The title of this paper is asking for trouble. Twenty years ago my then colleague at Kent, John Groom, published a history of the discipline with Bill Olson entitled *International Relations: Then and Now*, which our MA students immediately christened *International Relations: Now and Then* or, perhaps worse, *Now and Again* and I can see the same thing happening here (Groom & Olson, 1991). Still, this title does reflect the content of the paper. I have recently published a collection of my papers from the last twenty-five years (*Practical Judgement in International Political Theory* available in all good bookshops, £24.99) which contains an introductory essay which, as well as situating each paper has some reflections on where the discourse was then and is now, and this paper is a less introspective elaboration and extension of some themes I touch on there (Brown, 2010). One of the essays collected in this volume is ‘International Theory and International Society: The Viability of the Middle Way’ first presented at an English School oriented seminar at LSE in 1994, and reprinted from the *Review of International Studies* 21, (2) 1995 – so I have some excuse for approaching the notion of middle-ground ethics in this way, given that I have a certain amount of form on the subject of middle ways.

The structure of the paper is as follows: first, I will look at four developments in the 1970s and 1980s that created the discourse of IPT – on the positive side, the recovery of the history of international thought and the emergence of a discourse of global justice, on the negative side the collapse of ‘structuralism’ and dependency theory and the rise of structural realism and liberal institutionalism. Then, second, I will look at how these four changes interacted with one another, the characteristic problems thrown up by this interaction, and the way in which the new discourse of IPT related to English School International Society theory – this is where the middle ground comes in. Third, I will examine how these problems have played out of the last quarter century, and particularly some of the startling reversals of position that have taken place, the way in which, for example, cosmopolitan supporters of humanitarian intervention have often become firm defenders of the sovereignty norm of non-intervention. I’ll end on a somewhat pessimistic note; unlike the exciting days of dialogue and discussion in the 80s, the strands of thought that came together then have now sprung apart again, largely, I will argue, for political as opposed to scholarly or theoretical reasons – the middle ground is less easy to find now than it was then. Still we should not be too depressed about his; this kind of ebb and flow is characteristic
of disciplinary development, and the discourse today is certainly at a higher level than it was thirty years ago.

The (Re)Formation of IPT in the 1980s: IPT Then.

Four factors came together in the 1980s to create what we now think of as IPT – that is, a theoretical approach to IR which combines insights from Political Theory and IR Theory and is normative and interpretive as opposed to explanatory in ambition. Two of these factors represented positive developments, the other two reflected failings in the mainstream discipline of IR.

The first positive factor is the rediscovered relevance of classical political theory for IR. Before the 1980s serious discussion of the classics was pretty much limited to studies of Thucydides and Machiavelli, along with the Natural Lawyers, on the principle that domestic and international politics were governed by different forces and those classics who allegedly focused on the domestic arrangement of the state or Polis had little to say to scholars of IR. In the 1980s, this principle was challenged by a number of writers who demonstrated the falseness of the opposition upon which it was based – Andrew Linklater, Michael Doyle and Mervyn Frost immediately come to mind (Linklater, 1982; Doyle, 1983; Frost, 1986). The key point about these writers was not that they always provided compelling accounts of their sources – Doyle’s Kant and Frost’s Hegel are, in my view, rather dubious creations – but that they brought the classics to life in a contemporary context. The fact that one could argue about such hot topics as the influence of regime-type on foreign policy by reference to Perpetual Peace was enormously liberating.

Perhaps more important in the longer run was the way in which IR theory connected to contemporary political theory in the 1980s. The main area where this was the case concerned post-Rawlsian justice theory, but this was not simply a liberal project. Consider, for example, Terry Nardin’s Law, Morality and the Relations of States, a work of international society theory that is as important as Bull’s Anarchical Society and presents at least as compelling a ‘pluralist’ account as the obvious alternatives such as Robert Jackson’s Global Covenant (Nardin, 1983; Bull, 1977; Jackson, 2000) What is interesting is that although Nardin was certainly influenced by English School thought, still, it was to Michael Oakeshott and the notion of a ‘civil association’ that he turned when he developed his conception of international society, and not to Bull or Wight or Manning.

Nardin was important in my own thinking in the period, as was, and still is, Michael Walzer. Walzer’s Just and Unjust Wars remains a masterly study of Just War theory – although I am less convinced now than I was then by his legalist approach and his reduction of ‘just cause’ to resistance to aggression – but most of all stands as a defence of the idea that political communities have rights, which is a crucial corrective to the liberal notion that only individuals can be rights-bearers (Walzer, 1977).

Walzer was a contributor, albeit in the margins, to the debates on justice of the 1980s, and it was these debates that really did most to create the field of International Political Theory. The basic story here is well known; in 1970 John Rawls with A Theory of Justice revived the notion that one could write big books
on big topics and gave a fully worked account of what just social institutions
would look like, and thereby, for better or worse – mostly for better – changed
the study of Political Theory for ever, certainly in the Anglophone world, but
increasingly more widely (Rawls, 1971). However, as his critics pointed out from
day one, the international dimension of Rawls’s account of justice was strangely
conventional. Rawls’s conception of justice was based on a contract, and when it
came to the international, he imagined a second contract which would produce
the equivalent of a set of political liberties for the societies in question, but no
principle of social justice equivalent to the ‘difference principle’ which regulated
inequalities in domestic society (Rawls, 1999). In effect, Rawls recreated Hedley
Bull’s account of the normative foundations of international society, which was
not at all what most liberal political theorists had in mind – from their
perspective to ignore the inequalities that exist between states was, quite simply,
perverse, and could not be the answer to the question of global justice.

Brian Barry was the first writer to critique Rawls’s handling of the global
dimension, but the key writer in the development of the discourse of IPT was
Charles Beitz, whose Political Theory and International Relations was, and
remains, highly influential (Beitz, 19979). PTIR covers a lot of ground for a
relatively slim volume; the first two parts explore traditional topics in IR – the
notion of a ‘morality of states’ and the principle of non-intervention – rather in
the manner of an anthropologist exploring the customs of a strange, barely-
civilised tribe, which was a salutary and sobering experience (“O would some
power the gift to give us, to see ourselves as others see us”) for many of us in the
field. The third part critiqued Rawls directly, arguing for a global redistribution
of resources and, more fundamentally a global ‘difference principle’. While Beitz
actually soon came to acknowledge that he could not reach cosmopolitan
principles via Rawlsian mechanisms, he then, in a response to critics, based his
cosmopolitanism directly on a Kantian account of our obligations to others – a
position that sat well with some other Kantians who were entering the fray in
this period, most obviously Onora O’Neill, whose Faces of Hunger appeared in

Thus it was that in the 1980s Kant moved from being a marginal peace
theorists of little contemporary relevance to being a core thinker for a newly
emerging field. But as well as the cosmopolitan, Kantian reaction to Rawls’s
theory, there was also a ‘communitarian’ response delivered by Michael Sandel
(who coined the term), Charles Taylor, Alasdair McIntyre and, in rather different
terms, by Michael Walzer (Sandel, 1982; Taylor, 1975, 1991; McIntyre, 1981). In
the background of McIntyre’s and Taylor’s critique of the notion of a pre-social
individual can be discerned the figure of Hegel, and again there is a connection to
Frost’s recovery of Hegelianism, noted above.

Pull all this together, and oversimplifying madly, one finds that, in the
1980s, the fundamentals of IR theory are being challenged, and out of this
challenge comes the discourse of IPT. The notion of the state-as-actor is being
challenged by cosmopolitan thinkers who ground their work in the moral and
political theory of Kant (and Bentham, but I haven’t the space to make that point)
and defended by communitarian writers drawing on Hegel and J S Mill. In both
camps arguments drawn from the classics are being combined with modern
normative theory. The notion of justice in international relations was once a
topic that grew out of the study of international law, or was contrasted with
order as an organising principle – now, the debate had become global vs.
international justice. Meanwhile, lurking around the edges of this debate is the
issue of universal values – cosmopolitans, but also some state-centric writers,
work with the explicit or implicit belief that there is, in effect, only one set of
global values, that associated with Western modernity and the European
Enlightenment, but here too the sound of ice breaking can be heard.

The interest in global justice noted above came at just the time when
within the mainstream, conventional discipline of IR, the discourses which had
focused on justice were in trouble. In the 1960s and 70s, Dependency Theory,
AKA ‘Structuralism’ AKA ‘Centre-Periphery Analysis AKA ‘World Systems
Theory’ was the most obvious intellectual manifestation of the Southern drive
for global justice encapsulated in such phenomena as the push for a New
International Economic Order (NIEO) at the UN. This body of work generated an
interesting debate that reflected both the seriousness of the problem of Southern
underdevelopment, and the theoretical novelty of living in a world where the
formal principle of sovereign statehood and legal equality was combined not just
with inequalities of power – that had always been the case – but with
extraordinary inequalities of life chances for the peoples of the world. The
inequalities which had once been most striking internally now had been
externalised.

However, in the 1980s various developments in the world economy
undermined the basic plausibility of the dependency model. The international
division of labour changed in ways that the ‘dependendistas’ had deemed
impossible, with manufacturing capacity increasingly shifted to the South; the
rise of the Newly Industrialising Countries (NICs) signalled the end of the South
as a useful analytical or moral category. But the issue of global inequality had
not gone away, and was picked up by the theorists of global justice mentioned
above, who stepped into the space left by structuralist theorists.

These issues could actually have been addressed within a conventional IR
framework. The moral basis of the international order and the challenge posed
by international inequality was the kind of question that could be approached
from a realist or liberal perspective – however, a second change in the wider
discipline of IR that fed into the discourse of IPT was the rise of neo- or
structural realism, and its companion, liberal institutionalism, and with these
developments, realism and liberalism did indeed lose contact with such issues.

The most damaging feature of the new approach represented by Waltz
and Keohane was, and is, the sharp distinction drawn between ‘positive’,
explanatory theory and ‘normative’ theory, privileging the former over the latter
(Keohane, 1986). For Keohane in particular, there is really only one way of
doing IR that matters, hence his repeated and rather irritating advice to post-
structuralists, feminists et al that they should get themselves a proper research
programme and stop going down ‘reflectivist’ blind alleys (Keohane, 1989).
Waltz was, and is, less preachy, but still displays a lack of interest in work that
isn’t focused on his problematic.
This is, I suggest, a substantial change from the days of classical realism or, for that matter, the International Society theory of Bull and Wight in the 1960s. Morgenthau for one was always interested in the moral basis of the international order, and Bull’s late interest in global justice was perfectly consistent with the account that he and Wight’s gave of the agenda of International Theory in that decade (Butterfield & Wight, 1966; Bull, 1984). Once the agenda was narrowed to the basic question of how egoists manage to co-operate under conditions of anarchy and key issues became whether states pursued absolute or relative gains, something might have been gained in terms of analytical clarity, but much more was lost. In effect, mainstream IR theory ceased to have much to say about most of the serious normative issues of the day, and this created a space which IPT occupied.

**IPT, the English School and the Middle Ground**

As this last point suggests, there were many points of contact between the revamped notion of IPT and the English School (ES); in a way, the international society theorists of the ES were keeping alive some of the perspectives that the modern American discipline of IR had disregarded, perspectives which chimed with the sort of concerns IPT was in the process of developing. Still the new discourse of IPT generated a sense of intellectual excitement because of the dialogue between those of us whose background was in IR, and the political theorists. The political theorists wanted to hear what people from IR had to say and vice-versa, we were all trying to come to a new understanding of what was going on and there was, I think, a real desire to take on board different perspectives. Sometimes this could lead to comical results. I remember a workshop, organised by Peter Jones and Simon Caney at Newcastle University where, after I had passionately outlined some of the new thinking, Margaret Canovan, an excellent theorist on nationalism and patriotism from Keele, remarked, only partly in jest, that this was all very disappointing, what she liked about IR theory was that we were into power and violence, and what a shame it was that we seemed to be abandoning our unique selling point! (Caney et al 1996).

The eclecticism and the excitement was also generated by post-structuralists, post-modernists and feminist thinkers. Nowadays post-structural or ‘late modern’ writers mostly talk to each other and (with a few notable exceptions) make very little attempt to engage with outsiders but back then everyone was invited to the party, as long as one could guarantee that they weren’t going to start talking about measuring their independent variable. The label ‘post-positivist’ doesn’t mean much any more, but then it was, I think, meaningful. Frankfurt School ‘Critical Theorists’, analytical theorists of justice, followers of Foucault and Derrida, students of international society, lapsed or post-Marxists of one kind or another – everyone was aware of the radical differences between these positions, but back then these differences didn’t seem that important; we were all on the emerging orthodoxy’s enemies list.

This openness has now, I think, largely disappeared partly as a by-product of America’s ‘culture wars’ but also because of more substantive issues, in particular a struggle over the meaning of the European Enlightenment, which
I’ll look at in more detail below. Meanwhile, where did the ES come in all this? I suggest the big contribution of international society theorists was precisely to keep alive the notion of the ‘middle ground’. The IPT debates tended to polarise thought around the characteristic ‘cosmopolitan’ and ‘communitarian’ positions, with the former dismissing the idea of a ‘morality of states’ as a chimera, while the latter, though more sympathetic to conventional ideas of international law and practice, built this sympathy on a domestic analogy which could only take them so far. The value of English School thinking on the idea of an international society, especially when some enigmatic remarks by Bull about solidarist and pluralist versions thereof were taken up and developed by Tim Dunne and Nicholas Wheeler, was that it provided a middle ground between the cosmopolitan and communitarian versions of political life (Wheeler, 1992; Dunne, 1998). Solidarists could regard the individual as the ultimate member of international society and embrace the idea of universal rights, without losing contact with pluralists who stressed the importance of co-existence between societies with a different conception of the good, and were sceptical of more than a very basic version of the human rights regime.

The stark contrast between an ethics based solely on individual human rights, as advocated by cosmopolitans, and the devaluation of universal values in the name of community and tradition, as proposed by communitarians, was softened in the solidarist/pluralist debate. Solidarists offered a way of thinking about the rights of individuals that did not involve completely discounting the rights of states, and avoided thereby the unrealism of many cosmopolitan projects. By the same token, unlike some communitarians, pluralists did not lose sight altogether of universal values, but, interestingly their more distinctive contribution was to provide a way of thinking about states-rights that was not tied to a social-democratic/socialist project. One of the distinctive, and perhaps counter-intuitive features of modern communitarianism is its bias to the left; figures like Michael Walzer, Alasdair Mcintyre, and Charles Taylor are all, to one degree or another, offering a welfarist version of community in which the willingness of individuals to contribute to a social democratic vision of the common good is central (although I concede Mcintyre certainly wouldn’t accept this description of his project). Pluralists were not so constrained and saw no need to assume that the Good promoted by their account of international society would be shaped in this, or any other, way. One could be a conservative pluralist.

The middle ground ethics of international society theorists had, therefore, substantial points in its favour – however, as I suggested in the 1995 article referenced above, there are doubts about its viability. I suggested there that the idea of an international society was subjected to centrifugal forces that pushed it either towards an international system or towards community. The argument there was cast in real-world terms, with the suggestion that the normative basis of an international society would be difficult to maintain, because some of its members shared too few values even for a pluralist international society, while others, especially in the European Union and the West more generally, sought a closer relationship than was possible even within a solidarist account. To rework this point in the language of this paper, the key issue is whether pluralists and solidarists are able to keep in contact with each other, or whether these two positions are not subject to logics of argumentation.
that push them further and further apart. It seemed to me then that the latter might well be the case.

The Primacy of the Political: IPT Now.

What I want to argue in this final section is that the middle ground has indeed been undermined in the last 20 years, but that this has taken place for a mix of political and intellectual reasons, and in some respects the political reasons have been the more important. Moreover, it is not simply the middle ground that has been displaced – both the pluralist-solidarist and the cosmopolitan-communitarian divides have lost their salience. I’ll illustrate this point by considering one key issue and the shifts that have occurred around it in the ensuing decade – the issue of intervention and non-intervention – and I’ll then generalise the argument somewhat and suggest that it is not simply a political reaction to changing circumstances that has produced the change, but that a wider chasm has opened up between supporters and critics of universal values.

Principled opposition to the norm of non-intervention was one of the cardinal features of the thinking of theorists of global justice in the 1980s; figures such as Beitz, Barry, O’Neill were well aware of the pragmatic case against intervention, but deeply resistant to the idea that this case could be bolstered by a principled defence of non-intervention – their support for universal values led them to a cosmopolitan position that opposed this core feature of the sovereignty norm. That norm was defended by ‘pluralist’ theorists of international society such as Nardin and (usually) Bull, and by conventional state-centric realists, even though the latter didn’t necessarily think of non-intervention as a norm in any strong sense of the term. Communitarian writers defended a general norm of non-intervention but as a concomitant of the rights of political communities. Liberal internationalists, ‘solidarist’ international society theorists and liberal communitarians such as Michael Walzer combined a general commitment to non-intervention with support for intervention in some extreme circumstances. Post-structuralists and late moderns meanwhile were distrustful of the universalism of cosmopolitan thinkers, and tended to argue that to approach the issue of the responsibilities of foreigners towards the victims of domestic oppression in terms of intervention and non-intervention was to pose the wrong sort of question. All these different positions led to a multi-sided and quite fruitful debate on the subject.

But, of course, in the 1980s this was all pretty academic in the pejorative sense of the term. Scholars discussed the issue of intervention and non-intervention, but it didn’t seem necessary to develop a doctrine of humanitarian intervention, given the prevailing international political climate – however, this was soon to change, with the ending of the Cold War and the emergence of a (perhaps temporary) American hegemony. In the 1990s and into the 2000s, the US certainly possessed the capacity to intervene, if it chose to do so – as it occasionally did, in Somalia, Bosnia (eventually), Haiti and Kosovo, but rather more frequently did not, most obviously in Rwanda. I won’t go into this history – we all know it – except to say that after Kosovo, and 9/11 a couple of years later, the issues changed somewhat, and in the 2000s intervention has been discussed largely in terms of either the notion of a ‘Responsibility to Protect’ (R2P) or the
War on Terror and the fallout from the Iraq War of 2003. The core point is that in these decades intervention as an issue moved out of the seminar room and into policy forums and diplomatic Chancelleries. How did this shift interact with the earlier more academic debates?

One might have expected that, once intervention became a matter of practical politics, the many-sided debates of the 1980s would crystallise into a confrontation between two camps, communitarian/pluralist and cosmopolitan/solidarist, with the latter broadly supportive of the principle of intervention, the former not. However, this is not actually how things have panned out – instead the real dividing line has been between those who react strongly against any assertion of American/Western power, and those who do not. Liberal communitarians such as Michael Walzer, whose approach to the US could be described as critically patriotic and who see themselves as internationalists rather than cosmopolitans, have shifted their positions towards the interventionist camp – Walzer’s ‘politics of rescue’ paper is a marker here, significantly less anti-interventionist than his formulations in *Just and Unjust Wars* (1995). Cosmopolitans, on the other hand, have been very divided in their approach. For some, distrust of US power has led them to offer theoretical support for interventions but only under conditions that are usually quite impossible to achieve, such as unanimity in the UN Security Council. Others have joined with the majority of realists and Chomskyans in opposing all interventions on anti-imperialist grounds, even if UN support can be found, on the basis that US power is such as to undermine the legitimacy of UN votes. Yet others have gone in the other direction and found their cosmopolitan convictions are best expressed through alliances with neo-conservatives; in the UK the Euston Manifesto Group and the Henry Jackson Society contain many people who fit this bill.

The debate over the Iraq War of 2003 was instructive in this respect. There were many pragmatic reasons to oppose the war, but some of the actual, principled positions taken by the so-called ‘Anti-War Coalition’ offered an interesting insight into contemporary cosmopolitan thought, and the extent to which it has been re-oriented away from the condition of the oppressed and towards an inwardsness which focuses on the sins of the potential liberator. The war could have been, and sometimes was, opposed on the basis of the kind of arguments presented by e.g. Charles Beitz in *Political Theory and International Relations* – namely that there were quite good reasons to think that military intervention would make things worse rather than better, especially since, as Human Rights Watch pointed out, in a rather strange argument for a human rights organisation, that although Saddam Hussein had murdered hundreds of thousands of his people in the past, he was only engaging in ordinary repression in 2003 (Roth, 2004). But instead of relying on such arguments many people who would have described themselves as cosmopolitan opposed the war on the basis that national sovereignty should be defended, and that, in the wider context of contemporary international politics, the moat in the eye of America was of more significance than the beam in the eye of Saddam Hussein’s Iraq.

We have all seen Michael Moore’s film with its picture of an idyllic Iraq prior to the arrival of American bombers, and, sadly, this was not untypical of the
rhetoric of many of the protestors. The rather less famous, but equally irritating, so-called right-wing Michael Moore, Evan Coyne Maloney amusingly, albeit inadvertently, highlighted the point I want to make by turning up at an anti-war demo in San Francisco with a placard reading ‘Saddam Hussein only oppresses his own people so it’s none of our business’. Conservative columnists in the UK such as Simon Jenkins and Matthew Parris would have had no difficulty agreeing with this sentiment, but the San Francisco demonstrators saw themselves as broadly progressive and non-nationalistic with the result that the filmed reaction of the crowd was fascinatingly irrelevant and somewhat surreal – “are you from the suburbs?” he was asked, and “Do you realize that your ancestors killed millions of Native Americans?” (Youtube, 2003). The rejection of American power by much self-identifyingly progressive opinion has produced a mentality which can be seen in operation today with respect to Hugo Chavez, the Castro brothers and Mahmoud Ahmajinedad; by any objective standard these people run severely repressive regimes and yet they are feted in many progressive circles because of their anti-Americanism.

Shifting to a more theoretical basis for this shift, the issue of universal values is, I think central. Cosmopolitans and solidarists were generally clear in their own minds that the values of the European Enlightenment were universal values. Norm Geras on his blog told a good story here about Brian Barry, on the occasion of the latter’s death last year:

I was at a discussion meeting in London some time between 1988 and 1992 in which Brian was a participant. Though I don’t remember the precise terms of the question, at one point during the evening it was put to him (approximately) to say whether, in view of the great range of cultural forms, social practices and moral beliefs there had been historically, he was wanting to claim that liberal values were the best values for everyone. I do remember the precise terms of Brian’s answer. ‘Yes,’ he said. (Geras, 2009)

Barry was actually a little unusual in that he was prepared to say such things explicitly but most cosmopolitans believed something similar. Communitarians and pluralists were supposed to believe something rather different – that community ethics could actually trump universal notions in some circumstances and post-structuralists were professionally obliged to be sceptical about the values of the European Enlightenment in the name of perspectivism, so there was actually quite a heated debate on the subject, but, as with discussions of intervention, the debate took place within the seminar room, and had little contact with real-world concerns. Indeed, when I think back to my own modest contributions to such discussions I am struck by how abstract they were, and also, if the truth be told, how hypocritical; I would be sceptical about liberal values and point to the limits of tolerance and the difficulties involved in the obvious lack of a global consensus on key issues, but I did so from a position that took for granted that liberal values were actually pretty safe and that the society in which I lived was going to continue to be governed by them. I also assumed that if these values were threatened, progressively minded people would in practice come to their defence, whatever their theoretical objections to universalism might be.
I was wrong. It is interesting that Geras dates the Barry anecdote to 1988–1992. Since then liberal values have come under attack from adherents of so-called 'Asian Values', from radical Islam and from Western governments that have become increasingly authoritarian in their conduct of the struggle against radical Islam. Progressives have resisted the last of these trends, but have had little to say about the first, and in depressingly large numbers have refused to condemn, or in many cases have effectively condoned, the most serious challenges which have come from radical Islam. The latter is ‘irrationalist, misogynist, homophobic, inquisitional, totalitarian, imperialist and genocidal’ to adopt Martin Amis’s list, but already I anticipate that by stating this I will be accused of Islamophobia. As Ian McEwan points out in his new novel, suggest that it is worth examining whether evolutionary psychology has anything to say about gender differences and you are an appalling misogynist, but criticize the Taliban’s brutal treatment of women and you are an apologist for American imperialism (McEwan, 2010).

Let me make this point by reference to a writer for whom I have a great deal of time both intellectually and personally, Bill Connolly. In the last decade, Connolly has produced a series of critiques of contemporary liberalism and secularism, and arguing in favour of his version of agonistic pluralism – perhaps the most interesting title here is not the too-obvious Pluralism (2005) but the rather more counter-intuitive Why I am Not A Secularist (1999). Connolly’s point is that a faith in secular rationalism can be as ‘fundamentalist’ as religious faith, and that the liberal propensity to moralise and legalise questions that are essentially political is unhealthy. To which, as general propositions, I am happy to say ‘amen’; I admire many aspects of Connolly’s pluralism, but still he seems singularly blind to what I would consider some very important distinctions. To give just one example, Spinoza (a personal hero, I have to admit, but one of Connolly’s bugbears) was indeed a rather dogmatic rationalist, perhaps even as dogmatic as the religious authorities of the day – but he didn’t actually want to burn at the stake people who disagreed with him. Connolly doesn’t seem to regard this as a particularly important point, but to me it is the most important point of all. The same kind of neglect of the actual working through of different kind of fundamentalisms can be seen when looking at the way he considers our present day discontents. Ben Barber gets it right, I think, in a review of Connolly’s Pluralism for Ethics in July 2007:

[Connolly] is consistently more distrustful of the hidden coercions of rationality and liberal tolerance than he is of the explicit brutalities of unreason and fundamentalist bigotry.

There’s a degree of parochialism here, a determination to bring out all the faults with of the American body politic, which is, in some respects, admirable – self-criticism is pretty well always a good thing – but which misses the big picture.

Connolly’s position is, I think, shared by many/most contemporary poststructuralists but he is not, of course, someone who can be seen as in any way representative of modern analytical political theory or international society theory. Still, I think the perspective his work promotes is more widely shared than the Deleuzian/Foucauldian theory upon which it is based. Partly this comes
through by strategies of denial and avoidance. To take one recent explicitly cosmopolitan example, readers of Charles Beitz’s new book *The Idea of Human Rights* (2009) who do not possess a TV or a radio and don’t read the papers would never guess that there are large numbers of people in the world who are systematically hostile to the very idea of a human right or who, when they can, systematically deny the rights of women, gays and religious minorities. In this book, the opponents of human rights are communitarian political philosophers not religious extremists and in this Beitz reflects the usual cosmopolitan preoccupations – at least he doesn’t blame American conservatives and the religious right for all the ills of the world, the characteristic stance of progressive opinion represented in e.g. the *Guardian*’s ‘Comment is Free’ website.

Other cosmopolitans such as Simon Caney, Thomas Pogge and Lief Wenar are engaged more or less harmlessly in devising impractical schemes for global resource dividends, ‘democracy panels’ and the like. International society theorists such as Dunne, Wheeler and Alex Bellamy are focused on R2P and to institutional developments such as the arrival of an International Criminal Court – better than fanciful attempts to redesign the world economy, but still somewhat distant from most of the real politics of today’s world (Bellamy, 2009). Communitarian writers such as Walzer and Jean Bethke Elshtain do engage with what seems to me to be the real agenda in IPT today, but are no longer in any kind of real dialogue with cosmopolitans (Walzer, 2007: Elshtain, 2003). In fact dialogue more generally is hard to find – the middle ground where such a dialogue might take place having disappeared.

Conclusion: The Primacy of the Political

Pulling the story together, and bringing it to a conclusion, what I want to say is that in the 1980s International Political theory came together as a discourse because it was assumed that advocates of the various components of the discourse – classical political and IR theory, modern theories of justice, post-Marxist students of IPE, post-structuralists etc – although divided on many matters of substance, were actually united by their underlying commitment to a common set of values. In particular they were apparently committed to a loosely-defined anti-imperialism and anti-authoritarianism; combine these two positions and call the result a commitment to non-domination. What was not anticipated was that these two components of non-domination would often seem to contradict one another in the decades to come. Faced with the actual problems of the 1990s and 2000s, rather than dividing on e.g. cosmopolitan and communitarian lines, people took sides according to which of these two values, anti-imperialism and anti-authoritarianism, they were prepared to privilege. Those who privilege anti-imperialism often end up giving tacit, or even explicit, support to authoritarian regimes; opposition to authoritarianism can easily turn into a support for uses of western power that can be characterised as imperialist.

To put it another way, it is disagreement about ‘politics’ – and in particular the political significance of American power – not issues of ‘political theory’ that has caused the discourse of the 80s to fragment. And whereas international society theorists at one stage offered a space within which a less polarised discourse could emerge, partly because the commitment to non-
domination was less a part of this discourse, much the same political forces have
destroyed that terrain as well. Of course, this is a little too neat and the
participants in the controversies of our era obviously don’t always see things
that way; many of the anti-authoritarians would deny that America is in any
meaningful sense an empire, while the anti-imperialists often try to convince
themselves that the authoritarian rulers they support are not really
authoritarian. Still, the central point I want to make holds – the underlying value
consensus that made the dialogues of the 1908s and 90s possible and created
space for a middle ground has collapsed; when tested it fell apart.

Does this matter? I’m not convinced it does. The different branches that
came together to create a really exciting and interesting intellectual space in the
80s and 90s have now pretty much gone their separate ways, but this isn’t, or
should not be, a matter for regret. Fifty years ago Robert Dahl wrote a famous,
much anthologised, paper on the behavioural revolution in Political Science sub-
titled ‘Epitaph for a Monument to a Successful Protest’ (Dahl, 1961) and one
could, I think, quite plausibly hijack that title; the changes that I have described
could indeed be described as a ‘successful protest’ and even if the component
parts of the change no longer co-habit in the way they once did, they are still
each in their own way, thriving. In any event, combining, separating and re-
combining in different forms is the way in which academic discourses have
always operated, and if the conjunction of forces that created IPT back then has
ceased to operate, then some new conjunction will take its place. So it goes – but
it seems to me unlikely that such a new conjunction will occupy the, or an, ethical
middle ground.

References:


