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International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-), Vol. 53, No. 3. (Jul., 1977), pp. 364-376.

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ETHICS AND POWER IN INTERNATIONAL POLICY

THE THIRD MARTIN WIGHT MEMORIAL LECTURE *

Michael Howard

THERE has perhaps been no teacher in the field of international politics in our time whose approach to his subject was more deeply serious than that of Martin Wight—more serious, or more erudite. There have been many specialists more influential, more articulate and, regrettably, more prolific in their publications. Wight left behind him a lamentably small number of writings, enough to give only a mere glimpse of the qualities which so awed his pupils, his colleagues and his friends. It is thus all the more necessary that those of us who did have the privilege of knowing him should recall and retail as much as we can of his personality—of the moral force which he brought to intellectual questions, of the profound, sombre questioning which characterised his work.

Wight was a philosopher in the oldest and best sense of the word: a man who sought and loved wisdom. He was also a scholar in the oldest and best sense: a man who loved learning. He was above all a deeply committed Christian. He never forgot—and I think quite literally never for a moment forgot—that in the field of international politics one is dealing with the very fundamentals of life and death: with the beliefs, the habits, the structures which shape moral communities and for which it is considered appropriate to die—and, worse, to kill. He saw his subject neither as the interaction of abstract state-entities nor as the equally abstract legal and structural problems of international organisations, but as the exercise of crushing responsibilities by statesmen in an infinitely complex world; the conduct of policies for which the ultimate sanction might have to be war. And war was no matter of heroics or war-gaming, but the deliberate infliction, and endurance, of extremes of suffering as the ultimate test of the validity of human institutions and beliefs. The work of some American ‘behaviourists’, who sought to reduce the vast and tragic tapestry of human affairs to elegant mathematical formulae was not simply repellent to him. It was unintel-

* Given at Chatham House on January 12, 1977.

ligible. He could not understand how people could do such things. He refused even to discuss it. For him, International Relations did not consist of a succession of problems to be solved in conformity with any overarching theory. Rather, like the whole of human life, it was a predicament: one to be intelligently analysed, where possible to be mitigated, but if necessary to be endured—and the more easily mitigated and endured if it could be understood. In his acceptance of the ineluctably tragic nature of human destiny he was a thinker in a European tradition going back to that classical antiquity in which his own learning was so deeply rooted.

To superficial appearances Wight presented something of a contradiction. He accepted the fact, as he saw it, of 'Power Politics'. The brief study with this title which he wrote under the auspices of Chatham House in 1946 has been recently revised, enlarged and edited with an introduction by Professor Hedley Bull, and will soon be republished.¹ It is an almost defiantly traditional work, disdainful both of Liberal Utopianism and of the contributions of the behavioural scientists to the subject. It expounds the mechanisms of power politics in the international system without praise or condemnation: this is the way it has been, he implies, and there is no reason to suppose it could be otherwise. But at the same time he was a Christian pacifist and a conscientious objector, and no one who met him could be in any doubt of the profundity and the unshakeable firmness of the convictions on which his pacifism rested.

In actuality there was for him no contradiction. In a world of evil one must face the fact of evil and the need, in face of that fact, for the unfortunate Children of Darkness to be wise in their generation. In such a world statesmen and soldiers have responsibilities and duties which they cannot and should not seek to evade. Nevertheless in such a world it is the duty of some Christians to bear witness to a transcendent loyalty; and those on whom this duty is laid will know it in their inmost conscience and must fulfil it, irrespective of consequent embarrassment or hardship. Martin Wight's burning sincerity fused the apparent contradiction—not, probably, without much inner anguish—into a single coherent philosophy; one which provided an analysis of the world predicament as much as a guide to his own actions.

Wight was in fact a Christian pessimist, as were so many of that generation which had seen the hopes of the Locarno era wither, and who grew to maturity under the shadow of the vast menaces of the 1930s. Even the menaces of the 1950s, the perils, as they appeared at the time, of nuclear holocaust, never loomed so large in the eyes of contemporary observers. Those perils could be, and indeed have been

¹ By Leicester University Press and Penguin.

kept at bay by prudent statesmanship. The nuclear danger is predictable and controllable. But the 1930s saw the emergence of forces of irrationality which it would be neither inappropriate nor hyperbolic to call forces of *evil*: unpredictable, uncontrollable, still only partially understood. These forces fitted into the world picture neither of the Liberal humanists nor of the Marxists. Both of these schools were children of eighteenth-century rationalism and nineteenth-century radicalism. Each believed in its own way in inevitable progress towards world democratic systems and had welcomed the overthrow of the militarist autocracies of Central Europe as obstacles to the gradual convergence of mankind towards unity and peace. But in Fascism one was dealing with something consciously beyond reason and defiant to reason—something of which no secular ideology had hitherto taken account.

Christianity, unlike Liberalism or Marxism, did provide an explanation; not the cheerful liberal humanitarian Christian teaching which read little into the Bible except the Nativity and the Sermon on the Mount, but the teaching which digested all the implications of the Old Testament, including the prophetic books, before turning to the New, which emphasised that the Gospels themselves were full of uncompromisingly dark passages, and which faced the fact that at the centre of the Christian religion, as of no other great world religion, was the symbol of agonising and unavoidable suffering. The Christian eschatology, long disdained by liberal humanists even within the Church itself, once again became terrifyingly relevant to human affairs. The works of Charles Williams, of C. S. Lewis, and—drawing on yet wider sources of Manichean myth—of J. R. Tolkien were deservedly popular as allegorical commentaries on the events of the time. And the teachers who best provided an adequate framework for understanding were the philosophers and the theologians—Niebuhr, Bonhoeffer, Karl Barth, Tillich—who accepted uncomplainingly the remoteness, the inscrutability of God, who saw the focus of Christianity as the Passion rather than the Sermon on the Mount; men for whom the march of humanitarian, utilitarian liberalism, including its change of gear into Marxian socialism, had simply been a long excursion into the desert in pursuit of a mirage.

In the light of such a philosophy the accepted explanations of the problems of international politics and the causes of war all appeared inadequate to the point of superficiality. The received wisdom among liberal thinkers of the 1920s was that wars in general, and the First World War in particular, had been caused precisely by the operation of 'power politics' which in their turn reflected the prejudices of a militaristic ruling class and the interests of capitalist investors and armaments manufacturers. The solution lay in the abandonment of

power politics conducted by means of secret diplomacy, and the adoption instead of programmes of collective security, arbitration, disarmament and the resolution of differences through open and reasoned discussion at the League of Nations. The problems which called for solution were those arising from the inequities of the Paris Peace Settlement, which was far too tainted with the evils of the old system. If only Germany could be reconciled and the injustices done to it undone, then a new world order, a new era in the history of mankind, might be expected to dawn.

These ideas were reiterated in a deliberately simplistic form by publicists—E. D. Morel, Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, H. N. Brailsford, Leonard Woolf—who with some reason saw their first duty as the re-education of that public opinion on which they relied to make their dreams come true, but which had repeatedly shown itself vulnerable to stubborn fits of atavistic xenophobia. Few of them were as naïve as sometimes appears from their writings. The complexity of the problems of international politics was certainly not underrated by the founders of Chatham House. This group included not only such outstanding idealists as Lord Robert Cecil and Philip Noel-Baker but 'realists' of the stamp of Eyre Crowe and Neil Malcolm and such scholarly specialists as James Headlam-Morley and Arnold Toynbee; men who had discovered at Paris how terribly under-equipped the Allied statesmen were to deal with the tangled problems which victory had dumped in their laps, how vast was the distance which separated popular expectations from practical realities, and how important it was for the future peace of mankind that judgment on foreign affairs should be formulated on a basis of widely-shared expert knowledge.

Yet in broad terms these men certainly shared the aspirations of the liberal idealists. There was a broad ethical consensus that international politics should be conducted, not with the aim of maximising the national interest, but in order to enable mankind to live in a community of mutual tolerance and respect, settling its differences rationally, resolving its conflicts by peaceful means. This could best be achieved by the creation and management of international institutions, in particular the League of Nations; and by the education of public opinion in loyalties wider than narrow, old-fashioned patriotism. And finally Britain's own national affairs should be conducted in accordance with a Kantian categorical imperative, to provide an example for other nations and to smooth the path towards the development of a higher national community based on the rule of law. They would have accepted that it was their task to transcend the old order based on national power and to create a new one based on consent. It was very appropriate that the Royal Institute of International Affairs should have found a

permanent home in the house once occupied by Mr. Gladstone at Chatham House, 10 St. James's Square.

But what this generation did not fully appreciate was how far these values, the fine flower of Victorian Liberalism, was tied up with a social order and national institutions which might continue to need power, and in the last resort *military* power, for their survival. All had supported the Allied cause during the Great War on the not unwarranted assumption that its defeat would be a catastrophic setback to the progress of liberal ideas. All believed that responsibility for the war rested very largely with the militaristic ideology rooted in the quasi-feudal monarchical social order in Central Europe whose destruction had removed a serious obstacle to world peace. What was harder for them to appreciate was that the destruction of that order would not make easier the work of peace-loving bourgeoisie such as themselves, but infinitely more difficult: that it would create a vacuum to be filled by warring forces of revolution and counter-revolution out of which régimes would arise far more ferocious than those they had replaced—régimes even less susceptible to reason or enamoured of an order based on consent. It was the tragedy of the League of Nations, that consummation of a century of striving and dreaming, that it was founded at a moment when it could not hope to operate successfully except as the executive organ of a group of like-minded nations prepared in the last resort to enforce their decisions by precisely those mechanisms of military power which its very existence was intended to render obsolete.

The lesson was not lost on the men who had to reconstruct the international system after the Second World War. They were more modest in their aspirations—more modest also, it must be admitted, in their talents. The new generation, at least in Britain, produced no one to equal the vigour and vision of the surviving veterans, Toynbee, Webster, Lionel Curtis, Philip Noel-Baker. The officials and the statesmen—Strang, Jebb, Cadogan, Bevin—were the equals if not the superiors of their predecessors; but there were no seers to inspire them, no prophets of a new order. Only one new academic figure of any eminence had been tempted by wartime experience to reflect with any degree of profundity on the state of the world—Herbert Butterfield; and he did so in terms which echoed the teaching of Reinhold Niebuhr across the Atlantic, and which were to provide a continuing influence on Martin Wight. There were certainly no British thinkers who felt that the world was now theirs to mould; who would claim, as Dean Acheson was to claim, that they were present at the Creation. Perhaps the failure of the first creation was too fresh in all their minds. But what *was* dominant in their consciousness was the impotence,

almost one might say the irrelevance, of ethical aspirations in international politics in the absence of that factor to which so little attention had been devoted by their more eminent predecessors, to which indeed so many of them had been instinctively hostile—military power: power not necessarily to impose their standards upon others (though that, in the re-education of the defeated enemy, was not irrelevant) but simply to ensure the survival of the societies in which those ethical values were maintained. And to the vulnerability of such societies and their value-systems a sad procession of emigré scholars and statesmen from Central and Eastern Europe bore eloquent witness—both before and after 1945.

This realisation of the impotence of ethical principle to operate unaided in a world of power does much to explain the speed with which the world rearmed after 1950. The spirit of historical irony will record that it was Mr. Attlee and his colleagues, not excepting Sir Stafford Cripps, the men who had voted and spoken so eloquently in the 1930s against power politics and great national armaments, who now took the decision to equip the United Kingdom as a nuclear power; that the Minister of Supply responsible for the construction of the atomic bomb was Mr. John Wilmot—the same John Wilmot whose election for the constituency of East Fulham in 1934 had convinced Stanley Baldwin of the impossibility of persuading the country to accept a major rearmament programme; and that the Secretary of State for Air in 1947, when the Air Ministry began to design the V-bombers which would deliver the bombs, was that most tireless and dedicated advocate of disarmament, Mr. Philip Noel-Baker. And in the United States liberals of equally impeccable antecedents, men who had throughout their lives fought against American entanglement in the old world of power politics, now helped to build up an armoury of terrifying strength in order to ‘defend the Free World’.

It is easy enough either to deplore this apparent volte-face as a shameful betrayal of principle, or to sneer at it as a belated acceptance of the facts of life. But both reactions arise from an attitude towards political morality—indeed, towards social action as a whole—which has, although very widely shared, proved throughout history to be misleading. According to this view, actions are to be judged against a single scale which runs from the pole of ‘power politics’ at one end to that of ‘ethical action’ at the other. Ethical considerations are held *automatically* to enfeeble power; considerations of power are regarded as unavoidably sullying ethics. It is an attitude no less popular with professed ‘men of the world’ and ‘realists’ than it is with idealists and reformers. The reluctance of liberal critics seriously to examine the technical problems faced by the military—a reluctance as evident today as it was in the 1930s—is paralleled by the scepticism with which a substantial number of officials, soldiers and ‘defence

experts¹ regard the relevance of ethical factors to the problems which they face. War, they say, is war. Business is business. What needs to be done, has to be done.²

The assumption that the exercise of coercive power is in itself fundamentally immoral, and that involvement in power relationships automatically vitiates ethical behaviour, is natural enough. How can good ends be served by evil means? How can one get peace by preparing for war? How can all the mechanisms of military power—the disciplining of soldiers, the development of weapons, the training to kill, the posing of threats, to say nothing of the awful actuality of warfare, shocking enough in the pre-nuclear age, inconceivable today—how can such activities conceivably contribute to ethical goals? Is not the whole ‘power system’ alien to and irreconcilable with any ethical objectives except those of the barbarian—and in adopting it even to fight barbarians, is one not becoming a barbarian oneself? To adopt the methods of coercive power—and economic can be as debasing as military power—is *in itself* considered to be unethical, to debase the cause which those methods are intended to serve.

Are ethics and power in fact such poles apart? Most of us in practice do not consider that they are, and within our own experience we can normally reconcile them without too much difficulty. But this may simply be the result of our own moral obtuseness and intellectual laziness. To provide a satisfactory conceptual synthesis is not so easy. The long debate over *raison d'état*, which Sir Herbert Butterfield took as the subject of the first Martin Wight Memorial Lecture,³ has never been properly concluded. The tradition that led through Plato and Machiavelli to Hegel, by which all contradictions were resolved in service to a State which was itself the highest value since it made possible all other values, disastrously popular as it became in Germany, has never been acceptable to Anglo-Saxon Liberals—although the Marxist variant which for ‘State’ would substitute ‘Revolution’ succeeded in attracting some of them in the 1930s. But perhaps a clue to a more satisfactory formula can be found in the work of another German thinker, albeit one who is seldom regarded as an authority on ethical questions: Karl von Clausewitz.

Clausewitz did not indeed deal with ethical questions as such. He did not fundamentally question the crude Machiavellianism of

² Although in my experience, in this country at least, defence specialists are more likely to be concerned about questions of ethics than are ‘peace researchers’ and liberal reformers about the problems, either fundamental or technical, of military or any other kind of power. It is significant that association by universities with the Ministry of Defence in this country, or with the Pentagon or the Central Intelligence Agency in the United States, is regarded by many students as being immoral almost by definition, and one is regarded as extremely naïve if one ventures to ask why.

³ Given at the University of Sussex on April 23, 1975.

eighteenth-century politics: the Grotian Law of Nations he dismissed as 'certain self-imposed, imperceptible limitations hardly worth mentioning, known as international law and custom'. But on the relationship between war and politics he did, as we know, have interesting and original things to say; and these may provide useful guidance in any consideration of the relationship between power and ethics.

Clausewitz's theory was teleological. In warfare, every engagement was planned to serve a tactical purpose. These tactical purposes were determined by the requirements of strategy. The requirements of strategy were determined by the object of the war; and the object of the war was determined by State policy, the State being the highest embodiment of the values and the interests of the community. Thus the objectives of State policy ultimately dominated and determined military means the whole way down the hierarchy of strategy and tactics. War was not an independent entity with a value-system of its own.

For Clausewitz State policy was the ultimate mover and justification, the criterion by which all other actions were to be judged—which in itself would make his doctrine as it stands unacceptable to the liberal. But what if one introduces one further, and ultimate, step in the hierarchy, to which State policy itself should be subordinated—the ethical goal? The State itself then becomes not an end but the means to an end. It has a dual role. It exists primarily to enable its own citizens to realise their ethical values; but it exists also to make possible an *international* community of mankind, whose values and interests are ultimately determinant, not only of State policy as such, but of all the means, military and otherwise, that are used to implement State policy.

Such a pattern goes beyond that 'Grotian' concept of international relations of which Hedley Bull spoke in the second Martin Wight Lecture last year⁴; for although in the Grotian formulation States are governed by a 'Law of Nations' which is based partly on a reflection of the divine order and partly on prudential considerations of self-preservation, they need no justification for their policy beyond the requirements of their own existence. They accept a law of nations as man accepts the laws of a just society: because his own needs dictate that he should do so. But in the Clausewitzian formulation, as we have elaborated it, State policy would be determined by and judged according to the needs of the international community. In the same way as war, if it were not directed by State policy, would be 'a senseless thing

⁴ Reprinted in *British Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 2, July 1976, pp. 101-116.

without an object', so State interests and State policy would make no sense and have no justification if they were not shaped in accordance with the overriding needs of mankind. As military power is subordinated to and guided by State policy, so State power should be subordinated to and guided by ethical norms. The relationship would then become one, not of irreconcilable opposition between mutually exclusive poles, but of hierarchical subordination of means to ends.

That all sounds very fine as a theory. In practice, unfortunately, it settles very little. Having stated his own theory, Clausewitz identified the fundamental problem about its application. The military means should always by definition be subordinated to the political object, true: but the military had its own requirements. It had to work according to its own inner necessities. Only the military specialist could determine whether the goals set by policy were attainable, and if so what the requirements were for attaining them. Military affairs had, as Clausewitz put it, their own grammar, even if they were subordinated to political logic; and the grammar was intricate and ineluctable. Armed forces require bases, and those bases may only be available in countries with which one would, for ethical reasons, prefer not to be allied. National industry, on which military capacity is based, may require access to raw materials available only from countries which are equally politically embarrassing. The successful conduct of the most just and defensive of wars may demand alliance with States whose price is the support of war aims which flatly contradict all one's own normative values—as did those of Italy in the Treaty of London in 1915, that last and most notorious example of power politics and secret diplomacy. Yet rather than yield to Italian demands on Slav territory, would it have been *morally* preferable to have waived the Italian alliance, leaving the Central Powers with their hands free to deal with Russia, and thus prolonging the war if not risking outright defeat?

One can multiply examples endlessly; let me concentrate simply on one. In 1935 there occurred a superb opportunity for Britain to shape its policy in the service of an ethical objective: the implementation of its obligations under the Covenant of the League of Nations by imposing penal sanctions upon Italy in order to deter or punish its aggression against Abyssinia. Not only was the crime unambiguous: the criminal was highly vulnerable. Public opinion, in the 'Peace Ballot', had recently expressed itself in favour of mandatory sanctions, even at the risk of war. The case might have been deliberately created to test the effectiveness of that new system of collective security and the rule of law which had been brought into being since 1918 to replace the old chaotic system of power politics. It would have been a perfect example of the use of coercive means to attain political ends.

We can now see that there were many reasons why the British government flinched from the test; but certainly not the least was the uncompromising and unanimous opposition of those experts in military grammar, the Chiefs of Staff. Within the power structure which it was their duty to operate there were two far more serious threats, not simply to the rule of law in international politics, but to the security of Britain and its Empire: the growing power of Nazi Germany and the increasingly open aggression of Japan. To risk even successful war against Italy would have been to enfeeble the already pathetically weak fleet available to deter Japanese attack in the Far East, and to antagonise a potential ally whose help was, in the eyes of France if not of Britain, indispensable in containing the German threat. The military grammar appeared unanswerable; it was to be that, rather than the ethical imperatives of collective security, which determined State policy.

In retrospect one can say that even in their own terms the military grammarians may have got it wrong. Faced with the real prospect of war Mussolini might very easily have retreated; his catastrophic humiliation would probably have imposed a high degree of caution both on Germany and Japan; a pattern of peace-keeping would have been successfully established. But the arguments of the grammarians could not simply be overridden. The ethical imperative could not be, in Clausewitz's words, 'a despotic lawgiver'. In the last resort the statesmen were, as ever, faced with a balance of imponderables, with problems to which there were no clear-cut ethical solutions.

To say, therefore, that State policy should be subordinated to the ethical imperative as strategic considerations should be subordinated to State policy does not get us very far. The world of power remains stubbornly autonomous; the suzerainty of ethics may be of quite Merovingian ineffectiveness. Moreover such a formulation can lend itself to the crudest of casuistical justification of all coercive means in terms of the ethical end—of police torture of political dissidents in order to preserve a stable and orderly society, of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 in order to preserve the stability of Eastern Europe, of the 'destabilisation' of Chile to maintain the stability of the Western hemisphere, of the secret bombing of Cambodia to maintain the independence of South Vietnam. Because such actions may be dictated by the grammar of coercive power, they cannot—any more than can terroristic destruction of life and property or intimidatory guerrilla massacres—be *justified*, i.e. made in themselves ethical, by an ethical object. The dimensions of power and of ethics remain stubbornly different.

Indeed, so long as we think of power and ethics in terms of

dimensions, we may not go too far wrong. Dimensions do not contradict one another, nor can they be subordinated to one another. They are mutually complementary. Political activity takes place in a two-dimensional field—a field which can be defined by the two co-ordinates of ethics and power. The ethical co-ordinate (which we may appropriately conceive as vertical) indicates the purposes which should govern political action: the achievement of a harmonious society of mankind in which conflicts can be peacefully resolved and a community of cultures peacefully co-exist within which every individual can find fulfilment. The horizontal co-ordinate measures the capacity of each actor to impose his will on his environment, whether by economic, military or psychological pressures. Movement along this co-ordinate, the increase or decrease in coercive capability, has *as such* no dimension of morality, any more than does any elevation of moral standards necessarily involve an increase in one's power to implement them.

Effective political action needs to take constant account of both dimensions. To concern oneself with ethical values to the total exclusion of any practical activity in the dimension of power is to abdicate responsibility for shaping the course of affairs. To accumulate coercive power without concern for its ethical ends is the course of the gangster; of St. Augustine's robber bands. Indeed it could be argued that each of these unidimensional courses is self-defeating; that the co-ordinates, if indefinitely prolonged, become circular. Obsession with ethical values with no concern for their implementation is ultimately unethical in its lack of *practical* concern for the course taken by society; concern for coercive capability without the legitimisation of moral acceptance leads ultimately to impotence, and disaster at the hands of an indignant and alienated world. Thus political action, whether in the international or any other sphere of activity, needs to be *diagonal*. Ethical goals should become more ambitious as political capability increases. The political actor, be he statesman or soldier, needs to grow in moral awareness and responsibility as he grows in power. The moralist must accept that his teaching will not reach beyond the page on which it is written or the lectern from which it is expounded without a massive amount of complex activity by men of affairs operating on the plane of their own expertise. The more ambitious and wide-ranging the ethical goals, the greater the power-mechanisms required to achieve them.

In pursuing his diagonal course the statesman is like a pilot reading a compass bearing from which he must not diverge in either direction if he is to achieve his goal. Too rigorous a concern for moral absolutes may reduce or destroy his capacity for effective action. Yet to ignore such norms entirely may gain him short-term advantages at the cost

of ultimately reducing his capacity to operate effectively in a world made up, not of robber bands, but of States functioning as moral as well as military entities, whose authority is as dependent on moral acceptability as on coercive capability. He may have to commit or authorise acts which, as a private citizen, he would deeply deplore. No one involved, for example, in the repatriation of Soviet troops from British-occupied Europe to Russia immediately after the Second World War could have felt anything other than distress bordering on misery at the need for such action. But in the political dimension the object of maintaining friendly relations with the Soviet Union in order to achieve yet wider ethical objectives—the peaceful settlement of Europe and of the world as a whole—had to be regarded as mandatory. To call attention to the ethical problems created by such actions is appropriate and necessary; but they cannot be condemned on such grounds unless account is taken of the political dimension as well.

Acton was being less than fair to the world of politics when he declared that power tends to corrupt. What does tend to happen, as I suggested earlier, is that the grammar of power, so intricate, so compelling, becomes for those who operate it a universe in itself—as indeed for the moralist and the reformer, the ethical objective can become an exclusive obsession which makes him disdain the tedious and murky problem of how to attain it. Yet perhaps there is a kind of gravitational force against which statesmen have consciously to fight, which keeps their activities always closer to the horizontal co-ordinate of power than to the vertical one of ethics, which constantly weighs down their efforts to maintain the diagonal. Overloaded political decision-makers and members of huge bureaucracies have enough to contend with in day-to-day management of affairs without constantly searching their consciences as to the ethical implications of their actions. That makes it all the more important that their ethical perceptions should be internalised and operate automatically and continuously. Government departments seldom carry a chaplain on the establishment to provide an ethical input into policy-making.

The appropriate response of the political moralist to the world of power must therefore be not to condemn but to enlighten, to understand, and to acknowledge and accept that the Children of Darkness have a painfully-learned wisdom in their own generation which is deserving of genuine respect. As Niebuhr put it, 'Politics will, to the end of history, be an area where conscience and power meet, where the ethical and coercive factors of human life will interpenetrate and work out their tentative and uneasy compromises'.⁵ As a thinker whose

⁵ Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (New York: Scribner, 1949; first publ. 1932), p. 4.

ideas were deeply rooted in ethical values, Martin Wight knew that even he could make no serious contribution to the study of international politics without first attaining a full understanding of the coercive factors operating within it. But he never ceased to look beyond these 'uneasy compromises' to the ultimate goal of full and final reconciliation.