Empire as a Subject for Philosophy (*Polis, Imperium, Cosmopolis*)

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Abstract

In order to consider the question of whether empire is a subject for philosophy, I do three things. I sketch an original typology of three types of state, which I call *polis*, *imperium* and *cosmopolis*, in order to show that the second is an important philosophical conception which lies behind the terminology of empire and imperialism. I also consider modern theories of empire and imperialism in order to indicate some of their limitations as theories. And finally I indicate that it is important even for philosophers to recognise that all imperial terminology emerges out of a very complicated history in which the concept of *imperium* has been extended and distorted in meaning, so that, at best, any good theory of empire or imperialism can only be some sort of recapitulation of that history. Neither the second nor the third of these claims undermines the claim of *imperium* to be a concept of the state which is of great political and philosophical significance.

1. Introduction

What has philosophy to do with empire? Not much. Philosophers interested in politics have written about other types of state. Who has written about empire? Poets and publicists, while empire has lasted: historians, after it has gone. Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* is exemplary in this regard. We are told that it is only in the last twenty or thirty years that even historians of political thought[1] and political theorists[2] have come to write about empire rather than the state. This is slightly exaggerated. For some great strides were taken in the middle of the twentieth century by Ernest Barker,[3]

[1] David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 3.

[2] Jennifer Pitts, 'Political Theory of Empire and Imperialism', *Annual Review of Political Science* 13 (2010), 211–235, at 211.

[3] Ernest Barker, *The Ideas and Ideals of the British Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 1942); 'The Conception of Empire' in Cyril Bailey ed. *The Legacy of Rome* (Oxford University Press, 1951), 45–89.

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Carl Schmitt[4] and Richard Koebner,[5] whose works may still be a better foundation for making sense of empire than anything that has been written since. But it remains true that philosophers have hardly ever written about empire.

I have never seen an explanation for why this might be the case. If I were to answer in one sentence I would say: Philosophy is Greek, but Empire is Roman. Cicero, who was in some respects as much Greek as Roman, indicates an ambivalence which runs through history:

> Wisdom urges us to increase our resources, to multiply our wealth, to extend our boundaries; for what is the meaning of those words of praise inscribed on the monuments of our greatest generals, 'He extended the boundaries of the empire' (*finis imperii propagavit*), except that an addition was made out of the territory of others. Wisdom also urges us to rule over as many subjects as possible, to enjoy pleasures, to become rich, to be rulers and masters; justice, on the other hand, instructs us to spare all men, to consider the interests of the whole human race, to give everyone his due (*suum cuique reddere*), and not to touch sacred or public property, or that which belongs to others. What, then, is the result if you obey wisdom? Wealth, power, riches, public office, military commands, and royal authority, whether we are speaking of individuals or of nations. (*De Republica*, iii. 24–25)

If wisdom and justice point in opposite directions, then what we can say is that philosophers have always focused on justice. Consider the thread running from Socrates' 'What is Justice?' to John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*. Wisdom, by way of contrast, has been the subject of historians. Consider the thread running from Thucydides, Polybius and Tacitus, through Raynal, Gibbon and Seeley, to W.K. Hancock, Wm. Roger Louis and Niall Ferguson.

But why is this?

[4] Carl Schmitt, *Der Nomos von Erder im Völkerrecht der Jus Publicum Europaeum* (1950), *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum* trans G.L. Ulmen (New York: Telos Press, 2003).

[5] Richard Koebner, 'The Concept of Economic Imperialism', *Economic History Review* 2 (1949), 1–29, 'The Emergence of the Concept of Imperialism', *Cambridge Journal* 5 (1952), 726–741, *Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 1961), which was already posthumous, and from his notes, completed and co-authored by H.D. Schmidt, *Imperialism: The Story and Significance of a Political Word, 1840–1960* (Cambridge University Press, 1964).

The answer, as I shall hope to demonstrate, is that empire, unlike other concepts of the state, has been dynamic rather than static. It has, in short, been too capricious, too changeable, too *human* to be subject to the sort of theories favoured by political philosophers. It is a subject which is full of contraries, provoking scorn and contempt for what humans are capable of, but also tenderness and a certain admiration. History, with its capacity for *pro* and *contra* at close range, and Olympian detachment later on, is well fitted to the subject of empire.

It is important to recognise that something has changed in the last century or so. This is that although philosophers in general have left empire to the historians, there have been attempts made since the beginning of the twentieth century to theorise 'imperialism' and even a bit later on attempts to theorise 'empire'. 'Imperialism', as we shall see, was an ambiguous term which emerged in the nineteenth century. But, unlike empire, it was a dynamic word for a dynamic thing. This may be why Hobson's *Imperialism: A Study* (1900), Lenin's *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916), and Schumpeter's 'Sociology of Imperialisms' (1919) came before Doyle's *Empires* (1986), Motyl's *Imperial Ends* (2001), Münkler's *Imperien* (2005) and Colàs's *Empires* (2007).[6] I shall say more about these modern theories below, in order to indicate why they have not enabled us to overcome the gap between history and philosophy. But first it is desirable to grasp the nettle and attempt to say whatever *can* be said about empire philosophically.

What follows in the next four sections is, as far as I know, a wholly original theory. Its originality lies in the fact that it takes the form of a typology. But it should tell us nothing we do not already know. Instead it should enable us to understand better what it is we have come to know. As Hume once said on a related subject, 'New discoveries are not to be expected in these matters.'[7]

[6] I shall say nothing about Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Harvard University Press, 2000), except that it is a deliberately provocative book which was in content nothing more than a hopeful sketch of the future which only attracted attention because it the used the wholly inappropriate word 'empire' for its vague hints about the historical stage which will succeed Lenin's 'imperialism'. Their argument had nothing to do with empire; and only indicate that we are in an age in which the right and left often sell their wares most effectively when they confound expectations by adopting the terminology of their opponents. The book should be condemned by anyone who cares for clarity about the subject.

[7] David Hume, 'Of the Original Contract' in *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary* ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1985), 465–487, at 487.

2. Three Types of State

There are three fundamental types of state.

The word 'state' is ambiguous. I shall use it here to mean a society which recognises its own title to exist politically. This is clearly not the modern meaning of the word, which is usually taken to refer to something that is recognised as having a title to exist by other states. By 'political' I mean that this state exists in terms of power and rule: it has a right to rule over a certain territory and people, and it has the might to do so.

Imagine, then, a state in the world.

By the 'world' I mean the earth in so far as it is populated by humans. The world is the significant entirety which humans recognise as existing, whether they know it or not. If they know it, they have a geographical view of the world; if they do not, they have a practical or local view of the world related to a mythical view of it. Nonetheless, there is always a view of the whole world.

There are three fundamental ways that a state can exist in the world.

Firstly, the state may be one of many in the world, so that all of the states form a system which is likely eventually to mean that the states together make up the world.

Secondly, the state may be the only state in the world, without itself being the world: that is to say, the state exists in the middle of other societies which are not states.

Thirdly, the state may be the only state in the world, because it is the world.

I shall call these *polis*, *imperium* and *cosmopolis*.

I am not writing a conjectural history in what follows. If I were, I would probably begin with *imperium*, since I think that historically almost all ancient states, many medieval states and some modern states have at least begun with this attitude to the world: that they are the only state. But this is not conjectural history. It is more like a Hegelian dialectic, in which the logical rather than the historical is the point of origin. And there are good philosophical reasons – not least those evident in the history of philosophy – to think that the *polis* is the logically simplest state, if not actually the simplest, and, arguably, as a human achievement, the most difficult of all three to conceptualise. (This would explain why most political philosophy has concerned itself not with *imperium* or *cosmopolis* but with *polis*.)

3. Polis

I have said that a state may be one of many in the world, so that all of the states form a system which is likely eventually to mean that the states together make up the world. This state is called *polis*.

Polis is complicated because it requires recognition between entities, as *imperium* and *cosmopolis* do not. Any state which supposes itself to be the only state only has to recognise itself, which means it does not recognise others fully. The *polis* has to recognise others fully, which means recognise the right of others to exist and to rule whatever they rule. Indeed, *polis* presupposes the possibility that all other societies will resolve themselves into states, because *polis* supposes that the *polis* form is a good which should be adopted by all societies.

The postulate of the *polis*, to put it simply, is that it is a bounded entity. As we shall see, this has complicated consequences. Imagine what I am trying to convey by the word *polis*. It is a state which has three obvious characteristics. It is limited, bounded and static. That is to say, its extent is so far and no further, it has borders, and it neither increases nor decreases in extent. It has fixity.

The corollary of having borders which are fixed is that there are other states. If this were not so, it would be because the original state had fixed itself for entirely arbitrary and internal reasons: that is, had decided not to be an *imperium* for no apparent reason. A border is a shared limit. So a state which is a bounded entity presupposes the existence of others. Hence the *polis* is plural. It is the only type of state which forms a system of states, a state-system.

There is another corollary. Let us assume that in every state there is a centre, a seat of power, a capital city. Every modern state has a capital; just as every Greek *polis* literally was a city. The important thing about *polis* as I define it is that if we suppose that power radiates out from the capital, from some Senate or Council or Court, then that power, in theory at least, radiates out without any diminution towards the border. If a *polis* were an atom then the border between two *poleis* would be the equivalent of the point at which the power of one atom loses jurisdiction to another. In a *polis*, unlike in an atom, the border is established by custom or settled by some agreement: in other words, it is designed by humans. But it symbolises a point at which the power of one *polis* encounters the power of another *polis*, and in the resistance between those two powers – which is usually actually peaceful and should be theoretically entirely peaceful – forms a border, a line, an accepted limit. Any crossing of the line is a breach of custom, a breaking of law, damage to the system of states.

So it is, in the end, if a complete system of states exists – as it has for the last one hundred years – in the interest of all the states to guard against any breach of the established state-system.

This aspect of *polis* thought was understood very well by Aristotle, even though at that point the historical *polis* was nothing like a modern state[8] (though it was of course a state in my sense) and even though the *poleis* were very far from covering the entire world (though as far as the Greeks were concerned the Hellenic world was the only one which mattered). Everyone who has read Aristotle's *Politics* knows that Aristotle was continually concerned with moderation. A state should moderate itself, take only what is necessary for its own existence. In Machiavelli's terms, Aristotle's ideal was a state which exists for preservation, not increase. Again, if I consider the modern state, what we can say is that the modern state proved that there needed to be no contradiction if a *polis* sought increase not in terms of territory or hegemony but in terms of trade. But, again, this was unknown until around the time of Hume: who famously observed that before his own time 'trade was never esteemed an affair of state'.[9] (The entrance of the subject of trade is important later, when I consider the shift from 'empire' to 'imperialism'. But this will come much later.) For Aristotle, moderation meant no imperial activity of any kind, no attempt to extend one's power, no attempt to take more, not even any attempt to increase one's means beyond what was required. His ideal was that of what would later be called, by Adam Smith and others, a 'stationary state'. But what I want to say here is that the idea of the *polis* is the idea of a stationary state, at least in terms of territory.

There are two further things to say. It is no accident, I believe, that ancient Greece saw the origin of politics and the origin of philosophy. For the *polis* was perfectly suited for philosophical consideration. Admittedly, it was also suited for historical consideration. But the philosophers were never very interested in history. There are two canons in Greek reflection on politics, one effectively beginning with Plato and Aristotle, the other effectively beginning with Herodotus and Thucydides. History was local, immediate, particular, concerned with the rise and fall of the *polis*; whereas philosophy was universal, the study of the nature of the *polis* which was, by every philosopher, taken to be the highest form of state it was possible to imagine. Of course, there was a revolution after Alexander, which

[8] Moshe Berent, 'The Stateless Polis: A Reply to Critics', *Social Evolution and History*, 5 (2006), 141–163.

[9] Hume, op. cit. note 7, 88–9.

eventually led the *poleis* to be dominated by the *imperium* of Rome, and which immediately led the philosophers to generalise their concept of the state to the world, so the *polis* became the *cosmopolis*, but this did nothing to defeat the concepts which Plato and Aristotle had originated and which Cicero and others were to pass on, through many lines of influence, to the classical era of the theory of the modern state associated with Machiavelli, Hobbes and Hegel, when more work was done on strictly political thought, by which I mean thought about the *polis*, than ever before. The modern state was, in large part, the triumph of what I am calling the idea of the *polis*. It brought about the existence of a world which is a system of states, each of which is only a state if recognised by other states, and in which any breach of the state-system is considered of interest to all other states.[10]

The second thing to say is that what is owed to the congruence between philosopher and *polis*, what is owed to the fact that the major tradition we are so familiar with is called *political philosophy* and not anything else, is the very familiar emphasis on law, ethics, justice and rights. All of these, even those of them that are relatively modern (such as rights), have deep roots in political thought. This, I would argue, is because the *polis*, with its recognised and therefore justified power radiating to the border, where it suddenly ends, is fundamentally concerned with proper limit. And the idea of proper limit is not only imposed on the territory of this form of state, but is imposed on the character and the activities of the state. It is the *polis*, that particular idea of a state, which has done most to theorise the importance of restraint, law, tolerance, justice and other supposedly political virtues. In fact, there have always been wars, and some have said that states have their origin in war.[11] But, as many political philosophers have said, it does not do to look too closely at the origins of states. The idea of the state as a *polis* is the idea of a political order which is explicitly limited, so that its power is exercised for the sake of the people within its territory: people who are seen as, at the very least, deserving of protection, and, at the very most, deserving of inclusion in the workings of power. It is out of political thought, meaning thought about the *polis*, that democracy arose: both in

[10] For recognition by states of states, see, classically, Hersch Lauterpacht, *Recognition in International Law* (Cambridge University Press, 1948).

[11] For instance, Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capitalism and European States, AD 990–1990* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990).

Athens in the fifth century BC and in England, say, in the nineteenth century AD.

So, let us leave the *polis* to one side: that limited, moderate, plural state which aspires to justice, since it is in its nature that it admit the limitation of its own power internally as well as externally.

This *polis* is, it should be obvious, the state of the classical political philosophers. Most political philosophy has been concerned with exploring its presuppositions, examining its nature, commenting on its purposes.

4. Imperium

I have said that a state may be the only state in the world, without itself being the world: that is to say, the state exists in the middle of other societies which are not states. This is called *imperium*.

Imperium is clearly different from *polis*. Whereas *polis* has borders, and exists in a condition of plurality, of being one state among many, all of which states recognise the title of each other to exist, *imperium* recognises only itself. It is therefore a state without borders, in the sense of recognised or fixed borders. It has a title, therefore, to not only the territory it currently dominates but also any territory it can bring itself to dominate in the future. It is unlimited and unbounded, yet, at any particular historical point, until it dominates the entire world, is *de facto* limited, though only limited by the current extent of its power.

In considering *imperium* it is very important to distinguish what is true *de facto* and *de jure*. In fact, any actual *imperium* would of course recognise the existence of other societies, perhaps even recognise that there were states which recognised themselves (and others) as states. Yet *imperium* only recognises other societies or self-recognised states as societies. Any other supposed state is, in the consciousness of *imperium*, nothing more than a society. Nothing other than this state, this one *imperium*, has a title to statehood. Therefore everything else is, *de jure*, a society and not a state.

Other societies are therefore conceived to be raw matter for later subjection to *imperium*. As far as *imperium* is concerned, might is right, *de facto*. But, *de jure*, *imperium* has a title to the entire world. The actual extent of the *imperium* is a matter of history. As Hegel put it, *Die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht*. But, again, this is not true for all supposed, self-proclaimed states: it is only true of this state, as far as this state is concerned.

For some time I have called this distinctive phenomenon 'political solipsism', following a suggestion of the historian of political thought Kung-chuan Hsiao. Political solipsism is, simply, the conviction held within a state that that state is the only state which exists, the only state with a right to rule. Hsiao used the term 'political solipsism' – or an equivalent of this in Chinese which was translated this way – to refer to the fact that in the Chou and Ch'in ages, *t'ien hsia*, or 'all under heaven', referred both to the world and also the state.

> The saying of antiquity that 'Under the wide heaven, all is the king's land; within the sea-boundaries of the land, all are the king's servants' is the clearest expression of this concept. Consequently, all the political relationships of the period when this 'world' concept prevailed, pertained exclusively to internal government, and no diplomatic relations between nations could exist.[12]

The term 'political solipsism' has been used by other scholars in a variety of different ways, but none is as clear as this meaning.[13] Understood this way, it seems to have been an element in almost all antique states. Each great king of Babylon was the king of the world: 'strong king, king of the universe, unrivalled king, king of all the four quarters' and so on. Carl Schmitt noted that

> each [antique political order] considered itself to be the *world*, at least the world inhabited by human beings, or to be the *centre* of the world, the *cosmos*, the house, and each regarded the part of the earth outside this world, as long as it did not appear to be threatening, to be either uninteresting or an odd curiosity. To the extent that this outside was threatening, it was thought to be a malevolent chaos, in any case, to be an 'open and

[12] Kung-chuan Hsiao, *A History of Chinese Political Thought* Vol. I: *From the Beginnings to the Sixth Century AD* trans. F.W. Mote (Princeton University Press, 1979), 23.

[13] See, for instance, Alison Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Allanheld, 1983), 41; Frank. R. Ankersmit, 'Metaphor in Political Theory', in F.R. Ankersmit and J.J.A. Rooij, *Knowledge and Language* Volume III, *Metaphor and Knowledge* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishing, 1993), 155–202, at 174; Karin Fierke, 'Whereof We Can Speak, Thereof We Must Not Be Silent: Trauma, Political Solipsism and War', *Review of International Studies* 30 (2004), 471–492; Clifford Ando, *Law, Language and Empire in the Roman Tradition* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 73.

> unoccupied' space 'free' for conquest, territorial acquisition, and colonisation.[14]

The *de facto* existence of other empires was a matter of political importance, but did not change the theoretical inclination towards singularity and solipsism.

> Each empire was forced to face the fact that it was actually one among equals. At first, none could accept this fact, so a diplomatic protocol developed in order to handle the practical necessity of dealing with foreign empires: the envoys of one empire to the other paid obeisance to the foreign ruler in his home country, the envoy's obeisance was recorded locally in terminology that expressed his home empire's subservience to the local empire, and when the envoy returned home, usually in the company of an envoy from the people visited, the latter similarly paid obeisance to the foreign envoy's emperor.[15]

Instances could be added. Virgil in the *Aeneid* had Jupiter declare that Rome was granted *imperium sine fine*, empire without end. And, of course, the *Institutes* of Justinian had it that the Roman emperor was *dominus mundi*, Lord of the World. I would go so far as to argue that we could consider political solipsism a 'primitive survival' – to use R.G. Collingwood's useful term – that is to say, something which though we may formally and collectively abandon it through a process of civilisation, remains an ineliminable atavistic impetus, ineliminable partly because of something in human nature, but also, and more fundamentally ineliminable because every human begins as a child and has to be civilised in order to be brought into some sort of more complicated political consciousness.

In short, then, political solipsism issues in the view that no matter what is recognised *de facto*, the world is there for the taking and belongs to only one state, our state *de jure*. And political solipsism is the basis of *imperium*.

It follows that *imperium* strictly speaking only requires recognition of one's own state. There is no such thing as a justified enemy. All other societies must be subjugated to the rule of *imperium* or be destroyed, if it comes to that.

The major corollary, the decisive one, of this is that *imperium*, unlike *polis* and *cosmopolis*, is a dynamic ideal, not a static ideal.

[14] Schmitt, op. cit. note 4, 51.

[15] Christopher Beckwith, *Empires of the Silk Road* (Princeton University Press, 2009), 137–8.

Here there is no such thing as a stationary state. This state rises and falls, according to how far its might can extend over the world to which it has a right. One could even say that the pathos of *imperium* is that might has so rarely matched right. No empire has yet established its sway over the whole world, despite the attempts of Alexander, the Romans and the Mongols. The British Empire, though it was the greatest empire the world has ever seen in terms of territorial control, was never quite politically solipsistic, even in the highest aspirations of writers like J.R. Seeley who, for a time, was willing to encourage the notion that 'England' might be a 'World State'.[16] This is because Great Britain was, at root, a modern state: that is to say, a *polis*. It was founded on the idea that other states, at least in Europe, and later everywhere else, should be recognised as having a right to exist.

I have said that *imperium* is dynamic. This means that it has no fixed borders, and is not supposed to remain the same through time. On the contrary, it rises – hopefully only ever rises – and yet, alas, it falls. Again we inevitably think of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*. Gibbon wrote as a historian, and not as a philosopher. Only historians could deal with such a dynamic state form as *imperium*. Philosophers did not know what to do with it, and so always turned instead to theorise *polis* or *cosmopolis*, those static or stationary states.

The other thing to be said about *imperium*, though I have already alluded to it, is that its motive is never justice. Its motive is power. If might is right, *de facto*, and if might follows right, *de jure*, to the ends of the earth, then right offers no independent criterion. Everything that is done by the mighty is justified, since the right already exists. So right offers no criterion of limit, or of criticism. It is *our* law which shall be extended, and *our* civilisation which shall be imposed on others, according to the canons of *imperium*. According to Thucydides, the Athenians told the Spartans: 'We were not the first to act in this way. Far from it. It has always been the rule that the weak should be subject to the strong; and besides, we consider that we are worthy of our power.'[17] Eighteen centuries later the Great Khan wrote to the Christians of Europe: 'God ordered us to destroy [our enemies] and gave them up into our hands. For otherwise if God had not done this, what could man do to man? But you men of the West believe that you alone are

[16] Duncan Bell, *The Idea of a Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860–1900* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 108–112

[17] Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, 1.76, from Rex Warner's translation (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), 80.

Christians and despise others. But how can you know to whom God deigns to confer His grace? But we worshipping God have destroyed the whole earth from the East to the West in the power of God.'[18]

Power radiates out from a centre, from a capital, as in *polis*, but it does not radiate out at a steady intensity to a border where it encounters a rival power. On the contrary, it radiates out until it fades away. In practice, it may extend out through domination to a distance at which it is manifest only as influence. In the *Res Gestae* Augustus clearly understood 'friendship' to be an aspect of *imperium*: even an exchange of gifts was understood one-sidedly to be a sign of power. 'Embassies were often sent to me… our friendship was sought…'[19]

Mention of actual empires makes it possible to distinguish two types of *imperium*, though this involves a value judgement. The first type of *imperium* is simply any *imperium*, which extends its law and civilisation, such as they are, over others, and perhaps over others who are of similar or equal levels of civilisation. The second type of *imperium* is an *imperium* which extends its law and civilisation over others with a conscientious sense of the superiority of its law and civilisation. This second sort of *imperium* is conscious in a way that the first is not: it suggests that in some empires, and this perhaps especially applies to the Roman and British empires, consciousness of a superiority of civilisation was a major justification for imperial expansion. However, it has to be frankly admitted that such a sense of superiority exists for *imperium* whether or not it is justified in any strict sense. As far as this sort of state is concerned, it is always *our* might which is in accordance with right. And, indeed, when we consider the history of empires – the Ottoman empire is a good example of this – it is only when the empire begins to decline that the imperial consciousness is troubled with thought that perhaps one's own civilisation is inferior to others. And it is at such a moment that *imperium* enters a crisis of consciousness which has often led to an abandonment of political solipsism and the adoption of some other model for the state, usually the *polis*. I am writing this in the capital city of the modern Turkish state which, despite a strong primitive survival of imperial ideas, is, for the moment, still dominated by the idea of itself as a *polis*.

I shall have more to say about *imperium*, since this essay is about empire: and what I have written is far too simple to do justice to all

[18] Christopher Dawson, *Mission to Asia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 83.

[19] *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, v. 31, in the Loeb ed. trans. Frederick Shipley (Harvard University Press, 1924), 395.

of that subject. But for the moment it is necessary to consider the third form of the state.

5. Cosmopolis

I have said that a state may be the only state in the world, because it is the world.

Unlike *polis*, and like *imperium*, this is a singular ideal. Such a state is the only state. But like *polis*, and unlike *imperium*, it is a static ideal. It sketches a *telos*, an end state: a condition in which might and right are fully associated, and, crucially, unlike *imperium*, a condition in which might no longer attempts to match its perceived right, but in which might is co-extensive with right. At this point, like in the *polis*, right is no longer a justification for extending might endlessly, but is again a criterion by which state activity is judged.

In *cosmopolis* there is no centre, or capital, from which power radiates. There is no temple, no sacred mountain, no *axis mundi* where we find the meeting point of heaven, earth and hell.[20] Everything is flat, like Norfolk. The state is complete: it exists equally everywhere, so any actual capital city would be chosen completely arbitrarily. In fact, in a *cosmopolis* the state has transcended all problems of power, since no alternative to *this* power is possible. As in *imperium*, there is a concern with totality, with the entirety of the world, but, unlike as in *imperium*, the totality is an achieved totality. *Imperium* seeks inclusion by force, but *cosmopolis* is, in its idea, inclusive from the beginning. There are no inner distinctions in the world. The world is one, and it is a state.

This idea is a strange one, to anyone who is used to thinking in terms of *polis* or *imperium*. It begins with what, for a *polis*, could only be conceived as a far-fetched analogy, and with what, for an *imperium*, could only be conceived as an unlikely achievement of the solipsistic aspiration. Yet *cosmopolis* begins with this ideal. It is a state which is an end-state, a total imposition of the idea of the state on the world. It is, in consequence, in history, more often theorised in terms of analogies and hopes than in terms of actual achievements. Yet it is simple. It does not take much for anyone capable of any sort of political understanding to conceptualise a state which would be co-extensive with the world. Unlike *polis* and *imperium* it is not

[20] For the symbolic significance of cities, see Mircia Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1959), 12.

extrapolated from any facts: it is a pure ideal to be imposed on the facts. The limit is fixed from the outset, because it is the limit of the edge of the earth.

Cosmopolis is, for this reason, often a transcendent idea of the state: the ideal of all of humanity sharing the world as if it were one *polis* or as if they were in a completed, and transcended, *imperium*. It depends on belief: the belief that all of humanity form one polity. It necessarily, then, ranges between, on the one hand, a simple, or flat, inclusion by which it is asserted – as is now common – that all humans belong to one community, so that everyone belongs no matter what they in fact believe or do, and, on the other hand, a high ideal of what sort of condition humanity must attain to be capable of transcending either *polis* or *imperium*, so that we can have unity without exclusion or force or without rivalry, limit and recognition. In the former case, a *cosmopolis* exists as a sort of sociological possibility: everyone is included, no matter what. But in the latter case, which is more significant in the history of cosmopolitan thinking, a *cosmopolis* is seen to be a higher community – something above mere *poleis* or *imperia* – in which only humans who have attained some higher reason, law or truth are members of the community.

In this latter sense, *cosmopolis* is a philosophical ideal which inevitably posits a distinction between the actual world, the world *de facto*, in which societies and supposed states struggle with each other, and the ideal world, the world *de jure*, in which, as the Stoics put it, men and gods form a community. In the first century AD Seneca distinguished two cities,

> one great and truly common – in which gods and men are contained, in which look not to this or that corner, but measure the bounds of our state with the sun; the other, the one to which the particular circumstances of birth have assigned us – this will be the commonwealth of the Athenians or the Carthaginians or some other city.[21]

It has been common for such writers to speak of the 'city of the universe'. At times this was taken to be nothing to do with earth as such, but in fact a 'city of heaven'. This is how it was understood in the Epistle to Diognetus:

> Christians are not distinguished from the rest of mankind by a particular country, or language, or set of habits; they have no

[21] Seneca, *De Otio* iv. 31, quoted in Malcolm Schofield, *The Stoic Idea of the City* (Cambridge University Press), 93.

> cities of their own for their dwelling-place. They dwell in cities both Greek and barbarian but they have none the less a polity of their own. They spend their time on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven.[22]

And, of course, this is how it was for Augustine, who, in *The City of God*, distinguished the city of earth, *civitas terrena* from the city of God, *civitas Dei*.

This is the particular problem of *cosmopolis*: whether it is properly a wholly transcendent idea, philosophical or theological, or whether it has any claim to be a genuine earthly possibility – as *imperium* certainly has been, and as the *polis* was thought to be in ancient Greece and has seemed to be ever since the emergence of the modern state concept in Europe four or five centuries ago.

Cosmopolis is a conundrum. If it is of *this world*, then it is, as I have indicated, *polis* extended *imperially* over the whole world. Then it would seem to be a composite idea. But it is clearly an independent idea, which distinguishes itself from the plurality of *polis* and from the dynamism of *imperium*, while sharing the order of the political ideal and the extent of the imperial ideal.

If *polis* goes with a moderate, perhaps even liberal, temper, and *imperium* goes with an aggressive temper, then *cosmopolis* goes with a temper which is ambiguously both self-sacrificing and also almost maximally hubristic. We may think this is properly more theological or philosophical than political: but, clearly, for over two thousand years, and especially recently, this idea has had its political attractions.

In sum, we might say, if we were inclined to Hegelian formulas, that *polis* is the state in itself, *imperium* is the state for itself, and *cosmopolis* is the state in and for itself. But this poetic claim, which would seem to reconcile all forms of the state together, would perhaps prevent us from seeing that it is only with great difficulty, and perhaps with a lot of forcing or compromising that we can believe that these types of state are in fact the same state at different stages along one dialectic. It is more likely that they are simply and bluntly three rival ideas of the state, and will always exist to stand in contradiction to each other, with no reconciliation in sight.

[22] Excerpted from *The Epistle to Diognetus*, quoted in *From Alexander to Constantine: Passages and Documents Illustrating the History of Social and Political Ideas 336 B.C.–A.D. 337* trans. Ernest Barker (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 421.

I have written about cosmopolitanism elsewhere,[23] so I shall say no more about it. Instead it is desirable to leave behind this tripartite summary of types of states and turn back to actual theories of empire and imperialism, to see how the clarifying of the concept of *imperium* in this tripartite context can enable us to make sense of the problems we encounter as soon as we think about empire and imperialism on the ground.

6. Modern Theories of Empire and Imperialism

Theories of empire and imperialism appeared only very recently. Although the concept of *imperium*, as well its cognates and descendants and derivatives, was used for centuries, it was not put at the service of theory until the beginning of the twentieth century – at the end of and as a consequence of a complicated history of which the theories were in at least some sense meant to be a recapitulation. The reason for this sudden arrival of theory was the emergence in the nineteenth century of the highly malleable word 'imperialism'.

'Imperialism' is an important word. Its emergence is a sign of a major shift in meaning. The old concept of 'empire', which had previously indicated a state or condition, became a *telos*, and was at the same time rendered into a concept of movement towards that state or condition, by means of the word 'imperialism'.[24] It was the word for a process, a policy, a disposition, or even – in the hands of Marxists – the historical stage in which these processes, policies, dispositions were manifest. Hobson admitted: 'To lay one's finger accurately upon any "ism" so as to pin it down and mark it out by definition seems impossible.'[25] And what we may observe is that modern theories of *imperium* can be divided into two types. On the one hand there are static theories of 'empire'. On the other hand there are dynamic theories of 'imperialism'. The first are theories of a condition, a state. The second are theories of either the process, policy or disposition *by* which or a stage *through* which we are moving towards that state.

[23] James Alexander, 'The Fundamental Contradiction of Cosmopolitanism', *The European Legacy* 21 (2016), 168–183.

[24] This paraphrases a very useful sentence by Reinhart Koselleck on 'republicanism' found in *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Times* trans. Keith Tribe (Camb. Mass: MIT Press, 1985), 287.

[25] J.A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1938).

Dynamic theories attempt to do justice to the movement evident in imperialism and also to do justice to the fact that conquest was supplemented by commerce and competition, so that *imperium* was no longer what it had been for the old empires. Imperialism is a very ambiguous term. It can refer to the appropriate policy towards the empire (which is how the term was originally used in the nineteenth century), to the economic or political motives behind imperial policy (which is how Hobson and Schumpeter used it), or to the system which arose as the policy of different empires collided (which is how Lenin used it). One thing which united Lenin and Hobson was the view that imperialism was certainly nothing to do with any singular *imperium*. Lenin quoted this line from Hobson in his own book on imperialism: 'The new imperialism differs from the older, first, in substituting for the ambition of a single growing empire the theory and practice of competing empires, each motivated by similar lusts of political aggrandisement and commercial gain; secondly, in the dominance of financial or investing over mercantile interests.'[26] Imperialism was for Lenin the name of a system. Rather more philosophically pure than this, though no less dynamic, was Schumpeter's definition of imperialism as an atavistic element in all human activity: 'Imperialism is the objectless disposition on the part of a state to unlimited forcible expansion.'[27] For Schumpeter imperialism was a dynamic force somewhat akin to Schopenhauer's will. It was blind: it did not care what the object was, as long as it exerted its will over that object. These two dynamic theories: Lenin's, in which imperialism is a historical system, and Schumpeter's, in which it is a perennial impetus, have jostled together ever since.[28] If imperialism can be a conscious policy, an unconscious motive or a stage of history in which certain policies and motives have acted on the world in a particular way, then I think we are able to conclude that it is a word of rather uncertain signification.

The static theories of empire are much simpler, since they attempt to define a structure rather than explicate a process. Such theories are the achievement, if that is the word, of political scientists: they suffer

[26] V.I. Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism: A Popular Outline* (London: Penguin, 2010), 114.

[27] Joseph Schumpeter, 'The Sociology of Imperialisms', in *Imperialism, Social Classes: Two Essays* trans. Heinz Norden (New York: Meridian, 1951), 1–98, at 6.

[28] Arguably Hannah Arendt's account of imperialism is torn between these two theories. See, for instance, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* orig. 1951 (New York: Schocken Books, 2001), 170 & 176.

from a theoretical eagerness to establish a definition which can enable us to study empires in the actual world, as if they are members of a distinct species. So for Doyle an empire is 'a system of interaction between two political entities, one of which, the dominant metropole, exerts political control over the internal and external policy – the effective sovereignty – of the other, the subordinate periphery'.[29] For Motyl, similarly, an empire is 'a hierarchically organised political system with a hublike structure – a rimless wheel – within which a core elite and state dominate peripheral elites and societies'.[30] One obvious problem is that these definitions fail to distinguish an empire from a state. Could not these definitions just be definition of any state in which a ruling class dominates a ruled class? Münkler is shrewder when he declares that 'an empire must be distinguished from a state'. States, he says flatly, have borders; empires do not. This might almost be my distinction between *polis* and *imperium*. But unfortunately Münkler is also concerned to find empires in the world. After rightly saying that 'empires have no neighbours that they recognise as equals', he then worryingly adds 'states are always in the plural, empires mostly in the singular.'[31] The word 'mostly' is the sign that he is trying to define actual empires rather than offer a typology of empire. And, indeed, the book soon descends into trivial reflections about how the United States and the European Union resemble empires in certain respects, and ends up lacking any conceptual clarity. Colás also attempts to recognise the fact that empires are 'built on expansion'.[32] But he runs into the same problem Münkler has, which is of finding anything resembles an empire in a world of states.[33] So he rather awkwardly falls back

[29] Michael W. Doyle, *Empires* (London: Cornell University Press, 1986), 12.

[30] Alexander J. Motyl, *Imperial Ends: The Decay, Collapse and Revival of Empires* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 4.

[31] Herfried Münkler, *Empires: The Logic of World Domination from Ancient Rome to the United States* trans. Patrick Camiller (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 4–5.

[32] Alejandro Colás, *Empire* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 6–8.

[33] This was the same problem faced by Hans J. Morgenthau. Since the state was for him the status quo, he offered the remarkable definition of imperialism (not empire) 'as a policy that aims at the overthrow of the status quo', that is, as a word for any attempt to overthrow the established system of states. Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle For Power and Peace* 5th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), 46. This illustrates, I hope, the absurdity of trying to define these terms if

on a definition very similar to Doyle's, dividing his definition by making it partly about expansion and partly about subjugation.[34]

These theories differ in offering us rival views of empire, a static entity, and imperialism, a dynamic process. The theorists of empire all treat imperialism as without intrinsic interest, since it is derivative of empire. For Doyle imperialism is 'the process of establishing and maintaining an empire'.[35] For Motyl, even more pithily, 'imperialism is a policy, whereas empire is a polity'.[36] For Münkler imperialism is 'normative' while empire is 'descriptive'.[37] And for Colás imperialism is the 'more active cognate' of empire.[38] Such resemblance! On the other hand, the theorists of imperialism rarely define empire at all, or only mention it in order to say how unrelated to 'empire' is 'imperialism'.

In short, theories of imperialism suffer from the same dynamic indeterminacy as the phenomenon itself, while theories of empire, though clear, involve a translation error, because they reify a static concept of 'empire' which can do little justice to the dynamic, historical, nature of *imperium*.

Is this not an antinomy?

Either the modern theorists begin with *imperialism* which is one or more of the following:

1. a motive or impetus towards extending oneself (one's state or corporation) politically or economically across the world
   a. which is of a particular historical stage
   b. or which is atavistic and timeless, or
2. a policy towards the extension of oneself politically or economically across the world, or
3. the system which emerges when more than one state or corporation extends itself politically or economically across the world

in which case *empire* is just an obsolete word for pre-imperialist political forms or is a derivative of some aspect of imperialism as defined;

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one takes the state – the type of the state I call *polis* – to be the fundamental element of politics.

[34] Colás, op. cit. note 32, 18.
[35] Doyle, op. cit. note 29, 19.
[36] Motyl, op. cit. note 30, 32.
[37] Münkler, op. cit. note 31, 8.
[38] Colás, op. cit. note 32, 71.

Or they begin with *empire* which is defined in terms of

1. command: hence the subjugation of a ruled class by a ruling class, or, to use the imagery of territory, a 'periphery' by a 'centre' (which is a wholly static conception), or
2. territory: an expansive entity (which is a static conception standing for a dynamic entity)

in which case *imperialism* is just a derivative policy or attitude towards empire.

What can we take from all this? Well, it seems to me that when we use language like 'empire' and 'imperialism' we are using a language with great shifting blind spots: if we focus in on one element and seek to define that then we lose everything else. All that is clear is that empire is a metaphor, a metaphor of extension, which has itself been extended by the term imperialism. The justification of empire or imperial activity may be force or law (according to some sort of solipsism), but then it may be contract or trade (at which point there is no longer a solipsism since we are involved in reciprocal relations more reminiscent of the *polis* than of *imperium*). This metaphorical extension, which is irreversible, means that what we have here is a language which points to subjugation, oppression, exploitation but also points to any seeking of influence by peaceful means.

If this is so, then the modern theories of empire and imperialism are nothing more than elaborate ways of going wrong by selecting out of a complicated history of meanings certain elements and then using them to stand for an entire historical experience.

So much for the theories. Since history seems to bedevil theory, I think it is necessary to press on to consider history, much as this may seem to a philosopher to be a wandering in the wilderness. This I shall do in the next section, in order to show that the only sense we can make of imperial terminology is by recapitulating its history. This, admittedly, may not leave us with very much that is of philosophical value. But it is necessary.

7. Philosophy as the Recapitulation of History

So far I have sketched a threefold typology of states, one of which I have called *imperium*. Since this is a pure philosophical type I have turned to theories of empire and imperialism to see if there is anything of value in them. No doubt there is, but one continually struggles with the contradictions and complexities found in them. They seem to be fundamentally irresolute. In what follows, therefore, I shall consider the history of the concepts of empire and imperialism.

If historical reflection is important for *any* concept of the state, as it is, then it should be particularly so for the concept of *imperium*, which, as I have said, is a dynamic concept.

The history of imperial concepts is best written as a history of translation.[39] The phrase *translatio imperii*, 'translation of empire', is a famous one. It is apt here, because the concepts of empire have been much translated. Originating in the Roman republic, *imperium* and its related term *imperator* had distinct meanings which were complicated by the history of Rome once it became a monarchy, then a theocracy, was divided between east and west, and suffered the emergence of a rival in the west – meanings which were then complicated further as the terminology was extended to non-Roman rule by various analogies – so that 'empire' could refer first to a sovereign state and later to the colonial possessions of that state – and eventually by the emergence of the new word 'imperialism' which was used for both the political and economic aspects of this state activity and the world it created. The most significant translations of imperial terminology in this story are three. At first empire was Roman, later it was universal. At first empire was theoretically unitary, no matter what was the case in practice, later empire was plural. At first empire was political, later it was economic.

The story is one of many striking contingencies. Let me try to sketch it briefly by representing it as a history of nine meanings and eight translations.

1. At first, *imperium* had a simple meaning, derived from the verb *imperare* meaning 'to command'. It was the term in the Roman republic which denoted the right of command bestowed on magistrates like consuls and praetors, both to rule and to lead in battle. One could call it authority. Theoretically it was bestowed by the people. A cognate term was *imperator* which referred to someone with military *imperium* who had been successful in battle and had returned to Rome to be voted a triumph by the senate. In the republic many men could hold *imperium*; many men could be *imperatores*. 2. By a natural extension of meaning, the word for the right to command became a word for the territory over which command was exercised. Thus *imperium*

[39] No complete scholarly history of imperial concepts has been written. Until we have one, the best single account remains the one in the two volumes of Richard Koebner, op. cit. note 5. The many histories of eras of imperial thought, in the works of Dvornik, Brunt, Syme, Jones, Ullmann, Muldoon, Folz, Pagden, Armitage, Pocock, Mehta, Bell and Pitts etc, offer many refinements, but have not yet been incorporated into a single story.

became a word for territory. 3. In acts of major political significance Caesar and his heir Augustus arrogated the terms *imperium* and *imperator* to themselves. Now imperial terminology was no longer plural but singular: it was monopolised by monarchs who for historical reasons could not call themselves kings. The singularity of *imperium* was damaged whenever the empire was divided, as it was by Diocletian and Theodosius. Yet, no matter what happened in practice, the Roman empire always remained theoretically singular.

4. When Constantine declared the Roman empire Christian and moved the capital to Constantinople, the city of Rome was abandoned. Not only was the empire placed on a new divine foundation but the remaining authorities in the city were given the opportunity to exercise influence in another way, though this only became significant because the empire fell apart in the west. 5. The Popes, inspired by some passages about St. Peter in the New Testament, increasingly laid claim to elements of the imperial legacy. They claimed a spiritual dominion over the whole world, and an actual, spiritual and sometimes temporal, dominion over the barbarian kingdoms which replaced the empire in the west. 6. The Roman empire, theoretically singular, was practically divided once and for all when a Pope crowned Charlemagne Roman emperor in 800 AD, establishing what was later called the Holy Roman Empire. We now denigrate the empire in the east by calling it the Byzantine empire. But both were Roman.

7. Finally we reach the extension of imperial terminology as it was adopted by analogy by those who no longer saw themselves as Roman. Some kings of England and Castile in the ninth and tenth centuries had called themselves emperors, but this sort of use was easier to justify after Papal lawyers in the early thirteenth century came up with argument that *rex in regno suo imperator est*, 'a king in his own kingdom is an emperor'. Now imperial terminology was available for anyone, especially after Renaissance scholars unearthed the original meaning of *imperium* as meaning authority or sovereignty. The reason modern state sovereignty was seldom expressed in imperial terms was that the Roman association was too strong to be broken as yet – the Roman empire in the east survived until 1453 and the Roman empire in the west until 1806. So this was something of a dead end, though in the nineteenth century after Napoleon crowned himself emperor several great continental states came to be referred to as empires on an analogy with Rome. 8. Imperial language found its final home when the maritime European states began their activities in foreign trade and conquest. From this point on, empire was used, admittedly occasionally and imprecisely, to cover activities

that were both political and economic. Here, as with Constantine, who abandoned Rome and Christianised the empire, we have a double translation: imperial language was used of the overseas activities of some European states, rather than of continental empires of the Roman type, and it was used increasingly for commercial activity. 9. Finally, there was the extension of the language of empire by the emergence of the term 'imperialism'. This enabled imperial terminology to do better justice to the ambiguities of the experience of the European states. It offered commentators a language in which practical speculations about the appropriate policy towards empire and theoretical speculations about the causes and nature of empire could be expressed. This translation is the one which lies immediately behind our own use of all imperial terminology.

If we strip all determinants (Rome, Caesar, Augustus, Constantine, Christianity, the Papacy, Charlemagne, Napoleon, etc.) out of this history then we can say that in the abstract the terminology of *imperium*-empire-imperialism has referred to all of the following:

1. A right to command within a state.
2. Territory over which such command is exercised in a state.
3. The monopoly and singularity of that right to command in a state and hence the territory of the state.
4. Territories and commands acquired by a state (or any corporation licensed by a state) beyond its own immediate territory and command.
5. The practices, whether political or economic, of a state (or indeed corporation) in extending itself beyond its own immediate territory and command.
6. The politics in which we deliberate and display our attitudes, for and against, to these practices.

This is the sum of meanings to which imperial terminology can refer.

The problem is that stripping determinacy out of the history means leaving to one side Rome. But Rome may seem to be of the essence: Rome with all its ambiguities, Rome for which *imperium* was a legitimising concept of rule, Rome which established *imperium* over foreign territories, Rome which acquired the name *imperium* for its state even after it ceased to extend its rule. I think the only answer to this is to say *either* we must commit ourselves to a determinate history of imperial concepts, which will itself be a history of the sort a historian of ideas would write, *or* we can only do what I have done in singling out six abstract elements from that history. Either

way, we are recapitulating the history and generating what I shall call a recapitulative theory. A recapitulative theory is one which compiles those elements of a conceptual history which compose the possible range of meanings evident today but in such a way that there is a continual acknowledgement of the history out of which our concepts are being abstracted, thus granting us the perpetual possibility of returning to the history to recover something we might have forgotten.

Let me proceed with the more abstract version of such a recapitulation by considering more closely the six abstract elements I have identified.

The first three elements are centripetal: that is to say, they seem to have some sort of cumulative logic about them. The centre holds. At first we have a word for a *quality* (the authority lent to rule), which becomes a word for *territory* (the territory over which such rule is extended), which then becomes a word for an *entity* (the state) which is the combination of the quality and the territory. But even here there is an ambiguity about whether the territory over which command is exercised is one's own territory, of one's own people, or the territory of others, a 'province', to use the Latin term. There is a fatal ambiguity about empire: whether it is 'over us' or 'over others'. Some writers are impatient with this ambiguity: but it is an important one. This ambiguity is best expressed as being the classic one in which we have to distinguish *having an empire* from *being an empire*. Moses Finley observed that the Romans amassed their empire while still a republic, but that when the empire finally acquired an emperor it began the process of establishing itself as 'a unitary territorial state'. At this point, he commented pithily, 'what we call the Roman Empire had ceased to be an empire'.[40] What he meant was that the empire had ceased to expand and eventually, when everyone was granted citizenship, ceased to subjugate foreigners. The Roman empire was now an empire over us not an empire over others. It was an entity, a state, called an empire; it was not a state which had an empire. Here we have the ambiguities about state and empire which we saw troubling the theorists of empire who seemed not to grasp the distinction between what I call *polis* and *imperium*.

Nonetheless, this apparent consequential logic, this Roman logic, of *quality*, *territory* and *entity*, despite its ambiguities, remains at the essence of the meanings of empire even when we come to modernity. But they are complicated greatly by the other three elements when we shift from the older 'classical-continental' or 'continuous' empires

[40] M.I. Finley, 'Empire in the Graeco-Roman World', *Review (Ferdinand Braudel Center)* 2 (1978), 55–68 at 56.

like the Roman empire to the newer 'modern-maritime' or 'discontinuous' empires like the British empire.[41] These second three elements are centrifugal: that is to say, they indicate senses in which imperial terminology obviously falls apart, the centre does not hold.[42]

The fourth element is a consequence of the fact that it was hard to see how overseas empires could ever form a unitary territorial state. *Opposuit natura*, Burke said in 1775.[43] For the first time in history there was an indeterminacy about whether the word 'empire' should refer to the original state, to the state and its possessions together, or to its possessions alone. Henry VIII spoke in the first way in 1533 ('this Realme of Englond is an Impire'), Benjamin Franklin in the second way in 1754 ('the British Colonies bordering on the French are properly frontiers of the British Empire'), and Goldwin Smith in the third way in 1863 ('the greatness of England really lies not in her Empire but in herself').[44] From the middle of the nineteenth century, with the rising sense that the whole world was or should be a world of states, 'being an empire' began its precipitous decline, which was completed by the destruction of the great land empires in the early twentieth century. Meanwhile 'having an empire' changed its meaning in accordance with the new meanings of 'imperialism'.

The fifth element is a consequence of the bringing to consciousness of the fact, evident as early as in Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* in 1776, that empire might now solely take economic form, or that even if it took political form that might be a consequence of separate economic causes. Older empires were much simpler. As Finley put it, 'What passed for economic growth in antiquity was always achieved only by external expansion.'[45] But in modernity the separation of economic and political categories has both stimulated and confounded theories of imperialism. We can follow Hobson in taking imperialism to be 'an amalgam of economic and political forces.'[46] Or we can

[41] These useful names are owed to Ernest Barker, *Ideas and Ideals*, op. cit. note 3, 11 and Motyl, op. cit. note 30, 4 respectively.

[42] This may explain why so many defenders of the British empire made sense of in terms of Greek models. See Krishnan Kumar, 'Greece and Rome in the British Empire: Contrasting Role Models', *Journal of British Studies* 51 (2012), 760–101.

[43] Barker, *Ideas and Ideals*, op. cit. note 3, 81.

[44] Quoted in Koebner, *Empire*, 54 & 106 and *Imperialism*, 32, both op. cit. note 5.

[45] Finley, op. cit. note 40, 64–5.

[46] Hobson, op. cit. note 25, 368.

follow Gallagher and Robinson in distinguishing 'formal empire' and 'informal empire'.[47] But when the word 'imperialism' can refer to the political activity of a state, the economic activity of that state, the economic activity of a society (such as the East India Company) sanctioned by the state, or the political activity of such a society exercising more powers outside the state than it could do within the boundaries of that state, then there is almost nothing which is not imperial. Clarity has been lost.

Such a loss of clarity is what made imperialism in the end a political matter.

The sixth and final element is a consequence of the fact that empire and imperialism were brought into the centre of political dispute: they became subjects about which we could fundamentally disagree. No one in antiquity doubted that empire was natural.[48] But in modernity *imperium* was subverted by the *libertas* which was meant to be its major support. Historians observe this again and again. 'So powerful and consistent was this tendency to judge Britain's imperial conduct by the yardstick of liberty that it gave the British Empire something of a self-liquidating character.'[49] 'European principles undermined European imperialism all the more rapidly because the practice of the rulers was so much at variance with their principles.'[50] 'The concept of imperialism originated from an uneasiness within the British conscience.'[51] In short, imperialism was the language in which politics put empire to the question.

To summarise, then, in addition to the apparently but not entirely centripetal threefold of *quality*, *territory* and *entity*, we have the centrifugal threefold of what we could call *colony, economy* and *critique*. If the concept of empire had been wholly incorporated into the modern state, it would have had an exact meaning. It would have meant sovereignty. But it held onto something in the spirit of *imperium* and continued to extend its meaning further and further. Some scholars may suppose that 'imperialism remains the best word for the

[47] John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade', *The Economic History Review* 6 (1953), 1–15.

[48] Finley, op. cit. note 40, 59.

[49] Niall Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (Allen Lane, 2003), xxii.

[50] P.A. Brunt, 'Reflections on British and Roman Imperialism', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 7 (1965), 267–288, at 286.

[51] Richard Koebner, 'The Emergence of the Concept of Imperialism', op. cit. note 5, 741.

general system of unequal world economic relations'.[52] This may be so. But it is only so because its meaning is so ambiguous.

'The adjective that best qualifies the British Empire is not imperial but empirical', was the wry observation of A.P. Thornton. 'Its historians, like the statesmen who were involved in its history, must deal far more in circumstance than in definition.'[53] Most philosophers would agree. We can certainly say that the language of empire is too compromised to be the basis of a singular theory. But this does not mean that sense cannot be made of imperial terminology as a whole by means of a careful recapitulation of its history.

8. Conclusion

I have sketched a typology of the state, dividing it into three, so there is *polis*, *imperium* and *cosmopolis*. I have then selected out of these the most problematic of the three, which is the second, and attempted to recognise something of its complicated, transitive existence in theory and in history.

There is much ambiguity in theory and history. Ambiguity has flourished because the modern state has been theorised for five hundred years in terms of the type of state that I have called *polis*: that is, in terms of a bounded entity which is constituted by its recognition by others. This has made it clear retrospectively that *imperium* as a type of state is a solipsistic state. The significance of the establishment of the modern state in Europe (and of the imposition of this state by Europe on the world so that the world was now a system of states) was that in strict terms *imperium* was now obsolete as an idea. Recognition by *polis* was fundamental. This eliminated *imperium*, since *imperium* was based on no recognition of any other state as having a right to anything.

So what happened, and this is a historical point, but one of profound philosophical significance, was that imperial terminology survived only because it was translated out of a context of simple *imperium*. All of our modern language of 'empire' and 'imperialism' for the last five hundred years has been the use of the old language of *imperium* in a context which contradicts the fundamental assumption of *imperium*. There is no theory of empire or imperialism to be

[52] Michael Barratt Brown, *After Imperialism* (William Heinemann, 1970), viii.

[53] A.P. Thornton, review of Richard Koebner, *Empire*, in *The English Historical Review* 78 (1963), 546–552 at 551.

had which is not simply part of *translatio imperii*. All theories of empire and imperialism are practical theories, dynamic, transitive, in the middle of something, going somewhere. The only thing we can say that is philosophical about them is that this is so. As for *imperium* itself, since it was never a subject of philosophy in antiquity, there has been no reason to theorise it in modernity either. It was destroyed as a type of state once and for all. Hence modern political philosophy – which is, and has been for five hundred years, dominated by *polis* and its reflection in the heavens, *cosmopolis*.

But nothing can eliminate either the primitive survival of the disposition towards *imperium* or the complicated interaction of politics and economics that means that there is continual rise and fall of power, authority and influence in all corners of the world. Imperial language remains our language for this. It is not a legal, exact, language. It is hard for philosophers to talk about it. It is ideological, or political: it is there for distortion, it is part of a distorting mirror. But it is there, and politics cannot be made sense of without it.

I have attempted to show that there is an adequate object of philosophical reflection in the type of state that is at the root of all imperial terminology. I have called it *imperium*. Without a clear concept of *imperium* and without a sense of the threefold typology of states, political philosophers will be limited to the static systems of *polis* and *cosmopolis*, and will remain blind to everything in politics that is dynamic, atavistic or solipsistic.

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