

The Liberal Way of War

*“What conclusions are we to draw from this melancholy story of the efforts of good men to abolish war but only succeeding thereby in making it more terrible?”
(Sir Michael Howard, “War and the Liberal Conscience,” 1978: 130)*

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INTRODUCTION

In 1977, the distinguished English military historian Sir Michael Howard, then Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford University, gave a celebrated series of Trevelyan Lectures to the University of Cambridge. The lectures were entitled *War and the Liberal Conscience* (1978). A deeply conservative, in English we would say Tory, historian, and steeped in the modern geopolitical understanding of war, Howard described George Macaulay Trevelyan, in whose honour the lectures were given, as “the last of the great Victorian Liberal historians – perhaps the last of the great Victorian liberals.” Honouring the name in which he gave the lectures did not, however, prevent Howard from delivering what has become the classic indictment of what I would prefer to call directly ‘The Liberal Way of War’. In a wide ranging discussion, from Erasmus and Machiavelli in the Renaissance, to the Atlantic liberalism of the 18th century, through the utilitarian liberal imperialism of the 19th century, on into the Wilsonian liberalism which followed the First World War, and, finally, the liberal crusade which characterised the Cold War, Howard tracked the rise of what he called the liberal conscience – “not simply a belief or an attitude,” he says “but also an inner compulsion to act upon it.” (11)

Thus identifying several historical formations or manifestations of the liberal conscience, Howard was to pre-figure the argument of his lectures in the very way in which his preface characterised the man in whose name they were given. George Macaulay Trevelyan, Howard tells us, “was that not uncommon phenomenon, a profoundly pacific and kindly man with a passionate interest in military affairs.” “War was for him,” Howard continued, “the very stuff of history, and he found no difficulty in reconciling it with his liberalism.” But he nonetheless did apparently find it difficult to understand the world in which he was living. “I do not understand the world we live in,” Trevelyan confessed privately in a letter which Howard quotes from 1926, “and what I do understand I do not like.” (10) The signposts of the past seemed to bear little resemblance to the confused present and, Howard observes, Trevelyan was not alone among liberals in being confused by the ways of the world.

This character portrait sets the tone as well as the theme of Howard’s lectures. Liberalism is to be admired for its values but deplored for its idealism. Its proponents are well-intentioned but their actions only serve to compound the troubles of a world whose rules and dynamics they systematically fail to understand. In proclaiming peace, Howard goes on to explain, liberals are nonetheless committed also to making war. The martial face of liberal power is directly fuelled by the universal ambitions for which liberalism is to be admired. Unfortunately, making those ambitions the standards by which you problematise and prosecute war defeats the purpose. Not only has war remained common. Not only has it also become unimaginably more destructive. Waged in pursuit of liberal democracy and perpetual peace, the life of the species globally is now wagered on its political strategies. This is the melancholy story to which Howard refers in my epigraph. The efforts of good men to abolish war “only succeeding thereby in making it more terrible.”

Howard’s ‘melancholy story’ not only provides a powerful allegory for our own times, it does so in a voice which we cannot easily be dismissed as ideologically prejudiced against liberalism, fundamentally hostile to its general value system or nationally prejudiced against the United States as the leading liberal state. Howard subsequently held the Robert A Lovett chair of Military and Naval History at the University of Yale, from which post he retired in 1993.

The parallels between the war on communism, to which Howard makes reference in his final lecture, and our current war on terror are, however, too obvious to be dismissed. The long haul against the moral challenge posed by the Soviet Union announced in the Eisenhower doctrine of NSC 68 is similarly also too reminiscent of the long war now pronounced against El Quaeda, and its global terror networks, to be ignored. The alliance between war-preparation, science, technology and business threatening the very power of liberal citizenship, together with its republican institutions and values, can hardly be said to have diminished as the 20th century drew to a close. The deep fundamentalist religiosity of the liberal way of war - Howard observing that “the United States has always resembled rather a secular church, or perhaps a gigantic sect, than it has the nation-states of the old world.” (116) - has been equally evident in the liberal campaigns of the 21st century as well. We would therefore do well to recall the reminder which Howard supplies that, however diverse and heterogeneous liberal political theory may be, and however much the governmental mechanisms of liberal regimes of power may also change, in addressing the liberal way of war we are nonetheless also dealing with a long-established, if mutable and complex, historical phenomenon.

WAR AND THE LIBERAL CONSCIENCE

Howard begins by reviewing the traditional realist account of the rise of the modern state system, the monopoly of force by the state, the codification of this new international system of states through international law and the acceptance of war as a policy device. The modern conception of force as a necessary instrument in preserving an orderly system of states was only beginning to appear “in the most shadowy of forms,” Howard tells us, in the work of Machiavelli.” (16) By the middle of the 17th century, however (the 1648 Peace of Westphalia, always marking the point of significant difference in this narrative), European society was being organised in a system of states in which war was accepted as an inescapable process for the settlement of disputes between states in the absence of any higher authority than that of the state.

That being the case, Howard says, “it was a requirement of humanity, of religion and of common sense alike that those wars should be fought in such a manner as to cause as little damage as possible.” Soon the details of this philosophy were documented in the works of the great international lawyers of the 17th and 18th centuries: Grotius, Pufendorf and Emeric Vattel. If war could not be eliminated from the international system – indeed it had been installed as a principle mechanism of that system – then the best that could be done was to “codify its rationale and civilise its means”. (18) With the Prussian strategist von Clausewitz, geopolitical analysts maintained that the restrictive political instrumentality of war had also found its codifier. If the European state system had made wars necessary - they not only served to resolve disputes in the absence of a higher authority, they were instrumentally useful also in maintaining the checks and balances of power necessary, it was said, to prevent one state from becoming dominant - they had also made war limited; to rationally calculated political ends at least.

As this geopolitical rationale for the very necessity and instrumentality of war developed into the 20th century – it was not a fall from grace it was an instrument of *politik* –, the deterrent effect of military capability was added to the adjudicating, balancing and political restriction of war as an instrument of state policy. Regulation of a system which had made wars necessary, if restricted to political ends and

confined to the actions of states, gave rise to the *arcana imperii of raison d'etat, realpolitik*, high politics, diplomacy and statecraft. Howard indicts the liberal critique of this system on the grounds that liberals were too nice and pious to understand properly how it functioned.

Howard takes that great liberal agitator and pamphleteer, Thomas Paine, as the summation of the liberal doctrine on politics, power and war. "Tom Paine's synthesis...in *The Rights of Man*," Howard says, "provided a gospel which was to be preached virtually without alteration by many western liberals until our own day. According to this doctrine mankind would naturally live in a state of perfect harmony if it were not for the vested interests of governments." (31) This became a staple of liberal political philosophy. Rousseau, too, remarked that, "each government accuses the other of perfidy, intrigue and ambition, as a means of heating the imagination of their respective nations and incensing them to hostilities. Man is not the enemy of man but through the medium of a false system of government." (30)

Paine did not however simply propagate the view that the problem of war was a problem of wicked systems of government. He also helped lay the foundation for the view that if there was to be war its only proper objective was that of universal human emancipation, sanctioned by an international community premised on the freedom of natural rights. "The cause of the general poverty and wretchedness of mankind," he wrote, "lies not in any natural defect in the principles of civilisation but in preventing those principles having universal operation: the consequence of which is, a perpetual system of war and expense that drains the country and defeats the general felicity of which civilisation is capable." (29) By the second half of the 19th century the English Liberal prime Minister Gladstone concurred that self-interest alone could not justify resort to war. In 1882, he explained his conduct in authorising the bombardment of the port of Alexandria, by the British Mediterranean Fleet, and the subsequent occupation of Egypt, on the grounds that:

"We should not discharge our duty if we did not endeavour to convert the present interior state of Egypt from anarchy and conflict to peace and order. We shall look during the time that remains to use the co-operation of the Powers of civilised Europe. But if every chance of obtaining co-operation is exhausted, the work will be undertaken by the single power of England."

"The American liberal conscience of the fifties," Howard continues after moving through the experiences of the First World War and the interwar period, "tutored by its European mentors of the thirties, could understand and support either a just war or perpetual peace, and it appreciated that the former might be necessary to achieve the latter." (127)

In bringing his story up to the Cold War, Howard finally detailed what he thought was most dangerous and mistaken about the liberal way of war; especially as it manifested itself in the international politics of his day. His target was the way in which liberal universalisation of war in pursuit of perpetual peace impacted on the heterogeneous and adversarial character of international politics, translating war into crusades with only one outcome; the transformation of other societies and cultures into liberal societies and cultures. Liberal wars then "dehumanised the adversary". He ceased to be "a party with fears, perceptions, interests and difficulties of his own; one with whom rational discourse was possible." Speaking of the Cold War in general and the Vietnam War in particular: "Any opposition from any quarter to United States power was traced back to the manipulation of Moscow; and 'world communism' was

seen as a single monolith, subtle patient and powerful adversary..... those who made trouble for America's allies...all tended to be seen as clients of Moscow; an attitude which proved all too often a self-fulfilling prophecy." Once, "every state and every regime whose interests coincided with those of the United States automatically became part of the free world, honorary democracies whatever the nature of their political systems," the criterion of freedom rapidly ceased to be that defined by liberal political theory and became instead "accessibility to American influence and willingness to fall in with the wishes of the United States." (128) The outcome was two things, "which most liberals preferred to ignore." The first was what Howard called, "the cultural heterogeneity of the world," which either demanded some form of peaceful co-existence or the responsibilities and provocations of "cultural imperialism...conquest and re-education" The other was that, "wars conducted by democracies are seldom ended by moderate negotiated peace." (83)

Howard thus provides a summary dismissal of the classic liberal critiques of war as he indicts liberalism itself for its own commitment to war-making. War is not simply a result of the machinations of elites, it often expresses real material conflicts of interest between nations and communities. Commerce will never replace war because not only is war fought for commercial advantage, the logic of commerce mimics that of war. In any event freeing people from the yoke of tyrannous regimes, will not automatically abolish war because free peoples, possessed by national and emancipatory fervour, are just as willing as arms trading merchants of death, or aristocratic elites plotting in the chancelleries of great powers, to promote war. Wars of national liberation prove as long and bloody as wars fed by strategic rivalries.

It is a familiar story. I hardly need draw attention to the way it resonates with the policies and rationalities of liberal imperialism today. Gladstone's concern like that of his contemporary American and British successors, Bush and Blair, was that war needed to be justified by reference to a common interest of mankind over and above the maintenance of the security of the state, or the maintenance of a stable balance of power. And that if the international community was unable or unwilling to grant that sanction then liberal powers had the duty to take the responsibility upon themselves.

THE LIBERAL WAY OF WAR

But the liberals had at least one more potent argument to add to the ones which Howard had dismissed. This was not in fact a liberal argument at all. It was a matter of simple historical record although it was embraced and forcefully put by liberals. It arose with the first World War was confirmed by the experiences of the Second World War and seemed unassailable with the introduction of nuclear weapons and the continuous dissemination of these and other weapons of mass destruction throughout the second half of the 20th century.

However much realists and geo-strategists claimed that war was not only inevitable, because it reflected the originary cupidity of mankind, but also necessary, because it served so many useful political purposes in constraining that very cupidity, the experience of the 20th century fatally subverted this rationale. Restricting war to the ends of politics only worked if the political ends as well as the means of war were themselves, however, limited. The last century became one in which unlimited military means for unlimited political ends became the order of the day. If it was not only inevitable and necessary, as the realists have taught us, war had nonetheless also begun to price itself out of the political market. An historical threshold had been

crossed, the implications of which may not have fully materialised yet, but threshold there has been. With its many weapons of mass destruction, Modern war is capable of destroying mankind by rendering the planet uninhabitable. Every war, and of course there remain many, *in potentia* at least, is a Sarajevo. Globalisation compounds, it does not diminish, this historical transformation.

There is, then, no choosing between the liberals and the geostrategists on the grounds advanced by Howard, and others, that liberal wars are unending crusades whereas geostrategic wars are limited jousts between rationally calculative political actors; a charge laid with much greater philosophical sophistication and force by the German jurist, Carl Schmitt, in the inter-war years. Wars of the 20th century gave the lie to that geopolitical claim. So also did all the evidence accumulated during the crisis management debates of the Cold War that whatever the political motivations concerned, once the threshold of violence is crossed a dynamic is released which exceeds the control of all political actors; geostrategic and liberal alike.

This last point, concerning the ways in which the industrialisation, massification and nuclearisation of warfare crossed an historical threshold in the account of war as an instrument of state policy during the course of the 20th century, was nonetheless well made by liberals after the first world war, although it did not prevent them from joining the crusade against fascism. It was put again by the liberal peace movements of the Cold War, although it did not prevent them from signing up for local wars of global emancipation once the Soviet Bloc disintegrated. A curious and revealing symmetry thus emerges here between the geopolitical account of war which Howard employs to mount his critique of the liberal conscience, and the liberal problematisation of war itself. However much liberalism abjures war, indeed finds the instrumental use of war, especially, a scandal, war has always been as instrumental to liberal, as much as it has been to geo, politics.

This lesson is more widely taught by other schools of thought. Among contemporary sociologists Anthony Giddens in particular has persuasively argued that wars make states and societies as much as societies and states make war. This point subverts the position taken by realists in particular. Since, if wars make states as much as states make war, then we cannot safely assume, as realists do, that wars merely reflect a primal truth about political actors and their universal behaviour. For here the insight of political sociology is that the instrument is not simply wielded by the political subject. It makes that political subject the subject that it is. No state, no society, that makes war is unformed by its experience of violent conflict. In their universalising of war on behalf of human emancipation liberals would do well to recognise the point. It explains how liberal war-making also regularly fails to realise its emancipatory goals. For the point applies to liberal war-makers as much as it does to strategisers. If wars make states and societies, as much as societies and states make war, then liberal war-makers are likely to fare no better than geo-strategists in pursuing their ambitions militarily. All states and all societies which experience war are profoundly transformed by that violence. The unintended consequence of war simply overtake the supposedly rational risk taking of strategists as much as they do the universal ambitions of liberal emancipationists. Here it is worth pausing to recall the words of a different idealist Benedetto Croce:

“For all their boasting, practical men do not know either men or the world; they do not even know the reality of their own works. [If they could return to life], the geniuses of pure politics, the *fatalia monstra* recorded in histories, would be astounded to learn what they have done without being aware of it, and they

would read their own past deeds as in a hieroglyph to which they had been offered the keys.”

In short, war transforms governmental institutions and practices as much as it does political rationalities and civic cultures. It regularly introduces constitutional change, transforms the law and creates new departments of state. It also provides a testing ground for new micro-mechanisms of social, scientific and economic planning, organisation and control. These reach-out across the entire terrain of civil society and transform it. From the emancipation of women, the collapse of empires, the birth of new states and nationalisms as well as the establishment of social welfare schemes, the First and Second World Wars, for example, did more to transform the social, economic and political landscape of the globe, as well as that of Europe and North America, than did all the political activity of social and political reformers combined. Moreover, war has the effect of extending the logic of war deep into the structures and practices of civil society even in the absence of armed conflict. These forces are as powerfully at work today as ever they were in the wars and cold wars of the 20th century. Via its proliferating mechanisms of security and its continuous military preparedness as well as through the wars in which it is also currently engaged, the liberal way of life, itself, is in danger of becoming, has already become, a war making peace machine.

But it does not take a political sociologist, or Italian idealist of mixed political associations, to teach us this lesson. “Our military organization today bears little relation to that known by any of my predecessors in peace time,” noted one observer of the post-war United States who was better positioned than most to make the point:

“Until the latest of our world conflicts, the United States had no armaments industry [sic]. American makers of ploughshares could, with time and as required, make swords as well. But now we can no longer risk emergency improvisation of national defense; we have been compelled to create a permanent armaments industry of vast proportions. Added to this, three and a half million men and women are directly engaged in the defense establishment. We annually spend on military security more than the net income of all United States corporations.”

“This conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience,” he continued:

The total influence – economic, political, even spiritual – is felt in every city, every Statehouse, every office of the Federal government. We recognize the imperative need for this development. Yet we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications. Our toil, resources and livelihood are all involved; so is the very structure of our society.”

He ended:

“We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes. We should take nothing for granted. Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together.”

This was, of course, the Farwell Address which Eisenhower delivered to the American people on 17 January 1961, warning that, “we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.”

Shortly before the invasion of Iraq, to take an example which of course haunts this lecture, George Bush’s economic adviser Larry Lindsey estimated that the war would cost \$200 billion. “Baloney”, Donald Rumsfeld is reported to have fumed, and offered a figure of \$50-60 million instead. Joseph Stiglitz and Linda Bilmes now report that the conflict will likely cost somewhere between \$2-5 trillion for the United States alone. For a multitude of reasons it is of course hard to reckon it up since cost always seemed to figure least in the apology for a calculus which preceded the conflict in the first place.¹ In the United Kingdom, as well, the House of Commons Select Committee on Defence has just asked why the annual operational costs of British forces in Iraq and Afghanistan has just doubled to more than £3 billion p.a.² Some of the net political results of the Iraq war to the American led coalition thus far also include: a directly increased terrorist threat to the United Kingdom (UK Foreign Office and Intelligence Report); and the elevation of Iran into the region’s most powerful state, while pretty well ensuring that it will also go nuclear as well. The cost to the liberated people of Iraq is simply incalculable; not only because it is impossible to put a measure on the suffering caused, but because the coalition forces refuse to attempt any comprehensive account of it. In none of these instances – and the examples could be multiplied – was the outcome what the Bush and Blair governments promised, anticipated or wanted. Albeit, in these two case as in so many others, it is hard to distinguish between the liberal idealist and the strategic analyst, if war is a wager it would be hard to tell, also, who was the worst and more addicted gambler of the two.

It has not therefore been the necessity of war which has ultimately divided liberals from geostrategists. For, war has been as instrumental to liberalism, as it has to power politics. Neither, in fact, has it been a matter of strategic savvy. Strategists only ever get it right in books, on the sand table or after the event. It has been a question, instead, of which wars were said to be necessary and why. Which peace those wars were fought to win, and on behalf of what kind of political subject or, indeed, on behalf of what understanding of humanity, they have been said to have been fought.

THE DUAL NATURE OF THE LIBERAL SUBJECT

Forms of war and forms of life are correlated. Hence wars have been fought in the name of whatever different forms of life are said to hold sacred. Some are fought for honour, some for glory, and some out of loyalty to an Emperor, King or Leader. Yet others have been fought for a religion, nation, class, race or people. At the same time, however, all wars are also fought for material gain; depending also, of course, on how material gain is construed and what mechanisms are involved in producing it. As geo-economists will tell you, war is an economy that is always also fought for an economy of some description.

¹ Joseph Stiglitz and Linda Bilmes, *The Trillion Dollar War. The True Cost of the Iraq Conflict*, London: Allen and Lane, 2008.

² The Guardian

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2008/mar/10/iraq.defence?gusrc=rss&feed=networkfront>

Liberal wars are fought on behalf of humankind. This observation requires some explanation. That explanation leads us away from the traditional liberal discourse of natural freedom and natural rights to liberalism's long-standing historical preoccupation with the governance of populations, and the promotion of their welfare, through scientific understanding of the biological properties of the human species. Born of natural philosophy, liberalism has long-standing historical attachment also to the developing life sciences of the last three centuries as well. Some explanation of this is required for the following reasons.

First, it is a neglected but very significant and revealing chapter in the "melancholy story" which Michael Howard tells about war and the liberal conscience. It helps bring that story up to date by addressing, however, briefly the military strategic character of liberal war in the 21st century; the Revolution in Military Affairs, Networkcentric warfare and the adoption of the doctrine of Force Transformation. Here, in the jargon of contemporary military strategic discourse we move from material-based warfare to information-based warfare. Sometimes also referred to more modestly as a Military Technical Revolution (MTA), the RMA was however no mere technical revolution. Ordinarily described as the informationalisation of command, control, communication and weapon systems, exploiting the molecular as well as the digital revolutions of the late 20th century, the RMA was neither confined to equipment or to technology. It was much more than that. Weaponising information, as much as it informationalised weapon systems, the RMA signalled a radical transformation in military cognition resulting in a representation of world politics as a "global battlespace". This change in military cognition is an integral part of a complex liberal re-problematisation not only of war but also of the life of liberal politics itself. It is an account of what it is to be a living thing which differs significantly from the traditional account of the liberal subject as a singular entity providentially endowed with natural rights. In as much as it draws on what are said today to be the biological properties of living things it does not however depart at all from liberalism's historical preoccupation with the nature of the species and the promotion of its welfare. I will return to this below.

Second, liberalism is a normative political philosophy of natural freedom. But it is also a knowledgeable and adaptive regime of power relations. As such, it not only idealises human being, following the strict philosophical sense of the term, in the ways in which Howard and other realist are so critical. Precisely because it sought a revolutionary break with the feudal triangulation of Church, Empire and Kingship. Precisely because, in the process, it sought a way of constraining the exercise of power. Precisely, also, because it embraced the material progress of mankind, liberalism did not merely express the values of natural philosophy in teaching how men should be governed. Liberalism simultaneously also embraced what came to be known as the life sciences. Locke, for example, was a physician and a botanist – a natural philosopher – as well as a political theorist. Indeed he would not have recognised any significant difference between the two.

Third, the liberal way of war has therefore always been distinguished as much by liberalism's commitment to the promotion of human welfare as it has been to the defence of the doctrine of natural freedom. Indeed, from a liberal perspective, the two are linked in as much as expression of natural freedom was thought to be inseparable from the promotion of the general welfare. In short, the liberal subject was endowed with a dual biological and divine nature from its very conception in early liberal thought and practice. Locke, for example, taught that when God made the earth, created species and differentiated man from other species, Adam was not the

prototype of rule. What God gave was an original grant of government and dominion “given as it was to the children of men in common” (136).³

Since liberalism problematises rule in terms of this original grant of government and dominion in common, it must always return to the properties of this ‘grant’ not only to resolve the problematic of rule posed by the need to institute a civil society by founding a constitution, but also to resolve the everyday regulation of the conduct of conduct which life in civil society necessarily also posed. For the original grant of government and dominion did not specify entirely how dominion was to be conducted and government organised. Rather, it set conditions. These conditions were comprised of the different properties of the dual nature of the liberal subject itself, to which liberal government had to return when rule confronted the exigencies and contingencies of the everyday conduct of conduct.

Consequently, where natural law left off, positive law took over. Where law itself left off, however, micro-practices of liberal governance took over. If natural law could not cover all the juridical exigencies and contingencies which confronted the operationalisation of the social contract legislatively, neither was law, alone, sufficient to manage the task of rule which liberalism posed to itself. While positive law was therefore required to supplement natural law, governance was required to supplement law as such. The purpose of the constitution of civil society was precisely to make the positive law for which natural law could not always and everywhere provide. Equally, however, law itself, natural and positive, never claimed to be able to cover every governmental eventuality. In sum, the liberal subject was not only the beneficiary of a grant from God, it simultaneously also belonged to a species created by God. If it was to be organised constitutionally by reference to its providentially endowed property of natural rights, everyday governance of the liberal subject had, then, to be organised by reference to its biological properties as a species being. That was why reproduction was as important to early liberalism as representation. That was also why reproduction became one of the issues which nurtured the growing rupture between the 18th century American Colonies and their mother country. The Revolutionary War of Independence was ultimately to be driven by demographic as much as democratic pressures and ambitions. Indeed, the Colonists had long found providence at work in political arithmetic (later statistics, and demographics), as well as the population growth with which it was so originally concerned, as they had in natural rights and freedom.

LIBERAL WAR IN THE 21st CENTURY

If forms of war and forms of life are correlated, as Howard himself effectively acknowledges, different problematizations of security and war are therefore also comprised of different discourses of danger. Different discourses of danger revolve around different referent objects of security and war. Different referent objects of security and war do not simply give rise to different forms of war. They give rise to different ways of conceiving the entire domain of warfare – the reasons why people fight as well as the ways in which they fight. What they fight for, who or what they fight against, as well as what they fight with. In the dual nature of the liberal subject we therefore have two different referent objects of security and war; the one comprised of biological properties, knowledge of which is changing, the other

³ The term ‘original grant’ is one used by Sir Richard Filmer. Filmer is Locke’s main protagonist in “False Principles”, the first section of his *Two Treatise of Government*. Locke agrees that there was an original grant. He maintains instead that it was not to Adam ‘privately’ but to men in common.

comprised of natural political rights, knowledge of which, at least in principle, is supposed to be fixed. The dictates of biology do not automatically ally with those of political theory and political ideology. There is a constant struggle to make them conform to each other. Albeit that natural freedom was always said to favour the well-being of the species, there is no doubting that governing by reference to biological properties entailed mechanisms quite different from those instituted to govern on the basis of natural rights. For one thing natural rights are said to be universal and immutable, whereas species life is nothing if not complex, adaptive and changing. Above all, we learn about species existence through the life sciences whereas we learn about natural rights through political theory and political ideology. And the story of biological life was to change dramatically during the course of the 19th and 20th centuries; no more so than in the last 25 years of molecular transformation and change which has had such a transformative impact upon the way liberal powers no longer construe as well as pursue war-making.

We can end this lecture by sketching a final unwritten chapter in Howard's 'melancholy story', that of the liberal way of war in the 21st century, by returning first to the very origins of liberal government itself. Specifically to the American colonies of the 18th century. For it is here, among other places, in which we first discover that liberal preoccupation with the biological properties of individuals and populations, as much as with the natural rights of providentially endowed subjects. The counting of populations and accounting for their movements were matters of ever increasing importance to the 16th and 17th century European states. These activities took on increasing importance not only in the dynastic rivalries and inter-state competition which distinguished the newly emerging system of states, but also in their colonization of North America especially. The process of American colonization was therefore accompanied from the beginning by efforts to collect and record population data, for population, its growth and its decline, had become as much a matter of supreme strategic importance, then, as GDP is today.

This became a matter of concern as much for the colonists as it was for their imperial governors. Without detailing this neglected aspect of early modern liberal history, it is important to recall the active interest that almost all of the US Founding Fathers, including for example Franklin, Jefferson and Hamilton in particular, took in numbers, counting and demographics (the term statistics did not come into use until the 1820s and 1830s), while generalising about the astonishing population growth taking place around them and drawing increasingly revolutionary political conclusions from it. By the mid 18th century, demands for demographic data by the British imperial authorities had become a bone of contention between the Government in London and the colonists in America, as much as the burgeoning population of the colonies had driven a wedge of conflicting interest between Britain and the New World.⁴

Such concerns drew American demographic and liberal thinkers into ever closer discussions with their British sympathisers. "The plain facts of American population growth," observed one scholar, "were leading inexorably to confrontation between the mother country and the colonies that no longer felt dependent."⁵ In a chapter titled "The Numerical Basis of Revolt," Cassedy also traced how reproduction as much as representation, and the encroachments of British diseases revealed by political and medical arithmetic, joined the growing list of grievances which were

⁴ James H. Cassedy, *Demography in Early America. Beginnings of the Statistical Mind, 1600-1800*, Boston, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969.

⁵ Cassedy, 1969, 179.

eventually to prompt American subjects to become US citizens.⁶ The question of population persisted after the successful founding of the new United States since it had by then become an integral part of its manifest destiny, critical to its burgeoning political economy especially, as much as its political theory. The referent object of liberal freedom was therefore always as biological, preoccupied with the understanding and promotion of the species, as it was political.

Once, life operates as the principle of formation around which the problematization of security and war revolves, then, the politics of security and war are transformed. Most notably, they become subject to the changing ways in which the life sciences specify what life is. From the beginning of the 19th century onwards, albeit in significantly changing ways, the life of living things was increasingly said to be complex, subject to non-linear transformation and change (Jacob, 1989; Kaufmann, 1993; Dillon, 2005 and 2006; Dillon and Lobo-Guerrero, 2008). By the 21st century therefore life is now commonly understood to be a network of complex adaptive information exchange systems. No longer appraised in terms of its universal properties it is enumerated, evaluated and understood, instead, as a co-evolutionary system of continuous, developmental, emergence and change. No divine providence or historical teleology, it is now stated, explains the account of human existence as biological existence. It has no necessary cause external to it, and follows no pre-determined course. It underwrites itself and appears as the continually emergent sum total of its transactional encounters with the contingent conjunctures which are said to characterise the life of all living things. By the second half of the 20th century, the space of that transaction is thus said by widely influential authors like Stuart Kaufman, for example, to be “incalculable, non algorithmic, and outside our capacity to predict (Kaufman, 2000: X). “Emergence and persistent creativity in the universe,” he says with blunt ontological directness, “is real.” (Kaufman, 2000: X). “[N]o one,” he continues, “designed and built the biosphere. The biosphere got itself constructed by the emergence and persistent co-evolution of autonomous agents.” (Kaufman, 2000: 3). Life is an emergent co-evolutionary network of information exchange. This is a model which now dominates the liberal problematisation of security and war, a model reflected in the titles of its new military strategic discourse: *The Mesh and the Net* (Libicki, 1994), *Information Warfare* (Schwartz, 1996), *Shock and Awe* (Ulman and Wade, 1996), *Dominant Battlespace Knowledge* (Johnson and Libicki, 1995), *Strategic Information Warfare* (1996) *Network-Centric Warfare* (Cebrowski and Garstka (1998), *Chaos Theory and Strategic Thought* (1992), *Complexity, Global Politics and National Security* (Alberts and Czerwinski, 1997), *Swarming* (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 2000), *Effects Based Operations* (Smith, 2003).

The discourses and practices of liberal war have, therefore, never simply revolved around the idealism to which Howard objected. They have always revolved, in addition, around the promotion of human welfare through the understanding of the life sciences as well. The military strategic discourse and structures which characterise the liberal way of war in the 21st century, especially, are now distinguished above all the confluence of the digital and molecular revolutions. In the military strategic structures and rationales of liberal powers today, the biological is in the ascendant over the political. Strategy has in effect become a life science, and the omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent command of the global battlespace to which

⁶ See also Andrea A. Rusnock, *Vital Accounts. Quantifying Health and Population in Eighteenth Century England and France*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, for the other side of the story.

the liberal way of war now aspires is proclaimed in the name of a global biohumanity as much as in the name of natural rights.

To conclude: Michael Howard turned George Macaulay Trevelyan, the great Victorian liberal, into a cliché of realist rhetoric: the pious, but unworldly figure whose liberal war-making is well-intentioned but ill-advised. The truth of the liberal way of war is, as ever, more complicated than that. In its latest manifestation it bears all the features enumerated by Howard, and more. That more, that excess of the liberal way of war in the 21st century, requires a sustained interrogation of the changing military face of global liberal biopolitics, a topic I will have to reserve for another day.

Thank you for your attention.