

**DISCUSSION PAPERS IN DIPLOMACY**

***The English School,  
Herbert Butterfield and Diplomacy***

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper examines Herbert Butterfield's contribution to the English School approach to diplomacy. It argues that a broader reading of Butterfield's output, which incorporates his writings on Christianity, International Relations and History, provides the foundation for a rethinking of his work. In particular, it is suggested that there is a gap between the overly prescriptive approach of some of his writings on diplomacy and the more nuanced attitude to the subject evident in his publications as an international historian. This latter consideration points to an interpretation of diplomacy as a means of mitigating some of the excesses of power politics and ideological conflict which may potentially prove fruitful in the current broader re-examination of English School thinking.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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# THE ENGLISH SCHOOL, HERBERT BUTTERFIELD AND DIPLOMACY

*Paul Sharp*

## Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to examine Herbert Butterfield's writings on diplomacy with a view to assessing their contribution to our understanding of how international relations are and might be conducted. The practical context for this is provided by a recent revival of interest in diplomacy, the ways in which those who represent states and others communicate with one another. The theoretical context is provided by a similar revival of interest in the work of the English School (ES) and its hallmark concept of an international society as a distinctive set of institutions, understandings and practices by which the conduct of relations is, to some degree, regularized in accordance with a shared understanding of what is needed and what is right.<sup>1</sup>

Within this ES revival, however, both diplomacy in general and Butterfield's work in particular have been neglected. To date, the revival's intellectual focus has been upon international societies as discrete historical and cultural phenomena which come into being, prosper for a time, and then disappear or merge into new forms of arranging relations between distinct human communities, while its mode of explanation has been largely structural in character.<sup>2</sup> Structures and the patterns of relations between different sorts of structures presented by these accounts give rise to agency, practice, or, what Wight, Bull, Watson and Butterfield might have been content to call, diplomacy.

Clearly, the original members of the British Committee were very interested in international societies in this sense, and clearly those most closely associated with the revival of interest in their work are free to develop those aspects of it in which

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<sup>1</sup> The tendency is variously called the English School, the International Society School, and the British Committee on the Theory of International Politics.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Tim Dunne, *Inventing International Society: A History of the English School*, London, Macmillan, Houndmills, 1998, and Barry Buzan and Richard Little, (2000) *International Systems in World History: Remaking the Study of International Relations*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000.

they are interested and regard as important. Equally clearly, however, the original members of the English School were interested in diplomacy and believed it to be of fundamental importance to what happens in international relations and how they become organized. Accordingly, this paper should be seen, not as an attempt to recover what the English School was really about, but to redress the balance in this recovery and to make sure that interesting avenues of inquiry have not been prematurely closed down.

As a paper on Butterfield, however, it must be somewhat more pointed, for his reputation has suffered in the course of the ES revival. The latter's focus upon international societies, as opposed to the international society, while a consistent development from the preoccupations of Wight and Watson, seems to me to be driven in part by a desire to demonstrate the historical character and, thus, likely impermanence, of the present order of things. Butterfield, the activist Christian and conservative historian provides little support for such a concern, and I suspect that he, in his turn, would have regarded it as being based on a far too Whiggish interpretation of the history of the English School. Accordingly, Butterfield has rather been left out of the story as the founder who, while he worked as hard as anyone on the organizational front to make the British Committee work, was always a bad intellectual fit. Indeed, insofar as his own intellectual contribution to the ES has garnered attention, it has been for an unhappy emphasis upon the grinding logic which the balance of power allegedly imposes upon the conduct of sound diplomacy, and a nostalgia for a time now past when men who recognized this wisdom were allowed to handle the affairs of state.

This interpretation, I shall argue, is not so much incorrect as incomplete, and it is so primarily because it rests on too narrow a sampling of Butterfield's work. The latter may be conveniently divided into three basic types: his contributions to the work of the British Committee; his essays as a Christian polemicist on the international issues of his time; and his historiography and historical studies. I shall argue that in the works of history and historiography, in particular, there are to be found the elements of a theory of diplomacy which is based upon maintaining both a profound respect for the reality of the differences in outlook which separate people and a distance from the sort of things over which they argue. While people's commitment to their respective positions is profound, Butterfield does recognise that these positions are time-bound and liable to change. These may not be claims which sit easily with the priorities of many of those associated with the ES revival but, I shall argue, they are claims which any ES approach to understanding diplomacy and agency within international society must necessarily address.

### **Diplomacy in Butterfield's British Committee publications**

Diplomacy was at the heart of the research project of the original members of the English School. Its centrality is signaled by the title of the published papers of the British Committee, *Diplomatic Investigations*.<sup>3</sup> Martin Wight calls it “the system and the art of communication between powers” and refers to the diplomatic system as the “master institution of international relations.”<sup>4</sup> In the preface to *Investigations*, Butterfield and Wight present “the assumptions and ideas of diplomacy” as second only to “the nature of the international states system” as subjects which an enquiry into the theory of international politics can be taken to cover. The deliberations of the Committee, they continue, established “not the limits and uses of international theory, nor the formulation of foreign policy, but the diplomatic community itself, international society, the states-system” as the frame of reference. They found themselves “investigating the nature and the distinguishing marks of the diplomatic community, the way it functioned, the obligations of its members, its tested and established principles of political intercourse.”<sup>5</sup>

Important though they assumed diplomacy to be, however, the original ES members seemed to experience great difficulty in writing about it with much precision. In a later work, Bull notes three possible uses of the term: “the conduct of relations between states and other entities with standing in world politics by official agents and by peaceful means;” the conduct of such relations by professional diplomats; and their conduct in such a manner as to conform with the everyday use of the term diplomatic to connote tact, subtlety and intelligence.<sup>6</sup> Since, Satow notwithstanding, diplomats are not always tactful, subtle or intelligent, yet remain diplomats nonetheless, and since an increasing proportion of relations are no longer handled by professional diplomats, Bull opts for the first, or what he called “widest”, sense of the term. It is this sense which prevails in the earlier papers of the British Committee on diplomacy, and it does so with unfortunate consequences.

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<sup>3</sup> Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight (eds.), *Diplomatic Investigations: essays in the theory of international politics*, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1966.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Wight (edited by Hedley Bull and Carsten Holbraad), *Power Politics*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1979, p. 113.

<sup>5</sup> Preface, *Butterfield and Wight* (1966), pp. 11-12.

<sup>6</sup> Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: a study of order in world politics*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1977 (79), pp. 162-3.

Diplomacy in its widest sense easily becomes a synonym for international relations in general. This is not, in itself, a major problem. In the preface to *Investigations*, for example, it still permits Wight and Butterfield to make an important distinction between diplomacy and foreign policy. However, it also makes it easier for particular and narrow views of international relations in general, how they are presently conducted, and how they ought to be conducted to be presented as diplomacy as in Henry Kissinger's book of the same name.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, Butterfield's two essays in *Investigations* can be read as belonging to a *genre* of very conventional advice about statecraft which shares many of the preoccupations of US-based political realism.

The first is an essay on the balance of power.<sup>8</sup> Butterfield begins by treating it as an idea which emerges and acquires a "conscious formulation" in the course of modern history as sovereigns and their advisors develop a "more enlightened view" of their interests, limiting short-term objectives for the sake of long term advantage.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Butterfield infers from the story of the emergence of the balance of power that "an international order is not a thing bestowed by nature, but is a matter of refined thought, careful contrivance, and elaborate artifice." It needs the same kind of loyalty and attention which people give to their countries and private causes,<sup>10</sup> for in their absence, "one cannot apply the rules however earnestly one might desire to do so – they merely come to appear irrelevant." Indeed, Butterfield sees the Versailles settlement as a regrettable repudiation of the wisdom of the balance of power, and elsewhere expresses the wish that international thought about the latter had continued to develop.<sup>11</sup>

Yet rules about what it is prudent and right to do, given the world as it is and what you value and want from it, may easily take on the more solid character of laws of motion. They do so because the emerging consciousness Butterfield identifies is one in which circumstances and ways of coping with them are blurred. For example, Butterfield credits Francis Bacon with noting

the suggestion of nervous tension throughout the system – the various principalities not really trusting one another, but jealously watching one

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<sup>7</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, Simon and Shuster, New York, 1994.

<sup>8</sup> Herbert Butterfield, "The Balance of Power" in *Butterfield and Wight* (1966), pp. 132-148.

<sup>9</sup> "Balance of Power" in *Butterfield and Wight*, p. 140.

<sup>10</sup> "Balance of Power," in *Butterfield and Wight*, p. 147.

<sup>11</sup> Herbert Butterfield, "Morality and International Order" in Brian Porter (ed.), *The Aberystwyth Papers: International Politics 1919-69*, Oxford University Press, London, 1969, p. 340.

another's every move, diplomacy being unremittingly awake, and the whole still serving the purpose of peace.<sup>12</sup>

There is nothing wrong with this blurring, *per se*. Indeed, it is superior to maintaining an artificial distinction between circumstances and ideas about them, but it must be done consciously, and this Butterfield does not do.

The consequences become clear in Butterfield's subsequent paper on the new diplomacy and historical diplomacy.<sup>13</sup> This was written as a response to the popular claim that the maxims and principles of old or cabinet diplomacy are inappropriate in a world of modern democracies, which require a simpler, more open and more democratic practice. Butterfield disagrees and offers what looks like an orthodox realist argument against what Morgenthau called Idealism's depreciation of power. The developments of 1919, Butterfield claims, resulted from "a facile attempt to pander to the masses" by people whose time would have been better employed "asserting (and insisting upon) the continuity of history, or the importance of gaining every possible benefit from man's long-term experience."

It is possible that "statesmanship and the rules of policy," as Butterfield calls them, "are not amenable to the kind of arbitrary re-definition that was envisaged in the years after 1919." It might be argued that "if there are rules of diplomacy and laws of foreign policy," then these must be valid for "men, women, whites, blacks, monarchies or democracies, cabinets or parliaments." Some of the details and techniques of diplomacy may change, he claims, but this can "hardly be the case with the rules of policy and the way in which consequences proceed out of causes in international relations." If this is so, he suggests, then out

of the experience of centuries there ought to have arisen, if not something like a science of diplomacy, a least a ripe kind of wisdom in regard to the conduct of foreign policy – rules or maxims possessing permanent validity, at any rate so long as policy is being operated within a system of nation states.

This condensed experience and necessary knowledge of what he calls "the nature of diplomacy itself" should be turned into a teachable form for the benefit of both

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<sup>12</sup> "Balance of Power" in *Butterfield and Wight*, p. 137.

<sup>13</sup> Herbert Butterfield, "The New Diplomacy and Historical Diplomacy" in *Butterfield and Wight*, pp. 181-92.

the new types of political regimes coming into being and the citizens of democracies to ensure that there is, at least, a nucleus of people “outside the circle of government who are equipped to understand something of the real nature of foreign policy.”<sup>14</sup> What is to be gained from this experience is, firstly, the realization that only power can be used to contain power in international politics, and, secondly, technical knowledge of how this may be accomplished without necessary resort to political or military trials of strength.

How is this paper to be read? There is a conditionality which permeates the language in which the argument is presented, but it is difficult to determine the extent to which this results from genuine caution as opposed simply to a style of speaking and writing. If one can accept that rules of statesmanship and policy may not be amenable to arbitrary change and if the argument to this effect is contingent upon the continued existence of a system of nation-states, then an opening, at least, to a reading of this paper which is consistent with the interpretation of the English School made by those advocating its revival is certainly possible. Further, while the paper may be read as a realist essay, at no point does Butterfield provide a realist grounding for the argument in terms of ubiquity of power as a motivator and objective of policy arising out of human nature or the dynamics of the system. The latter only is present in an implied way in the sort of axioms for diplomatic conduct which Butterfield says are suggested by a grasp of history: do not exploit a victory over-much; do not forget that today’s enemy may be tomorrow’s ally; do not rely upon a power’s virtue to restrain it when it can misbehave with impunity; and always remember that arms serve not just for making war but also to “secure the necessary ‘pull’ in negotiations.”<sup>15</sup> We are egotists, but we are capable of realizing that our long-term interests may be served by denying our short-term appetites in the interest of a measure of co-operation with others. It is this which provides the order which is the precondition of all else.

These are matters of judgement. What is clear is that whatever may be read out of the text, it was written by someone whose theoretical orientation at the time of writing was becoming more realist. However, this occurs in an almost Hegelian way. While Butterfield shares much of classical realism’s understanding of human nature, he does not accept the sovereign state unquestioningly or as natural in the manner of the neo-realists. Rather, Butterfield’s sense of the historical process is built around achievement of the “modern idea of the state,” a point certainly not

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<sup>14</sup> “The New Diplomacy and Historical Diplomacy,” pp. 182-85.

<sup>15</sup> “The New Diplomacy and the Historical Diplomacy,” pp. 183-84.

reached in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but apparently reached by the time of writing. This is again a matter of interpretation, but it seems evident that Butterfield's acknowledgment of the possibility that the international society of states may some day be transcended is of the order of a piety, for he cannot begin to imagine how this might actually occur. In the main, he deploys historical experience to show how important constraints upon international behavior have remained constant. It is only the experience of how to cope with those circumstances which has evolved, improved and, arguably, been perfected. Corroborating this realist reading of the paper, I would argue, is the disappointment expressed by Dunne, among others, regarding what Butterfield actually has to say about the axioms of diplomacy. They are a disappointment because, he maintains, they are vague, empirically questionable and unsupported by specific examples.<sup>16</sup> If you want to improve and civilize international relations, you will not do so by privileging and perfecting what has historically been simply one way of conducting them, and a way which has a tendency to create precisely the sorts of problems which its defenders said it was intended to solve.

The real difficulty with Butterfield's axioms, however, lies not with arguments about how the historical record should be interpreted, but with the gap between what he has to say and what seems to matter in contemporary international politics. In the diplomacy essay, Butterfield counters the claim that international relations have changed with the argument that to say so is to confuse a world of appearances and aspirations with the underlying reality. Human cupidity or the moral factor, as he also calls it, both fueled this hope and guaranteed its stillbirth. The contemporary reader, however, cannot help but be struck by the way the gap between the world of appearances and Butterfield's underlying reality has widened since the time of writing. The former has prospered to the extent that the avowedly timeless advice, for example, to trust to the balance of power rather than to the virtue of a power which can misbehave with impunity, seems not so much wrong as simply irrelevant.

China and Russia may sign pacts of co-operation against the hegemonic aspirations of third parties, and one day such pacts may even have some weight to them, but not now. The gravitational pull in contemporary international politics seems to be less exerted by state interests than by other very different dynamics, and it is by no means clear that even a successful balancing of the US by Russian and Chinese cooperation would serve any systemic interest, particularly the

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<sup>16</sup> *Dunne* (1998), pp. 79-80.

independence of the small states which Butterfield maintains is guaranteed by an effective balance of power. Indeed, those who most obviously and effectively oppose the US currently do so not on the grounds of its hegemonic aspirations but out of hostility to what its internal values and arrangements represent. It is by no means clear that they would object to effective hegemony exercised on behalf of, for example, global public policies ensuring sustainable development and the redistribution of wealth.

This is not to say that Butterfield's thesis about diplomacy and the axioms he offers for diplomatic behavior are simply wrong. We should be wary of interpretations based upon only fifty, or even a hundred, years of historical experience, especially in one particular part of the globe. It may well be that the stumbling attempts at cooperation by Russia and China and European complaints about American assertiveness are precursors of a balance of power politics which is to come, rather than echoes of a balance of power politics which has all but gone. We do not know. What is disappointing about what Butterfield had to say to the British Committee on diplomacy, however, is that he, unlike Watson, for example, gives no sense of the sorts of historical conditions which might favor a particular kind of diplomatic practice or how a practice might produce and reproduce those conditions. His argument is not induced from a reading of the historical experience, so much as deduced from some sparse propositions about the international system of states and human nature.

As such, the paper provides some general outlines about the possible trajectories of actors in an international states-system, but nothing at all about diplomacy, the practice of real people who are charged with, or assume, the responsibility of representing states and others in their relations with each other. This is doubly disappointing because, as we shall see, Butterfield was an expert in both the practical and moral dilemmas which confront diplomats and also had a great deal to say about how to resolve them and how to proceed when they cannot be resolved. Unfortunately, it would appear that a number of obstacles, particularly the prevailing sense of what constituted acceptable international relations theory at the time and Butterfield's own preoccupation with correcting what he saw as the wrong-headed course of international education, entailed that he brought this expertise sufficiently to bear neither in the deliberations of the British Committee nor as a guest of its American equivalent.

### **Diplomacy in Butterfield's writings on Christianity and International Politics**

These obstacles were not present in Butterfield's writings on Christianity, in one of which 'diplomacy' features in the title and in all of which there is some discussion of what it lends to international and human relations in general.<sup>17</sup> From the standpoint of IR theory, however, these writings present another problem. To employ a distinction which Butterfield himself makes, they take Christianity on its own terms as the starting point, as opposed to seeing it in sociological terms as a glue or bonding agent for society.<sup>18</sup> They are also directed at an audience which is both broad, in the sense that it is composed of general readers rather than international experts, and narrow, in the sense that it is expected to share Butterfield's religious convictions. Accordingly, a series of very general claims are made on behalf of Christianity. He argues for example, that it is a primary source of Western civilization's emphases on the individual, the importance of restraint, and the dangers of self-righteousness but without addressing the claim that Christianity might be seen as a symptom, as much as a cause, of such developments. And, once again, diplomacy is dealt with, for the most part, only in very general terms with the discussion shading into statecraft, foreign policy, and observations on 20<sup>th</sup> century diplomatic history and the world wars in particular.

The problem with faith-based arguments, of course, is that one either does or does not share the convictions upon which they are based, and the process by which one acquires them is not susceptible to conventional criteria for judging arguments and evidence. Butterfield maintains that each of us settles the big questions for ourselves in advance of detailed inquiry. One cannot, for example, obtain an interpretation of life from the study of history; you get this from your own life and apply it as best you can to the evidence.<sup>19</sup> I suspect that this is not too distant from what many of us do much of the time as scholars. The difference is that we feel burdened to mount a conventional defense of our claims when conventionally assailed, as did Butterfield when he was arguing as a scholar.

However, these difficulties notwithstanding, two themes of considerable importance to an understanding of diplomacy emerge from Butterfield's writings on Christianity: the focus upon self-conscious individuals who are free moral agents and the role of civilization in reducing both the opportunity and the need

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<sup>17</sup> Herbert Butterfield, *Christianity, Diplomacy and War*, Epworth Press, London, 1953.

<sup>18</sup> Herbert Butterfield, *Christianity in Human History*, Collins, London, 1952.

<sup>19</sup> Herbert Butterfield, *Christianity and History*, Charles Scribner and Sons, New York, 1950.

for them to indulge what Butterfield calls their cupidities. For him, it is essential to see how they are derived from his understanding of Christianity. I will present them, however, as if this is not the case or, more accurately, as if it is not important.

Butterfield argues that as both practitioners and theorists we are primarily concerned with “the drama of human life as the affair of individual personalities, possessing self-consciousness, intellect and freedom” which he contrasts with “bleak diagrams of developing structures, or mechanical expositions of social change.”<sup>20</sup> We are susceptible to being ruled by “abstract nouns,” the proper purpose of which is merely to help us “as a species of shorthand,” but which can become “pervading systems” which grip us as in some sort of possession. It is important to remember at all times that nothing but human beings matter and that this should be the basis for all judgements. There is, for example, no special ethic for statesmen derived from the nature of states and politics, just the same ethic as exists for all other men and women.<sup>21</sup>

As a result, Butterfield advocates maintaining a sense of distance from the affairs of the world or, at least, the terms in which they play out. He frequently refers with approval to Ranke’s observation that all generations are equidistant from eternity and are not to be interpreted in terms of a march of history in any particular direction, least of all towards our own present.<sup>22</sup> History may appear to march for periods of time in different places, but for Butterfield, other than the great event of the birth and life of Christ dividing all else into before and after, the march of history is not the big story to be identified. If there is a meaning to history, he says, “it lies not in the systems and organizations which are built over a long period” but in each personality taken “for mundane purposes as an end in himself.”<sup>23</sup> Indeed, a preoccupation with bigger stories is symptomatic of the sort of self-righteousness and pride which leads to human suffering in the name of sticks and stones or, worse still, abstract nouns. The collapse of western civilization, Butterfield argues, would not mean the end of everything any more than the collapse of Rome or other international systems because life, with its potential for developing and enriching human personalities capable of understanding, love and

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<sup>20</sup> *Christianity and History*, p. 26.

<sup>21</sup> Herbert Butterfield, *International Conflict in the Twentieth Century: a Christian view*, Harper and Brothers, New York, 1960, p. 15 and *Christianity in Human History*, p. 57.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, *Christianity and History*, p. 66. As we shall see, this observation also plays an important part in Butterfield’s writings on historiography.

<sup>23</sup> *Christianity and History*, p. 67.

charity, would continue. It was this belief which made it difficult and, at times, impossible for Butterfield to accept that the threat upon which nuclear deterrence was based during the Cold War should be ever carried out, and which led him to say

we should teach men not to trust too greatly in human arrangements of any sort, not to have too much faith in projects for saving human nature by the process of rectifying institutions.<sup>24</sup>

There are, he said, some principles “to which we cannot attach ourselves too firmly ... existing in a rare and lofty realm.” “But for the rest, the mundane affairs of men and women and their attempts to deal with them”, he continued, “the mind can hardly attain the mobility which the case requires.” It was the duty of the Christian, in particular, “to break through the conventional framework of contemporary thinking on those subjects.”<sup>25</sup>

How then is the open-ended disposition towards arrangements in what Butterfield regarded as the mundane aspects of life to be reconciled with the sort of theorizing which led towards an almost dogmatic assertion of the ubiquitous and inescapable character of the balance of power? The answer is to be found in his conception of the nature of those individual human beings upon whom we should remain steadfastly focused amidst the currents and froth of mundane life. The picture is a familiar one. Our cupidities, principally those of wilfulness and self-righteousness, entail that, while we try to be good, we do not try very hard when the going gets tough or when the opportunity for easy gain presents itself. This is why, Butterfield maintains, “All our deadlocks are traceable to difficulties and paradoxes of human relations which have existed for thousands of years” which themselves result from “universal cupidities and fears” and why for

moral reasons human beings are incapable of establishing a system of human relations on this earth such as can go on indefinitely without resort to violence in one form or another.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *Christianity in Human History*, p. 60 and p. 52.

<sup>25</sup> *International Conflict in the Twentieth Century: a Christian view*, p. 13 and *Christianity, Diplomacy and War*, p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> *International Conflict in the Twentieth Century: a Christian view*, pp. 13-14, *Christianity, Diplomacy and War* p. 72 and *Christianity and History*, p. 42.

In particular, even the most virtuous can become aggressors on behalf of their interests or their conception of the good if they are unrestrained by countervailing power, either directly or expressed through institutions. It is a combination of virtue and self-interest, therefore, which leads people into adopting measures to restrain both the ambitions of the powerful and the manner in which power relations are conducted. These fall under the rubric of civilization, the second major theme to emerge from Butterfield's writings on Christianity. Civilizations, for Butterfield, are patterns of behavior which emerge over time through the experience of people who are capable of empathy with others and capable of denying themselves short-term gains for the long-term goal of maintaining ordered relations in which they believe they have an interest. Institutions give expression to civilizations and make the relations in them possible, but they do not give rise to them. They grow as a consequence of what Butterfield calls "imponderables".<sup>27</sup> This is an unhelpful term by which Butterfield may want to convey the growth of a sense of community by habit and experience, together with the exercise of virtue by free and moral beings. What is clear is that, in Butterfield's view, neither agreements nor rules on their own, or backed by force, are sufficient to create and maintain such institutions.

Diplomacy, for Butterfield, is just such an institution; indeed, he employs it in an exemplary role to make his argument. Diplomacy emerges as one of the means by which "mankind may gradually progress out of the conditions of the jungle" for in postponing the use of force, it may accomplish several things: it allows reason a chance to hold sway in negotiations; it may permit stealing a march on power, in other words finessing brute strength; and, if nothing else, it may permit the contestants to undertake the "mental arithmetic ... the calculation of forces and chances" without actually having to put their arguments to the test of arms.

The metaphors of progress occur frequently in Butterfield's discussions of civilizations. Jungles may be escaped or encroached upon, and at one point he likens the march of progress to that of the stately progress of the ploughman or the canal barge.<sup>28</sup> However, progress for Butterfield is neither global nor unidirectional, but rather episodic and vulnerable. It happens not in the midst of turmoil, but in the long periods of settled calm, and it involves not an escape from the troubles of the world, but a mitigation of their effects. "Steady conditions, historical continuity, and the healing effects of time" are the correlates of a progress which

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<sup>27</sup> *Christianity, Diplomacy, and War*, p. 21.

<sup>28</sup> *Christianity, Diplomacy and War*, pp. 68-69 and p. 110.

allows human beings to “achieve a relative comfort and security even under a system with ... obvious imperfections.”<sup>29</sup> Indeed, Butterfield maintains, to see how fragile this progress is and how the civilizing benefits of experience may be lost, one need look no further than diplomacy itself which, he argues, is fast declining from the refined and effective system which he identifies with 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe.

Diplomacy is declining because what Butterfield regards as the specifically Christian values of restraint and empathy have become devalued in societies in which God has been replaced by materialism and secular humanism. The latter, in particular, has given rise to the belief that the origin of all moral value resides in human beings rather than God. Unsurprisingly, this has resulted in the rise of self-righteousness and the pernicious belief on the part of particular people that they represent and act for what they understand to be universal values. We live, as a consequence, in a world where ‘pagan’ leaders “tend to be cruelly, grimly, appallingly, and even hideously, moral in a way that is calculated to be ruinous to the world” and in which the greatest menace is “the conflict between giant systems of organized self-righteousness” finding fault in each other and using this as a pretext “for still deeper hatred and animosity.” Once we replace the idea of sin as a crime against God with the idea that sin is a crime against Man, Butterfield says, then there will be no end to the atrocities.<sup>30</sup>

Perhaps, but the key point as far as diplomacy is concerned is that its agents, or those they represent, are losing the patiently acquired sense of a long term stake in, and mundane moral obligation to, maintaining the conditions, *la raison de système*, which make international relations possible. Unfortunately, this broad and important insight about the norms and values necessary to the functioning of international order is almost entirely reduced once again by Butterfield to the claim that nearly everyone has lost sight of the requirements of the balance of power. What follows are some astute observations on 20<sup>th</sup> century statecraft which are always provoking, and sometimes disturbing. However, they reveal more about Butterfield’s preferences for certain historical epochs over others and his determination to see an argument through to its logical end, rather than his views on how diplomacy between states and others is, might, and ought to be conducted.

The hallmark of 20<sup>th</sup> century diplomacy, as Butterfield sees it, has been its willingness to substitute assessments of the internal virtue of states for calculations regarding their ability to do harm to the general peace or one’s specific interests.

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<sup>29</sup> *Christianity, Diplomacy and War*, p. 76 and p. 74.

<sup>30</sup> *Christianity, Diplomacy and War*, p. 41 and p. 43.

A number of catastrophes have resulted from this, the most important being the western powers' willingness to continue supporting Russia against Germany long past the point when balance of power considerations suggested at least a withdrawal, and possibly a shift, of commitments. "Let the rascals fight it out" he argued elsewhere, but not to the point where one destroys the other "because it is necessary for the safety of civilization that both exists to operate as a check upon one another."<sup>31</sup> The practical and moral problems of pursuing such a course of action are so neglected by Butterfield, that one begins to wonder whether his expertise in diplomacy and his moral emphasis on the primacy of the individual, have become subordinated to a very unpleasant form of conservatism.

This is especially so when he suggests that, on the principle that a victim's role in putting cause and temptation before an aggressor makes them partially responsible for that aggression, the West bears some of the responsibility for Hitler.<sup>32</sup> And Butterfield clearly employs a scale of degrees of civilization. He argues, for example, that a "highly civilized and highly responsible state" would not accept a system under which "it could be outvoted by undeveloped and irresponsible states."<sup>33</sup> And he sees Russia, in both its Tsarist and Soviet forms, as being far below Germany as a civilization deserving of respect.

While views such as these may be easily associated with certain ideological forms of conservatism, Butterfield is not, in this context, primarily concerned with advocating or opposing any particular set of ideas about social arrangements. The problem comes when such ideas are promulgated in a spirit of aggressive self-righteousness and in the absence of an effective power to counter them, circumstances which he regards as revolutionary. Christianity and Liberalism had their historical moment as insurrectionist transnational movements when they were just as odious as Fascism and Communism in this regard. Indeed on several occasions, Butterfield makes it clear that liberal states would be as likely as anyone else to behave aggressively in the absence of an effective countervailing power.

It is not possible to say that liberal states or liberal parties are in any sense out of reach of the temptations involved ... We cannot say that democracies are exempt; for if anything they seem in history to have been more bellicose

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<sup>31</sup> "Official History: Its Pitfalls and Criteria" in *History and Human Relations*, Collins, London, 1951, pp. 218-19.

<sup>32</sup> *Christianity, Diplomacy and War*, p. 63.

<sup>33</sup> *International Conflict in the Twentieth Century: a Christian view*, p. 71.

than kings, who after all were generally related to one another – more bellicose than aristocrats, who so often formed an international fraternity.<sup>34</sup>

What, Butterfield asks, “would happen if Communism collapsed, and if the United States were left as a single giant, lording it alone in the world?”<sup>35</sup> He provides an answer elsewhere. Should the US and Britain adopt a doctrine that only a certain kind of democracy is conducive to peace and pursue a policy of tolerating only those sort of systems, this would not only be based on an untruth, it “would be indistinguishable from a project of Anglo-American domination.”<sup>36</sup>

It may be seen, therefore, that Butterfield is not even a defender of the status quo, or at least the one which existed at his time of writing. The status quo which was worth defending, he argues, was irretrievably destroyed in the course of the First World War.<sup>37</sup> What is needed is a project to recover some of its virtues, most notably on the part of the rich and powerful states. In their relations with one another this involves the recovery of some humility and restraint with regard to their own aspirations. In their relations to the poor and weak it requires a readiness not to stand over much on their own legal rights, a willingness to understand the sources of violent conduct in the developing world and an understanding that adjustments in their favor may be necessary. Our purpose, Butterfield argues,

... should be the development and maintenance of an international order which properly embraces all the competing nations, systems, creeds and ideologies ... We have to work for this even if the other party is not working for it; we cannot leave anybody out of the system, cannot send any nation or creed or regime or ideology to Coventry.<sup>38</sup>

In short, what Butterfield hopes for is a restoration of his understanding of the Westphalian system, a world where great powers pursue their ambitions with restraint, independent small states contribute to the process of balancing, and everyone agrees to leave each other to find their own way to mundane internal salvation. If this is to be achieved, it will be through the recovery of lost or devalued wisdom about what is and is not really important, for it is this which

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<sup>34</sup> *Christianity, Diplomacy and War*, p. 52.

<sup>35</sup> *International Conflict in the Twentieth Century: a Christian view*, p. 87.

<sup>36</sup> *Christianity, Diplomacy and War*, p. 117.

<sup>37</sup> *International Conflict in the Twentieth Century: a Christian view*, p. 33 and *Christianity, Diplomacy and War*, p. 14.

<sup>38</sup> *International Conflict in the Twentieth Century: a Christian view*, pp. 99-120 and p. 78.

makes possible the restraint of ambition. About the likelihood of this occurring, Butterfield makes no promises. Indeed, he does not even exhibit optimism. He simply claims to be saying what is the case on the basis of an understanding of eternal truths and accumulated experience.

The distance between Butterfield's writings on Christianity and international relations and the ways in which we customarily "do IR" today are striking. They are so, however, not because of the faith-based reactor at their heart which Butterfield himself believes animates them, nor because of the apparently conservative character of some of his observations. For every expression of nostalgia for what he sees as a better international practice in the past, Butterfield affirms that there is no going back, merely a chance that the wisdom which informed 18<sup>th</sup> century diplomacy may be recovered and find its own expression in the future. For every hair-raising expression of regret that a peace was not achieved with Germany at the expense of Russia at some point in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there is an acknowledgment that no one holds a monopoly on the propensity to aggression.

To discover why his ideas really seem so strange, it is helpful to employ Bacon's dictum of which Butterfield himself was most fond, namely to ask what, in his work, appears obvious? What seems to go without question?<sup>39</sup> The answer is that one of the timeless and essential features of international systems is that they are, indeed, made up of states or something very like them, and that these states can be taken as constituting authentic expressions of the communities of human beings within them. What is most striking in the present context, however, is not the proposition *per se*, but the fact that it forms the starting point for argument, rather than a point which is reached after an engagement with claims to the contrary.

The most obvious consequence of this is Butterfield's attempt to read a measure of legitimacy into all state regimes. The USSR, he argues, must be an expression of something about the concerns and aspirations of the people who live there; indeed, some form of Communism may yet come to characterize the modern world's attempts to come to terms with itself in this regard.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, the violent challengers to the existing order thrown up by the developing states must be an expression of something authentic and worthy of respect. Even a Nasser must be recognized as such, and Butterfield's comments on not sending states to Coventry permit little doubt as to what he would say about present Anglo-American policy

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<sup>39</sup> *International Conflict in the Twentieth Century: a Christian view*, p. 51.

<sup>40</sup> Herbert Butterfield, "Morality and International Order," in Brian Porter (ed.), *The Aberystwyth Papers: International Politics 1919-69*, Oxford UP, London, 1969, p. 353.

towards Saddam Hussein's Iraq. In a world in which new polarizations – for or against globalization – appear to be exerting their pull on international thought to the point where states are all widely seen as symptoms of a broader problem, Butterfield's willingness to take states on their own terms as a basis for international understanding suggests that the plot has moved on since he was writing.

And yet, what is equally striking about his work is the fact that in spite of its own apparent distance from the present we find him talking about precisely those issues we now regard as central: the problem hegemony or, as he would have put it, the problem of power in the absence of effective countervailing power; and the democratic peace debate, or as he would have put it, the dangers of the conceit of insisting that one's own values and interests are universal. Butterfield's writings on Christianity and international relations suggest these are instances of problems in human relations which are certainly ancient and probably essential. They provide a sparse account of how these problems arise out of the cupidities and insecurities of human nature, and suggest the moral principles of self-restraint, empathy and charity upon which an effective diplomacy should be based.

Absent from these writings, however, is any kind of systematic account of the particular contexts in which these problems arise or detailed description of the diplomacy which, successfully or not, seeks to address them. For this, it is necessary to turn to Butterfield's writings on history and historiography. It is in these that the apparently anachronistic and, at times, nostalgic references to the European diplomacy of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the international civilization which disappeared in 1914 give way to a much richer argument about how different societies and civilizations should be understood and the implications of that understanding for international practice. Paradoxically, it is these writings which, while they focus explicitly on particular historical periods, do most to bear up Butterfield's claim that there is something timeless and essential about both the predicaments thrown up by international relations and our efforts to address them, whether international relations are primarily constituted by states, states and others or, indeed, just others.

### **Diplomacy in Butterfield's historiography and history**

For Butterfield, the need to maintain a sense of distance from human affairs has its foundation in his religious position that all the issues and causes about which we argue pale into insignificance when compared to the relationship which each and

every one of us has as individuals with God. In his writings on historiography, however, this sense of distance is deployed in a different way to emphasize the importance of doing our best to interrogate the past on its own terms and to avoid, at all costs, making sense of it in terms of the preoccupations of the present. The 20<sup>th</sup> century, Butterfield claims in his first book, differs from the 12<sup>th</sup> century “not merely in its dress, its implements, and its armour, but in its whole experience of life.” This does not mean that people separated by time and/or space are incapable of understanding what life means to one another for, he continues, “life is all one, and essential experience is ultimately the same.” The example he provides of an essential experience is that of the young boy running away from home to escape a life of drudgery. What constitutes drudgery and what constitutes an escape from it may not be the same at different times or in different places, but everyone can grasp the story.<sup>41</sup>

The good historian begins, however, by seeking to recognize the differences, rather than by establishing the similarities between the past and the time in which he or she is writing. He or she should not be an avenging judge, raising up the righteous and diminishing the proud but, rather, should seek to provide a better understanding of the parties than that which they had of themselves; seeking out how they came to differ, the points of agreement between them which they could not see themselves and taking pity on “these men who had perhaps no pity for one another.”<sup>42</sup> In this regard, Butterfield claims that “a precise piece of straight diplomatic history is happy training” even for Big Ideas people.<sup>43</sup> It is so because it involves laying bare “the essential geometry of the problem” and isolating “for examination the fundamental predicament that required a solution.”<sup>44</sup> It also involves studying people, the diplomats, who, if they are doing their job properly, are also engaged in this kind of activity.

It is tempting to conclude from the sort of language that Butterfield uses here that he is writing in a realist and positivist vein, referring to the basic logic of the balance of power which holds pride of place in his more explicitly theoretical writings on international relations and diplomacy. Up to a point, this is so, for Butterfield rarely passes up an opportunity to criticize what he sees as the errors of new diplomacy. Nevertheless, when he claims that, stripped of all incidental and

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<sup>41</sup> *The Historical Novel*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1924, pp. 34, 112 and 102.

<sup>42</sup> *The Whig Interpretation of History*, Bell and Sons, London, 1931, p. 1.

<sup>43</sup> *Man On His Past: the study of historical scholarship*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1969 (first published 1955), p. xiv.

<sup>44</sup> *History and Human Relations*, Collins, London, 1951, p. 26.

specific features “we shall find at the heart of everything a kernel of difficulty which is essentially a problem of diplomacy as such”,<sup>45</sup> Butterfield is not reducing all differences to conflicts of interests which can be adjusted by war or negotiation. Rather, he is suggesting that in an immediate sense, many differences are so real and so fundamental as to be non-resolvable, and certainly non-resolvable on the terms of one of the protagonists, while, in a more important sense, it may be recognized that resolving these differences is not vital. Certainly, their non-resolution may pose fewer dangers and evils than an attempt to force the issue on current terms.

The principal task of diplomacy in its broadest sense, therefore, is to remind us of the importance of “imaginative sympathy.”<sup>46</sup> We ought to begin by assuming that people mean what they say and are committed to the terms in which they say things and then, aided and abetted by diplomatic history in its broadest sense, remind ourselves of the time-bound character of the issues over which we argue and the manner in which we argue over them. A developed sense of the possibility of “an alteration in [our] feelings for things” transforming the way we see them, might modify the intensity and commitment with which we pursue our present conflicts.<sup>47</sup>

For Butterfield, this time-bound character of the way we see things and care about them rests on his sense of the cognitive and emotional limitations of human beings and the conditions under which they function best. And, as far as international relations are concerned, it is best diplomatic practice which sustains and, indeed, constitutes those conditions. Butterfield offers a dialectical conception of historical progress in which particular agents have a firm grasp of only one end of the stick at best. In the conflict between Whigs and Tories in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century England, for example, the resulting good issued not from the triumph of either side’s ideas, but from what was learned about tolerance and liberty through the conflict itself viewed as a process of mediations leading to something genuinely new.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *History and Human Relations*, p. 26.

<sup>46</sup> *The Whig Interpretation of History*, p. 92.

<sup>47</sup> The phrase “an alteration in Man’s feelings for things” is from *The Origins of Modern Science: 1300-1800*, Macmillan, New York, 1962, p. 118.

<sup>48</sup> *The Whig Interpretation of History*, p.48. In *George III, Lord North and the People*, Bell and Son, London, 1949, p. 8, Butterfield maintains that liberty was saved because the contest was fought a no one won.

The ideas of progress and novelty, however, are used in a very limited way for, as Butterfield asks, “If men are able to do so little to control the consequences of their actions in their own day, how shall they presume to make themselves the architects of a dim and highly contingent future?”<sup>49</sup> Progress then amounts to what he refers to as “the gradual growth of reasonableness” engendered by “long periods of peace and stability” and “the healing effect of time” upon old arguments.<sup>50</sup> It is not what people argue about or the directions which their positions imply for human history which matter so much as the manner in which they conduct their arguments at critical moments. Then, among what Butterfield regards as civilized people, we see that “over and above the irrationalities of the world, the social pressures and the sheer play of forces, there moves something of a rational purpose, something of the conscious calculations of reasoning and reasonable men.” This, for him, is civilization, a system of relations which exist for “the heightening and enrichment of the human personality itself.”<sup>51</sup>

It may be diplomacy’s task to sustain the order in which progress towards achieving civilization in these terms can be attained,<sup>52</sup> but that progress is fragile and may be lost, not least because diplomats and those they serve are prey to the emotional limitations which afflict us all. The high calling Butterfield reserves for diplomacy, notwithstanding, his historical studies, leave us in no doubt as to the importance of individual personalities in shaping events, because “every public action which was ever taken can be regarded as a private act, the personal decision of somebody.” Butterfield argues in his work on the historical novel that personality counts as much as it ever did, “it is still the real power” even if its influence is “not direct, and immediate, and palpable.”<sup>53</sup>

This is certainly the case in his one major work of diplomatic history, a study of the great power negotiations which took place between Napoleon’s victory over the Prussians at Jena and the summit with Tsar Alexander at Tilsit, at which Russia was detached from the Coalition and a common front created against Britain.<sup>54</sup> While the book is a work of diplomatic history based upon public and private papers in the principal archives, it is not so much a narrative of the

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<sup>49</sup> *The Englishman and His History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1945, p. 108.

<sup>50</sup> *The Discontinuities Between the Generations in History: their effects on the transmission of political experience* (Rede Lecture), 1971, Cambridge University Press, London, 1972, p. 28.

<sup>51</sup> *George III and the Historians*, Collins, London, 1957, p. 205.

<sup>52</sup> *Liberty in the Modern World*, Ryerson Press, Toronto, 1952, pp. 58-9.

<sup>53</sup> *The Historical Novel*, p. 74.

<sup>54</sup> *The Peace Tactics of Napoleon, 1806-1808*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1929.

negotiations as a set of reflections on the evidence of participants and observers which is itself often reflective in character. Diplomatic history, Butterfield maintains, is often presented as a cold and calculated matter in which the balancing of forces, the adjustment of interests and the logic of the situation seem to dominate. It is easy to forget, he says, “that human beings are at work, with play of mind and mood and impulse” and to attribute actions to “the logic of policy rather than to the operations of personality” thereby falling into history’s “greatest temptation – hearing the tick of the clock, but forgetting the feel of the pulse.”<sup>55</sup> What is required, therefore, is an investigation of personalities which rests as much on the interpretive methods of literary criticism as upon the archival skills of technical history.

We are presented with an investigation, therefore, in which Napoleon’s arrogance and impatience, the physical and moral exhaustion of the Prussian monarch, and the Tsar’s unpredictable swings between moods of almost utopian high principle, cold, frightened self-interest, and plain self-delusion play their part. People do not always add up. If one does not take this into account, then it is impossible to understand why and how utterly the Tsar gave way to Napoleon at Tilsit. It is impossible to understand how at one moment a war seems glorious and at the next, after rumors of stalemate or setbacks, it seems insane. Without such sensitivities, we will “find ourselves in a world where causes seem hopelessly inadequate to effects.”<sup>56</sup>

More importantly, however, Butterfield is interested in the way in which the idiosyncrasies of ambassadors and ministers far from home can deflect the course of events.<sup>57</sup> This point is best made, perhaps, by brief profiles of some of the most important diplomats involved. Andréossy, France’s ambassador in Vienna, cannot stand the Austrians and keeps quiet about French motives so that Austria will fear an attack, when the real thrust of French policy is to do all in its power to persuade Austria into an alliance against Britain as quickly as possible. Merfeldt, Austria’s ambassador in Saint Petersburg, is actively pro-British and personally upset by the Tilsit settlement. Starhemberg, Austria’s ambassador in London, is also pro-British and attempts to delay Austria’s entry to Napoleon’s continental system. Alopeus, the Russian ambassador in London, pursues a freelance policy of accommodation with Britain in conjunction with his unofficial counterpart in Saint Petersburg, long after the Tsar has lost even his pretense of interest in it. And both Metternich and

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<sup>55</sup> *The Peace Tactics of Napoleon, 1806-1808*, p. 232.

<sup>56</sup> *The Peace Tactics of Napoleon*, p. 65 and p. 255.

<sup>57</sup> *The Peace Tactics of Napoleon*, “Preface.”

Tolstoy, Austria's and Russia's representatives in Paris, work for their respective countries' alignments with France while loathing Napoleon and making it clear privately that all roads will eventually lead to an anti-French coalition.

In such circumstances, in which ambassadors sometimes sought to make, rather than execute, the policies of their sovereigns, or executed them with extensive mental reservations and hedges against the future, it was not unusual for sovereigns to refuse to deal with particular ambassadors on personal grounds. They would seek to circumvent them by using other representatives thereby creating a new level of tensions and rivalries among the diplomats themselves. Therefore, neither diplomats, Butterfield argues, nor those who study them, should forget that this is the raw material with which they work. Diplomats are people who are capable of talking in terms of the grandest designs and most rational of strategies for state and international society purposes, but who are vulnerable always to their necessarily imperfect and partial understanding on the one hand, and to their emotions and egos on the other. In this, they are not different from other people. Indeed, at the heart of Butterfield's historiography and histories is the sense that these problems are inescapable, and that wisdom lies in taking them into account.

## Conclusions

The world of diplomacy implied by Butterfield's historiography and outlined in his diplomatic history is one in which the contingent, the unforeseen, and the irrational are likely to prevail as people conduct arguments from partial and transient, yet deeply held, positions about issues which come and go. Effective diplomats will take differences very seriously and attempt to encourage others to do likewise, and yet all the while they will maintain a mental reservation about the sorts of things over which people argue and may fight and seek to hold the ring within which the civilized conduct of such arguments is possible. Thus, while Napoleon triumphs for a while, believing he can do without diplomacy and rely upon the subservience of allies, everyone knows this cannot last. His arrogance and the contemptuous manner in which he treats others will eventually bring the world down upon his head.<sup>58</sup> All this is a far cry from the sparse and dogmatic diplomatic advice provided in Butterfield's more explicitly theoretical works: recognize the virtues of the balance of power and act always in accordance with its requirements.

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<sup>58</sup> *The Peace Tactics of Napoleon*, p. 355.

And it would seem to be a great improvement upon advice which leads Butterfield into explicitly asserting that beyond a certain point, the West should have supported the Nazis to keep them in the field against the Communists, and that it should wish for the survival of the USSR as a counter to the US on the grounds that any hegemon, be it democratic, liberal, or otherwise, will eventually start throwing its weight around.<sup>59</sup>

It is arguable whether even this richer account of diplomacy and what it should be attempting is not without problems of its own and, by way of a conclusion, I will attempt to deal with some of these. Most obviously, it may be objected that Butterfield's account of diplomacy pertains to sovereign states only, and to a type of state which no longer exists, the dynastic empire with a personalist form of government and an aristocratic foreign service. It cannot apply to a world in which the affairs of states are guided by complex and interlocking bureaucracies and where they compete for attention with increasing numbers of functionally differentiated non-government organizations. It is a striking feature of Butterfield's work that while he is willing to problematize almost every sort of issue, idea and institution from his position of distance, the national state is presented as both natural and real. Specific ones do no more than emerge and then, once realized, they remain a constant. However, there seems to be no compelling reason why, in this regard, we should not follow Butterfield's own advice on how to read old historians with "a more disrespectful treatment of their remains ... so we may learn whether there is not a history to be wrung out of them totally unlike anything that the writers of them ever had in mind."<sup>60</sup> Indeed, Butterfield was keenly interested in new social movements and the new practices by which they "emerge into effective politics".<sup>61</sup> That he did not himself apply these insights to international society is not, in itself, a reason for others not to try.

Secondly, it may be claimed that a spirit which is essentially conservative, romantic and complacent informs Butterfield's work. It is one thing to inquire whether the costs of trying to change things be weighed against the costs of leaving them, but it is a question which is far more easily asked from a position of comfort than one of discomfort. It is another to suggest that on occasions "a puff of wind" the brightness of the stars, or the absence of a loved one might shape the destiny of an empire or a continent, and to hope that Providence and reason, acting through people with sufficient "grasp" to assign the right "weight" to matters, will see us

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<sup>59</sup> "Official History: Its Pitfalls and Criteria" in *History and Human Relations*, p. 218.

<sup>60</sup> *Man On His Past*, p. xiii.

<sup>61</sup> *George III, Lord North and the People* p. 1.

through.<sup>62</sup> Adam Watson suggests that Butterfield's great strength lay in open-minded deduction, brooding over the facts until they distilled their own generalizations and offered their own answers.<sup>63</sup> This sort of claim for facts about the social world is no longer very easy to defend. And, when coupled with Butterfield's own attraction to the historical novel as a better way than mere technical history of capturing the essence and meaning of a period, and his observation that stories about Christ, like stories about Churchill, while apocryphal, may be "more true" in the sense of more typical of the person than stories which could be established as absolutely correct, it can be seen that his insistence on the creative component in historical and theoretical writing may be moving him on to dangerous ground.

Yet, while Butterfield's version of letting the facts speak for themselves could, on occasions lead him in hair-raisingly conservative directions, his conservatism did not have a specific political character. His views on sending countries to Coventry, his conviction that democracies unchecked would be as bad as anyone else unchecked, and his kind words on occasions about the classical approach of Soviet diplomacy, if well known, would considerably reduce his standing in, for example, certain US policy circles in which he is still remembered with a measure of affection for his association with notions of moral rearmament. He may not belong in the ES as it has been subsequently (re-) interpreted and developed, but he cannot be conveniently and obviously placed in any other particular grouping in contemporary international theory and this, for students of diplomacy, should make Butterfield particularly interesting.

Finally, it may be claimed that what Butterfield actually had to say about diplomacy, as I have interpreted his writings here, amounted to little more than old, familiar pieties: respect others, behave with restraint and do as you would be done by. Such pieties, it may be argued, address neither the "other fellow" problem of how prudence and restraint are to prosper in a world where the imprudent and unrestrained are poised to take advantage, nor the problem of why even the supposedly virtuous do not practice what they preach. Given Butterfield's religious position – here on Earth, at least, no rose garden is promised and virtue is its own reward – he would not have regarded these as particularly weighty criticisms. He was not a historical optimist.

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<sup>62</sup> *The Peace Tactics of Napoleon*, p. 249, discussing Tsar Alexander's state of mind as he agonized over whether to maintain his cause or to compromise with Napoleon.

<sup>63</sup> Adam Watson "Introduction" in *The Origins of History*, Basic Books, New York, 1981, p. 7.

However, for Butterfield, pessimism about the broad sweep of human history would not be, in itself, sufficient grounds for failing to encourage the values which might engender the growth of reasonableness during the brief time in which we are destined to live. The challenge for diplomacy would be to do its best to insert two such values into the consciousness of their political masters or the conduct of their policies: respect for differences and restraint in the pursuit of objectives. One may be skeptical about the capacity and willingness of actual diplomats to take on this challenge, but there is little in the conduct of contemporary international relations to suggest that the need for such values has diminished. There is a great deal of evidence to suggest that, in difficult times, our contending normative and empirical systems contribute more heat than light to our attempts to solve the problems of current international relations, and that Butterfield's case for maintaining a distance from the sorts of things about which we argue provides one way of attempting to secure greater respect for these values.