

A European 'society of states' —but only states of mind?*

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The integration of contemporary Europe was not a subject on which Martin Wight wrote a great deal, but there are some penetrating remarks on it in the chapter he contributed to the book edited by his colleague David Daiches.¹ Discussing the origins of the School of European Studies at Sussex, of which he was of course the first Dean (and where, significantly, he chose to hold a chair of History rather than of International Relations), Wight notes that, as the plans for the university took shape in the late 1950s, 'the case for European Studies was strengthened by the progress of the European Economic Community and the possibility that Britain itself might join'. He also comments, provocatively, that 'Europe' could only become a 'self-aware' civilization to be studied academically (in the way that specialists in area studies had already dealt with, say, the Middle East or Latin America) after Europe had been, as he poetically put it, 'deposed from world primacy by her American and Russian descendants'. 'The end of European hegemony', he argued, 'made the concept of "European Studies" possible.' A final short quotation from this statement of Wight's view of Europe is particularly telling. Noting that Europe cannot be just 'a great civilization which we can examine with detached curiosity from outside', he continues: 'Europe is the seat of our own civilization: it is ourselves. The social scientists in a School of European Studies are anxious to join the Common Market; the students of literature, the historians and the philosophers have never left it.'²

This emphasis on ideas, on culture and on values (the contents of that great Sussex concept, 'The Modern European Mind') was quite fundamental to Wight's interpretation of the academic discipline to which most of his writing was devoted, that of International Relations (IR). One argument I shall advance in this article is that, even though the European Union of today is a very different entity from the historic European 'society of states' which Wight

* This article is an edited text of the 1999 Martin Wight Memorial Lecture, delivered at the University of Sussex on 28 October 1999.

¹ Martin Wight, 'European studies', in David Daiches, ed., *The idea of a new university: an experiment in Sussex* (London: Deutsch, 1964).

² *Ibid.*, pp. 101, 100, 103.

analysed, the concepts he developed then can help us to understand the thing we have now; and indeed, that his approach has strong affinities with the interpretations of those present-day analysts who maintain that in the process of European integration, in one way or another, ideas matter.

A recent issue of *The Economist* contains a survey of the state of the European Union whose central argument could almost serve as a text for this article. The author concludes his summary of 'how European integration works' thus: 'It does not rely primarily on a somewhat arbitrary institutional superstructure, as some of the earlier models of the European Union presumed. Rather, it operates through a rich substructure: a corpus of values, laws, rules, norms and procedures which all EU countries must respect.'³ In what follows I shall examine Martin Wight's account of the European society of states, looking in particular for insights that may help us to understand the phenomenon of western Europe's postwar integration, and compare his approach with some of those adopted by present-day specialists on this subject. I shall say something in particular about interpretations based on economics and history, and in conclusion something about the schools of thought which maintain that the 'construction of Europe' is best understood as a mental or cognitive construction—essentially, something shaped in the minds of those concerned with it, either as policy-makers or as observers. The links between this approach and Martin Wight's own emphasis on what *The Economist* summarized as transnational 'values, laws, rules, norms and procedures' will, I hope, become clear.

First, then, I turn to Wight's own ideas. As a student of IR in the realist tradition (though he preferred to call himself a rationalist), he regarded the international behaviour of states, and the relationships between them, as his central subject-matter. A glance at the titles of his main works—many of them published after his death in 1972—will confirm this: they include *Power politics* (1946, revised edition 1979), *Diplomatic investigations* (1966), and *Systems of states* (1979). Even *International theory: the three traditions* (1991), broader and more philosophical in scope, is concerned essentially with rival traditions of thought about the relations between states.

Wight's belief that relations between states formed the central subject-matter of IR is also reflected, in a concentrated form, in the syllabuses he composed for the relevant undergraduate courses when the University of Sussex first started. For instance, the rubric for the School of Social Studies' contextual paper in 'International Politics', on offer from the University's foundation in 1961, covered 'the nature of the international community and of international law; the diplomatic system; the balance of power and other concepts in international politics; small powers, great powers, and superpowers; the problems of security and aggression; the League of Nations and the United Nations; current problems of tension, strategy, deterrence, and disarmament'.⁴ In his fuller syllabus for the undergraduate 'major' in IR, offered from 1963 (though unfortunately only

³ *The Economist*, 23 Oct. 1999.

⁴ *The University of Sussex: Prospectus 1961–1962* (University of Sussex: Stanmer, 1961), p. 15.

for two years in this form), there is a similar emphasis on the power politics of interstate relations. The core paper on 'International Society' was designed to cover 'the economic bases of international power; the diplomatic system; international institutions—political, economic and juridical'.⁵ There is an intriguing nuance in the slightly revised version of this rubric in the following year's prospectus: for budding social scientists majoring in IR in the School of Social Studies, the text is unchanged, but for IR majors in European Studies and in the brand-new School of African and Asian Studies, the order is reversed, and 'the economic bases of international power' are relegated to the end of the list, after the study of diplomacy and international institutions. I offer this evidence of an apparent revision of Wight's thinking, or of his attention to detail, as raw material for the army of younger scholars now devoting meticulous attention to the history of the 'English School' in IR, of which Wight was of course a central figure. One of these authors has recently made the very odd statement that in IR 'disciplinary self-consciousness only started in 1972'.⁶

If we now look more closely at Wight's writings on states and their relationships, we see that the passages most likely to shed light on recent and current developments in Europe are those devoted to the central concept of 'a society of states'. In *Power politics*, the chapter headed 'International society' begins by noting that the collectivity to which states belong 'has been variously called the family of nations, the states-system, the society of states, the international community'. Here and in some of his other writings, though not always, he drew a distinction between a 'states-system' (meaning a collectivity of states which are forced to interact, willy-nilly, and are thus interdependent) and on the other hand a 'society of states', distinguished by their having joined cooperatively 'in a system of relationships for certain common purposes', and by the fact that 'there are a diplomatic system and international law and international institutions which complicate or modify the workings of power politics'.⁷

We have, of course, to beware of the word 'institutions' in this context. For Wight, it meant not only formal institutions like those of the League of Nations or the UN (let alone the distinctly more supranational ones of the European Union), but also—and primarily—the customary processes and usages of a society of sovereign states: the kind of society his LSE colleague Hedley Bull called 'a society without government' and analysed in his seminal book *The anarchical society*.⁸

⁵ *The University of Sussex: Prospectus 1963–1964* (University of Sussex: Stanmer, 1963), pp. 39, 50.

⁶ Peter Wilson, 'The myth of the "First Great Debate"', *Review of International Studies* 24, special issue, Dec. 1998, p. 8. But what were all those long syllabus debates of the 1960s about, at Aberystwyth, LSE, Sussex, UCL and elsewhere, if not a highly conscious effort to define what the discipline of IR was about? On the textual variations, see *University of Sussex: Prospectus 1964–1965* (University of Sussex: Stanmer, 1964), pp. 48, 62, 67.

⁷ Martin Wight, *Power politics*, 2nd edn, ed. Hedley Bull and Carsten Holbraad (Harmondsworth: Pelican Books/Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1979), p. 105. Unless otherwise stated, references are to this edition.

⁸ Hedley Bull, *The anarchical society: a study of world politics* (London: Macmillan, 1977). See also the discussion of Bull's belief in the prevalence of 'co-operation among sovereign states in a society without government', in Tim Dunne, *Inventing international society: a history of the English school* (London: Macmillan, 1998), esp. p. 97.

‘The institutions of international society’, says Wight sternly, ‘are according to its nature’, and he summarizes these institutions and their functions as follows: ‘Diplomacy is the institution for negotiating. Alliances are the institution for effecting a common interest. Arbitration is an institution for the settlement of minor differences between states. War is the institution for the final decision of differences.’⁹

This rather grim summary of the ‘institutions’ of international society obviously bears the marks of its origin in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. It also focuses entirely on the institutions regulating relations between states; and yet we should note an intriguing counterpoint a page or two earlier, in Wight’s discussion of the nature of international society itself. This is, he says, ‘a unique society composed of the other, more fully organized societies which we call states. States are its prime and immediate member, even if there is a sense in which its ultimate members are men.’¹⁰ This broadening of the definition of the component units or actors of international society is immensely significant. It echoes Jean Monnet’s dictum about the process of European unification: ‘Il ne s’agit pas de fédérer les Etats; il s’agit d’unir les hommes’; and it also reminds us that Wight’s own conception of international society in fact covered much more than merely the system of states. In one of his later studies of historic states-systems, an essay on ‘Hellas and Persia’, he observes:

A historic states-system may seem a tolerably clear and distinct kind of community, or set of relationships and practices, when we study its internal structure and organic life. But when we examine its penumbra, look at its connections with what lies behind it, explore the scarcely definable gradations by which it shades into its cultural and diplomatic background, it begins to lose its coherence and identity, and doubts may arise about the validity of the concept itself of a states-system.¹¹

This typically honest admission, whose significance Hedley Bull underlines in his introduction to the book, indicates the potential ramifications of Wight’s conception of international society. As Bull has noted, in a comment on Wight’s interpretation of the Kantian or ‘revolutionist’ tradition of international thought: ‘The idea...that international politics is not just a matter of relations between states, but also a matter of so-called ‘transnational’ relations among the individuals and groups that states compose, is one to which Martin Wight’s exposition affords a central place: it is the core of the Kantian tradition.’¹²

Wight’s conclusion to the first edition of *Power politics* (published in 1946, before the full implications of the ‘Kantian tradition’ had been worked out) allowed only a glimmer of hope that the negative effects of international anarchy could

⁹ Wight, *Power politics*, p. 112.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

¹¹ Martin Wight, *Systems of states*, ed. with an introduction by Hedley Bull (London: Leicester University Press/London School of Economics and Political Science, 1977), p. 105.

¹² Hedley Bull, ‘Martin Wight and the theory of international relations’, in Martin Wight, *International theory: the three traditions*, ed. Gabriele Wight and Brian Porter (London: Leicester University Press/Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1991), p. xix.

be overcome: 'Powers will continue to seek security without reference to justice, and to preserve their vital interests irrespective of common interests, but in the fraction that they may be deflected lies the difference between the jungle and the traditions of Europe.'¹³ The particular element in Europe's traditions that offered, in Wight's interpretation, the most ambitious hope of overcoming the law of the jungle was what he called the Kantian or revolutionist tradition. As he put it in his famous LSE lecture course, the answer given by this school of thought to the question 'What is international society?' is as follows: 'It is a state (or ought to be).'¹⁴ With this slogan the Kantian school of thought obviously aspired, ideally, to embrace the whole of international society in a global state, or world government, representing the kind of worldwide authority which the League and the UN had failed to achieve.

In practice, nothing approaching this has ever been attempted at more than a regional level of the system: the nearest that any group of states has voluntarily come to accepting this vision of an integrated supranational polity is represented by the group of European states that now calls itself the European Union. Six member states in the 1950s, nine in the 1970s, twelve in the 1980s, fifteen today and perhaps twenty-five or more in a few years' time, are committed, or will be, to what the Treaty on European Union calls 'the process of creating an ever-closer union among the peoples of Europe'. This ever-closer union may or may not one day take the form of a European state, and it may or may not reflect and develop what Martin Wight called 'the traditions of Europe'; but it is certainly a political (as well as an economic, social and cultural) experiment without parallel either in European history or in the experience of other parts of the globe.

I would argue that part of the explanation of why west European integration has gone as far as it has, and some indication of how it may develop in future, can be found in the attributes of a 'society of states' as Martin Wight conceived it: that is, as a community of states (and thus, to use Max Weber's terminology, a *Gemeinschaft* rather than a *Gesellschaft*), sharing certain common purposes and values, responsive to each others' views and interests (or at least some of them), accepting the formal rule of law in some matters as well as the authority of common institutions, and behaving in relation to many other matters as if they were bound by formal legal rules, even if they are not. An organization of this kind is difficult to categorize in the conventional terminology of political science. The title of one of the early analyses, *Europe's would-be polity*, comes near to it;¹⁵ it echoes the 'Kantian' idea that international society 'is a state (or ought to be)'. William Wallace's characterization of the EU as 'less than a federation, more than a regime',¹⁶ clearly locates it somewhere on an identifiable spectrum. And recent authors have deployed a colourful variety of concepts to

¹³ Wight, *Power politics*, 1st edn (1946), p. 68, quoted by Dunne, *Inventing international society*, p. 61.

¹⁴ Wight, *International theory*, p. 48.

¹⁵ Leon N. Lindberg and Stuart A. Scheingold, *Europe's would-be polity: patterns of change in the European community* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970).

¹⁶ William Wallace, 'Less than a federation, more than a regime', in Helen Wallace, William Wallace and Carole Webb, eds, *Policy-making in the European Community*, 2nd edn (Chichester: John Wiley, 1983).

try to capture the nature of the thing. Philippe Schmitter, for instance, has ingeniously explored a range of constitutional forms which the EU of the future might take, going from the institutional extreme of a European state or federation (*stato, federatio*) through a series of less centralized forms of governance, which he calls *confederatio, consortio* and *condominio*. Of these, he thinks *condominio* the most likely—a competition among multiple and overlapping regional centres of power.¹⁷

The attempt to assess which of these developments (or others) is most likely, and to explain the process by which the states engaged in ‘the European construction’ are moving unsteadily towards something new, has of course produced a plethora of competing schools of thought and of conceptual ‘isms’, most of which find some reflection, and hence some methodological justification, in the real world. The main ‘isms’ are the following:

- *functionalism*, which holds (or held) that the incapacity of states to deal with concrete economic and social problems—trade, transport, migration, the environment—would become so obvious that states would be replaced, with regard to these issues, by transnational functional authorities capable of dealing with them, and that the state would thus become redundant and wither away (as Lenin had also expected, but for different reasons);
- *federalism*, which argues that supranational political institutions are the key to a rational decision-making structure at the European level, and that a constitutional transformation (perhaps in stages) is the way to establish a constructive relationship between the institutions of a European federation, those of its member states, and those representing subordinate regions (or in some cases nations) within these member states;
- *neo-functionalism*, which like pure functionalism, stresses the tasks or problems with which public authorities have to deal, but instead of relying on the spontaneous emergence of new functional agencies, insists on the need for deliberate initiatives by representatives of economic and other interests, and entrepreneurial action by the embryonic European authorities already in existence, to move the process of integration forward;
- *intergovernmentalism* (currently the most influential school, and one which has proliferated into a number of branches), which holds that the creation of supranational institutions is possible only with the agreement of the EU’s member states, and that both institutional and substantive progress in European integration depend essentially on these member states’ decisions and actions.¹⁸

¹⁷ Philippe Schmitter, ‘Some alternative futures for the EU and their implications for European public policy’, in Yves Meny et al., eds., *Adjusting to Europe: the impact of the European Union on national institutions and policies* (London: Routledge, 1996).

¹⁸ See further Dimitris N. Chrysochoou et al., eds., *Europe in change: theory and reform in the European Union* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999) and Ben Rosamond, *Theories of European integration* (London: Macmillan, 2000). For a review of Rosamond’s book, see this issue of *International Affairs*.

It is perhaps not surprising that most of the theories of integration produced in recent years have presented various forms of an intergovernmental Europe.¹⁹ From our constant observation of the tenacity with which national governments cling to their authority, and the enduring strength of their citizens' attachment to their 'national identities' (however vaguely these are perceived), it should not surprise us that the EU's member states continue to be the principal agents in the process of 'constructing Europe'. These states (or rather the governments which represent them) make the critical decisions about whether and if so how the Union's common institutions should have a greater say in managing specific areas of policy; they decide whether the roles of the Commission or the European Parliament should be increased; and, as they are always mindful of the extent to which Europe's integration affects *them*, they are extremely cautious about entering into new bargains which extend integration into new areas, without assessing most carefully the likely balance of gains (mainly economic) and losses (mainly in freedom of action) from their respective national standpoints. This calculus is clearly applied to such decisions as whether the states concerned should establish a common currency/set up unified policies in relation to asylum and immigration/take more foreign policy decisions by majority vote/move towards the harmonization of fiscal policies, and so on.

It should therefore not surprise us that most of the concepts now used by analysts of European integration are related more or less closely to the intergovernmentalist school of thought, rather than to the others I sketched earlier. This is true, for instance, of the notion that there exist EU-wide 'regimes', in which states behave as if they were bound by rules established in a specific policy area.²⁰ It is true of the set of ideas according to which the EU's member states behave in a 'consociational' way with one another.²¹ It is true of the concept developed by Wolfgang Wessels, according to which the bureaucracies of the member states and of the Union interact in a process of 'fusion', which creates a new transnational mode of governance;²² and it is true of Helen Wallace's metaphorical pendulum of policy-making, which swings sometimes towards nationally centred decisions made in the EU's national capitals, and sometimes towards collective decisions adopted at the European level of the Union's 'partial polity'.²³

¹⁹ This is not to deny the significance of theories about supranational or multilevel governance or regulation, derived from the concepts of comparative government rather than those of IR. See Rosamond, *Theories of European integration*, esp. chs 5, 7.

²⁰ See Stephen Krasner, ed., *International regimes* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983); Chrysochoou et al., eds., *Europe in change*, ch. 1.

²¹ See Paul Taylor, *The European Union in the 1990s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), esp. ch. 2; Rosamond, *Theories of European integration*, pp. 148–51.

²² See Wolfgang Wessels, *Die Öffnung des Staates: Modelle und Wirklichkeit grenzüberschreitender Verwaltungspraxis* (Opladen: Leske & Budrich, 2000).

²³ See Helen Wallace, 'Politics and polity in the European Union: the challenge of governance', in Helen Wallace and William Wallace, eds, *Policy-making in the European Union* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

To recall one of Wight's formulations, the EU's member states, in their mutual relations, have moved a long way from the law of the jungle; but 'the traditions of Europe', to which they remain attached, still provide for a strong element of national autonomy, based on the right of each state to define its national interests, as well as an increasing commitment—probably—to joint action, and—perhaps—to strengthened common institutions. One of the central questions, as we try to make sense of the uneven and obscure development of the European Union, is this: what exactly are the states of Europe *creating*, as they strive and struggle to 'construct' a Europe that suits their interests? And there is also a question in the reverse direction: what exactly has the construction of this Europe been doing to its member states?

Before trying to answer these questions, we should pause to recall the obvious point that, whatever the process of formal integration is doing to the states of Europe, it is by no means the only powerful force now at work on them. The last few years have seen a barrage of academic and journalistic analysis showing how the state as a form of organization (and not only in Europe, of course) is in a state of crisis, which some observers see as terminal. This conclusion is arrived at from a variety of different angles: it is clear, we are told, that most states are now too small and too vulnerable to cope on their own with such vital tasks as military defence and environmental protection; that economic 'globalization' (an advanced form of what we used to call 'interdependence') gravely impairs their capacity to determine their own economic, fiscal, industrial or social policies; that the power of states is clearly in retreat before the advancing power of multinational business corporations; and that today's 'nation-states' (even highly centralized ones like the United Kingdom and France) face internal disintegration through the self-assertion of the subject nations, or disgruntled regions, which they contain.²⁴ Even more comprehensively, as Susan Strange put it, in today's world of 'multiple, diffused authority', the allegiances, loyalty and identity of individuals lie 'sometimes with the government of a state. But other times, with a firm, or with a social movement operating across territorial frontiers. Sometimes with a family or a generation; sometimes with fellow-members of an occupation or a profession.'²⁵

This reminder of the manifold challenges confronting the nation-states of Europe raises the question whether some of their governments, when they consider their relationship to the institutions of the EU, may calculate how to use these institutions, and the common policies they conduct, among other things as a means of defending their own interests against these very threats. Do they not seek to use Europe—as we shall consider below when I come to discuss the thesis advanced by Alan Milward—to 'rescue' the nation-state from the predicament in which it has been placed by the overwhelming forces of the

²⁴ See e.g. Patrick McCarthy and Erik Jones, eds, *Disintegration or transformation: the crisis of the state in advanced industrial society* (London: Macmillan, 1995).

²⁵ Susan Strange, *The retreat of the state: the diffusion of power in the world economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 199.

twentieth-century world (not least the Second World War, as well as the other phenomena to which I have alluded)?

The EU's member states, then, may be passive victims of supranational integration; they may be fighting a rearguard action to protect their essential interests, while drawing whatever benefit they can; or they may be active European construction workers, ardently embracing the process of Europeanization in order to maintain their own viability and their own capacity to meet the needs of their citizens. Whichever of the above (or whatever mixture of them) is the case, it remains true that every realistic interpretation of the European integration process places the national governments of the member states at the heart of what happens.

How does the process work? What is the most appropriate or useful method for comprehending it? In my own search for the most useful approach, I am drawn to those that make systematic use of historical evidence, tracing patterns of causality over a period of time and conceptualizing as precisely as possible what these patterns tell us. It makes sense, now that we can consider fifty years of experience of 'the construction of Europe', to examine the critical stages of this complex story, and to try to see what patterns of causality they reveal. (The attempt to draw explicit theoretical conclusions, or to formulate general propositions about, say, the causal factors that lead European states to agree on particular measures of economic or institutional integration, may not come naturally to historians, but what I am advocating is a combination of historical and social-scientific approaches.)

The most ambitious and the most interesting attempt, so far, to use the evidence of history to construct a general theory of European integration is offered in Andrew Moravcsik's weighty volume *The choice for Europe*.²⁶ The subtitle, *Social purpose and state power from Messina to Maastricht*, indicates both the book's chronological scope (from the 1950s to the 1990s) and its central thesis. Crudely summarized, this is that the decisive causal explanation for each major step forward in European integration is to be found in a combination of three factors: the national commercial interests of the major states concerned, their relative bargaining power, and the incentives for them to enhance the credibility of their commitments to each other by the acceptance of binding and institutionalized procedures. This last point is important: without going so far as to endorse the extreme 'institutionalist' thesis that the leaders of the European bodies themselves (even the powerful Commission President Jacques Delors) played a critical role, Moravcsik stresses that the member states themselves frequently desired strong central institutions, as a safeguard against defection by any of their number from agreements reached.

Moravcsik traces the influence of his three causal factors (and, scrupulously, the hypothetical influence of other factors too) in determining the course of events in five critical stages of the story: first, the negotiations among six European

²⁶ Andrew Moravcsik, *The choice for Europe: social purpose and state power from Messina to Maastricht* (London: UCL Press, 1999).

countries which produced the Treaty of Rome in the mid-1950s; second, the series of package-deals in the 1960s which removed tariffs between the member states, established a common external trade policy, finalized the Common Agricultural Policy and clarified the roles of the Community's institutions; third, the establishment of the European Monetary System in the late 1970s and 1980s; fourth, the negotiation and adoption in 1986 of the Single European Act, providing for the liberalization of the internal market by 1992 and for a range of related procedural and institutional changes; and fifth, the negotiation of the Treaty on European Union signed at Maastricht in 1991, which provided not only for dramatic progress towards economic and monetary union in the 1990s, but also for enhanced coordination in matters of foreign and security policy, policing, immigration and judicial affairs.

I have sketched a long and complex catalogue of the main decisions that have made the European Union what it is today. The significance of Moravcsik's analysis of these events is that his systematic examination of every key stage confirms his original hypothesis. The policy preferences of the main states involved (he discusses essentially France and Germany plus, from the 1970s, the United Kingdom), and the outcomes of their negotiations, can indeed be explained by the three basic factors he has identified: their national commercial interests, their relative bargaining power, and the degree of their commitment to creating institutions strong enough to ensure the observance of the agreements reached. The historical approach, comparing different situations over an extended period of time, allows the author to establish continuities—in, say, German policy from Adenauer through Brandt to Kohl, in French policy from de Gaulle through Giscard d'Estaing to Mitterrand, or in British policy from Macmillan through Wilson to Thatcher—without losing sight of the obvious fluctuations and mutations that have occurred along the way.

Moravcsik calls his theory 'liberal intergovernmentalism': in contrast to the 'realist intergovernmentalism' which argues that national interests are monolithic and self-evident, laid down from above by the governments of states, his view of how national preferences are formed, and how nations shape the policy positions with which they enter negotiations, is more subtle. 'Liberal' implies an interpretation of national preference-formation which takes full account of the diversity of commercial, industrial, monetary, and social interests *within* a nation, and also of the readiness of nation-states to negotiate agreements if the complex balance of different domestic interests requires it—as well as to establish effective institutions to ensure that these agreements are observed. We are thus given a picture of the EU as a society, or community, of European states, each fully aware of its national interests but on the whole responsive to those of the others, and choosing repeatedly to 'pool and delegate sovereignty to common institutions' designed 'to commit other governments—perhaps their own future governments—to particular future policies'.²⁷ While Moravcsik

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 485.

allows that the idea of Europe—the vision of a European federation—has played *some* part in the process, he insists that 'the EC has been, for the most part, the deliberate creation of statesmen and citizens seeking to realize economic interests through traditional diplomatic means.' The paradox, he adds, is that these traditional means lead to a result which is very non-traditional indeed: the persistent widening and deepening of the EC/EU by 'repeated transfers of sovereign prerogatives'.²⁸

It will be clear by now that I find Moravcsik's approach impressive and valuable; but we should note that his is by no means the only one to use historical data to support general explanations of European integration. There is also, for instance, the so-called 'historical institutionalist' approach, associated with another Harvard scholar, Paul Pierson, which studies European policy developments over a period of time, as Moravcsik does, but which differs from his approach in assigning a significant causal role to key officials within the European institutions, who are seen as using their position to act as 'policy entrepreneurs', leading the EU's member governments into new agreements which they would not otherwise make. This approach seems to provide a good explanation in certain relatively limited areas of what has been called 'low policy' (education, social policy, and the like), but probably not in the major 'constitution-making' decisions of the kind analysed by Moravcsik.²⁹

And then, as a last example of a general explanation based on historical data, there is the challenging view put forward by Alan Milward, according to which the leaders of European states in the postwar period not only played a decisive role in advancing the European project, but did so for very precise and self-interested national reasons. Milward is not content with arguing that the progress of European integration depended on national decisions, or even that one of its consequences was to revitalize the states concerned and to enable them, as states, better to provide for the economic prosperity and social welfare of their citizens: he goes well beyond this in affirming that the very *purpose* for which these leaders adopted the aim of 'constructing Europe' was precisely to rescue their respective states, as functioning *states*, from the level of chronic inadequacy to which they had been reduced by their terrible experiences during the Second World War. As Milward summarizes it, their aim in being 'European' was to accomplish a 'successful reassertion of the nation-state as the basic organizational entity of Europe'.³⁰

Milward's major work on this provocative theme, *The European rescue of the nation state*, is based essentially on the economic history of postwar Europe, including the history of economic policy-making. Like Moravcsik, Milward

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 501.

²⁹ Paul Pierson, 'The path to European integration: a historical institutionalist analysis', *Comparative Political Studies* 29: 2, April 1996. See also the interesting evidence in Douglas Webber, ed., *The Franco-German relationship in the European Union* (London: Routledge, 1999) that 'top-down' integration, directly involving the EU institutions, has sometimes been more effective on issues of 'high politics' than on more 'technical' ones.

³⁰ A. S. Milward, *The European rescue of the nation state* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 437.

produces copious historical evidence, though he has chosen to concentrate not on issues agreed to be intrinsically significant, but on those for which the fullest contemporary documentary evidence is available. Thus he offers detailed case-studies covering Belgian policy on coal production from about 1947 to 1960; the policies of certain west European countries (especially the Netherlands) on international trade and related issues from about 1952 to 1957; national policies on agricultural production in roughly the same period; and British policy on monetary and trade questions from 1951 to 1956. Milward derives from this evidence the conclusion that the essential causal factor which produced European integration was the concern of Europe's governments to find ways to 'uphold and stabilize the post-war (domestic) consensus on which the European nation-state was rebuilt'. He even, in an iconoclastic chapter entitled 'The lives and teachings of the European saints', asserts that many of the revered pioneers of European unity—the Belgian Paul-Henri Spaak, the German Konrad Adenauer, the Italian Alcide de Gasperi and the two Frenchmen Robert Schuman and Jean Monnet—shared 'a strong conviction that the nation-state could be rescued and made to serve as the foundation of a successful postwar European order'.³¹

In this European order, according to Milward's interpretation of what the founding fathers had in mind (and we should recall that his essential claim is to have uncovered the truth about what their deepest motivations were), the function of the new European institutions was to act as 'supranational buttresses' to a European order based on revitalized nation-states.³² However, once we note that these leaders did indeed promote supranational institutions conducting common policies, then it becomes imperative to ask in what sense, exactly, the nation-state was being 'rescued'. As Milward says, integration meant that states had entered into commitments which were 'irreversible', imposing on them 'a single enforceable law in place of that international law which had never been enforced'.³³ Thus it becomes apparent that the European states as 'rescued' by European integration, even though they had clearly enhanced their *internal* authority and capacity to act, had equally clearly accepted *external* constraints on their sovereignty. These constraints were so severe that they removed the collectivity of west European states almost unrecognizably far from the pre-1939 states-system of which Martin Wight wrote: a system unstable, fractious and prone to internecine wars of a kind unthinkable in the western Europe of the 1950s and 1960s.

Perhaps the answer to the question of whether European integration has 'rescued' the nation-state depends on the professional speciality of the respondent. A constitutional lawyer or an expert in comparative politics might argue (indeed, many of them do) that involvement in European institutions has enhanced the power of national *governments* at the expense of national *parliaments* (the executive branch becomes stronger, the legislative branch weaker). An

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 44, 337.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 337.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 438.

economic or social historian, analysing the capacity of the postwar nation-state to deliver such public goods as economic prosperity or welfare services, could again argue, as Milward does, that European integration has strengthened or 'rescued' the competence and capacity of the state in this respect. But a historian of the European states-system, or a specialist in IR, focusing on the capacity of states to inflict grievous damage on one another, and on the nature of the states-systems that make this easier or harder, more or less likely, must have difficulty in accepting the Milward thesis that the nation-state has been 'rescued', if that is to be taken to mean restored to the external autonomy which was historically one of its strongest characteristics.

I turn now from considering the diverse ways in which historical research methods have been used to interpret the European experience. It will be abundantly clear that there are profound differences of opinion, even among close observers of the process of integration, about what exactly this is, what exactly it has done to the states involved in it, and what exactly they in return have done and are doing to it.

The recognition of this great diversity of perceptions among observers provides a starting point for considering the very last school of thought I shall discuss, the 'social constructivist' school which maintains that the thing is essentially 'all in the mind': that what we call 'the European construction' should be seen as an individual or collective construction of an intellectual kind, and that each person's or each group's conception of it may be as 'real' as any other, however much they may differ. Different national political leaders differ dramatically in their perceptions of what 'Europe' is really about, and these perceptions or 'constructions' directly affect their political decisions, as the following anecdote will illustrate.

In 1984 (two years after the Falklands War had ended) Mrs Thatcher gave a dinner at No. 10 Downing Street for the eminent German statesman Richard von Weizsäcker, who was then the Governing Mayor of Berlin and was shortly to take office as President of the Federal Republic. At this time, the British government was concerned to reduce what appeared to be Britain's excessive contribution to the European Community's budget, and Mrs Thatcher had used the popular phrase 'I want our money back.' In his after-dinner speech, the German visitor spoke eloquently of the political, cultural and ethical purposes of European unification, and gave a tactful warning that if 'certain states' went on too much about their budgetary balance with Brussels, the process of integration would be discredited: even the Germans (in fact the largest net contributors to the budget) would lose interest in voting for the European Parliament, and the whole majestic project might grind to a halt. In reply Mrs Thatcher made a speech about Britain's recent victory in the Falklands War. She began by remarking that to receive a visitor from Berlin was a reminder that the United Kingdom had troops there, and assured her guest that if Berlin were to be threatened as the Falklands had been, he could be sure that Britain would save the city as she had saved the Falklands. 'Now the way I saved the Falklands

was like this...' and she recounted it. Later in the evening one of her British guests took the opportunity to ask her what she thought of the Governing Mayor's remarks about the future of Europe. With a steely glare at the questioner, she replied: 'They've nearly got it right. We just have to keep up the pressure, and then we'll get the money back!'³⁴

To consider the two conceptions of Europe reflected in these contrasting ways of speaking—the two 'discourses', as the social constructivists would say—is to be reminded of the contrasts between different ways of perceiving the same thing, different ways of constructing 'reality', which can lead to very different practical conclusions, and therefore have to be taken very seriously. In discussing contemporary theories about European integration I have concentrated mainly on theories about why the member states of the EU have *gone as far as they have* in adopting common policies, and in bargaining away their sovereignty (selectively but surely) to supranational institutions. If we ask a further question—why have they not gone further?—it may be that some of the same theories will provide an answer, but I think not a complete one. To answer this question, I believe, we need to explore and to take into account less tangible factors, such as subjective perceptions of national identity, the ideas people hold about their 'national character' (and the characters of other nations), and 'collective memory' in the sense of peoples' mental pictures of their own national histories and of the history of others.³⁵

It is, I believe, in coming to terms with intangible but obviously important factors of this kind that the 'social constructivist' school can help to advance our understanding. Here I can only briefly sketch some of the tenets of this school. A full exposition, and some applications, will be found in a recent issue of the *Journal of European Public Policy*.³⁶ When the editors of that special issue tell us that 'the European integration process...has as much to do with socially constructed realities as it has with material reality', our first reaction may be one of scepticism, especially since in their view, 'in contrast to material reality, social realities exist only by human agreement', and it is difficult, if we are considering (say) the functioning of an institution of the EU, to be sure where one kind of 'reality' ends and the other begins.

However, we can readily think of social and political arrangements which depend for their actual functioning on conventions, on informal or tacit understandings, on loyalties and on senses of identity which are none the less indispensable for being in a strict sense intangible. Such loyalties and identifications may also change over time: a public sense of a common European identity may become stronger or weaker, as may the senses of national identity which coexist with it. Most of the elements in 'the European construction' may be

³⁴ Personal experience.

³⁵ See Cyril Buffet and Beatrice Heuser, eds, *Haunted by history: myths in international relations* (Oxford: Berghahn, 1998).

³⁶ *Journal of European Public Policy* 6: 4, Sept. 1999, special issue on 'The social construction of Europe'. See also Rosamond, *Theories of European integration*, esp. pp. 131–5.

solidly explicable in terms of the commercial interests, national bargaining power and desire for institutional commitment adduced by Moravcsik and his school, but there are, I think, dimensions of the process—particularly such issues as divergent national perceptions, public acceptance and political legitimation—which are not fully accounted for by this approach. If we consider, for instance, the striking gap between the rhetoric and the reality of what is now called the 'Common Foreign and Security Policy' of the EU—the rhetoric of a single European voice and concerted European action in the world, the reality of the EU's inability to act in concert in the Gulf, in Bosnia or in Kosovo—it is hard not to conclude that the states and peoples of western Europe are still some way from perceiving themselves as a single 'actor' in the global political system. There has, of course, been some progress towards this aim, and there may be more, but it is slow and painful. One of several reasons for this seems to be the sentiment in at least the EU's bigger member nations that foreign policy is something to be decided nationally, and a matter of 'the kind of thing that we as a nation do', leading to situations in which the resulting 'social construction' of each national foreign policy tends to produce disharmony among the EU's states as a group.³⁷

The idea that national perceptions of what 'Europe' is about, and indeed national identities more generally, are shaped in the imaginations of leaders and peoples, is not a new one. In October 1862 William Ewart Gladstone made a striking statement on the subject, when he called on a British audience to face what he saw as the facts about the American Civil War: 'We may have our own opinions about slavery; we may be for or against the South, but there is no doubt that Jefferson Davis and the other leaders of the South have made an army, they are making, it appears, a navy; and they have made what is more difficult than either, they have made a nation.'³⁸ What occurs in the minds of political leaders—their internal 'construction' of the world in which they operate—clearly has a powerful influence on what they do. The contrasting 'constructions' of Europe by Margaret Thatcher and Richard von Weizsäcker, sketched above, certainly led to predictably different lines of political action in relation to the institutions and policies of Europe. This brief allusion to the way in which the social constructivist school may contribute to our understanding does, I think, bring us back towards Martin Wight's conception of a European society of states. The interest of this school in exploring Europe in terms of what one of them has described as 'norms, rules, practices...a multitude of common understandings, inter-institutional agreements, and informal modes of behaviour'³⁹ carries echoes of Wight's depiction of a states-system in practice 'shading into its cultural background'. It also takes us near to his picture of a society of states using the institutions of diplomacy, alliances and arbitration: a

³⁷ See Jan Zielonka, *Explaining Euro-paralysis: why Europe is unable to act in international politics* (London: Macmillan, 1998), esp. ch. 2.

³⁸ Quoted in Roy Jenkins, *Gladstone* (London: Papermac, 1996), p. 237.

³⁹ *Journal of European Public Policy* 6: 4, Sept. 1999, pp. 538–9.

society in which ‘the traditions of Europe’ make at least some impact on the law of the jungle.

Of course, the basically anarchical society of states of which Wight wrote was a very different one from the highly institutionalized society of today’s European Union. Perhaps we could locate three different systems (imagined ‘ideal-types’) along a scale or continuum: at one extreme a situation in which Europe’s major states are actually at war with one another (as they have been for a tenth of the twentieth century), and in which the collective usages and customs of society are limited to such questions as the treatment of prisoners of war: second, at some distance from this end of the scale, the international society which Wight would normally have had in mind, and which lasted basically from 1815 to 1914, with a resurgence during the ‘twenty years’ crisis’ between the wars—a most anarchical society, sometimes stable, sometimes desperately unstable; and finally, a very long way from the starting-point and quite a long way past this second scenario again, the European society of today’s EU. This is a society in which the member states are bound fairly solidly together by the network of common interests they have cultivated, and by common rules and institutions which they have voluntarily created and sustained: a society in which conflicts between member states, although certainly still endemic, are resolved, or managed, by peaceful procedures instead of by the violence employed not only in earlier centuries but for much of the twentieth.

These different European societies of states are indeed in sharp contrast, and if we think of what has happened to individual states within the present system, we have to be very sceptical of the late A. J. P. Taylor’s dictum that ‘states will be states’. To be sure, states are still a central feature of the life of Europe. As we have seen, their functions have even increased, in some respects, and their peoples’ sense of national identity may owe more to perceptions of their long past history than of the complexities of their present situation. But in reality they have become something very different from what they were, and this is one reason why we need to keep exploring new ways of understanding what is happening. As for the principles governing relations among states and peoples in the European system, I think we can see, as well as the enormous changes and differences over time, something of the enduring elements of ‘values, laws, rules, norms and procedures’ about which Martin Wight taught us to think.