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Classical and Modern
Thought on International
Relations
From Anarchy to Cosmopolis

Robert Jackson

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CLASSICAL AND MODERN THOUGHT ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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For Steven
Kindred Spirit and Fellow Traveler

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Preface

This is a study of political thought on international relations, or international thought. For many years I was involved in teaching Canadian undergraduates the history of modern political theory, from Niccolò Machiavelli to John Rawls. I always wanted to write a book on the subject. I made an attempt twenty years ago, but abandoned the project when I became caught up in the study of international relations. Questions of international thought—fundamentally although not exclusively normative questions—have been at the back of my mind in everything I have written since that time. They are brought forward and addressed explicitly in this volume.

International thought calls to mind images and conceptions of the political world as a discernible and distinctive sphere of human activity, of which a foundation element is ideas, beliefs, and values. Isaiah Berlin summarizes, with characteristic eloquence, what such an approach involves:

Ethical thought consists of the systematic examination of the relations of human beings to each other, the conceptions, interests and ideals from which human ways of treating one another spring, and the systems of value on which such ends of life are based. These beliefs . . . are objects of moral inquiry; and when applied to groups and nations, and, indeed, mankind as a whole, are called political philosophy, which is but ethics applied to society.¹

Berlin is emphasizing the normative presuppositions, and one is tempted to say foundations, that all human relations involve, and that international relations cannot completely escape. What ideas and what sort of thinking are at the back of world affairs? Every chapter is occupied, in one way or another, with this question. My concern is not only with concepts and

categories: such notions as anarchy, war, sovereignty, security, national interest, diplomacy, international law, human rights, among many others. My concern is also with the preconditions of thinking in terms of these fundamental ideas. What are the preconceptions and presuppositions of an anarchical system? What are the preconditions of sovereignty, diplomacy, or human rights? To raise such questions is to get involved in international thought, which tries to look behind or beneath the surface activities and happenings of world affairs.

World affairs compose the most diverse and far-flung sphere of human relations. Yet in spite of its global range and its encapsulation of numerous, assorted countries, it nevertheless has a certain discernible coherence. The international world is one world in some basic ways. It is embodied by the global system or society of states that is comprised of territorially separate political systems. This worldwide political arrangement is thus holistic and pluralistic at one and the same time. Any attempt to reflect on it in fitting theoretical terms also must be pluralist, if its diversity is to be comprehended. By “pluralist” in this latter sense, I am referring to the various political and moral doctrines at the back of world affairs, the different traditions of reflecting on international relations over the centuries, which have to be taken into account in the study of international thought.

The leading traditions range from realism, at one extreme, which focuses narrowly on the nation-state, to cosmopolitanism, at the other extreme, which envisages a worldwide community of humankind. The narrative in the following chapters proceeds from an initial examination of a body of thought, identified with Thrasymachus, which denies there is anything of substance in political life—either domestic or international—that could be characterized as genuinely ethical. It moves on to a closely related body of thought, identified with Thomas Hobbes, which acknowledges the reality of political ethics but sees that as confined within the domestic sphere of the sovereign state. The international sphere is anarchy. From that classical realist tradition, the narrative proceeds to a body of thought, identified with Hugo Grotius, which locates international ethics in the pluralist society of states. International society, in that way of thinking, is a historical arrangement of political life, with distinctive institutions and practices—international law, diplomacy, and so forth—and corresponding ideas, beliefs, and values. Finally, it examines a body of thought, identified with Immanuel Kant, which envisages a world that is progressing some distance beyond a society of states, and is becoming a solidarist community or *cosmopolis* of humankind, where ethics are truly universal, in the sense of applying to every man and woman on earth.

In writing this book, I have incurred debts to institutions and individuals whom I wish to acknowledge. Preliminary versions of several chapters were published previously. They have been revised for this study. Chapters 3 and 4 on Martin Wight's international thought appeared in *Millennium* (1990) and *Diplomacy and Statecraft* (2002). Chapter 5, on the idea of sovereignty, was published in *Political Studies* (1999). Chapter 7, on Richard Falk's "Grotian moment," appeared in *International Insights* (1997). I am grateful for permission to publish them here. For financial support for researching and writing some of the chapters I would like to express my gratitude to the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Danish Social Science Research Council, and the Department of International Relations at Boston University.

I also wish to thank friends and colleagues scattered across the United States, Canada, Britain, Denmark, Australia, and Israel who in various ways, either directly or indirectly, helped me reach closure in this lingering and occasionally languishing project. Some provided comments on earlier drafts of individual essays. Others influenced or provoked my thinking by their own work on questions addressed in this study. They are: Barry Buzan, Tonny Brems, Chris Brown, David Clinton, Claire Cutler, Michael Donelan, Roger Epp, Mikulus Fabry, Mervyn Frost, Martin Griffiths, David Hendrickson, Andrew Hurrell, Alan James, David Long, James Mayall, Terry Nardin, Cornelia Navari, Nicholas Rengger, Adam Roberts, Joel Rosenthal, Paul Sharp, Sasson Sofer, Hidemi Suganami, Georg Sørensen, Nicholas Wheeler, and especially Peter Wilson, the editor of this series.

I owe a particular debt of gratitude to several friends and colleagues at Boston University. Erik Goldstein and David Mayers opened the doors wide on my arrival at the Department of International Relations and the Department of Political Science in 2001. Cathal Nolan was instrumental in my move to Boston and made me feel at home from the start. Michael Field enlightened me on pacifist thought and introduced me to the Boston Red Sox Nation, the most militant form of nationalism I have witnessed at close hand.

My greatest intellectual and personal debts are owed to Will Bain, who engaged me in stimulating dialogue on these topics for half a decade, during which time my thinking evolved and hopefully matured, to my daughter, Jennifer Jackson Preece, who cheerfully kept me on my academic toes the whole way while providing perceptive critiques essential to the improvement of the argument, and to my wife Margaret, who kept our household in good running order while providing the love and encouragement that was absolutely necessary to sustain my enthusiasm for this project during some

trying moments in our late-career trek from the Pacific coast of Canada to the Atlantic coast of the United States. This relocation fortified my conviction that moving across international borders—even the most tranquil border in the world—is not as smooth or as swift as our globalization theorists make it out to be. Nation-states still have a lot to say about human mobility across the planet. I have dedicated this book to my son-in-law, Steven Preece, who came to my rescue—when my analytical skill seemed at the point of deserting me—with his incisive legal mind, lively conversation, good humor, and excellent wine and spirits.

R.J.
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