of reflection and debate’ (p. 88).

In light of that observation, which I think is a crucial insight into how the project of international intellectual history should be carried on, it is disappointing that a great deal (but not all) of *FMIT* looks rather like an attempt to excavate international thought from the canon of political theory. For example, arguably the central theme in the book is to call attention to the international dimensions that can be found within the works of canonical political thinkers such as Hobbes, Burke, Bentham and, of course, Locke. I am not sure that this is the way forward. The danger is that it may lead to little more than a re-drawing of the boundaries between the ‘traditions’ of international theory, and a re-placement of individual thinkers within them, which would make the book less of a novelty (for example, compare with Boucher, 1998). In these respects, much of *FMIT* could be read merely as an exceptionally learned contribution to an old parlour game of pointing out the distortions and misreadings produced by Wight’s three traditions, or other oversimplifications that have become commonplace within the discipline of International Relations: for instance, the clever thrust that ‘Hobbes himself was no Hobbesian’ (p. 72). It seems that *FMIT* is more ambitious than that, but how is the project of international intellectual history to become more than just a reshuffling of the political theory pack?

The crucial questions to ask at the beginning are: Where was international thinking happening, and who was doing it? In answering precisely this question, Wight proposed four main sites where one should search for international theory: irenical schemes for a new world order; ‘Machiavellian’ treatises on reason of state; the ‘*parerga* of political philosophers, philosophers and historians’; and the ‘speeches, despatches, memoirs and essays of statesmen and diplomatists’. He ended up with an intriguing list of candidate international theorists, including a handful of familiar names (in which both Burke and Bentham feature), alongside some famous figures from outside the standard political theory canon (for example, Otto von Bismarck), and several more marginal, and now largely forgotten authors, such as Gatien Courtilz de Sandras and Jean Rousset de Missy, whom Wight locates, as Friedrich Meinecke had done, within the tradition of ‘Machiavellism’ (Wight, 1960, pp. 36–37; Meinecke, 1984).

Armitage does not take on the question of where to find international theory quite so directly, but it is important to note two crucial moves that he makes that are



relevant to this issue. The first is that, in analysing Locke as an international thinker, Armitage considers him not so much as a philosopher, but also (or, perhaps, rather) as a *practitioner* actively involved in the conduct of international affairs, especially in his capacity as secretary to the Lords Proprietors of the Carolinas. This is reminiscent of one of the central themes of contextualist approaches to the history of political thought: as well as understanding the linguistic context of treatises in political theory, one also tries to locate ‘theoretical’ treatises within their immediate political context, closing down the supposed distance between the ideal world of political theory and the real world of practical politics. To the extent that this is Armitage’s point, it is an important one for International Relations theorists to take on board, because there has been an equally problematic tendency in previous histories of international theory to imagine the subject as a timeless conversation among great minds from all ages, conversing over perennial questions without much concern for their immediate circumstances: while certainly suspect, Wight’s ‘traditions’ are by no means the greatest culprits here (see, for example, Thompson, 1994).

The situation within International Relations is not quite so bleak as that may suggest. Although there is still a thriving industry of works that imagine what Thucydides might say about contemporary world politics were he to walk among us, perennialist and traditionalist historiography now looks rather dated within the field, and indeed Armitage notes a recent tendency in International Relations to adopt a more contextualist perspective to the history of thought, in which he and other scholars with Cambridge connections (such as Duncan Bell) have played a prominent role. Importantly, Armitage also notes the potential relevance of ‘constructivist’ International Relations theorising in this vein as well, since it often concerns itself with historical and ideational aspects of the subject (pp. 5–6). It is a disappointment, though, that while these connections are made at the very beginning of *FMIT*, they are not really followed up in subsequent chapters, which represents something of a missed opportunity: if a new field of international intellectual history is to flourish, it seems probable that it will require the active collaboration of sympathetic International Relations theorists. It is obvious that like-minded scholars such as Bell will see the value of Armitage’s contribution, but it may prove to be even more important that the project of intellectual international history is able to speak to those who do not primarily conceive of themselves as contextualists, or even as intellectual historians, but who would still appreciate the value of a historically well-grounded understanding of the way in which certain key discourses about the international have developed.

To return to Locke’s international thought, it is worth highlighting Armitage’s point that it seems to have been inspired by a very specific kind of practical international context, involving land settlement in the Carolinas and relations with Native American peoples. In part, this suggests that the best place to start looking for international thought is to begin not with the established political theory canon, nor with Wight’s ‘three traditions’ as an intellectual foil to be criticised and reformed, but rather with moments of contact between political communities that posed specific problems for the



people involved in managing them. The foundations of international thought, one might say, lie in international practices, and it is communities of practitioners that should provide a key focal point for the initial survey of international thought, something that is already evident in the development of related aspects of the history of legal and international legal thought (for instance, Brundage, 1998, and Koskenniemi, 2002). An important further point to take from Armitage's analysis of Locke as a key international thinker within the context of Anglo-American colonialism is that the international contexts within which international thought happened were not geographically confined to Europe, and that practitioners were not all, as in Wight's phrase, 'statesmen and diplomats'. For instance, Locke's thought illustrates the importance of treaty-making between Europeans and non-Europeans, which is a practice that has tended to be neglected, but that could become a key site for the development of a somewhat less Eurocentric approach to the history of international political thought (more generally, see Alexandrowicz, 1967, or, more recently Onuma, 2010).

These reflections on the relationship between international practice and international theory lead me on to the second significant move that Armitage makes. Compared with his discussion of Locke, it could be seen as much more bravely extra-canonical and, not coincidentally, I see it as having much more potential to transform our understanding of international thought. In this move, Armitage shifts attention away from individual thinkers, such as Locke *et al.* Instead, he directs us towards whole genres of international thought (for example, declarations of independence), and to sites where the practical theorising of International Relations was happening: the discussion in Chapter 8 of how international law featured in eighteenth-century British parliamentary debates. Rather than opening a window on how one colonial administrator saw the world, the analysis of parliamentary discussion illuminates a transformative moment in the *public* understanding of international law. It captures crucial evidence about the reception of certain authors, such as Emerich de Vattel, whose influence beyond the small world of juristic doctrine has more often been taken for granted than critically examined. It also highlights vital changes in how the law of nations was understood. For example, Armitage is among the few (see also Butler and Maccoby, 1928 and Toscano, 1966) to have noted how the shift from more naturalist to customary or positivist idioms was accompanied by an increased demand for treaty collections, which were understood (as Armitage cites Charles Jenkinson) as offering the possibility of a consent-based code, where the collection of treaties played an analogous role to a collection of statutes in domestic law (p. 151).

This is one issue that could be taken yet further, and here I think it is worth recalling Wight's suggestion that one of the places to look for international theory would be in the works of 'Machiavellians' such as Courtilz de Sandras or Rousset de Missy. One theme that Wight does not develop here, and which goes well beyond the rather crude representation of them as Machiavellian exponents of *raison d'état*, is that both of them were centrally involved in the extraordinary flourishing of journalistic commentary on international affairs in the late seventeenth and early



eighteenth centuries that sought to supply information to a reading public that was considerably larger than the parliamentarians on whom Armitage focuses in *FMIT*. It was from this context that some of the most significant collections of treaties actually emerged, the most celebrated of which was Jean Dumont's *Corps universel diplomatique du droit des gens*. Later in the eighteenth century, it was again from these journalistic roots that some of the most strikingly *modern* contributions to international thought came, such as John Campbell's influential *The Present State of Europe*, which gained an international readership and was an early attempt to employ statistics to depict the international distribution of capabilities as the basis for an analysis of state interest.

Further discussion of this literature is beyond the scope of this present essay, but the point is that in the analysis of parliament and international law Armitage really confirms his insight that international thought cannot be extracted from the political theory canon, and indeed shows that the deeper study of individual thinkers may be a less productive research tactic than the analysis of *publics* within which new ways of imagining the international took shape. In conclusion, then, I would propose that the lesson to take from *FMIT* is that it is in the relationship between international thought, international practices and international publics that the future of international intellectual history may lie. This, I would add, seems to me to be a field within which there is a real possibility for productive engagement among a group of scholars – intellectual historians, constructivist International Relations theorists and perhaps global historians as well – that could make this a flourishing interdisciplinary research programme.

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## Liberalism and empire in the foundations of modern international thought

David Armitage's excellent book does not actually provide us with *foundations* of modern international thought as much as shake the ones we have. One of the greatest merits of the book is how it draws attention to concepts and categories central to our current understanding of globalisation in a way that challenges conventional ways of thinking about the agents and practices that have contributed to its emergence (that is, the state, territorial political authority or realism about power) while at the same time redirecting our attention to others (the empire of the seas, commercial relations, the international circulation of ideas, the making of global intellectual thought). This attempt to scrutinise what Armitage calls the 'prehistory', or rather the 'prehistories', of globalisation is immensely beneficial to both historians of political thought and to normative theorists, especially in the light of the latter's tendency to reflect on the current global order inspired by the thought of canonical figures associated to different projects of global reform: witness the influence of Hobbes's thought on any self-respecting realist about International Relations or the appeal to Kant's project of perpetual peace in virtually any text defending the need for a more cosmopolitan outlook (including this author's).

Armitage's book problematises the seemingly unproblematic adaptation of the thought of such canonical figures to contemporary debates, drawing attention to the difficult relation between their intellectual biographies, the contribution made by their works and the often uneasy complicity between their theories and the dominating system of rules shaping the emergence of the European political order. This is for example the case with the by now familiar question of the relationship between liberalism and empire, to which Armitage devotes the second part of the book, examining seventeenth century foundations. The central character is here





John Locke, frequently invoked in a number of important normative debates on global justice, political legitimacy or the contemporary justification of states' territorial rights and yet an author whose life and works seem to offer a paradigmatic illustration of the comfortable coexistence and sometimes mutually constitutive relation between liberalism and empire.

Here, too, Armitage seeks to disrupt foundations, challenging the emerging image of John Locke as one of the founding fathers of the European imperial vision that has been recently suggested by interpreters such as James Tully, Barbara Arneil, Duncan Ivison or James Farr. To be sure, he does not dispute the link between Locke's liberal justification of the state (focused as it is on criteria of productive interaction with land and consent required to legitimise private property) and the defence of English colonialism through the expansion of settlements in the New World. Indeed, one of the most interesting chapters of the book illustrates the enduring influence of Locke's direct involvement with the affairs of the colony of Carolina (including contributing to the drafting of its pro-slavery constitution) on the content of his *Second Treatise*, going against a number of interpretive moves seeking to question that relation by pointing out the discrepancy between the period in which Locke took an interest in the administration of Carolina and the time in which the relevant chapters on property in the *Second Treatise* were drafted.

Yet Locke, Armitage maintains, cannot plausibly be considered a theorist of *empire*, for two reasons: one historical and the other philosophical. The historical reason is, as he suggests, that Locke's intellectual energies were directed to political projects taking place on the Atlantic and, unlike those of many other defenders of empire, did not link to a project of universal monarchy extending to the Indian Ocean. Indeed, Locke appears to have taken little interest in the East Indies, hardly engaged with the modern tradition of natural jurisprudence to which the thought of other theorists of maritime empire (such as Grotius) was closely aligned, and hardly contributed to disputes concerning the control of the seas. However, it may be worth asking what exactly is the definition of *empire* that contributes to render this argument persuasive? As Armitage himself points out in his excellent *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire*, one of the most characteristic features of the intellectual production accompanying the emergence and consolidation of the British Empire is its unique conceptualisation as *both* an empire of land and of sea, with different aspects of it becoming more or less prominent depending on the contingent rivalries between European powers and the political and economic interests articulated at different points in time. Locke's lack of interest in the Indies might be explained for example by the fact that at the time of his writings, the Anglo-Dutch controversy concerning control over the seas was drawing to a close with, on the one hand, the publication of John Selden's *Mare Clausum* providing the definite response to Grotius's arguments on freedom of the seas, and on the other the emergent rivalries between the English and the French shifting the balance of political conflict. As a matter of philosophical debate, as Armitage (2000) himself emphasises, citing the words of Sir Philip Meadows,



a diplomat and former secretary to the Commonwealth, anyone who discussed the sovereignty of the sea after Selden would ‘certainly incur the whole censure of writing an Iliad after Homer’ (p. 121). As a matter of law, Armitage (2000) aptly illustrates, ‘Selden’s arguments were effectively irrelevant by 1689’ (p. 122). Why then would Locke have wanted to join a politically irrelevant controversy, which was moreover also philosophically moribund? And does the mere fact that he did not take sides in this debate really exonerate him from taking an interest in and defending (the land component of) the British Empire?

This takes us to the second key argument Armitage makes against those who interpret Locke as a theorist of empire. Unlike other would-be champions of European imperialism like Kant and Mill, he claims, the label ‘imperial’ cannot be applied to Locke since he ‘did not espouse or elaborate a hierarchical ordering of populations’ and in fact ‘saw rationality itself as evenly distributed among human populations and the usual markings of civilisation as contingent and fragile’ (p. 115). Locke’s resistance to the theory of innate ideas, his reliance on sense experience as the source of all knowledge and the epistemological humility that accompanied both his moral and political writings meant that he could not share the traditional ethnocentric or racist outlook espoused by other champions of liberalism who defended the superiority of Europeans.

However, we might wonder about the accuracy of this contrast. Does Locke’s epistemology really set him apart from other modern representatives of liberalism? After all, the paradox of all historical versions of liberalism, whether one traces its epistemological foundations back to innativist or to empiricist doctrines, is their anchorage to a universalistic conception of rationality as equally accessible to all human beings, coupled with a defence of the need for paternalistic interventions in cases where such human capacities are less developed (as in the case of women, children or, more relevant in this context, non-European peoples). Whether human knowledge is innate or developed through experience is, to some extent, beside the point of this developmental defence of the superiority of Europeans. Indeed, even on an innativist account of knowledge, the point made by its proponents is not to emphasise that some human beings are naturally inferior, but rather that because of the effects of contingent natural and historical circumstances, their innate (equal) capacities are more or less evolved depending on the contact with certain environments. To take the example of Kant, relevant to the contrast on which Armitage develops the rest of his chapter, it was precisely such a theory, developed under the influence of the writings of the Swiss naturalist Charles Bonnet, which was in turn inspired by Locke’s philosophical adversary, Leibniz, that informed his early racism. Similarly to these other defenders of preformist theories of human development, Kant maintained that the contrast between human races is explained by the different development of the same innate germs and dispositions in specific natural and historical circumstances. In doing so he appealed to a stadial theory of human history culminating with a defence of the superiority of agricultural and commercial ways of life, which is not too dissimilar from Locke’s.<sup>1</sup> Hence, if we grant that it is



the environment rather than the difference in capacities (whether innate or acquired through experience) that accounts for the uneven development of human races, and if we revisit the definition of civilisation to take into account of this more evolutionary defence of the superiority of Europeans, the case for setting John Locke apart from other would-be champions of European imperialism appears much less persuasive.

It is important to emphasise, however, that the point of these comments is not to try and come to a firm judgment on whether Locke's version of liberalism is more or less plausible depending on its complicity or not with the emerging vision of European imperialism. Nor is it to try and isolate the intellectual biography of one of liberalism's founding fathers from the conceptual core of his thought. It is rather to raise the broader methodological question concerning the relation between the kind of research that historians of political thought are immersed in, and that which occupies normative theorists seeking inspiration in the thought of canonical figures to revive one or the other normative project orienting current political activities. The former are inherently suspicious of any attempt to examine an author's thought in isolation from its context and regardless of its complicity in the production of categories of thought supporting the consolidation of certain power structures. The latter often dismiss the painstaking work that goes into such detailed analysis as irrelevant to contemporary attempts to recuperate the philosophical roots of current liberal doctrines and, where necessary, criticise them. Even if we concede that the past is what makes us who we are, why shouldn't we both appropriate and interrogate it, normative theorists ask? But if, as historians point out, liberalism is an ideology at the service of a particular system of rules, what follows from such normative attempts to rescue that ideology and sanitise its main protagonists? How can we be sure that current attempts to reform its categories have critical bite and are not simply one more replication of an all too familiar historical scenario?

One of the arguments that David Armitage's book makes to suggest an avenue for restoring the figure of Locke among the authoritative founding fathers of modern *international* thought is the inspiration it offers to understanding the writings of another, much more recent, liberal project for international reform, that of John Rawls (pp. 86–89). But in so doing Armitage places his project at the heart of the intersection of normative theory and international political thought. At a broad methodological level, this raises the question concerning the most fruitful way to engage historians and normative theorists in a productive intellectual exchange. But more specifically, and more dramatically, it also forces us to ask what prospects there are for current liberal projects to really offer critical normative guidance on the existing global order, given the complicity of its foundational categories in the construction of a system of rules that has for centuries been instrumental to the domination and exploitation of millions of people all over the world. Engaging these questions requires shaking the foundations of modern international thought, without sacrificing either historical rigour or radical critique. Armitage's book provides an excellent example of how that might be achieved.

## Note

- 1 The question is much more complicated, and of course Kant's later account of indigenous ways of life and his related theory of political legitimacy is very different from that of Locke. For a discussion that traces this development and illustrates Kant's early theory of germs and dispositions as it relates to the genesis of human races (see Ypi, 2014).

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## Possibilities of international intellectual history

David Armitage's essays provide a theoretical and methodological purchase on the nascent field of international intellectual history. He argues that international intellectual history critically supplements and expands conventional disciplinary approaches to the major figures of political thought, while also introducing new transits of exchange to the field of intellectual history. He focuses on the 'key elements of international thinking as they emerged between the late 18th and late 20th century', explaining that this selection of key elements (which include figures, texts and events) is critical for a revaluation of the 'just so' stories and 'foundation myths', which structure the field of international intellectual history (p. 9). In his analysis of individual scholars, such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jeremy Bentham, and of significant acts, such as declarations of independence, Armitage illustrates and exemplifies the benefits of this approach.

In his choice of already canonised texts and figures, he finds company with those scholars of International Relations and international law who have also nominated them as foundational. He does not, however, align himself with the more traditional



practitioners of those disciplines, but rather with those scholars whose critical reassessments have begun to broaden the fields' attention from primarily state actors and positive law to a more expansive inclusion and interpretation of each field's constitutive elements. Consequently, 'much' of Armitage's book is 'dedicated' to the 'salutary enterprise' shared by those who seek to rewrite and refigure the conventions of International Relations and international law (p. 13).

Armitage describes a synchronous shift in the disciplines of international law, International Relations and intellectual history, but his optimism may be more ambitious than the shift itself. For example, in his chapter on Thomas Hobbes, he questions how and when Hobbes became the patriarch of the field of International Relations, remarking that it is an especially ironic status given the weak grasp of his *oeuvre* such a view entails. After all, Hobbes' writings offer 'a more expansive and nuanced set of reflections on the state', than 'inferred from most treatments of the subject', which view Hobbes as prototypical realist (p. 60). Yet, he also concludes that because of the triad of disciplinary changes the 'Hobbesian theory of international relations' has either been 'unsettled theoretically or discredited historically' (p. 74). Depending on which scholars of International Relations one reads, in effect his conclusion can be equally true or false, but overall, as a field, International Relations has certainly yet to 'expel' Hobbes from its 'canon' (p. 74).

These tensions within Armitage's claims about Hobbes illuminate the perennial conundrum of identifying and evaluating disciplinary changes and their effects, and raise the question of how to determine or judge their meanings. Consider Kenneth Waltz, one of the progenitors of the field of International Relations, who recently lamented: 'And you think of Plato and St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas and Machiavelli ... (i)t's a wonderful literature. And it's a shame that there are people in the field who have not had the benefit of thorough exposure to that literature' (Waltz and Fearon, 2012, p. 12). Waltz does not negate the worth of this 'wonderful literature'; indeed it is a shame if the field is not made aware. However, why is it a shame? More precisely, what elicits the shame? Shame is a result of not recognising that the benefit of encountering these figures comes at no cost. Waltz explains that one should read 'not to the exclusion of other things, by any means, but there's enough time to read the really great literature in our field and to do other things as well. It doesn't interfere with doing other things' (Waltz and Fearon, 2012, p. 12). It appears, then, that shame is not educed from neglecting the intrinsic worth of reading and contemplating these scholarly works, nor does it result from ignoring the transformative potential of such endeavours. Rather, it is a shame because it does not interfere with other things; it can be transacted without effect. As it is not an onerous burden on one's time, it would be a shame not to read. However, it is exactly the *interference* with other things – concepts, categories, assumptions – that international intellectual history represents and foments; otherwise the engagement with this 'wonderful literature' risks remaining perfunctory and instrumental, a static enterprise.



Likewise, a similar functional orientation structures the predominant interdisciplinary conversations between International Relations and international law. Although International Relations scholars have traced the ‘evolution of international law’, it has been primarily as an institutional development (Hafner-Burton *et al.*, 2012, p. 82). In the words of the authors of the latest overview, ‘some substantial progress has been made, especially through empirical studies, in disentangling the effects of international institutions on behavior from the effects of other factors such as interests, power, knowledge, social norms, and ideas’ (Hafner-Burton *et al.*, 2012, p. 82). Thus, the governing approach conceives quite narrowly of international law, while presuming a directly causal or empirical separation between institutions and ideas, and remains more ‘international’ than transnational or global in the context of Armitage’s thought (p. 28). One could even argue that both disciplines still rarely venture ‘above or beyond the history of nationally defined states and state bounded nations’, for even in their analysis of networks, domestic politics or social movements each returns to the state, and state behaviour, as the bulwark and as the measure of effect (p. 18). As a result, while both IR and IL attend to and acknowledge ‘wonderful literature’ and ‘ideas’, the major justification and purpose for this engagement is fundamentally utilitarian, and the effects are thus not disruptive. Whether one agrees or not with this approach, it does suggest a less than robust engagement with the spirit of international intellectual history, and highlights potential differences in its reception. Thus, while Armitage is correct to highlight some shift in the fields of IR and IL, the degree or depth of such a shift is worth considering as well.

So what is this new field of enquiry? Defining the content or scope of a new field is always a tricky enterprise, and Armitage does not defend any absolute boundaries of international intellectual history. Rather, he includes in his analysis ‘the creation of mutual understandings of international, transnational and global connection and competitions ... which ... often depended upon the intercultural translation of texts of religion, diplomacy, and law just as transnational structures of commerce and international relations facilitated or hindered the movement of books and other vectors of ideas’ (p. 7). Notably, the international turn in history pushes open ‘conceptions of space’ to networks, exchanges, connections, ‘webs of significance’, ideas and organisation of international orders (p. 23). Once connections, conceptions and conduits are brought to the fore, the question naturally follows: ‘How did we – all of us in the world – come to imagine that we inhabit a world of states?’ (p. 13). As Armitage skillfully shows, responding to this question involves histories of empires and oceans, captured in the evocative images of the elephant and the whale, for what ‘preceded, and also for a long time accompanied, the emergence of this world of states was a world of empires’ (p. 49).

There is much to be learned from his reappraisals. Moreover, there is equally as much to be learned from his oversights. First, no less occluded in Armitage’s work than the initial ‘retrospective reconstruction or appropriation’ of these authors



and texts as foundational are the dispossessed and the excluded: figures, texts, peoples and events, which nonetheless constitute the narrative as much as those that are cited (p. 12). Thus, and second, it is worthwhile to consider what ‘just so’ stories Armitage reaffirms or creates with his own choices, perhaps more so in light of Strong’s (2012) claim that, ‘(t)here is as yet *no* story – there is as yet *no* mythos – for the twentieth century’ (p. 8). Third, and perhaps as a consequence of his multivocal commitment to these (and to the idea of) ‘just so’ stories, Armitage neglects to fully pursue what he rightly identifies as the persistent force of the split between the internal and the external in all of its political manifestations (for example, public/private, nation/empire, combatant/civilian). He calls the external/internal division a fundamental (and fundamentally false) distinction, which ‘still remains so’, and is the ‘least investigated of all the fundamental divisions in our political lives’ (p. 10). The fields of International Relations and international law certainly contributed to and supported the division of domestic and international, the internal and external, and have only recently begun to pay attention to the domestic (p. 25). Oceanic history – one of Armitage’s key interests – may indeed bring to surface the ‘borderlessness’ and ‘fluidity’ of the past, but it does not on its own resolve or ameliorate the internal/external heuristic, even if it may reconfigure its forms (p. 56). It would also seem inarguable that this split is absolutely imbricated in the question of space not bounded by sovereign states which, as Armitage argues, is a ‘final frontier’ for international intellectual history because as ‘conceptions of space expand’ so do ‘ideas and, with them, the very possibilities of thought’ (p. 23).

Taken collectively, these three faults indicate the challenges intrinsic to charting and developing a nascent field, but by no means damn the attempt. In the end, Armitage ably succeeds in his effort to exemplify (as he paraphrases from Kant) how ‘intellectual history without material history will be empty while material history unformed by intellectual history will be blind’ (p. 8). In this spirit, and in appreciation of Armitage’s hope that his book be ‘an inspiration’, I wish to ask: How can international intellectual history inform questions about contemporary crises of thought and practice that fall under the term ‘new imperialisms’, and, in turn, how may those crises animate international intellectual history (p. 1)? (Ghosh, 2012, p. 773). A few, all admittedly too brief, remarks about Afghanistan may illuminate the possibilities. Afghanistan had already been nominated as a ‘highway of conquest’, travelled by Tamerlane and Genghis Khan to name just two, and was part of the trade and travel route known as ‘Silk Road’ by the time the ‘Great Game’, played by Britain, China and Russia, commenced. In the nineteenth century, although not formally a part of the British Empire, and caught between British-ruled India and Czarist Russia, Afghanistan fought three wars against the British. Having relinquished control over its foreign affairs, victory in the final war ended Britain’s oversight and set the contours of Afghan rule. The defeat of the British and the expulsion of the Russians (an iteration of which occurred in 1989 when the last Soviet troops withdrew) gave rise to its moniker as the ‘graveyard of empires’.

The complexity of meanings, imbricated in the politics and power of past and present, that these terms evoke is more easily grasped ‘when older experiences of space – more extensive, more fluid, and less confined by territorial boundaries’, inflect the analysis (p. 21). For one, such analysis illuminates the imposition of boundaries where, historically, there were different configurations of space and of rule, while also illuminating the interlocking measures of Afghanistan’s worth or threat.

Not until the conclusion of the Treaty of Rawalpindi in 1919 was Afghanistan formally recognised as independent from the British, sovereign over its external and internal affairs. And, insofar as a declaration of independence exists in Afghanistan, it is found in this treaty. Whether this treaty ‘formed’ peoples, as Armitage suggests declarations may do, is questionable; independence was predicated on nominal acceptance, debated to this day, of the Durand line (1839) that divided the Pashtun peoples between India and Afghanistan. As Barfield (2010) writes, Afghanistan’s ‘international borders are arbitrary and divide communities that continue to see themselves as one ... (thus) ... it distorts reality to use the modern nation-state as a fixed unit of historical analysis’ (p. 48). Recognising this history helps to explain one of the more vexing elements in contemporary discussions of Afghanistan, namely the inability to acknowledge the mixture of rule that defines the country, and has defied many attempts to govern. Territorial it may be, but the most successful forms of rule have traditionally not been national, but a conglomeration of elite dynastic (and tribal) rule and external support. We do ‘inhabit a world of states’, as Armitage notes, but as he too highlights in his exemplary work, the exact terms of those states are deeply imbricated in past expressions of empire’s rule (p. 49).

Theorizing conceptions of space and of rule also underscore the fundamental gendering of each, and the multifarious distinctions of external and internal intrinsic to both. Notations of gender scored essential transformations in space and in rule, empire and state, attesting to its own ‘transtemporal’ histories (p. 30). Edicts on veiling and *purdah*, which may be the starkest material displays of the overlapping ordering of space and rule, were promulgated or retracted depending on the way each figured in the projection of authority – whether it was by the Emir, the Communists or the Taliban. As postcolonial and feminist scholars have demonstrated, the very creation of the desired form of rule, in all its expressions, demands and induces particular notions of gender to sustain its identity. This process is quite evident in the sacralised memory of Malalai, a village girl said to have rallied Afghans to defeat the British in the 1880 battle of Maiwand. Horribly outnumbered and out-equipped, the Afghans still inflicted one of the worst losses suffered by the British in the nineteenth century, with Maiwand becoming ‘a thrilling symbol of national pride’ (Ansary, 2012, p. 83). Malalai saw the battle was turning against the Afghans, and, unveiling herself, rallied them to return: she is reputed to have called to those who would hesitate before she was killed ‘If you are not killed in Maiwand, O my beloved, it is a life of shame which you will live’. Her iconic status is such that Malalai Joya, who has repeatedly denounced both Taliban warlords





and the presence of foreign troops, adopted her name, signalling not only the risks she runs (four attempts at assassination), but also the significance of her presence. The imperial legacies so significant to international intellectual history are indeed gendered and profoundly so.

Such an attention to this variegated conceptualization of Afghanistan can help to better grasp the persistent ignorance of Afghanistan itself – one of our own ‘just so’ stories – that marked not only the start of the ground war, but continues to this day. Armitage’s work offers a way to begin.

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## Shaking the foundations: A reply to my critics

*Foundations of Modern International Thought (FMIT)* (Armitage, 2013) is a work of history that poaches shamelessly on the territory of political theory, international law and International Relations. The book was the product of more than a decade of conversation with practitioners in these fields – some in person, many through engagement with their scholarship – and I hoped its conclusions, as well as its provocations, might continue that discussion into the future. I am therefore both flattered and humbled to receive responses to the book from five distinguished critics, none of whom is herself an historian. I must therefore begin by warmly



thanking Jens Bartelson, Kimberly Hutchings, Edward Keene, Helen Kinsella and Lea Ypi for reading my work so carefully and for offering their reactions so generously. I am also very grateful to Lisa Disch and Terrell Carver for giving me the opportunity to respond to their comments in the pages of *Contemporary Political Theory*.

When I first began working on *FMIT*, there were few glimmerings of the interdisciplinary dialogue so richly evident in this critical forum. Such work as there was in what I have called ‘international intellectual history’ was either very old or very new. Most historical study on the intellectual history of international norms, institutions and theories stretched back to the founding decades of professional international law in the late nineteenth century or to the upsurge of internationalism in the inter-War period. After a long hiatus, described in the first chapter of *FMIT*, the turn of the twenty-first century witnessed the first efforts by historians of political thought to expand the boundaries of their field to include the international realm; that same moment also saw the emergence of historical studies by self-critical International Relations theorists and international lawyers (for example, Tuck, 1999; Koskeniemi, 2002; Keene, 2005). Little of this work was yet informed by the international and cosmopolitan strains of political theorizing that emerged in the wake of Rawls, Walzer and Beitz, for example. The robustness and sophistication of the engagements with history and theory in this forum show how far the conversation has moved in the past decade.

*FMIT* was intended to be a more focused and more narrowly historical study of ‘international thought in the Age of Revolutions’ treating the international dimensions of political thought from the Seven Years’ War to the Napoleonic Wars. Its planned coverage was both firmly canonical – examining major thinkers such as Rousseau, Smith, Bentham and Kant – and expansively contextual, dealing with non-canonical genres such as treaty collections, diplomatic handbooks and the earliest histories of the law of nations. I then spent much of a year reading my way into contemporary International Relations theory and looking for points of contact with historical work. I found them particularly in the writings of the so-called English School of International Relations and in more recent studies in a constructivist and historicist vein, by Duncan Bell, Nicholas Greenwood Onuf and others. This engagement might explain my choice of some of the figures and problems treated in *FMIT*; it certainly helped me to decide that I wanted to intervene in debates in International Relations, as well as those in history and political theory, and contributed to the rethinking – and ultimately to the dissolution – of my working plan for the book.

My original project may have been too ambitious, and it soon exploded as one chapter expanded into a free-standing book (Armitage, 2007); others appeared as separate articles, and I also took it upon myself to promote the emergent field of international intellectual history through other occasional pieces. Deconstruction precedes reconstruction, and after all this centrifugal activity, it seemed wise to



collect the scattered fragments to see whether they added up to something more than the academic equivalent of Frankenstein's monster. Kimberly Hutchings is accordingly quite correct to say that *FMIT* is not 'a systematic engagement with specific concepts' but instead 'an eclectic collection of essays'. I am especially grateful to her for providing an excellent roadmap of the book's contents, especially for International Relations theorists. I was especially delighted that she found *FMIT* useful to her as an International Relations theorist and teacher for its aversion to anachronism and its warnings against oversimplification. I am also glad she saw in the book a 'challenge to the Eurocentrism of International Relations' – although this was not something I followed through in detail, it certainly fits with more recent attempts to decentre Europe in accounts of International Relations and international law (for example, Acharya and Buzan, 2010; Kayaoğlu, 2010; Hobson, 2012; Becker Lorca, forthcoming).

Conversely, Hutchings is right to say that my selection of case studies could serve to 'reinscribe a history of international thought in which certain developments in Anglophone international political thinking in particular, are predominant', a worry Jens Bartelson shares. That was certainly not my intention because my selection of cases was not meant to confine the methods of international intellectual history to English-language materials – or even, for that matter, to European sources – alone, even though many British thinkers are still coin of the realm in International Relations courses. I would want *FMIT* to work strenuously against any attempt to create 'a new master narrative' to replace the Westphalian 'myth of 1648', whether pivoting around 1776 or any other date. It would obviously be a mistake to propose a single alternative starting point, and I consciously chose to drop the definite article from my title – *Foundations*, not *The Foundations* – for that very reason. My series of overlapping and intersecting perspectives was meant instead to suggest multiple moments of conceptual generation (as well as degeneration) and to question the notion of any one teleological story of the advance towards modernity. I therefore wholeheartedly endorse Hutchings's view that we need 'pluralism' in our intellectual histories of International Relations.

However, I wish I could be as confident as Hutchings that 'the debunking message' of some of the chapters 'reads now as somewhat superfluous from the point of view of contemporary history of ideas in International Relations'. Historical study of ideas in International Relations has advanced greatly in recent years, as figures like Hobbes and Burke have been dethroned from their positions as timeless theorists rather than time-bound thinkers (compare Prokhovnik and Slomp, 2011; Bourke, forthcoming), but there is still a long way to go. As Jahn (2010) has noted, 'studies in intellectual history will only overcome their marginal position in our field when they link their subject area and findings explicitly to contemporary debates in International Relations and concrete issues in international politics'. I hope that by joining the classics to discussions of contemporary issues – among them, the meaning of globalisation; legislative authority over the executive in foreign

affairs; and the procedures for declaring new states – *FMIT* will help to inspire more work on the intellectual origins of our current international order (compare Sluga, 2013).

Connective as well as global approaches to these questions will be essential if we are to discover how ideas circulated from multiple centres, metropolitan and non-metropolitan and around the world (Moyn and Sartori, 2013). Only then will we understand how international thought became internationalised, as part of the proliferation of multiple modernities and competing universalisms that accompanied the moving tides of globalisation in the last five centuries (compare Armitage *et al.*, 2013). Such work would, I trust, help to allay some of Jens Bartelson's fears about the possible effects of *FMIT* as propagating 'a fairly conventional and at times conservative view of International Relations'. I aimed only to offer examples of practice in international intellectual history, targeted at some of the professional pillars common to political theorists, International Relations theorists and intellectual historians. Yet, I did hope that the historical methods I use could also be applied to more radical strains of international thought: in this regard, I am particularly pleased to see that historical studies of anarchism in International Relations theory have now begun to blossom (Kazmi, 2012; Prichard, 2013; Kazmi, 2014).

Even more satisfying would be to have more historical work on what Bartelson calls the 'holistic and universalistic world orders' that challenged the modern international system. Here Bartelson's (2009) own recent work on visions of world order might be a better guide than *FMIT*, although a fusion of horizons – between *FMIT*'s historicist practice and Bartelson's critical international theory – should certainly be possible, as part of the emergent field of global intellectual history. It may be tempting to take pot shots at sitting ducks, as Bartelson notes, but as both he and Edward Keene urge, there will be happier hunting if we range further afield, beyond the conventional canon selected for long-forgotten or obsolete disciplinary reasons. They suggest that we look instead to the 'lesser and sometimes long forgotten names', those 'communities of practitioners' who actively constituted the international realm and who left behind less formal examples of international thought (compare Devetak, forthcoming).

In regard to novel sources, Keene's questions about international thought are a version of Lenin's 'Who, whom?': '[W]here was international thinking happening, and who was doing it?' His first question might seem to be an extension of my own recommendation that intellectual historians should generally be more alert to space: not simply the spatial dimensions of thought about the continental, oceanic, transregional and global, but more specifically the concrete locales: the very rooms, buildings and institutional settings in which thinking took place. The second question means not figures like Hugo Grotius, John Locke or John Stuart Mill, whose theories arose in part from their practical work on behalf of European overseas trading companies (Muthu, 2013); instead, Keene alerts students of international thought to the producers of 'medium thought' (Rothschild, 2005) – journalists, publicists, the editors of treaty collections and popular historians among them – and his advice



would also lead us to the work of diplomats, envoys, consuls, missionaries of modernisation and the functionaries of international institutions such as the League of Nations, the United Nations and UNESCO in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Mining their writings would reinforce Keene's point that 'international thought cannot be extracted from the political theory canon'. The concern might be that we would lose political theorists from the exercise of international intellectual history if we stray too far from their normative interests.

I would very much like to see the flourishing of the interdisciplinary research programme Keene recommends – on 'the relationship between international thought, international practices and international publics' – especially if it could be tied to a more broadly cultural history of the international and also if it took full account of the history of political economy, one of the most fertile new fields in the study of international thought (for example, Stern and Wennerlind, 2014). Yet, if Keene wants international intellectual history 'to become more than just a reshuffling of the political theory pack', then I imagine Lea Ypi and Helen Kinsella might think political theory itself would get short shrift from such a development. For Ypi, in particular, the question is not *where* to find international thought or its foundations, but how to find 'the most fruitful way to engage historians and normative theorists in a productive intellectual exchange'. One way to do this, as she shows, is to use history to 'disrupt [the] foundations' of the contemporary international order, not least by exposing its complicity with empire (as Kinsella also argues).

Exhibit A for Ypi, as for many historically minded critical theorists, is John Locke. She is certainly correct that Locke would have had no interest in joining 'a politically irrelevant controversy which was moreover philosophically moribund' regarding the freedom of the sea in the late seventeenth century: Grotius had won this argument over his adversary John Selden, decades earlier, as Locke's own definition of the ocean – 'that great and remaining Common of Mankind' (*Second Treatise*, § 30) – revealed. I remain less certain that Locke can be assimilated wholesale to the modern tradition of liberalism, with its combination of 'universalistic rationality ... coupled with a defence of the need for paternalistic interventions'. As I argued in *FMIT* itself, I believe that broadly Kantian conception of liberal foundations – which Ypi subtly reaffirms in her own contribution – cannot be projected back onto Locke, who did not doubt the capacities of non-Europeans to be fully rational, whose paternalism targeted the English poor rather than indigenous peoples and who never followed Kant – at least, the early Kant – into anything that looks like modern racism.

I am therefore sceptical that Locke himself would ever have produced an 'evolutionary defence of the superiority of Europeans'. Some later Lockceans would selectively invoke him to that effect in the early American republic or colonial New South Wales, for instance, but the very same arguments were also deployed to defend indigenous property rights (Fitzmaurice, 2014). There are undoubtedly imperial pillars underpinning our current global order (compare Tully, 2008), but whether Locke is the culprit on whom we should expend our critique is not so obvious, at

least not to me. Nonetheless, despite these slight disagreements, Ypi is surely quite right to insist that historical evidence deployed to critical ends comprises a major reason why the history of international thought should be of pressing concern to political theorists.

Helen Kinsella fortifies this motive for political theorists to engage in historical discussion when she writes approvingly of ‘the *interference* with other things – concepts, categories, assumptions – that international intellectual history represents and foments’. She contrasts this with Kenneth Waltz’s rather more complacent attachment to the ‘wonderful literature’ represented by the canon of political theory from Plato to Machiavelli and beyond (Waltz and Fearon, 2012). My own desire was and is definitely to be ‘disruptive’ rather than ‘utilitarian’, not to uphold the foundations of modern international thought but to shake them. It is in this spirit that I take Kinsella’s account of some of *FMIT*’s oversights so seriously. It is true that the book pays little attention ‘to the dispossessed and the excluded’: their voices in the international conversation need to be recovered like the neglected sources Keene highlights in this contribution. Theirs would not be just-so stories but I keenly wonder what the ‘story ... for the twentieth century’ Kinsella hopes for (along with Tracy Strong) would look like if composed by them. Finally, I could not agree more with her that ‘the split between the internal and external’ deserves much more concentrated attention from historians and theorists alike. I proposed that as one of the most important open questions for the field of international intellectual history. Kinsella’s (2011) own recent work effectively points to the way it might be historicized, and its politics – especially its gender politics – excavated to critical effect, and we might follow other feminist scholars in tracing the sexing of the state to pursue this vital theme (compare Corcoran, 1997; Simons, 2003).

Kinsella generously extrapolates from my own work to conclude her remarks by asking ‘how international intellectual history [can] vivify questions about contemporary crises of thought and practice’. Her brief but provocative thoughts on Afghanistan reach well beyond my own cases but they reveal the layered history of space – especially territorialised space – in such a contested part of the world. Territoriality is rapidly becoming a fertile object of study in its own right among both theorists and historians (Elden, 2013; Maier, 2014). If I were writing *FMIT* now, I would pay much more attention to this dimension of the modern international order. Kinsella’s account illustrates how multiple layers of rule, of authority, of boundedness can coexist without superseding one another. Just as there is no linear narrative of territorialisation, she implies, so there is no consummation of Weberian statehood. The international order is always becoming, never being because our world is formally post-colonial but only incompletely post-imperial.

In light of the richly engaged contributions to this forum, I now see *FMIT* as perhaps too formalist and itself incomplete. I may have been too hard-edged in my attempts to excavate and upset some of the foundations of modern international thought. A linguistically more diverse canon; a wider range of sources; greater



attention to gender and the subaltern; even greater intolerance of grand narratives – all these would have made the book better and its message more effective. I would also now view the foundations as more like those of ancient Rome in Freud's famous metaphor from *Civilization and Its Discontents*: that is, conceived not as 'a human habitation but as a psychical entity with a similarly long and copious past'. One layer does not replace another; each new building is not constructed from the stones of the ones that came before; but 'all the earlier phases of development continue to exist alongside the latest one. ... Where the Coliseum now stands we could at the same time admire Nero's vanished golden house' (Freud, 1989, pp. 16–18). The foundations laid down between the early seventeenth century and the early nineteenth century might be the equivalent of the Domus Aurea; later conceptions of international thought – metropolitan and colonial; supremacist and subaltern; anarchic and utopian – have risen up alongside them like the Coliseum without entirely effacing or erasing them. That may be an unsettling thought for those who believe history is smoothly progressive rather than messily cumulative, but such disruption was the real aim of my book as 'an exercise in how to think rather than what to think' (Wolfson, 2013; compare Armitage, forthcoming). I am lucky to have found such a congenial group of interlocutors to carry forward that project of shaking the foundations of modern international thought.

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