

The Gift of King Solomon

by Phillip Hansen

The question of what gives a political community its distinctive character is fraught these days with ambiguity and uncertainty. At the level of political practices and institutions the erosion of the post-war welfare state social contract in Western liberal democracies, and the accompanying rise of those disintegrative forces associated with globalisation, have called into question long accepted conceptions of citizenship and belonging. Increasingly, citizens of Western liberal democratic states are encouraged to see themselves as self-interested, infinitely desirous consumers and appropriators, rather than as enjoyers and exerts of their uniquely human capacities (Macpherson). The market has once again come to be celebrated as the primary locus not only of the allocation of resources but also of the formation of personal identity. We have increasingly been told to look to ourselves for security and fulfilment, to relate to others and society as a whole in a purely instrumental way.

Traditionally, socialism has provided the major ideological challenge to the destructive consequences of unregulated market relations. But socialist ideas are clearly in disrepair, if not utterly disrepute, these days, and this not only because of the collapse of the Soviet model or the decay of Western social democracy. Where explicitly concerned with the issue of communal bonds among citizens, socialism offered, sometimes rather vaguely, a rich or 'thick' conception of social ties which, arguably, are beyond the reach of even the most socially committed individuals in communities small or large.

In the face of the resurgence of the 'free market' and the collapse of socialism, the debate between so-called 'individualists' and

'communitarians' has, at least in intellectual circles, come to replace the older contest between capitalism and socialism. This has broadened the terms of the earlier one by explicitly raising the issues of individual identity and community, and thus citizenship, across a wide range of social, economic and political institutions and practices. It suffers, however, from its academicism, which has meant it has remained largely confined to the university with little wider normative significance. It also presents competing perspectives on human agency that are insufficiently nuanced to capture the complexities of self-other ties which invariably have both an 'inner' and 'outer' dimension.

The recent work of Jürgen Habermas and those who have followed in his footsteps on communicative action and discourse ethics has gone some way in repairing these deficiencies. But on the whole this work, too, is overly formalistic and, perhaps surprisingly - given Habermas's own democratic aims - insufficiently political. While today important political issues crowd in on us and there is no shortage of interesting and stimulating political theorising, one can justifiably feel uneasy about the present prospects for creative political thinking that is both illuminating and practically effective.

Over the past several years, Hannah Arendt has widely and deservedly come to be recognised as a powerful analyst and critic of twentieth century politics and society. Yet there remain dimensions in her work that have not yet been given the examination they warrant. This is especially true with respect to the lived, experiential nature of political life, and in particular, the kind of bonds which make possible a worthwhile - and achievable - political community. Arendt's work offers us a unique perspective which may help overcome the limitations of both a 'thick' (communitarian) conception of community and a 'thin' (rights-based) notion.

In 'Understanding and Politics' (1953), one of her most powerful essays, Arendt makes a poignant plea on behalf of plurality and reciprocity in the face of totalitarian threats then evident everywhere, not just in Stalin's Soviet Union or Hitler's Germany. At the centre of her plea is her defence of the 'gift of King Solomon': 'an understanding heart'. Neither a product of 'mere reflection' nor 'mere feeling', an understanding heart 'makes it bearable for us to live with other people, strangers forever, in the same world, and makes it possible for them to bear with us'.

This idea of bearing with strangers opens up a whole range of issues which relate both to Arendt's legacy and its significance for the pressing problems of *fin de siècle* politics. The idea implies a kind of acceptance of the other which requires neither that the other be somehow won over to our 'side', nor that we abandon the place where we stand and merge ourselves with the other. This idea allows us to make sense in a new way of Arendt's signal and controversial distinction between the public and private realms. It also, and just as importantly, gives us the prospect of seeing our way beyond the friend-foe antagonism which, as Carl Schmitt has reminded us, is the secular twentieth century legacy of an insufficiently transcended theological heritage. In a world in which our 'friends' often seem or can become our enemies, and in which our enemies can lose human status in our eyes altogether, Arendt's legacy can perhaps help us put the lie to what the triumph of the renascent free marketers and apologists for everything from globalisation to ethno-nationalist chauvinism implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) assume: that hell is other people.

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E. H. Carr on Democracy and Security

by Charles Jones

E. H. Carr, so often and misleadingly referred to as a 'historian', began his career in 1916 as a temporary clerk in the Foreign Office. A witness of the Paris Peace Conference, the implementation of self-determination, and the League of Nations, the young diplomat doubled as a journalist. Reading and reviewing Russian and European literature voraciously during the 1920s and early '30s, he found time to produce biographical essays on Dostoyevsky, Marx, Herzen, and Bakunin, before resigning from the Foreign Office in 1936 to take up the Wilson chair in International Relations at Aberystwyth. Only after 1947, when he concluded a third career, as wartime deputy editor of *The Times*, did Carr turn seriously to history, embarking on the multi-volume study of the Russian revolution and the Soviet state that was to occupy him up to his death, and laying claim to a place among the country's notable historians through his provocative and enduring essay, *What is History?*

At Aberystwyth, far from writing international history from primary sources, Carr's mission had been to use his new independence to influence British foreign policy in a way he had been unable to achieve from within the Foreign Office. His publications of this period might review or enlist history and the history of thought, drawing on their author's extensive reading, but did not pretend to empirical originality. Instead, Carr tried to develop a systematic approach to the study of international relations and the practice of foreign policy, based on an appreciation of the relative economic, military, and cultural strength of the great powers, and the futility of mere goodwill,

international organisation and law as guarantees of a lasting peace.

In particular, he advocated appeasement as a practical foreign policy, and a critical methodology as the basis for a science of international relations. He supported appeasement in the 1930s on the grounds that Britain



lacked the resources to face Germany, Italy, and Japan simultaneously. After war swept this policy aside, he argued for appeasement of the Soviet Union and an effective partition of Europe between the USSR and Britain, which he believed would create a stable balance of power in the post-war Europe while creating, in a British-led Western Europe, an economic and security community of culturally independent nations with sufficient power to match the challenge of the United States.

As for Carr's methodological contribution, it consisted largely in the adaptation of Karl Mannheim's sociology of knowledge to international relations. He sought to expose the often unconscious self-interest that led mature powers like Britain or France to prefer peace and free trade while their newer rivals, such as the Axis powers, favoured the more aggressive and nationalistic policies from which, it seemed, they had relatively more to gain. The element of truth in this analysis contributed to the status of *The Twenty Years' Crisis* as one of the few classic texts produced by academic international relations,

still in print almost sixty years after its first publication in 1939. But the argument invited the charge of relativism. If the liberal or utopian analysis of President Wilson was socially determined, did not the same flaw weaken the realism of its critics? Carr could offer no better exit from the dilemma than through Mannheim's postulate of the supposed self-knowledge of the enlightened intellectual, suggesting that the best chance of understanding international relations lay in appreciating the inextricable elements of power and morality that necessarily characterised them.

Confusion between this dialectical realism and the more brutal *realpolitik* position set out in the early chapters of *The Twenty Years' Crisis* frequently led to Carr being classified as a 'classical realist'. Yet Carr hardly conforms to the text-book definition of realism and lately there has been a tendency to recognise this. His major wartime publications, *Conditions of Peace and Nationalism and After*, support this revision by their clear commitment to the creation of a welfare state, Keynesian economic management, and the sublimation of nationalism in the large multi-ethnic states or grouping of states which alone, he believed, could provide welfare and security in the era of world economy and strategic bombing.

Yet far from being a radical, Carr turns out on close examination to have been just what he claimed to be in *The Twenty Years' Crisis*: a man of the political centre. This becomes evident as soon as one examines his core statements on practical political method and fundamental values: pragmatism and democracy.

'Foreign policy' he argued, 'is not, as some people imagine, the discovery and application of appropriate means to achieve known ends. It involves the discovery and formulation of ends and means and the adaptation of both to the circumstances of the moment.' Pragmatism, for Carr, consisted in the aspiration to