

# Founding the World State: H. G. Wells on Empire and the English-Speaking Peoples

## Introduction

Celebrated as a genius by many, dismissed as a monomaniacal crank by others, H. G. Wells (1866-1946) was once hard to ignore. Most famous today as one of the founders of modern science fiction, during the first half of the twentieth century he was known throughout the world as an audacious and controversial political thinker. Questions of global order were central to his work. From the opening decade of the century until the close of the Second World War he campaigned tirelessly for the eradication of the system of sovereign states and the creation of a new order, characterised by universal peace and justice. He was the twentieth century's most prolific, original and influential advocate of the world-state.

While omnipresent before the Second World War, Wells's star waned rapidly. Even as millions continued to marvel at his "scientific romances," his political writings were largely forgotten. The evolving discipline of International Relations (IR), fighting for credibility in the rapid post-war expansion of the social sciences, and shaped by the power dynamics of the Cold War, had little time for such a protean writer. There have been exceptions to this general rule. In 1950, for example, the eminent strategist Edward Mead Earle published an acute analysis of Wells's political thinking. He was, Mead wrote in the pages of *World Politics*, a "mercurial and versatile genius" who had "exercised an almost unique influence on the generation which reached maturity during the decade 1910-20" (1950, 181, 185). But few other scholars followed Earle's lead.

Today Wells's writings about global politics are usually either ignored or mentioned only in passing. He makes fleeting appearances in some intellectual histories of twentieth century

internationalism and globalism (e.g. Ashworth 1999; Mazower 2009; Rosenboim 2016, 211-16), and his ideas about human rights are occasionally subjected to scrutiny (e.g. Partington 2007; Planinc 2016). Unsurprisingly, he is frequently hailed by scholars cataloguing ideas about the world state (Cabrera 2010, 520; Craig 2008, 133; Weiss 2009, 260). For many years W. Warren Wagar's *H. G. Wells and the World State* (1961) was the most comprehensive account of his international thought, though it has recently been supplemented by the work of John Partington (2003a). Both make bold claims about Wells's importance as a political thinker. Partington, for example, argues that he "promoted, years ahead of his time, many of the internationalist policies and realities of the post-1945 period," and in particular that he was the first to develop a theoretical account of international functionalism (2003b, 234). Among contemporary IR scholars, Daniel Deudney (2001, 2008) has demonstrated the most interest in Wells, writing insightfully about him as a pivotal thinker of post-Westphalian order. The "breadth and originality of Wells's world order prophecies," he claims, "were unmatched by any writer of the era" (2001, 203).

None of this scholarship, valuable as it is, provides an adequate analysis of the early development of Wells's vision of world order, and in particular of his shape-shifting account of the "English-speaking" peoples and the British empire. Yet this was one of his preoccupations during the Edwardian years, and he spent much time debating it with some of the leading imperial thinkers and politicians of the day. Wells saw both the "English-speaking peoples" and the empire as potential agents of world transformation, even as institutional foundations for a universal state, though he struggled to work out how they might be reconciled. In this essay I explore his evolving attempts to imagine a future world in the years before the First World War, the period during which he attained global fame as a political thinker and produced some of his most innovative and influential work. In doing so, I offer a new interpretation of the political thought of one of the most prominent twentieth century visionaries of global order.

The *fin de siècle* was a key moment in the evolution of global politics. Deudney terms it the “global industrial period.” The industrial revolution, he contends, was a “primal development,” as new technologies deepened interactions across the planet. “As the scale and tempo of human affairs changed, a major and tumultuous reordering of large-scale political relationships and institutions seemed imminent and inevitable” (2008, 215, 219; see also Buzan & Lawson, 2015, 67-96). Questions of “polity ontology” moved centre stage. Contemporary thinkers propagated endless plans for transcending the state system, including pan-regional imperial structures, European union, the federation of the British empire, and a world state.<sup>1</sup> Numerous commentators regarded the (re)unification of the British colonial empire and the United States as the harbinger of a brighter future, one in which the “Anglo-Saxon race” or “English-speaking Peoples” could order and police the world (Bell 2014; 2017b). Wells was foremost among them. In 1901 he published *Anticipations*, the book that made his name as a prophet. In it, he predicted the emergence of a “New Republic” centred on the “synthesis” of Britain and the United States. This polity would govern a globe-straddling empire dedicated to “civilising” backward peoples, and it would serve as the basis for a future world state. But Wells soon came to realise that the British empire and the Anglo-American New Republic were potentially incompatible.

To examine the early development of Wells’s political thought, I explore the character and purpose of his arguments about empire, race and Anglo-American union, the theoretical assumptions that underpinned them, and the early twentieth century intellectual and political

---

<sup>1</sup> On early twentieth century attempts to envision post-Westphalian political formations, see Bell (2007); Conrad & Sachsenmaier (2007); Long (1991); Wilson (2003).

debates he sought to shape.<sup>2</sup> I draw extensively on Wells's work, both published and unpublished, as well as the writings of his interlocutors. The first three sections of the article follow a broad chronological arc, tracing Wells's mutating conception of the "New Republic." Section I reconstructs Wells's initial account, articulated principally in *Anticipations*. Section II examines the ontological basis of this imagined polity. Focusing on *Mankind in the Making*, published in 1903, and *A Modern Utopia*, which appeared in 1905, I argue that he grounded it in language rather than race. Wells was adamant that the "English-speaking peoples" not the "Anglo-Saxons" furnished the basis of unity. However, he never managed to escape the imaginative pull of global racial hierarchy, and despite his ostensible critique of race science his account of the New Republic reinscribed a racialized geopolitical vision. Section III identifies an important but unacknowledged shift in Wells's position that occurred in the following years, and which is most apparent in his 1906 volume *The Future in America*. Silently dropping his support for formal Anglo-American union, he promoted instead a looser co-operative arrangement. I argue that Wells rejected the "Larger Synthesis" for two reasons: first, he realised that the British empire was a bar to reunion with the United States, and second, he discerned a ubiquitous "state-blindness" among American citizens, an unwillingness to acknowledge the significance of state institutions in underwriting individual freedom, political stability and economic productivity. The final section analyses his involvement in Edwardian debates over the British imperial order. I show that he regarded the empire as a potential foundation for the creation of a world state, and I explore how he navigated the tension between his advocacy of the New Republic and liberal imperialism.

---

<sup>2</sup> Contextualist studies of modern British international thought include Ashworth (1999); Bell (2007); Hall (2006); Holthaus (2018); Long (1991); Rosenboim (2017); Sylvest (2009); Wilson (2003).

## **In the Beginning of a New Time: The Larger Synthesis**

During the 1890s arguments over Anglo-American relations moved to the centre of political discourse on both sides of the Atlantic. In particular, the Venezuelan boundary dispute (1895-96) triggered acrimonious exchanges between Washington and London, although it also prompted many commentators to recoil from confrontation, and forge a transatlantic “rapprochement” (Adams 2005; Perkins 1968). The clamour for unity was partly a result of Washington’s new assertiveness, for although the United States had been engaged in violent territorial conquest since its founding, the annexation of Hawaii and the Spanish-American War, both in 1898, signalled its first sustained burst of extra-continental imperialism. Many observers, especially in Britain, argued that the two countries should co-operate closely, and some even foresaw a form of collaborative “Anglo-Saxon” imperialism, a joint shouldering of the global “civilizing mission.” Proposals for fortifying Anglo-American relations ranged from deepening informal cooperation, through a defensive alliance, to projects for formal political (re)unification (Bell 2016, ch. 8).

The rapprochement has long presented a puzzle for IR scholars interested in hegemonic transition. Assorted explanatory variables have been posited: democratic culture, liberal values, shared strategic and economic interests. But, as Srdjan Vucetic has argued, race was a key determinant (2011a, 2011b). Anglo-American cooperation, on this constructivist account, was “established on the basis of race, or, more specifically, because American and British elites succeeded in framing their community as a single Anglo-Saxon brotherhood” (Vucetic 2011b, 403-404).<sup>3</sup> It was a “racial peace.” While political elites on both sides of the Atlantic “understood

---

<sup>3</sup> For an alternative explanation, see Kupchan (2012), ch. 3; Rock (1997). On the role of imperialism in early IR, see Long and Schmitt (2005); Schmidt (2005), ch. 3; Vitalis (2015).

each other as fellow democrats ... their antecedent ontology was always race, not regime type” (Vucetic 2011b, 413). Perceptions of shared interests and values were shaped and filtered by a sense of common racial identity.

As the twentieth century dawned, Wells wrote a series of books and articles outlining a “New Republicanism” fit for a world in flux. The most significant was *Anticipations*. It offered a methodology for delineating the shape of things to come, a set of predictions about how existing trends would reshape the world, and normative arguments justifying the superiority of the future order. The consummation of the “English-speaking peoples” stood at the very core of Wells’s account. Proclaiming *Anticipations* the “first attempt to forecast the human future as a whole and to estimate the relative power of this and that great systems of influence,” Wells stated that the book comprised the “keystone to the main arch of my work” (2008, 643, 645), and he returned obsessively to its main themes throughout his career.

Wells hoped that his bold vision of the future might seed ideas about the necessity of radical social change. In a performative vein, he thought that it might bring about the very changes he predicted. Pressing the novelist Arnold Bennett to help spread “my gospel,” he confided his belief that “a real first class boom and uproar and discussion about this book will do an infinite amount of good in the country.” Wells sought to reach a large audience, drawing the attention of “parsons and country doctors” as well as the denizens of the London literary scene.<sup>4</sup> He achieved his goal: the book was a best-seller, elevating him to the top ranks of intellectual celebrity (on its reception, see Smith 1986, 92-5, 97ff). It established his reputation as a seer of modernity. Its huge success also had practical consequences for his career, opening doors for a lower-middle class writer, bringing him to the attention of leading thinkers and politicians, and prompting invitations to join some of the most significant campaigning organisations of the

---

<sup>4</sup> Wells to Bennett, 25/11/1901, in Harris (1960), 68.

time, including the Fabian Society and the Co-efficients dining club. He was soon a leading figure in Edwardian intellectual life.

In *Anticipations* Wells analysed how assorted social, political, and technological, processes were dissolving venerable patterns of power and privilege, and heralding unprecedented forms of political association and human subjectivity. The English-speaking people were both an agent and a product of change. The astonishing power of new transport and communications systems – the “distinctive feature of the nineteenth century” – propelled the argument. Altering the very conditions of human existence, “[m]echanism” had triggered more than a “mere” revolution, it had catalysed an “absolute release from the fixed condition about which human affairs circled.” The reconfiguration of space and time augured a fundamental shift in geopolitical ordering. Technology was “abolishing locality,” eliminating traditional conceptions of territoriality and political identity (Wells 1999, 3, 44, 122, 74). Wells was echoing a popular theme in *fin de siècle* political thought. Since the mid-nineteenth century, but especially from the 1880s onwards, the development of new communications technologies – above all the electrical telegraph and the ocean-traversing steam ship – had prompted intense speculation about the abolition of distance, the acceleration of social and political life, and the imperative to develop new models of international, imperial and global organisation (Bell 2007; Deudney 2008). Wells harnessed such concerns to his project for world-transformation. He argued that the enormous “synthetic” communities of the future would necessarily differ in form and scale from those of the past. “Mechanism” provided both the infrastructural means through which the world would be rebuilt, and – in the elevation of scientific rationalism to a pervasive ideology – the basis for an ethos that would constitute new types of human and practices of rule. Parodying strains of contemporary utopianism, G. K. Chesterton painted Wells as the man who believed most fervently that “science would take charge of the future” (1904, 15).

The New Republic would be germinated by small groups of individuals. These embryonic New Republicans – an emergent technocratic class of “efficients” – would act as a largely uncoordinated secret society, an “informal and open freemasonry,” gestating a new phase in human history. These groups would slowly coalesce, recognising a common purpose and need for collaborative action. Sooner or later, they would form a “functional social body” composed of (among others) scientists, engineers, teachers, administrators, and managers (Wells 1999, 155, 81). Here Wells was channelling the obsession with “national efficiency” that gripped swathes of the British intelligentsia, fearful that the public and state administration alike were plagued by torpor and ineptitude (Searle 1971; Tonooka 2017). Rigorously planned, well-governed, and populated by highly-educated individuals, the New Republic would be a beacon of hyper-efficiency. However, Wells cautioned that the developmental process was beset with danger. The efficients would come into conflict with other social formations determined to halt their relentless march – the traditional landed aristocracy, the “helpless, superseded poor,” a social residuum he termed the “people of the Abyss,” and finally, “a possibly equally great number of non-productive persons living in and by social confusion” (Wells 1999, 56). The efficients would win out eventually, their greater organisational skills and intelligence guaranteeing victory.

The role assigned to human agency in this epic of world-making was unclear. Wells frequently argued that the New Republic would only materialize if it was *willed* by enough people. It required dynamic leadership, assiduous planning, and effective mobilisation. Alive to the daunting technical challenges facing humanity, and keen to grasp the possibilities they heralded, the New Republicans would be consummate “artists in reality.” Their artistry combined two primary features: a desire for order, efficiency and simplicity yoked to a zealous commitment – embedded at the heart of their “ethical frame” – to construct a world-state (Wells 1999, 167). Fusing aesthetic sensibility and political vision, they would labour ceaselessly to reweave the threads of reality, transfiguring prevailing ideas about social order, political institutions, and the

ends of human life. This argument rested on Wells's underlying ideational social theory, which posited that institutions and laws were crystallised beliefs, thus implying that a change in belief would invariably alter the institutional ecology (Bell 2017a). It followed that the principal role of the dedicated reformer was to convince people of the need to change patterns of belief. Elsewhere, however, Wells indicated that the new world would emerge regardless of human intervention, as a result of socio-technical developments "with all the inevitableness and all the patience of a natural force." The "final attainment" of the larger synthesis, he wrote in this vein, appeared to be a process acting "independent of any collective or conscious will in man," and it was "working now, and may work out to its end vastly, and yet at times almost imperceptibly, as some huge secular movement in Nature," the equivalent of tectonic shifts in the earth's crust or the annihilation of mountain ranges (Wells 1999, 139, 146-7). Here we see the clash between Wells's scientific naturalism and the mysticism that permeated his political writings. However it was to be achieved, the result would be an order populated by a new type of human, their personalities attuned to perpetual technological change and novel forms of living, working, and thinking.

The new time would be an age of vast omniscient political associations. Wells identified several "spacious movements of coalescence" as possible agents of future synthesis: Anglo-Saxonism, the "allied but finally very different" ideology of British imperialism, Pan-German and Pan-Slavic groupings, and the "conception of a great union of the 'Latin' peoples." He also predicted that the brutality meted out by the "white" powers would precipitate the unification of the "'Yellow' peoples" of East Asia. Wells was far from alone in predicting a future dominated by massive pan-movements – in *Imperialism*, for example, the political economist J. A. Hobson discerned a world dominated by a handful of "great civilizational empires" (1997, 332). Yet Wells was sceptical about the likely success of most pan-movements. The pan-Slavic and the pan-Latin peoples were too weak and divided to form a durable polity. A Pan-Germanic movement was

feasible, not least because the Germans exhibited remarkable technological prowess and had the most “efficient” middle classes in Europe, but they were hamstrung by a political system at once too aristocratic and monarchical. They would fail to draw willing support for accession, meaning that a German attempt to conquer Europe entailed war with France to the West or Russia to the East. A more likely outcome, Wells foretold, was a negotiated compromise between the continental powers, leading to the creation of a federal European union (Wells 1999, 143, 145).

For Wells, the New Republican ideal would be best realised by the fusion of the United States and the British colonial empire. “A great federation of white English-speaking peoples,” he claimed, was both likely and desirable during the coming decades. It would reorder the world, bringing stability and spreading civilization. He thus articulated a vision of white supremacist global governance. Again emphasizing human agency, Wells contended that the main impediment to realizing the New Republic was a lack of “stimulus,” a political shock that would focus minds and motivate action, although he speculated that German naval expansion and the potential emergence of an East Asian synthesis might perform a catalytic role (Wells 1999, 146, 145-6). However, *Anticipations* was no bombastic hymn to lasting British predominance, for Wells argued that the intramural balance of power was shifting westward, from London to Washington. The United States embodied the ideal of efficiency more successfully than Wells’s own countrymen. It was already pulling ahead economically, and political and military ascendancy would soon follow. Consequently, the “intellectual, political, and industrial centre of any permanent unification of the English-speaking states” would be located in a megalopolis that would sprawl between Chicago and the Atlantic. The future was likely to be *Anglo-American*.

*Anticipations* was at once an exercise in sociological extrapolation, an example of social prophecy, and a pointed intervention in contemporary political controversy. The previous decade had

witnessed a wide-ranging debate over the possibility of Anglo-American union. It had begun in earnest in the early 1890s, and was bolstered by the fears of conflict over Venezuela and the subsequent “rapprochement.” Played out in literary periodicals, pamphlets, speeches, newspaper columns, and fictional narratives, it was given institutional support by a cluster of civil society associations that promoted Anglo-American cooperation. The campaign for unification represented, Wells argued, a “preliminary sigh before the stirring of a larger movement.” While he was sceptical of the effectiveness of the existing associations (Wells 1999, 147), he regarded them as a sign of things to come, a portent of synthesis. In *Anticipations*, he developed the most elaborate and theoretically-sophisticated account of Anglo-American union found at the time.

Like most advocates of Anglo-American unity, Wells was unclear about the institutional structure of the future New Republic. He referred to a “federal government,” but alternated between calling it a “federation” and “confederation” (Wells 1999, 148, 146; 1903, 391). Recognising that knotty constitutional problems had to be surmounted, especially the clash between monarchical and republican models of government, he was blithely confident of success. In a panglossian vein, he argued that the New Republic would also resolve the vexed status of Ireland and South Africa, “two open sores of incorrigible wrong,” for while they would never be happy under the “vacillating, vote-caching incapacity of British Imperialism,” a federation of the English-speaking peoples would make it possible for them to achieve “equal fellowship,” thus removing the sources of bitterness and allowing them to flourish (Wells 1999, 148-9). Generally loathe to cite other writers, Wells did endorse A. V. Dicey’s intriguing proposal for the creation of “isopolitan” citizenship: “the extension of common civil and political rights throughout the whole of the English-speaking people” (Dicey 1897, 458; Wells 1999, 148; Bell 2014a). But whereas Dicey had proposed common citizenship as an ostensibly modest *alternative* to full political union, Wells incorporated it into his account of a fully-fledged New Republican state.

Whatever institutional form the New Republic assumed, Wells argued that it would command a huge joint fleet and its population would exceed one hundred million. It would be the greatest empire in history, administering most of the existing British imperial territories, as well as much of the Caribbean, the Americas, the Pacific, and the “larger part of black Africa” (Wells 1999, 146). Entrusted to an unprecedentedly large polity, and injected with an enervating dose of “efficiency,” the civilizing mission could finally be enacted on a global stage. This steroidal fantasy of universal imperium was the apotheosis of nineteenth century visions of empire as pedagogical technology, educating the backward peoples of the world until they were capable of self-government.

Adamant that his vision of the future was no idle dream, Wells regarded the New Republican synthesis “not only as a possible, but as a probable, thing” (Wells 1999, 146). By the turn of the second millennium, it would be an achieved fact. However, Wells offered conflicting accounts of the political inflection of his prognostications. He wrote to one correspondent that it was the “prospectus of a new revolutionary movement,” while he boasted to another that it was “designed to undermine and destroy the monarchy, monogamy, faith in God & respectability & the British Empire, all under the guise of speculation about motor cars & electrical heating.”<sup>5</sup> Yet he informed the radical journalist W. T. Stead, a fellow Anglo-American unionist, that the book was intended as “a sketch of a possible new Liberalism, that I have sufficient confidence to believe might very usefully supersede the chaotic good intentions that constitute contemporary Liberalism.” He made a similar point to Winston Churchill.<sup>6</sup> Oscillation between audacious

---

<sup>5</sup> Wells to Joseph Edwards, 7/11/01; Wells to Elizabeth Healey, 2/7/1901: Smith (1998), I, 383, 379.

<sup>6</sup> Wells to Stead, 31/10/1901, cited in Baylen (1974), 61; Wells to Churchill, 19/11/01, Smith (1998), I, 457.

revolutionary claims and the profession of gradualism marked Wells's political thinking at the time. It is perhaps best to read his work as trying (though often failing) to reconcile two temporal registers, a relatively modest liberal-socialist reformism aimed at influencing contemporary British debate and a hugely ambitious vision of world transformation that necessitated transcending the very world he was otherwise seeking to modify. It was often unclear how these could be rendered compatible.

Some advocates of Angloworld consolidation saw it as the potential end of history, the terminal form of global political organization, while others regarded it as a transitional phase, a step on the road to a yet grander mode of political life. Wells fell squarely into the latter camp. He thought that the final stage of human political evolution – at least on earth – would be the creation of a universal world-state, a synthesis of the New Republic and the other predominant powers. The New Republic would be self-overcoming. By the year 2000, the English-speaking federation would most likely set in motion the incorporation of the European union and the “yellow state.” A fully-fledged universal polity would emerge only after at least another century had passed, though it might take as long as a thousand years (Wells 1999, 177; Wells 1902, 331). There was no guarantee that this process would be peaceful. The synthetic associations would battle for global domination unless or until their energies could be harmonised to create a higher unity (Wells 1999, 139). Although Wells had initially presented *Anticipations* as a work of scientifically-informed social prophecy, it ended as spirited advocacy, celebrating the virtues of the New Republic and the value of English-speaking leadership. As he confessed a few years later, “I had intended simply to work out and foretell, and before I had finished I was in a fine full blast of exhortation” (Wells 2016a, 17).

### **Cyborg Imperium: On Race and Language**

As the new century broke the ideology of “Anglo-Saxonism” pervaded political discourse in the British empire and the United States (Horsman 1981), with many thinkers viewing race as the basic ontological category of politics, and the “Anglo-Saxons” as the most highly-developed racial group, ordained to dominate the world. White supremacist visions of global racial governance circulated widely, and played a formative role in the discipline of political science (Blatt 2018; Vitalis 2015). Most accounts of Anglo-American union were grounded in claims about racial kinship and superiority. Wells staked out a different position, arguing that language not race provided the foundations of the New Republic.

Long fascinated by the nature and functions of language, Wells assigned it a pivotal role in his understanding of human evolution (Hardy 1991). Following T. H. Huxley, he argued that contemporary evolutionary pressures were fundamentally different from those that had originally produced humans (1975b, 211). Humanity, in all its manifold complexity, resulted from the fusion of natural and social forces. Modern “civilised man” was a synthesis of “natural man” and “artificial man,” the former a product of millennia of Darwinian natural selection, the latter moulded by “tradition, suggestion, and reasoned thought” (1975a, 217). Wells argued that while the basic biological features of humanity were the same as those found in the Palaeolithic era, there had been innumerable changes in “suggestions and ideas.” The “artificial factor” had been “modified” by learning and the accumulation of knowledge (Wells 1975b, 211, 217). Language was central to the development of artificiality, the escape from brute nature. Writing and speech were fundamental features of social evolution.

His most fully-developed account of the linguistic basis of the New Republic is found in *Mankind in the Making*. Much of the book was dedicated to “man-making,” sculpting citizens

suitable for the New Republic through improving education and child-rearing practices.<sup>7</sup> Wells reiterated his support for the political consolidation of the “English-speaking community,” its teeming multitude of citizens then “scattered under various flags and governments throughout the world.” It was essential to comprehend the whole of this distributed polity, “unless our talk of co-operation, of reunion, is no more than sentimental dreaming” (Wells 1903, 34, vii). Once again, he argued that technological and political developments were tending towards the creation of a “new State,” a “great confederation” of “republican communities” all “speaking a common language, possessing a common living body of literature and a common scientific and, in its higher stages at least, a common education organisation” (Wells 1903, 391). While there were significant political obstacles to overcome, he insisted that the underlying similarities between the communities were of yet greater significance (Wells 1903, 260, 266). “Until grave cause has been shown to the contrary,” he declaimed, “there is every reason why all men who speak the same language, think the same literature and are akin in blood and spirit, and who have arrived at the great constructive conception that so many minds nowadays are reaching, should entirely disregard these old separations” (Wells 1903, 27). The territorial boundaries dividing the English-speaking peoples would be eradicated. It was vital to acknowledge that they were one people endowed with a common destiny, a community that “should become aware of itself collectively and should think as a whole” (Wells 1903, 361).

Wells’s analysis of the New Republic was marked by spatial ambiguity. Despite opening and closing with an encomium to the English-speaking peoples, the bulk of *Mankind in the Making* refers only to Britain and the United States (Wells 1903, vii, 34). Canada, Australia and New Zealand were absent, as were Ireland and South Africa. Moreover, Wells never explained clearly the selection criteria for inclusion in the New Republic. As with many other Anglo-unionists, the exact boundaries of the future polity were left fuzzy.

---

<sup>7</sup> He also rejected some of the eugenic arguments of *Anticipations* (Partington, 2005)

He argued that the New Republic faced a major problem. The quality of written and spoken English displayed by its inhabitants, especially in the Colonies, was worryingly low. This hampered the “development of the racial consciousness,” which depended on clear and intelligible communication, facilitating the growth of a sophisticated public culture capable of sustaining and disseminating complex ideas. The “thought of a community,” he insisted, “is the life of that community,” and if that thought was underdeveloped, or “disconnected and fragmentary,” the result was weakness and division. “That does not constitute an incidental defect, but essential failure” (Wells 1903, 128, 390). It was a feature, not a bug. Linguistic degeneration was, he cautioned the readers of *Mankind in the Making*, the “darkest cloud” hanging over potential confederation (Wells 1903, 131). It was essential to act before it was too late.

We have to save, to revive this scattered, warped, tarnished and neglected language of ours, if we wish to save the future of our world. We should save not only the world of those who at present speak English, but the world of many kindred and associated peoples who would willingly enter into our synthesis, could we make it wide enough and sane enough and noble enough for their honour (Wells 1903, 135).

Both the future of the New Republic and the World State depended on a significant improvement in the linguistic capacities – and thus the thought-worlds – of (white) English-speakers. The answer, Wells argued, lay in standardizing language, eliminating the distracting cacophony of dialects, idioms and accents that beset interpersonal communication and cognitive development. The citizens of the New Republic needed to speak with “one accent, one idiom, and one intonation.” This was a “necessary preliminary” to the “complete attainment of the more essential nucleus in the new Republican idea” (Wells 1903, 136, 157). He outlined various projects for achieving this end. For example, he supported the campaign for “simplified

spelling,” seeking to alter the orthography of the language, and argued that more effort should be put into the systematic institutionalisation of knowledge. “Organized general literature”

...would be the thinking department of the race. Once this deliberate organization of a central ganglion of interpretation and presentation began, the development of the brain and the nervous system in the social body would proceed apace. Each step would enable the next step by being wider and bolder. The general innervations of society with books and book distributing agencies would be followed by the linking up of the now almost isolated mental worlds of science, art, and political and social activity in a system of intercommunication and sympathy... (Wells 1903, 388).

The technologies that helped to make union both practical and necessary – above all the “more highly evolved” forms of telegraph and phonograph – also provided the means for improving language, chiefly through the rapid dissemination of information (Wells 1903, 137). This process would produce a “Collective Mind.”

Utopian energies pulsed through the racial discourses of the time, with Anglo-American union often hailed as an instrument of global justice and perpetual peace (Bell 2014b, 2017b).<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the line between science fiction – then emerging as a popular medium for both critiquing the present and envisioning assorted futures – and dreams of the Angloworld-to-come, was often blurred, the fictional and non-fictional discourses interpenetrating. In particular, both emphasised the revolutionary potential of technology, its ability to reshape social structures, geopolitical alignments, and human subjectivity. Imaginative renderings of future Anglo-American unification and global domination – often in the wake of cataclysmic war – were a prominent feature of late Victorian and Edwardian science fiction on both sides of the Atlantic.

---

<sup>8</sup> For an interesting discussion of popular culture and politics, see Furman and Musgrave (2017).

Although Wells did not write the New Republic into any of his novels, *Anticipations* and *Mankind in the Making* figured the electrical telegraph as animating the living body of the new polity, generating a form of distributed cognition, even consciousness, among its scattered elements. They can be read as contributions to the science fiction of empire. He conjured up the vision of a *cyborg imperium* – a translocal fusion of humans and machines, acting as a single entity and endowed with a form of agency, poised to order and rule the world.

Wells rejected the racial theories on which most accounts of Anglo-American union were based. In *A Modern Utopia*, published in 1905, Wells warned that “the world is in a sort of delirium about race and the racial struggle,” a delirium legitimated by a “vast edifice of sham science” (Wells 2005a, 218, 224).<sup>9</sup> This had to be confronted, for it underwrote some of the worst problems facing humanity. This error took different forms. Some thinkers assumed that there was a “best race,” and regarded all others as inferior, even as “material for extermination.” Dreaming of *Weltpolitik*, stern German professors asserted the superiority of the “Teuton,” while their British equivalent, Cecil Rhodes – himself an enthusiastic Anglo-American unionist (Rhodes 1902) – “affected that triumph of creative imagination,” the “Anglo-Saxon race.” Such racial supremacism augured a world of death and destruction. For those aiming to establish a “*Welt-Apparat*” – a “global police machine” – it was a “perfectly sound and reasonable policy,” but it would necessitate “national harrowing and reaping machines, and race-destroying fumigations” (Wells 2005a, 229). The climacteric of Rhodes’s politics, Wells suggested, was genocide enacted on a global scale.

Even if one “race” did manage to predominate, Wells continued, it would then subdivide into competing factions, and conflict would begin anew. It was an invitation to perpetual war. While such “scientific Welt-Politik” was a relatively marginal idea, Wells contended that the modern

---

<sup>9</sup> On *fin de siècle* British racial discourses is Lorimer (2013).

imperialist school was far more influential. It was possible to distinguish variations on the theme: German, British and Anglo-Saxon, as well as a “wider teaching which embraces the whole ‘white race.’” Proponents of each identified their own “race” as the chosen one, looking “with a resolute, truculent, but slightly indistinct eye to a future in which all the rest of the world will be in subjection to those elect” (Wells 2005a, 229-30). Wells cited Benjamin Kidd’s *Control of the Tropics* (1898) as exemplary. Kidd had argued that the “childish” peoples of the world could not be entrusted with the economic development of the untapped resources of the tropics, and that the task should be assigned to the advanced “white states,” which would administer the land for the benefit of humanity.

Wells argued that contemporary racial theory was derived from a dangerous combination of speculative philology and misappropriated evolutionary biology (Bell 2017a). In *Anticipations*, he had scorned the “oil-lamp anthropology” of those “[u]nobservant, over-scholarly people” who “talk or write in the profoundest manner about a Teutonic race and a Keltic race” (Wells 1999, 124, 123). He later blamed the influential philologist Max Müller for inspiring the misguided search for a “new political synthesis in adaptable sympathies based on linguistic affinities,” a search that had spawned numerous celebratory stories of English Teutonism (2005a, 218; see also 1907b, 383). Yet for Wells this philological theory was premised on the “unaccountable assumption” that language “indicated kindred,” that the linguistic structures apparently shared by the Indo-Europeans identified a common “Teutonic” racial descent (2005a, 218). This argument informed many projects for Anglo-American union. Müller’s work also underpinned the “comparative method” propagated by a raft of prominent historians and anthropologists, including Henry Maine, Edward Augustus Freeman, and J. R. Seeley, that did so much to shape the late nineteenth-century academic disciplines of political science and history (Burrow, Collini & Winch 1983; Adcock, 2014; Den Otter, 2007). Wells was never convinced.

Although Wells was firmly committed to a Huxleyean understanding of evolution (Huxley 1989a, 1989b; Wells 1901, 1975a; Hale 2014, ch. 6), he deprecated the widespread abuse of Darwinian insights by contemporary political thinkers. They traded in a “bastard science” (Wells 2005a, 219), justifying their positions by appeals to authority that often bore little relation to contemporary scientific opinion. Wells’s philosophical commitments reinforced the latest findings of the biologists. Scholars of his international and imperial ideology have missed this aspect of his work, yet it is vital for understanding his political thought. During the opening years of the century he expounded an idiosyncratic form of philosophical pragmatism, indebted heavily to William James (Bell, 2017a, 2018). At the core of his philosophical vision was a nominalist metaphysics that issued in severe scepticism about the truth-value of classification. During the early Edwardian years Wells elaborated this argument in a series of philosophical works, most thoroughly in “Scepticism of the Instrument” (1904), and utilised it to intervene in debates over the methodology of social science (Wells 1907a; Bell 2017a). Nominalism underwrote his scepticism about race. The pragmatist philosophy of the unique, he argued in *A Modern Utopia*, demonstrated that the “mania” for race was fundamentally misguided. Races were “no hard and fast things, no crowd of identically similar persons,” but instead “massed sub-races and tribes and families each after its kind unique, and these again are clusterings of still smaller uniques and so down to each several person” (2005a, 220, 23; see also 2016b, 67). Here Wells invoked both methodological and ontological individualism. Human groups were no more than the sum of their parts. Since all persons were “individualized,” he rejected the claim that racial differences were inherent and “insurmountable” (Wells 2005a, 221).

Yet despite his explicit rejection of racial theorising, Wells’s early work presented a racialized picture of the New Republic. Although he grounded his vision of an emergent polity on linguistic foundations, it was very hard to practically distinguish from explicitly racial accounts of the English-speaking peoples or Anglo-Saxondom: it drew from the same stock of images,

terms, and conceptual resources. Moreover, his constant resort to charged racial markers – and in particular his tendency to classify polities as “white,” “yellow,” and “black” – highlighted an inability to escape the dominant interpretive frameworks shaping perceptions of the world. Moreover, even as he rejected racial classification, Wells reaffirmed a Eurocentric developmental account, one in which societies were assigned a place in a hierarchy at the top of which resided the advanced (“efficient”) Europeans and Americans, who were given the role of helping backward peoples to reach their immanent potential. Ultimately, then, Wells offered a distinctive variation on the theme of liberal imperialism.

### **American Pathologies**

In April 1906 Wells visited the United States for the first time. He collected his thoughts in *The Future in America*, a popular addition to the genre of travelogues that attempted to divine the inner essence of the country (Frankel 2007; Seed 2016). Widely regarded as embodying the future, the United States was viewed as both laboratory and template for social change. It was one of his most successful books. William James informed Wells that it was as “good a service as a foreigner has ever performed.”<sup>10</sup> Franklin Giddings, one of the leading sociologists in the United States, was even more effusive: “It is a wonderfully true book, and I am deeply thankful that you have said to the American people all the things which it contains. As a general sociological description of the essentials of a big national society this study is immeasurably the best thing that has ever been done by anybody.”<sup>11</sup> While these judgements exaggerate the quality of Wells’s book, they highlight the esteem in which many held him.

---

<sup>10</sup> James to Wells, December 4 1906, in James (2003), XI, 290.

<sup>11</sup> Giddings to Wells, 6/2/1906, Wells papers, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

*The Future in America* marked an important, but unacknowledged, shift in Wells's account of future global order. While he reiterated his view that Britain and the United States were bound together by a shared history and destiny, he silently dropped his backing for synthesis. "Our future is extraordinarily bound up in America's and in a sense dependent upon it," but not, he maintained, because "we dream very much of political reunions of Anglo Saxondom and the like" (Wells 2016a, 22). It was as if he had never written *Anticipations* or *Mankind in the Making*. Wells glided from impassioned prophecy-cum-endorsement to outright rejection, without flagging the move for his readers. Nor did the Larger Synthesis warrant a mention in Wells's other major political writings of the pre-war era, including *New Worlds for Old*, *First and Last Things* or his extended essay on "The Great State" (1912). He had moved on.

The answer to this puzzle, I want to suggest, lies chiefly in what Wells learned from his travels around the United States. He went in search of America's dream of the future but was underwhelmed by what he found. The key to American destiny, like that of any country, was the coherence and quality of its national *will* (2016a, 19). He travelled there, he informed his readers, "to find whatever consciousness or a common purpose there may be," and to ask,

... what is their Vision, their American Utopia, how much will there is shaping to attain it, how much capacity goes with the will – what, in short, there is in America, over and above the mere mechanical consequences of scattering multitudes of energetic Europeans athwart a vast healthy, productive and practically empty continent in the temperate zone (Wells 2016a, 21).

Wells never defined national *will* clearly, nor discussed how it could be measured, but the quest for this elusive property shadowed his visit and shaped his conclusions. Writing aboard the ocean-liner *Carmania* as she hurtled across the Atlantic to New York, Wells confessed that in researching his trip he had struggled to find an idea of the future animating American life (Wells

2016a, 21, 22-3).<sup>12</sup> This indictment was amply confirmed during his travels. *The Future in America* is as much a study of disenchantment as of celebration. The United States was thriving economically, and Wells was awed by the scale and tempo of change, but the social conditions, the political system, and the intellectual life of the country, were all worryingly defective. This diagnosis, I contend, had deep implications for Wells's account of future geopolitics.

The overriding problem was that the United States promoted a hyper-competitive capitalist ethos rooted in extreme individualism and motivated by worship of private property. This simultaneously drove the motor of change and threatened to undermine the epochal promise of the country. "Property becomes organized, consolidated, concentrated and secured. This is the fact to which America is slowly awakening at the present time." In a system based on democratic equality, lacking a landed aristocracy and a proletariat, unrestrained capitalism generated a massive concentration of wealth. This dynamic threatened the very foundations of society (Wells 2016a, 77, 78). The fabled robber barons, Astor, Morgan, Rockefeller, and Carnegie, stood at the apex of this bloated system, accumulating unimaginable riches at the expense of the poor. It is little wonder that Wells sympathised with the Progressives fighting the obscene excesses of the Gilded Age, or that many leading Progressive thinkers embraced him as an inspiration and ally (Bell 2017a).

Wells was struck by the diversity of the American population, but he maintained that its vibrant core was descended from British colonists. While the "typical" American was "nowhere and everywhere," Wells insisted that "he" was nevertheless an "English-speaking person, with extraordinary English traits still, in spite of much good German and Scandinavian and Irish blood he has assimilated." But dangers abounded. Some of the most despondent – and racist –

---

<sup>12</sup> Wells cited assorted sources for his research, including Thodore Roosevelt, Thorstein Veblen, Moisey Ostrogorsky, and the psychologist Hugo Munsterberg (2016a, 112).

passages in *The Future in America* concerned the threat of unchecked immigration. They reflected on one of the most fiercely contested debates in American politics, characterised by vicious hostility to immigrants from East Asia, eastern Europe, and Ireland (Lake & Reynolds 2008; Vitalis 2015). Wells argued that the United States was foolishly admitting huge numbers of peasants from Central and Eastern Europe, and transmuted them “into a practically illiterate industrial proletariat.” Uneducated, uncivilized, and poorly disciplined – *inefficient* – the teeming masses threatened social stability and political destiny. Crowded in festering slums, they were easily manipulated by machine politicians, their sheer numbers stoking ethnic tensions and undercutting wages. The country faced an urgent choice: improve the machinery of assimilation or close the border (Wells 2016a, 109, 132). Although Wells emphasised “efficiency” rather than “race,” his arguments dovetailed with nativism. Unsurprisingly, he was praised by supporters of tighter immigration restrictions (e.g. Auerbach 1907, 292-301; Warne 1913).

The social crisis precipitated by mass immigration was amplified by other vices. He worried that political myopia hobbled the American system. In particular, Wells diagnosed a pervasive “state-blindness” – a lack of a “sense of the state.” Despite their assertive patriotism, the typical American (male) citizen failed to understand that “his business activities, his private employments, are constituents in a large collective process; that they affect other people and the world forever, and cannot, as he imagines, begin and end with him” (Wells 2016a, 140; Wells, 2008, 111, 245). As Charles Merriam glossed the idea, which was widely adopted by writers in the United States, Wells meant that Americans lacked “political consciousness and interest expressed in political action for the commonweal” (1920, 386-7). This blinkered individualism simultaneously fuelled the hyper-competitive capitalist economy and produced the inequality and social anomie that threatened its very existence. Francis Coker, a young political theorist, commended Wells for pinpointing the lack of imagination displayed by American elites (1914, xiii). For Wells, such intellectual failures damaged the political culture. Intelligence, and especially

“intelligence inspired by constructive passion,” was the “hero” of the “confused drama of human life” (2016a, 184). State-blindness was an impediment to enlightenment, to recognizing both the ills of the contemporary world and strategies for overcoming them. I would argue that the implications of Wells’s argument for a future New Republic and world state were clear. The United States was a poor candidate for leading the effort to fabricate either of them. It was not (yet) ready to engage in the epic task of building globe-spanning political associations.

Despite all of these problems, Wells maintained that the United States was still the best hope for the future of humanity. Because of the “sheer virtue of its size, its free traditions, and the habit of initiative of its people,” it was and would remain the indispensable nation, and with it the “leadership of progress must ultimately rest” (2016a, 230). It was both synthesis and microcosm: a fecund synthesis of peoples and languages carving out an ever-greater role in the world and a microcosm of what may *eventually* supersede the parochial nation-state. Yet absent a fully-developed sense of the state, this would remain more an immanent potentiality than an imminent probability.

### **Civiliser-General: The Value of Empire**

In 1914 Wells added a new preface to the English edition of *Anticipations*. Expressing pleasure at how well the book had lasted, he restated his New Republican prophecy. “The whole of that chapter, the Larger Synthesis, has stood the wear of fourteen years remarkably well. For the most part it might have been written yesterday.” He would change very little if he started afresh (1999, xiii, xiv). Listing a series of errors and miscalculations in the text, Wells was happy to acknowledge faults with the work of his earlier self. Yet Anglo-American union was not among them. On the eve of the First World War, then, he reaffirmed his account of future Angloworld unification.

How can this reaffirmation be squared with his position in *The Future in America*? The answer, I argue, can be found in his views on empire and on time. Visiting the United States had highlighted the substantial differences between the English-speaking polities, as well as their conflicting attitudes to empire. This precluded synthesis in the near future. In the long-run, however, such differences could be overcome – whether through irresistible social forces working their providential magic or by concerted human action – and the English-speaking peoples would fuse into a single political community. The synthesis was pushed deeper into the future. In the meantime, the British empire offered both a vehicle for helping to civilise the world and a template for a world state.

During the Edwardian years Wells threw himself into the maelstrom of imperial debate. Like many radicals, he was ambivalent about the value of imperial rule (Bell 2016; Morefield 2014). Some of his best-known fictional writings have been read as imperial critique – *The War of the Worlds*, after all, opens with the genocide of the Tasmanians and encouraged its readers to have “pity for those witless souls that suffer our dominion” (1898, 249). China Miéville, meanwhile, construes *The First Men in the Moon* as an anti-imperialist parable (2005, xx-xxiv). But it is a mistake to view his early work as evidently anti-imperialist.<sup>13</sup> During the years in which he made a name for himself as an author of scientific romances, he defended a variant of liberal imperialism, and sought to reform and prolong the British empire. Empire, he argued, possessed instrumental not intrinsic value. It was legitimate only insofar as it helped to realize a vitally important goal: the supersession of the system of states and the creation of a universal political order. If and when it stopped being useful, it would need to be replaced. Empire was, as he put it in his autobiography, “a convenience and not a God” (2008, 765). Prior to the First World War,

---

<sup>13</sup> For conflicting accounts of imperialism in Wells’s fiction, see Worth (2010), Deane (2014), ch. 7; Parrinder (1995), 65-80.

Wells was torn between a patriotic impulse to defend the British empire, a visionary enthusiasm for imperium as a model of post-sovereign political order, and disdain for imperial greed and hubris.

The future of the empire was a topic of fierce debate during the Edwardian years (Cain 1996; Howe 191-274; Morefield 2004). At times it occupied the very centre of political life, most notably when in 1903 Joseph Chamberlain, the Tory Secretary of State for the Colonies, initiated his controversial tariff reform campaign. Politicians and intellectuals from across the spectrum joined the fray. Their attention focused principally, as it had for their late Victorian predecessors, on the setter empire – on “Greater Britain” (Bell 2007). Most of those favouring consolidation endorsed one or other version of “imperial federation.” As with the debate over Anglo-American union, which was parasitic on the earlier discourse, imperial federalism encompassed a broad spectrum of plans, ranging from greater informal co-ordination to dreams of a globe-straddling nation-state. By 1900, the debate seemed exhausted, with the Imperial Federation League disbanded, and its heirs fighting over the best way to proceed. It was given fresh impetus by Chamberlain’s program, and then by the insistent promotion of an imperial federal “commonwealth” by the Round Table group (Kendle 1975; May 1995; Morefield 2014, ch 3).

The Fabian Society, which Wells had joined in 1903, was the most pro-imperial of the British socialist organisations of the time. A majority of its leading members – including Sidney Webb and George Bernard Shaw – sanctioned imperialism of one kind or another.<sup>14</sup> However, the Society did not speak with one voice on the topic, and its members disagreed over assorted imperial issues. Wells’s Fabian work focused principally on domestic social and political reform. The main forum for testing and refining his views on empire was the “Co-efficients Club.”

---

<sup>14</sup> Of the Fabians, Wells’s views on empire were closest to those of Sydney Olivier. On Wells’s fraught relationship with the Fabians, see Smith (1986), ch. 4; Partington (2008), 522-33. On Fabian international and imperial thought, see Wilson (2003); Claeys (2010), 180-98.

Established in 1902 by Sidney and Beatrice Webb, it was envisaged as the “Brains Trust” for a new political party committed to improving national efficiency, though it soon morphed into a high-powered discussion group (Semmel 1960, 81).<sup>15</sup> Invitations were extended to a dozen prominent individuals, including Leopold Amery, Bertrand Russell, Halford Mackinder, Leo Maxse, William Pember Reeves, William Hewins, Lord Robert Cecil, and Lord Haldane. Wells was a founding member. While there was some overlap with the Fabians, the group was dominated by Tory imperial reformers. Sidney Webb informed Wells that they planned to address “the aims, policy and methods of Imperial Efficiency at home and abroad” (Harrison 2000, 327). Wells later recalled that the monthly meetings of the group in 1902 and 1903 had probed the “future of this perplexing, promising and frustrating Empire of ours,” and that they played “an important part in my education” (Wells 2008, 761).

There was widespread agreement among the Co-efficients on the need to consolidate the British colonial empire, though they diverged over questions of imperial economic organisation and defence.<sup>16</sup> In March 1903 the group discussed Anglo-American relations. The minutes, penned by Amery and Mackinder, document a wide-ranging debate, recording that “it was generally concluded that circumstances would ultimately bring about some form of Anglo-Saxon union,” though this was not imminent. Obstacles persisted; patience was necessary. They finished by noting that the group was split between supporters of an active policy to encourage union, and those professing caution.<sup>17</sup> The general consensus about the future signals how widespread belief in union was at the time.

---

<sup>15</sup> Informal groups were central to imperial debate in Edwardian Britain (Thompson 2000).

<sup>16</sup> Co-efficient Minute book, 1902-3, Assoc-17, London School of Economics and Political Science.

<sup>17</sup> 16/3/1903, Co-efficient Minute book, 1902-3, 3. It is likely Wells was one of those pushing an active policy.

In January 1905 Wells presented a paper to the Club, asking “What Part are the Coloured Races Destined to Play in the Future Development of Civilisation?” It illustrates both his critique of prevailing accounts of race and his failure to escape the assumptions of the position he aimed to reject. Wells opened by defining civilization as the achievement of peace, first between individuals and then between polities. This argument provoked numerous objections. In particular, it was asserted that many of the most civilised states had been bellicose, and some of the least civilised – the “Australian black fellow,” for example – were peaceful. Civilization, the majority of his audience contended, was better understood as a combination of material abundance and organisational sophistication. Wells ploughed on, rejecting the “biologic-evolutionary” idea that there were intrinsic differences between races. Existing inequalities, he maintained, could be explained by structural variables, and in principle they could be overcome. However, Wells still distinguished between “coloured” races that were capable of contributing to civilization on an equal basis with the “white” races, and those that would have to contribute in a different manner: “even if deficient in brainpower, some of these races possess physical characteristics which might render them, either pure or interbred with higher races, the only possible basis of civilization in certain parts of the world.”<sup>18</sup> Those places and races were left unnamed, but the image Wells conjured up was a familiar one, the peoples of the world arrayed in a developmental hierarchy, with those at the top duty-bound to help those below them. This was a conventional liberal imperial narrative, fleshed out with an unorthodox account of civilization and a scathing critique of racial science.

Wells was on friendly terms with some of the leading imperial ideologues of the day. His closest interlocutor was Amery, a prominent journalist turned political campaigner. Originally a Fabian, Amery soon drifted into the orbit of the Tory social-imperialists under the spell of Alfred

---

<sup>18</sup> “What Part are the Coloured Races Destined to Play in the Future Development of Civilisation?” 18/01/1905, *Co-efficient Minute book*, 1904-5, 1-4.

Milner.<sup>19</sup> In his satirical novel of 1911, *The New Machiavelli*, Wells cast him as Crupp, a progressive Tory devoted to both domestic reform and empire. For “persons like ourselves,” Amery wrote to Wells in September 1903, it made sense to “get our Imperialism independent of Tory party politics.”<sup>20</sup> The future of the empire was too important to be left to the vicissitudes of party political conflict. The two men had much in common. “Our minds certainly worked very much alike in many ways,” Amery observed later, “and for some years we saw a good deal of each other” (1953, 223). He marvelled at Wells’s extraordinary insight into technological developments, and the fertility of his imagination, though he rejected his scientific rationalism (1953, 225-26). As Wells recognised, his dream of an English-speaking New Republic resonated strongly with the “constructive” imperialism of Milner and Amery. In a self-reflective moment in *First and Last Things*, he acknowledged that the New Republicans of *Anticipations* and *Mankind in the Making* were less a desirable ideal than an extrapolation of existing political trends (Wells 2016b, 114). “Most of the people who have written to me to call themselves New Republicans,” he observed, “are I find also Imperialists and Tariff Reformers,” and of his contemporaries, those who best approximated the model were Milner “and the Socialist-Unionists of his group,” men who were as “a type harshly constructive, inclined to an unscrupulous pose and slipping into a Kiplinesque brutality” (Wells 2016b, 115). The young Winston Churchill was another devotee, and his later promotion of the “English-speaking peoples” owed much to the inspiration of Wells (Toye 2008).

Wells’s most detailed Edwardian account of the subject, “Cement of Empire,” was published in *Everybody’s Weekly* in 1911. He defended an idealized liberal vision of the British empire. In doing so, he diverged from his former co-efficient colleagues. Hewins, Maxse, Amery, Milner and Mackinder, for example, all supported Chamberlain’s program. Indeed Hewins, the political

---

<sup>19</sup> On Amery, see Faber (2007); Louis (1992), 29-75. Faber describes Wells as Amery’s regular “sparring partner” (311).

<sup>20</sup> Amery to Wells, [???] Wells papers, A108-1.

economist of the group, was arguably the key influence on Chamberlain's conversion to tariff reform (Wood 1983, ch. 9).<sup>21</sup> Wells demurred. Nor was he attracted to the view that imperial federation could serve a vehicle for realizing a radical liberal (even socialist) political agenda, a view promoted, at one time or another, by J. A. Hobson, L. T. Hobhouse, Keir Hardie and H. M. Hyndman (Claeys 2010, 207-9). Some even saw it as a template for a future post-Westphalian order. Thus in 1911 Hobhouse stated that it was "a model, and that on no mean scale, of the International State" (1994, 116). Wells was unconvinced.

Wells contended that the empire was a fortuitous product of accident and individual endeavour, rather than coherent government policy. "The normal rulers of Britain never planned it; it happened almost in spite of them" (Wells 1911, 38). It was less a vehicle of conquest than of "colonisation and diplomacy." (Given Wells's earlier acknowledgment of the fate of the Tasmanians, it is striking that he did not regard colonisation as a form of violent conquest). Echoing a common trope, he maintained that the British empire was unprecedented. "Essentially it is an adventure of the British spirit, sanguine, discursive, and beyond comparison, insubordinate, adaptable, and originating" (1911, 33, 37-8; on this trope, see Bell 2016, chs. 2 & 5). Aligning himself with those who "desire its continuance," he launched an attack on projects for imperial preference and an integrated imperial defence system, arguing that they were gravely flawed. They shared the same weakness as all plans for imperial federation: there was little that united the "incurably scattered, various and divided" empire. It faced no common foe to catalyse a sense of common purpose. Wells argued that if it was understood properly, and if it acted to improve the lives of its subjects, it could and should endure. He said little about institutional innovation, implying that he thought the existing governance structure was suitable. "It is to the

---

<sup>21</sup> In the 1950s Russell mistakenly recalled that he and Wells were the only non-imperialist Co-efficients (1956, 77). He might have been projecting Wells's later views into his earlier self.

free consent and participation of its constituent peoples that we must look for its continuance” (Wells 1911, 37, 34).

It is a living thing that has arisen, not a dead thing put together. Beneath the thin legal and administrative ties that hold it together lies the far more vital bond of a traditional free spontaneous activity. It has a common medium of expression in the English tongue, a unity of liberal and tolerant purpose amidst its enormous variety of localized life and colour. And it is in the developing and strengthening, the enrichment, the rendering more conscious and more purposeful, of that broad creative spirit of the British that the true cement and continuance of our Empire is to be found (1911, 38).

If it was to be anything, the empire had to be a liberal civilizing force. The English language was fundamental to its resilience. Since language was an agent of civilization, the empire had to become the “medium of knowledge and thought to every intelligent person in it” (1911, 39). It was to become a vast cyborg technology for the progressive education of humanity. Although his discussion of institutional reform was vague, Wells’s commitment to liberal imperialism was clear.

However, there were serious obstacles to realizing the full potential of empire. To become “civiliser-general,” it had to be governed by an enlightened administration and overseen by politicians who understood its true value. Instead, it was endangered by the “intellectual inertness” of those entrusted to rule, the “commonplace and dull-minded leaders” (Wells 1911, 39, 40-1). This was a recurrent theme in Wells’s Edwardian writings. His searing reflections on deficiencies in the British education system were inflected by a concern that schools were incapable of producing citizens and leaders equipped to pursue the imperial mission. He lambasted private schools for manufacturing docile, unimaginative drones. “I submit this may be

a very good training for polite servants, but it is not the way to make masters in the world” (1905, 227). The incompetence of the imperial class even threatened the settler empire, as people in Australia, Canada and New Zealand had already begun to turn to the United States for ideas and inspiration (Wells 2016b, 42). Moreover, a successful liberal empire required its citizens to behave in a civilized manner. This too was lacking. In *The Future in America*, Wells had castigated the vicious racism of white southerners in the United States. His compatriots were no better. British settlers living in the Cape, for example, exhibited the same deplorable attitude: “the dull prejudice; the readiness to take advantage of the ‘boy’; the utter disrespect for colored womankind; the savage, intolerant resentment, dashed dangerously with fear, which the native arouses in him” (2016a, 169, 170). Fully realizing the potential of the British empire required substantial change. It was threatened by the very people who hymned its virtues the loudest.

The empire, then, was worth saving. However, this created a problem for Wells, because British imperialism was a bar to union with the United States. When he was composing *Anticipations*, Washington seemed ready to embark on a policy of overseas expansion, perhaps in conjunction with the British. An era of Anglo-American inter-imperialism beckoned. Cementing ties between the polities would accelerate the creation of a New Republic. The vast new polity would properly fulfil the role of Civiliser-General, educating the world’s peoples for their eventual integration into the world-state. Yet by the time Wells visited the United States in 1906, he sensed that imperial enthusiasm had cooled. The Americans were even ready to shed the Philippines “at as early a date as possible” (Wells 2016a, 111). Wells recognised that future American political development would fall principally within continental bounds, while the British remained wedded to their imperial project. “So long as we British retain our wide and accidental sprawl of empire across the earth we cannot expect or desire the Americans to share our stresses and entanglements” (Wells 2016, 22). Given the position of the British empire, and the current

failings of the United States, it made sense to temporarily prioritise the improvement of the former over reintegration with the latter. The New Republic had to be deferred.

### **Conclusion: Towards Cosmopolis**

Wells was one of the most influential theorists of global order during the first half of the twentieth century. He made his name as a social and political commentator during the Edwardian years, his work attracting the attention of a huge audience throughout the world, and drawing praise from some of the leading political scientists, sociologists, philosophers, and politicians of the day. Tracing the early development of his ideas about empire, race and the world state, sheds light on an important contributor to modern international and imperial political thought.

Wells's Edwardian writings explored two possible institutional foundations for the world-state. It might be built on the back of the British empire or through Anglo-American union. Initially, Wells believed that the two models could be fused together, but it soon became apparent that this was unrealistic. They pulled in different directions. *Anticipations* looked a century into the future, whereas *The Future in America* scanned a closer horizon. In the former, Wells had been sanguine that Britain and the United States were sufficiently alike to merge seamlessly together into a "Larger Synthesis." The latter expressed a more cautious outlook. His transatlantic visit convinced him that Washington was turning away from overseas imperialism and that the ubiquity of "state-blindness" rendered the country unfit to shoulder the burden of state-building on a global scale. Wells thought that the tension could be resolved through the medium of time. The unrelenting processes transforming the world would eradicate or transcend the obstacles to union in due course. The shared identity of the English-speaking polities was more fundamental than their differences, and it trumped disputes over imperial rule. "[O]ur civilization," he proclaimed in *The Future in America*, "is a different thing from our Empire, a thing that reaches

further into the future,” and Americans were part “of our community, are becoming indeed the larger part of our community of thought and feeling and outlook,” and this was far more “intimate than any link we have with Hindoo or Copt or Cingalese” (2016a, 22-3). The English-speaking peoples would unite eventually, constituting the vanguard of the world-state.

In the short-term, however, the British empire – at least if governed properly – could serve as a “civiliser-general,” combating ignorance and spreading progressive institutions and values. In doing so, it could help to dissolve nationalism and prepare people throughout the world for the emergence of a new universal order. The “precursor of a world-state or nothing” (2008, 765), it was a self-dissolving enterprise. In the following years, Wells’s thinking on global order continued to develop, and he became increasingly hostile to the empire, but he never lost his fascination with the English-speaking peoples, nor his fervent belief that they were fated to shape the future of the world.

## **Bibliography**

Adams, Iestyn. 2005. *Brothers Across The Ocean: British Foreign Policy and the Origins of the Anglo-American ‘Special Relationship.’* London: Tauris.

Adcock, Robert. 2014. *Liberalism and the Emergence of Political Science: A Transatlantic Tale.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Amery, Leopold. 1953. *My Political Life, Vol 1.* London: Hutchinson.

Anderson, Stuart. 1981. *Race and Rapprochement: Anglo-Saxonism and Anglo-American Relations, 1895-1904.* Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.

Ashworth, Lucian. 1999. *Creating International Studies: Angell, Mitrany and the Liberal Tradition.* Aldershot: Ashgate.

Auerbach, Joseph. 1907. Review of Wells, *Future in America*, *North American Review* 104(608): 292-301.

- Baylen, Joseph. 1974. "W. T. Stead and the Early Career of H. G. Wells, 1895-1911," *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 38(1): 53-79.
- Bell, Duncan. 2018. "Pragmatism and Prophecy: H. G. Wells on the Metaphysics of Socialism." *American Political Science Review* (FirstView)
- 2017a. "Pragmatic Utopianism and Race: H. G. Wells as Social Scientist." *Modern Intellectual History* (FirstView).
- 2017b. "Race, Utopia, Perpetual Peace: Andrew Carnegie's Dreamworld." In *American Foreign Policy: Studies in Intellectual History*, edited by Jean-Francois Drolet and James Dunkerley, 46-67. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
2016. *Reordering the World: Essays on Liberalism and Empire*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- 2014a. "Beyond the Sovereign State: Isopolitan Citizenship, Race, and Anglo-American Union." *Political Studies* 62(2): 418-34.
- 2014b. "Before the Democratic Peace: Racial Utopianism, Empire, and the Abolition of War." *European Journal of International Relations* 20(3): 647-70.
2007. *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860-1900*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Blatt, Jessica. 2018. *Race and the Making of American Political Science*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Burrow, John, Stefan Collini, and Donald Winch. 1983. *That Noble Science of Politics: A Study in 19th-Century Intellectual History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Buzan, Barry & Lawson, George. 2015. *The Global Transformation: History, Modernity and the Making of International Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cain, Peter. 1996. "The Economic Philosophy of Constructive Imperialism." In *British Politics and the Spirit of the Age: Political Concepts in Action*, edited by Cornelia Navari, 41-65. Keele: Keele University Press.
- Cabrera, Luis. 2010. "World Government: Renewed Debate, Persistent Challenges." *European Journal of International Relations* 16(3): 511-30.
- Chesterton, G. K. 1904. *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*. London: Bodley.
- Claeys, Gregory. 2010. *Imperial Sceptics: British Critics of Empire, 1850-1920*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Coker, Francis. 1914. *Readings in Political Philosophy*. London: Macmillan.
- Conrad, Sebastian and Dominic Sachsenmaier, eds. 2007. *Competing Visions of World Order*. Basingstoke
- Craig, Campbell. 2008. "The Resurgent Idea of World Government." *Ethics & International Affairs* 22(2): 133-42
- Deane, Bradley. 2014. *Masculinity and the New Imperialism: Rewriting Manhood in British Popular Literature, 1870-1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Den Otter, Sandra. 2007. "The Origins of a Historical Political Science in Late Victorian and Edwardian Britain." In *Modern Political Science: Anglo-American Exchanges since 1880*, edited by Robert Adcock, Mark Bevir and Shannon Stimson, 37-66. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Deniker, Joseph. 1900. *The Races of Man: An Outline of Anthropology and Ethnography*. London: Walter Scott
- Deudney, Daniel. 2008. *Bounding Power: Republican Security Theory from the Polis to the Global Village*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
2001. "Greater Britain or Greater Synthesis? Seeley, Mackinder and Wells on Britain in the Global Industrial Era." *Review of International Studies* 27(2): 187-208.
- Dicey, A. V. 1897. "A Common Citizenship for the English Race." *Contemporary Review* 71: 457-76.
- Earle, Edward Mead. 1950. "H.G. Wells, British Patriot in Search of a World State." *World Politics* 2(2): 181-208.
- Faber, David. 2007. *Speaking for England: Leo, Julian and John Amery*. London: Simon & Schuster.
- Frankel, Robert. 2007. *Observing America: The Commentary of British Visitors to the United States, 1890-1950*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press
- Furman, Daniel and Paul Musgrave. 2017. "Synthetic Experiences: How Popular Culture Matters for Images of International Relations." *International Studies Quarterly*, 61(3): 503-16.
- Hale, Piers. 2014. *Political Descent: Malthus, Mutualism, and the Politics of Evolution in Victorian England*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Hall, Ian. 2006. *The International Thought of Martin Wight*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Hardy, Sylvia. 1991. "H.G. Wells and Language." PhD Dissertation, University of Leicester.
- Harrison, Royden. 2000. *The Life and Times of Sidney and Beatrice Webb*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Hobhouse, L. T. 1994. *Liberalism*, ed. J. Meadowcroft. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hobson, J. A. 1997. *Imperialism: A Study* [1902] ed. Philip Siegelman. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Holthaus, Leonie. 2018. *Pluralist Democracy in International Relations: L.T. Hobhouse, G.D.H. Cole, and David Mitrany*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Horsman, Reginald. 1981. *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism*. Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press.
- Howe, Anthony. 1997. *Free Trade and Liberal England, 1846-1946*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Huxley, T. H. 1989a. "Prolegomena to *Ethics and Evolution*" (1894). In *T.H. Huxley's "Evolution and Ethics"*, edited by James Paradis and George Williams, 59-104. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- 1989b. "Evolution and Ethics" (1893). In *Huxley's "Evolution and Ethics,"* 104-145.
- James, William. 2003. *The Correspondence of William James*, XI, ed. Ignas Skrupskelis and Elizabeth Berkeley. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.
- Kidd, Benjamin. 1898. *The Control of the Topics*. London: Macmillan.
- Kendle, John. 1975. *The Round Table Movement and Imperial Union*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Kupchan, Charles. 2012. *How Enemies Become Friends* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).
- Louis, William Roger. 1992. *In the Name of God, Go! Leo Amery and the British Empire in the Age of Churchill*. New York: Norton.
- Lake, Marilyn and Henry Reynolds. 2007. *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Long, David. 1991. *Towards a New Liberal Internationalism: The International Theory of J.A. Hobson*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Long, David and Brian Schmidt, eds. 2005. *Imperialism and Internationalism in the Discipline of International Relations*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Lorimer, Douglas. 2013. *Science, Race Relations and Resistance: Britain, 1870-1914*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- May, Alex. 1995. "The Round Table, 1910-1966," Unpublished D.Phil, University of Oxford.
- Mazower, Mark. 2009. *No Enchanted Palace*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Merriam, Charles. 1920. *American Political Ideas: Studies in the Development of American Political Thought, 1865-1917*. London: Macmillan
- Miéville, China. 2005. "Introduction." In Wells, *The First Men in the Moon*, ed. Patrick Parrinder, xiii-xxix. London: Penguin.
- Morefield, Jeanne. 2014. *Empires without Imperialism: Anglo-American Decline and the Politics of Deflection*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
2004. *Covenants without Swords: Idealist Liberalism and the Spirit of Empire*. Princeton: Princeton University Press
- Parrinder, Patrick. 1995. *Shadows of the Future: H.G. Wells, Science Fiction and Prophecy*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
- Partington, John. 2008. "H.G. Wells: A Political Life." *Utopian Studies* 19(3): 517-76
2007. "Human Rights and Public Accountability in H.G. Wells's Functional World State" in Gary Banham and Diane Morgan (eds.), *Cosmopolitics and the Emergence of a Future*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 163-90.
2005. "Revising *Anticipations*: Wells on Race and Class, 1901 to 1905." *The Undying Fire* 4: 31-44.
- 2003a. *Building Cosmopolis: The Political Thought of H. G. Wells*. Farnham: Ashgate

- 2003b. "H.G. Wells and the World State: A Liberal Cosmopolitan in a Totalitarian Age." *International Relations* 17(2): 233-46.
- Perkins, Bradford. 1968. *The Great Rapprochement: England and the United States, 1895-1914*. New York: Atheneum
- Philmus, Robert & David Hughes, ed. 1975. *H.G. Wells: Early Writings in Science & Science Fiction*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Planinc, Emma. 2017. "Catching up with Wells: The Political Thought of H.G. Wells's Science Fiction." *Political Theory*, 45(5): 637-58.
- Rhodes, Cecil. 1902. *The Last Will and Testament of Cecil J. Rhodes*, ed. W.T. Stead. London: Review of Reviews.
- Rock, Stephen. 1997. "Anglo-U.S. Relations, 1845-1930." In *Paths to Peace: Is Democracy the Answer?* edited by Miriam Fendius Elman, 101-49. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Rosenboim, Or. 2017. *The Emergence of Globalism: Visions of World Order in Britain and the United States, 1939-1950*. Princeton: Princeton University Press
- Russell, Bertrand. 1958. *Portraits from Memory and Other Essays*. London: Allen & Unwin.
- Schmidt, Brian. 1998. *The Political Discourse of Anarchy: A Disciplinary History of International Relations*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Searle, G. R. 1971. *The Quest for National Efficiency: A Study in British Politics and Political Thought, 1899-1914*. Berkeley: University of California Press
- Seed, David. 2016. "The Land of the Future: British Accounts of the USA at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century." *European Journal of American Studies*, 11(2): 1-23.  
(2010) "The Course of Empire: A Survey of the Imperial Theme in Early Anglophone Science Fiction," *Science Fiction Studies*, 37/2: 230-252.
- Semmel, Bernard. 1960. *Imperialism and Social Reform: English Social-Imperial Thought, 1895-1914*. New York: Doubleday.
- Smith, David. 1998. *The Correspondence of H.G. Wells*, ed. David Smith, 4 vols. London: Pickering & Chatto.  
1986. *H. G. Wells: Desperately Mortal*. London: Yale University Press.
- Sylvest, Casper. 2009. *British Liberal Internationalism, 1880-1930: Making Progress?* Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Thompson, Andrew. 2000. *Imperial Britain: The Empire in British Politics, 1880-1932*. London: Routledge.
- Tonooka, Chika. 2017. "Reverse Emulation and the Cult of Japanese Efficiency in Edwardian Britain." *Historical Journal* 60(1): 95-119.
- Toye, Richard. 2008. "H.G. Wells and Winston Churchill: A Reassessment." In *H. G. Wells: Interdisciplinary Essays*, edited by Steven McLean, 147-61. Newcastle: Scholars Publishing.

- Vitalis, Robert. 2015. *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Vucetic, Srdjan. 2011a. *The Anglosphere: A Genealogy of a Racialised Identity in International Relations*. Stanford: Stanford University Press
- 2011b. "A Racialized Peace? How Britain and the US Made Their Relationship Special." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 7(4): 403-21.
- Wagar, Warren. 1961. *H.G. Wells and the World State*. London: Yale University Press.
- Warne, Frank Julian. 1913. *The Immigrant Invasion*. New York: Frank.
- Weiss, Thomas. 2009. "What Happened to the Idea of World Government." *International Studies Quarterly*, 53(2), 253-271.
- Wells, Herbert George. 1898. *The War of the Worlds*. London: Heinemann
1903. *Mankind in the Making*. London: Chapman
1904. "Scepticism of the Instrument." *Mind* 13(51): 379-93
1905. "The Schoolmaster and the Empire." In Wells, *An Englishman*, 218-29.
- 1907a. "The So-Called Science of Sociology." In Wells, *An Englishman*, 192-206.
- 1907b. "Race Prejudice." *The Independent* (New York) 62: 381-84.
1908. *New Worlds for Old*. London: Macmillan.
1911. "Cement of Empire." *Everybody's Weekly*, 1(1): 33-41.
- 1914a. *An Englishman Looks at the World*. London: Cassell.
- 1975a. "Human Evolution, An Artificial Process" (1896). In *Wells*, ed. Philmus & Hughes, 211-19.
- 1975b. "Morals and Civilisation" (1897). In *Wells*, ed. Philmus & Hughes, 220-28.
1999. *Anticipations of the Reactions of Mechanical and Scientific Progress upon Human Life and Thought* [1901] Mineola: Dover.
- 2005a. *A Modern Utopia*, ed. Gregory Claeys (1905). London: Penguin.
- 2005b. *The New Machiavelli*, ed. Simon James. London: Penguin.
2008. *An Experiment in Autobiography*, 2 vols. (1934). London: Faber.
- 2016a. *The Future in America: A Search after Realities* (1906). London: Read.
- 2016b. *First and Last Things: A Confession of Faith and Rule of Life* (1908). London: Read.
- Wilson, Harris, ed. 1960. *Arnold Bennett and H.G. Wells*. Urbana: Illinois University Press.
- Wilson, Peter. 2003. *The International Theory of Leonard Woolf: A Study in Twentieth Century Idealism*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Worth, Aaron. 2010. "Imperial Transmissions: H.G. Wells, 1897-1901." *Victorian Studies*, 53(1): 65-89.
- Wood, John Cunningham. 1983. *British Economists and the Empire*. London: Croom Helm.