

Alternative Views of War and Peace between the World Wars

Abstract

The growth of pacifist and pacificist sentiment between the two world wars was bound up with a sense that both institutional and cultural change were needed to prevent a repetition of the horrors of the Somme and Passchendaele. While debates about war and peace aroused strong passion, both sides typically articulated their views in a familiar religious or political vocabulary, focusing on the ethical challenges posed by war and the extent to which it was rooted in existing social and political structures. This article examines the ideas of three individuals who approached the subject in rather different ways. The British writer Aldous Huxley drew on his knowledge of Eastern religions to suggest that war was incompatible with the spiritual unity that underpinned human society. The Serbian émigré Dimitrije Mitrinović argued that international politics could only be understood in terms of deeper historical processes. The Russian artist Nikolai Berdiaev believed that his ideas about war and peace were shaped by spiritual guides who provided him with unique insights into international developments. While the ideas expressed by all three men sounded eccentric to many of those who heard them, they nevertheless commanded varying degrees of interest and support, reflecting a wider sense of disenchantment with the *status quo*.

Key Words

War, Peace, Aldous Huxley, Dimitrije Mitrinović, Nikolai Roerich

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The author James Hilton is seldom thought of as a writer of war novels, yet the subject regularly occurs in his best-known books, including *Lost Horizon* (1933), *Goodbye Mr Chips* (1934), and *Random Harvest* (1941). One of the most memorable passages in *Goodbye Mr Chips* describes how the eponymous school master doggedly persists in teaching his Latin class even as anti-aircraft guns fire at a Zeppelin dropping bombs, reassuring his pupils that they should not be scared simply because some ‘stink-merchant’ has developed a new form of explosive in their laboratory.¹ The central character in *Random Harvest*, a book set against the growing international tensions that exploded into war in September 1939, was a First World War veteran who had been severely wounded more than twenty years earlier during a foray into No Man’s Land.² While neither book was explicitly ‘about’ war, the storylines tacitly assumed that readers shared the horror of the carnage in the trenches that was a staple of public memory after 1918, along with the pervasive fear that even worse destruction would result from another great European conflict.

The question of war and peace also ran through *Lost Horizon*, although in a very different way. The book describes how a small group of travellers are kidnapped and taken to Shangri-La, a monastery hidden away in a remote Tibetan valley, where the monks follow a religious tradition shaped by both Christian and Buddhist traditions. The central character, Hugh Conway, ‘in whom a mystical strain ran in curious consort with scepticism’, is a member of the British Consular Service and a veteran of the 1914-18 war (a conflict that, in his own words, ‘used up most of my passions and energies’).³ The aura of peace in Shangri-La appeals to him, and in a series of conversations with the Chief Lama he is warned that the outside world is destined to be destroyed in a conflict that ‘will rage till every flower of culture is trampled, and all human things are levelled in a vast chaos’.⁴ The secret valley alone will remain untouched, preserving ‘lost and legendary treasures’ that will in time provide the kernel of a new civilisation.⁵ Hilton did not intend *Lost Horizon* to serve as any kind of manifesto, even though he had from his youth been sympathetic towards the pacifist cause, refusing to join the Officer Training Corps when attending the Leys School in Cambridge (he did later respond to his call-up papers although the war finished before he was posted abroad).⁶ The success of the novel – and the film that followed a few years later – was due above all to the beguiling strangeness of the story and (in the case of the film) the stunning cinematography.⁷ Yet many of the sentiments

and attitudes that appeared in *Lost Horizon* echoed those found among a section of the pacifist movement of the 1930s.

A good deal has been written about what might loosely be called the religious element in the development of the pacifist movement across western Europe and North America in the years between the world wars. Much of this literature has focused on members of the better-known Christian churches: Nonconformist (including the Quakers), Anglican and Roman Catholic. Rather less has been written about what might loosely be called a 'spiritual-mystical' critique of war that rested not so much on Biblical scripture or Christian theology and more on an (often uncertain) metaphysical foundation which held that commitment to peace flowed naturally from a right understanding of the cosmos.⁸ Tolstoy's pacifism proved less influential after 1918 than it had been before the outbreak of war four years earlier.⁹ The ideas of Mahatma Gandhi on non-violence by contrast attracted growing interest on both sides of the Atlantic, although they were always quite marginal in mainstream pacifist discourse, appealing mostly to an intellectual audience sceptical of many elements of modern western life.¹⁰ The following pages examine the ideas of three individuals active in the inter-war years who similarly believed that international politics – including questions of peace and war – could not be fully understood through either the material or religious categories in which such questions were generally discussed. The first of these is Aldous Huxley, the celebrated author of *Brave New World* (1932), who in the mid-1930s played a significant role in the British peace movement. Huxley's later book *The Perennial Philosophy* (1945) detailed his conviction, developed over the previous ten years or so, that there were features and values common to all the world's major religions.¹¹ His pacifism was grounded on a belief in a universal spiritual order that was violated by any nation that used force to advance its interests. The second case-study focuses on a less well-known figure, the Bosnian Serb émigré Dmitrije Mitrinović who, following his move to Britain during the First World War, wrote extensively about international questions, interpreting developments using a historical-cosmological language that beguiled some of his readers while infuriating others. The third case study explores the career of the celebrated Russian émigré artist Nikolai Roerich, who during his travels through India and Tibet in the 1920s and 1930s became convinced that he and his wife Helena had developed the ability to channel the ideas of certain Himalayan 'Mahatmas' who possessed a wisdom lost to the wider world.¹² The Roerichs' ideas were frequently contradictory as well as obscure. During the 1920s and 1930s, Roerich actively promoted efforts to build international cooperation to protect cultural heritage in times of war, while at the same time doggedly pursuing a 'Great

Plan' to build a new Buddhist federation in Asia, a development that would inevitably cause conflict among the great powers.

While the ideas of all three men discussed here were shaped by a sense that human society could not be understood without an 'esoteric' cognizance of the spiritual principles that underpinned the world, each of them was also determined to identify ways in which their unorthodox insights could influence both public and political opinion.¹³ The result was often a bewildering fusion of abstractions and speculation combined with trenchant observations and analyses of the contemporary international crisis. Before his departure from Britain to California in 1937, Aldous Huxley worked hard to promote the pacifist cause both through his writings and his work on behalf of the Peace Pledge Union (PPU). He was nevertheless shrewd enough to realise that his fascination with eastern religion was unlikely to be shared by many of his readers, and while his ideas were shaped by his distinctive metaphysics, he was careful to avoid using a language that might alienate his audience. Dimitrije Mitrinović also sought to disseminate his ideas through his writing, though his work typically appeared in publications with a limited circulation, while his convoluted language meant that many of his readers struggled to understand him. He was indeed by the 1930s more focused on developing a group of devoted followers, in the manner of better-known 'gurus' of the period such as G. I. Gurdjieff and P. D. Ouspensky, hoping that his acolytes would in some way form a nucleus for change. Roerich similarly built up a devoted following, both in Europe and the USA, although he was far more ambitious (and successful) than Mitrinović in influencing policymakers and publics, attracting extensive press coverage on both sides of the Atlantic, and acquiring significant influence on leading figures in the Roosevelt administration. The unorthodox character of the views articulated by Huxley, Mitrinović and Roerich limited their popularity, sounding 'crankish' to most of their contemporaries, yet they still commanded a degree of interest at a time when the social and political dislocations of the inter-war years were fuelling disenchantment with the *status quo*.¹⁴ While the ideas of all three men were unconventional, and often downright confusing, they echoed a wider interest in the 1920s and 1930s about the potential for developing radically new approaches to questions of war and peace.

Aldous Huxley

Aldous Huxley's influential novel *Brave New World* was fuelled by its author's dislike of 'Fordism',¹⁵ which he treated not simply as a system of mass production, but rather as 'a

dreadful religion of the machine' that would in time 'end by destroying the human race'.¹⁶ He was nevertheless still comparatively uninterested at this point in his career in the kind of questions about spirituality and consciousness that would soon come to fascinate him. Huxley was, though, already in the early 1930s on close terms with the writer and broadcaster Gerald Heard, who had a long interest in psychic research, as well as being a yoga practitioner and leader of group meditation sessions (he had argued in his 1929 book *The Ascent of Humanity* that telepathy had been a feature of early human societies).¹⁷ Heard was without doubt influential in changing Huxley's outlook in the mid-1930s, encouraging his friend's mystical 'turn', as well as encouraging him to become active in the burgeoning peace movement. The two things were closely connected in Huxley's mind.¹⁸ He was by 1935 convinced that 'nothing can possibly work or get us out of our present state except complete pacifism of the Quaker or Buddhist kind. The implications of this are, of course, fundamentally religious – Christian for those who believe in Christianity; for those who don't (and Christianity has a very bad record on peace) some simple conception of an underlying spiritual unity, realized through the practice of meditation'.¹⁹ Pacifism was for Huxley not simply about opposing war but instead part of a search for new ways of living. He had in *Brave New World* outlined his fears about how contemporary technological developments threatened to subordinate human freedom and destroy any semblance of individuality. His interest in exploring the spiritual underpinnings of human society was fired by a more positive search for alternative patterns of development that emphasised organic unity over conflict and war.

Huxley corresponded regularly with the Rev. 'Dick' Sheppard,²⁰ the founder of the PPU, and devoted a good deal of time and energy to speaking and writing on behalf of the Union. In his 1936 pamphlet *What are You Going to Do About It*, he suggested that members of the PPU should meet regularly both to discuss affairs and conduct 'spiritual exercises' that would remind them of humanity's 'profound spiritual unity'.²¹ His friend Gerald Heard argued that such group sessions were capable of creating a collective force that could shape the actions of governments and influence the behaviour of the dictators (an idea that seems to have been based on a rather bowdlerised understanding of Gandhi's concept of *satyagraha*).²² Robert de Ropp, who came to know both Huxley and Heard well, later recalled how he and a number of fellow-minded members of the PPU also committed themselves to vegetarianism and the pursuit of a simple life.²³ One of the most influential figures for those who sought to 'live out' their pacifism in this way was the American Richard Gregg, author of *The Power of Nonviolence* (1934), which circulated widely in Britain from the moment of its first publication.

Gregg also helped draft the 1936 PPU pamphlet 'Training for Peace' that, among other things, recommended meditation and communal folk-singing as part of a training in non-violence.²⁴ Such ideas and practices were, though, decidedly unattractive to many members of the PPU (including, eventually, Sheppard himself). One member from Bradford complained that a focus on fostering hatred of war was being distorted into searching for 'the regeneration of the individual' rather than shaping a coherent political response.²⁵ A student at Oxford fretted that 'we have gossiped about vegetarianism and knitting and Indian *ahimsa* [non-violence], when we ought to have pondered economics and Parliament and Spain'.²⁶ Other influential figures in the PPU like Kingsley Martin insisted it should act as a political organisation rather than a setting for quietist retreat.²⁷

Huxley's natural sympathies undoubtedly lay with the 'Gregg cranks'. The story of his 1936 novel *Eyeless in Gaza* focused on the story of how the suicide of a close friend led the central figure, Anthony Beavis, to abandon his habitual cynicism and embark on a spiritual journey that led him towards pacifism and mysticism (Beavis was in large part a self-portrait of Huxley). It ended with a resounding claim that achieving peace depended on a sense of 'Unity with all being ... Peace from pride and hatred and anger, peace from cravings and aversions, peace from all the separating frenzies. Peace through liberation ... Peace beyond peace, focussed at first, brought together, then opening out in a kind of boundless space'.²⁸ The book, described in the *Times* as less of a novel and more 'a ballet of ideas',²⁹ was widely reviewed in newspapers and journals, although surprisingly few critics engaged with its central argument that pacifism should form part of a wider process of personal and social transformation.³⁰ Gilbert Armitage suggested in the *English Review* that the author of *Eyeless in Gaza* had turned into 'a bit of a bore'.³¹ Other writers lamented the fading of the youthful Huxley whose cynicism had captured the mood of a post-war generation. His turn to mystical pacifism was generally seen by reviewers as a personal quirk rather than an interrogation of the fundamental causes of war.

While Huxley's views on war and peace were shaped by his conviction that the most propitious metaphysical environment for pacifism was one that recognised a 'belief in a spiritual reality to which all men have access',³² he often crafted the language he used when talking and writing about the peace movement to avoid alienating those of his readers who did not share his interest in *satyagraha* and *ahimsa*. His principal focus was instead on showing that pacifism could be 'strictly ethical and *business-like*' [*italics added*].³³ In his 1937 book *Ends and Means*, written after he had left Britain for America, Huxley argued that good

objectives could not be achieved by unethical measures, a position that did not depend on a commitment to any particular religion or philosophy, and was indeed consistent with a traditional Kantian ethics. He emphasised that international change could only come about when individuals rejected the idea that war could serve as a legitimate means of securing national interest and instead embraced the principle of non-violence ('The thing that makes for peace above all others is the systematic practice in all human relationships of non-violence').³⁴ The entries in the *Encyclopaedia of Pacifism* which he edited (and largely wrote) were similarly neutral in character, providing information on subjects ranging from disarmament to Christian teaching on war, although Buddhism was described as 'the only great world religion which has made its way without bloodshed or persecution'.³⁵ Huxley's pacifism nevertheless continued to be viewed with suspicion in many quarters. It was particularly unattractive to left-wing writers like C. Day Lewis, a member of the Communist Party, who attacked it as a 'big beautiful idealist bubble' that failed to engage with the political and material realities of the contemporary world.³⁶ Huxley's pacifism also continued to perplex many in the PPU who were more focused on supporting practical measures to prevent war.

Huxley's pacifism and fascination with eastern religions were nevertheless shared by many prominent literary figures of the inter-war years, including E. M. Forster and Christopher Isherwood, although Isherwood's interest in Hindu philosophy and meditation only developed fully after he moved to California.³⁷ An interest in the 'occult' had for many years been a prominent feature of English literary modernism, typically taking the form of a fascination with unorthodox forms of knowledge, often supposedly derived from eastern religious and spiritual traditions.³⁸ The growth of interest in Theosophy in North America and western Europe during the late nineteenth century, fostered by Mme. Blavatsky's writings on the Secret Doctrine supposedly revealed to her by the 'masters' she encountered during her travels in the East,³⁹ resonated with an audience searching for new forms of understanding in an increasingly routinised world devoid of meaning and enchantment. The carnage of the First World War increased still further the appeal of esoteric forms of knowledge, along with spiritualism,⁴⁰ prompted by a sense that the conflict had shown the emptiness of materialism and the triumph of what D. H. Lawrence called 'sordid, rampant, raging meanness'.⁴¹ A commitment to pacifism was for many in the 1920s and 1930s an integral part of a broader critique of a deracinated society that appeared to have lost any sense of its foundations.

This pervasive sense of crisis helps to explain the growing interest between the wars in figures like the Russian émigré P. D. Ouspensky, a sometime follower and collaborator of G. I.

Gurdjieff, the Greek-Armenian ‘guru’ who developed a convoluted ‘philosophy’ which attracted numerous devotees to the Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man which he established at Fontainebleau in 1922.⁴² Ouspensky had by the 1930s established himself in England, where he attracted a group of followers who, in the words of one of them, were expected to act with great ‘secrecy. No one was allowed to talk about the teachings outside the group’ (something that reenforced the cult-like atmosphere).⁴³ Ouspensky’s ideas seem almost impenetrable today, fusing together elements of eastern wisdom with a laboured pseudo-scientific language, but his lectures in central London were attended by many prominent literary figures including J. B. Priestley, T. S. Eliot, Gerald Heard and Aldous Huxley himself.⁴⁴ Their presence reflected the widespread interest in esoteric forms of understanding among at least a section of the British intelligentsia. Ouspensky also attracted numerous followers from other walks of life, many of whom lived and worked as ‘students’ at Lyne House, the estate in Surrey overseen by ‘The Master’ and his wife. The students were expected to labour on the estate farm, as well as attending lectures, a course of action designed to ensure that ‘the neophyte who enters the school has to realise that he is asleep, that he has no will, no permanent I’.⁴⁵ Such a life was not for everyone. When Huxley and Heard visited Lyne House they found little to attract them. Robert de Ropp, who had by now become one of Ouspensky’s students, later recalled in his memoirs that both men were too ‘unpractical’ and ‘fond of their own opinions’ to join Ouspensky’s band of devotees.⁴⁶ He was almost certainly right.

Huxley and Heard were already set on leaving Europe when they visited Lyne House. The two men moved to America shortly afterwards, in part to escape what they believed was an inevitable war, although Huxley also planned a lecture tour there on pacifism.⁴⁷ They encouraged Ouspensky to consider emigrating as well. Ouspensky himself had a lively awareness of the dangerous international situation, along with an abiding hatred of Bolshevism, but he seldom addressed questions of war and peace directly in his writing and lecturing. He subsequently described in his book *In Search of the Miraculous* how Gurdjieff had, while still living in Russia, argued that war was ‘the result of planetary influences’, and could only be ended when men and women awoke to understand their true nature and break free from the constraints under which they laboured.⁴⁸ Such bizarre and perhaps allegorical words seemed to indicate that a change in the international order could only come about through a transformation of human beings themselves. Ouspensky was himself equally gnostic on the whole subject. When De Ropp told Ouspensky that he was perturbed to find that many of his followers did not ‘work for peace’, but were instead only concerned with ‘the salvation of their

own souls', the Master pointed to a young man shovelling manure into a wheelbarrow and chuckled that such action was itself 'work for peace'.⁴⁹ Ouspensky's claim – which echoed Gurdjieff's – was presumably that real peace could not be brought about by disarmament talks and treaties but only through a fundamental transformation of both individuals and society. De Ropp appeared for a time to accept the argument, becoming an *habitué* of Lyne House, where he joined with others in the search 'to extract meaning from a world that seemed to be meaningless'.⁵⁰ The question of how a process of personal transformation could impact in a practical way on the wider world nevertheless remained (to say the least) unclear. Huxley by contrast always recognised that while his own commitment to pacifism was rooted in a distinctive understanding of the fundamental unity of the world, he could best influence public opinion by using a language that chimed with widespread popular anxiety about the destructiveness and inhumanity of war. It was both a shrewd practical strategy and a recognition that pacifism could easily descend into a sectarianism that would reduce its influence and appeal. Huxley acknowledged that pacifists could only 'persuade the majority of their fellows that the policy of pacifism is preferable to that of militarism' if they made at least some effort to engage with their concerns.⁵¹

Dimitrije Mitronović

The growing interest during the inter-war years in what might loosely be termed an esoteric understanding of human society – and its impact on broader questions of peace and war – can also be seen in the career of Dimtrije Mitrinović. Huxley was a well-known figure in Britain. Mitrinović was not (though he has in recent years been much studied by scholars in Serbia where he has been widely acclaimed as a central figure in creating the idea of a common European identity).⁵² Yet his career, too, shows how the 'occult' currents that flourished between the wars could shape ideas about the nature of international politics. Mitrinović was a central figure in the Young Bosnian movement that flourished in the years before 1914, writing pieces in journals including *Zora* and *Bosanska Vila* in which he argued that European civilisation was in a state of terminal crisis, a motif that was hardly unusual during this period (in part a reflection of the influence of Nietzsche on *fin de siècle* culture).⁵³ He was as a young student in Munich deeply interested in the work of the Russian philosopher Vladimir Solov'ev, who argued that the world should be viewed as an organism moving towards a final reconciliation of God and humanity,⁵⁴ and subsequently gave close attention to the ideas of the

German Erich Gutkind, whose *Siderische Geburt* (*Sideral Birth*) deployed an elusive mystical language to argue that humanity was at the dawn of a new age.⁵⁵ Mitrinović was also closely involved with efforts to build a small group of initiates – a *Blut-bund* – capable of understanding ‘the entire horizon of truths’ that could alone lead to the creation of a new sense of pan-humanity cutting across lines of ethnicity and religion (he established particularly close relations with the Russian émigré artist Wassily Kandinsky).⁵⁶

The outbreak of war in July 1914 effectively destroyed these outlandish hopes, and Mitrinović escaped to London, where he sought to keep alive the ideal of the *Blut-bund*, approaching influential figures including H. G. Wells and Petr Kropotkin in an effort to persuade them ‘to join our undertaking’.⁵⁷ Like many others at the time, Mitrinović was convinced that the war was not simply a conflict between nations, but rather an apocalyptic event that would, despite the slaughter, eventually allow the ‘noble and lofty elements within the European race’ to ‘build a more God-like mankind than the present one’.⁵⁸ By 1916 he was working with the Serbian Orthodox bishop Nikolai Velimirović and the writer Stephen Graham to build ‘a secret society’ that would ‘operate from the invisible towards the visible, from an initiated few to the many who were as yet unaware of the movement’.⁵⁹ The initiative came to nothing, in part because attempts to recruit influential individuals failed, but the emphasis on personal contacts and secrecy were to become defining features of much of Mitrinović’s work in the years that followed.

In the years following the end of the war, Mitrinović was successful in attracting the support of the influential writer and editor Alfred Orage, who had over the previous decade turned his journal *The New Age* into one of the most influential literary publications in Britain. Orage had himself been interested in theosophy when a young man, and while he later broke with the Theosophical Society, his long-standing concern with questions of religion and spirituality was enhanced by the horrors of war.⁶⁰ One of those who knew him well recalled that the conflict had ‘led to an exodus of occult philosophers from Eastern and Central Europe’, many of whom like Mitrinović made their way to the offices of the *New Age*, while another of Orage’s collaborators subsequently wrote that the Serb appeared ‘out of the centre of what one feared was now the flaming wreck of European civilization, proclaiming a gospel of world salvation inspired by the perennial philosophy and the Christian revelation’.⁶¹ Orage was impressed by his young visitor, subsequently publishing numerous pieces by Mitrinović, including a series of articles on ‘World Affairs’ that appeared in the *New Age* in 1920-21 under the telling pseudonym ‘Cosmoi’.

Mitrinović eagerly seized the opportunity to promote the kind of ideas he had been developing over the previous fifteen years or so, using his ‘World Affairs’ column to analyse through the language of ‘towering abstractions’ and ‘metaphysical allusions’ both historical and contemporary developments.⁶² Readers who expected ‘World Affairs’ to reflect on diplomatic and military affairs in an immediate way were likely to be disappointed. They were instead treated to such passages as

We conceive the world as one great mind in process of becoming self-conscious; and from this point of view the various races may be regarded as rudimentary organs in course of development within the great world-embryo ... Where there is war there is, therefore, something wrong – a misunderstanding or ignorance on the part of one or all of the parties of their respective world obligations.⁶³

Many readers were confused and frustrated. Some of those familiar with the *New Age* later claimed that ‘Cosmoi’s’ columns so alienated readers that some of them stopped buying the journal. Yet others, like the writer Philip Mairet, believed that ‘for all [the] vast array of transcendental concepts and eternal values, [the articles] had a bearing upon some concrete and temporal issues’.⁶⁴ Mitrinović certainly believed that a full understanding of the contemporary world was impossible without grasping the fundamental factors that underpinned its development. His use of quasi-mythological language reflected his sense that the complexity of humanity’s evolution in the universe could only be captured in these terms. Such esoteric *bon mots* as ‘the idea of Universal History is contained within normal Man, since the very unity of man is only a meta-type of the pleromic unity that is and is to be’ might not have meant much to many readers.⁶⁵ It was, though, a language that came easily to a man well-versed in the history of European philosophy in general and the language of the Silver Age of Russian culture in particular. Mitrinović was sufficiently rooted in the language of *fin-de-siècle* symbolism to interpret the world as something more than its immediate material presence.

The ‘World Affairs’ columns defy easy summary, but at the heart of Mitrinović’s *credo* was a powerful sense of the organic character of human society, in which nations and races represented aspects of a single whole. While his words about the distinct mission of different races grate on a modern consciousness, Mitrinović claimed that no single nation was more advanced than any other, despite his suggestion that ‘The inward and temperamental cult of the East ... whether ancient or modern, is essentially the cult of the Past, of the Race, of the Universal [while] that of the West, speaking in a general way, is the cult of the Future, of the

Individual, of the Particular'.⁶⁶ He argued that 'the White race', although 'the appointed natural and historic organ and instrument of world-organization, is without any centre and direction', with the result that it could only fulfil 'its duty' to provide an impetus towards new forms of world union by building on the Universal instinct of the East. Britain in particular, was destined by 'Providence and Destiny' to play a pivotal role in fostering a 'Universal Organic Order [which] transcends all such limiting ideas as Peace of the World, League of Nations, Reunion of Christian Churches, Social Revolution [and] United States of Europe'.⁶⁷ Mitrinović's complex language was designed to persuade his audience of the need for new and creative ways to build an international order that would not like 'The League of Nations [be] a typical piece of bourgeois machinery designed, first and foremost, to keep the world as it is ... a negative concept of progress, of harmony without movement'.⁶⁸ The ideas expressed in the 'World Affairs' columns may have alienated many *New Age* readers, but they fascinated Orage, who helped to draft some of the early pieces. Mitrinović's ideas and *persona* also intrigued many of those he met, including the poet Edwin Muir (who praised the Serb's 'erratic soaring mind') and the critic Paul Selver ('Hardly had I shaken hands with him than I found myself so affected by his mere presence that I nearly lost consciousness').⁶⁹ Mitrinović was throughout his time in Britain more adept at winning the loyalty of individuals 'face-to-face' rather than through the printed word. His complex ideas seemed, at least to some, intimately bound up with his personality and presence.

Orage's departure for Gurdjieff's Fontainebleau Institute in 1922 removed from the scene Mitrinović's most influential supporter. In the years that followed, he became increasingly interested in the study of psychology (his reading of Jung confirmed his belief that 'at the back of our individual organs and functions lie collective, racial and perhaps even deeper levels of consciousness in which each of us lives and moves and has his being').⁷⁰ He was instrumental in establishing the International Society for Individual Psychology, more commonly known as the Adler Society, which was inspired by the ideas of the Austrian psychiatrist Alfred Adler. The membership overlapped closely with the Chandos Group, whose affiliates were broadly committed to guild socialism and the social credit scheme associated with C. H. Douglas, which claimed *contra* conventional economics that the main economic problem was not one of scarcity but distribution.⁷¹ Mitrinović himself believed that the development of the informal networks associated with the Adler Society and the Chandos Group were evidence of his ability to bring together individuals and groups to work for the cause of Universal Humanity (his involvement with both organisations reflected his characteristic sense that contemporary issues

could not be understood without reference to more fundamental questions about the nature of humanity and human destiny). The creation of both the Adler Society and the Chandos Group also shows how there was in 1920s Britain a significant public appetite for new ways of thinking that went beyond conventional economic and political debate, instead focusing on deeper questions about the nature of human society, and the way in which it was shaped by deep-seated patterns of historical development.

The critical developments of the late 1920s and early 1930s, ranging from the Wall Street Crash and the Great Depression through to the Japanese invasion of Manchuria and Hitler's rise to power in Germany, signalled a new phase in 'the Twenty Years' Crisis'. The rise in support for the extreme left and right across much of Europe reflected a pervasive sense that existing economic and political institutions needed to be transformed. Mitrinović responded to these changes with a blizzard of activities, establishing new journals and discussion groups, as well as giving large numbers of lectures at the central London house that served as headquarters for the Adler Society. There was, though, always something of a contradiction in the strategy he used to win support for his ideas about the nature of the global crisis and its possible solutions. While he was extremely active in establishing new fora designed to encourage fresh thinking about economic and political issues, including questions of international relations, he typically preferred to remain outside the public gaze, instead working closely with a small number of close followers. And, while the articles that appeared in the journals Mitrinović helped establish echoed his belief that greater harmony in both international and domestic affairs rested on understanding the deeper unity that bound humanity together, they typically sought to focus on more immediate questions such as the potential of the British Empire or an Anglo-American Federation to serve as the foundation for a new international order. There was not necessarily a tension between the two, given Mitrinović's core belief that contemporary developments were shaped by more fundamental processes of historical change, but they did reflect his ambivalence about whether he should seek to influence developments through public engagement or by cultivating followers who could become catalysts in bringing about change. There was indeed always something of a tension between the publicist and the guru in the Serb's approach to advancing his ideas.

Mitrinović's ideas about both domestic politics and world order remained as elusive as ever throughout the 1930s.⁷² In his lectures he continued to use a language that confused or alienated many of his listeners ('There is a new realm to conquer, the realm of Spirit and Deed, where Personal Initiative unites in Personal Alliance to create a New Social Order').⁷³ In 1933 he

once again used the pseudonym 'Cosmoi' for a series of articles that appeared in the journal *New Britain*, a publication he had established some months earlier, which commanded a significant readership drawn from those who believed that the world was in crisis but were unconvinced by the shibboleths offered by the extreme left and right. Mitrinović told his readers that he sought to analyse global developments through 'the vast processes of time' ('Our crisis of today is a planetary spasm of birth and ascension into greater and new existence'). The same piece continued by arguing that the time had come to 'become aware of the glorious truth of the immanence of Divinity in our human essence...For the human world is freezing in its institutions and in its giant blocks of mass movements'.⁷⁴ Mitrinović tried on occasion to analyse contemporary developments in terms of his grand vision, arguing that closer Anglo-American union could help create greater global stability, and support 'Albion' in its appointed task of leading the move towards European federation. In an editorial in *The New Atlantis*, another journal he helped to establish, he warned that in the absence of fundamental change, both domestic and international, the triumph of materialism would lead to a global conflict and sweep away 'our human and universal Europe, the world's heart of culture and of the sense of personality'.⁷⁵ He also suggested that Britain should lead the transformation of the League of Nations so that it could become 'the organization of Man'.⁷⁶

Some of those who contributed to the bewildering succession of journals that Mitrinović established – *New Britain Quarterly*, *New Britain*, *New Atlantis*, *New Europe* and so on – were convinced by the esoteric pronouncements of their *eminence gris*. Winifred Fraser, one of Mitrinović's most loyal acolytes, suggested in 1932 in *New Britain Quarterly* that 'we old Europeans ... need a creative catastrophe and a change of consciousness' in order to solve 'the problem of community' (like Mitrinović she believed that the search for a sense of community capable of overcoming a prevailing sense of anomie and fragmentation was the most important challenge facing the contemporary world).⁷⁷ Two years later, Maj-General J. F. C. Fuller argued in *New Europe* that efforts to secure international peace were doomed without an acknowledgement that 'the world order is insane' and that 'individuals and peoples must rise from the grave' if the current crisis was to be overcome.⁷⁸ The opening editorial of the first edition of *New Europe*, in which Fuller's article appeared, sought to present 'Albion' as 'the material-foundation ... for the Western and for the World-Renaissance', calling for 'the humanity of England' to 'burst into higher consciousness'. The transformed continent sought by Mitrinović and his closest adherents was not simply a federation designed to overcome war and conflict caused by clashes of national sovereignty, but rather a place informed by 'that truth

of humanity which is more than historic and material, more worthy than this world of matter and power'.⁷⁹

Mitrinović's distinctive *persona* was as noted earlier pivotal in attracting many of his more devoted followers. It was in many ways like the impact Ouspensky had on his acolytes. While neither man were charismatic figures in either the popular or Weberian sense of the term, at least some of the attendees at Mitrinović's lectures found the atmosphere 'hypnotic',⁸⁰ while one of his followers later recalled how the Serb 'held me firmly by a strong leash' (Alan Watts, subsequently to become one of the best-known popularisers of Eastern spirituality in the West, noted more acerbically that Mitrinović's closest followers 'loved and feared him' as a 'great magician and rascal-guru').⁸¹ Yet Mitrinović's influence on the wider network of groups and publications that he helped establish in the first half of the 1930s was in practice often limited. Publications like *New Britain* and *New Atlantis* attracted many prominent contributors, ranging from socialists like G. D. H. Cole and Raymond Postgate through to the former *Times* editor Wickham Steed and the Nobel prize-winning scientist Frederick Soddy. Bertrand Russell also contributed. Most of these writers were blithely unaware of the outlandish views of Mitrinović and unaware of his connection to the various journals. They certainly made no effort to engage with the Serb's more esoteric ideas.

The editor of *New Britain* – the most widely-circulated of the journals associated with Mitrinović in the early 1930s – was the journalist Charles Purdom, who wrote numerous pieces calling for the creation of a new economic and political system that would allow individuals to flourish as members of a transformed British polity committed to changing the pattern of international politics. The distinct if somewhat incoherent fusion of internationalism and guild socialism that ran through many articles in *New Britain* undoubtedly appealed to a section of 'disaffected youth, disillusioned with the state of Britain, but unwilling to embrace fascism or communism'.⁸² Many readers were, though, less than patient when confronted with Mitrinović's 'hysterical outbursts of pseudo-religious "explosion" which astonish all normal readers'.⁸³ Purdom urged readers to be patient and persevere in trying to understand such pieces, and his own articles represented an attempt to embed abstractions in a more familiar language, although in time he too came to disagree sharply with Mitrinović. Purdom believed that to have any real impact, the advocates of the kinds of ideas outlined in *New Britain* needed to engage fully with the political system, perhaps even trying to establish some kind of political party.⁸⁴ Such an idea was anathema to Mitrinović, who preferred to analyse both domestic and international politics in terms of a language that sought to identify how historical change was

shaped by deep-seated if elusive metaphysical principles, while remaining distinctly vague about how such knowledge could influence the real world.

Mitrinović's occasional efforts to engage more directly with contemporary international challenges showed the problems he faced when seeking to apply his abstract ideas to concrete problems. In autumn 1933, he published 'An Urgent Appeal to His Excellency the Chancellor of the Reich', claiming somewhat curiously that 'my own [i.e. Serbian] culture is essentially German', adding that his youthful work to build the *Blut-Bund* was intended to lay the foundations for a wider European federation. Despite his emollient opening words, he went on to chide the Führer and other Nazi leaders for behaving like 'evil supermen', who would in time be judged 'by the Christ-Spirit and the Spirit of Adam', unless they abandoned their narrow nationalism in favour of a recognition that only a European federation rooted in spiritual unity could prevent American and Soviet domination of the world. Mitrinović urged Hitler to approach Britain to take the lead in building such a federation, within which Germany could 'realise the Organic, the Threefold, the truly Socialist State of Manu, of Plato, or of Rudolf Steiner's meaning and essence'.⁸⁵ He also argued that Europe's salvation could only be achieved by abandoning materialism (an argument that he developed using a series of distinctly antisemitic tropes). It can safely be assumed that Hitler never read Mitrinović's Open Letter! Mitrinović himself within a few months acknowledged that rearmament was likely to be critical in restraining the expansion of Nazi Germany. It was a concession to the world of material force that was in some ways at odds with his general philosophy and reflected the challenge of relating practical policy recommendations to more abstract ideas about the role of pan-humanism in transcending national divisions.

Mitrinović's British biographer has made a valiant if not altogether successful effort to identify a degree of coherence in his subject's views on issues ranging from the nature of history to international politics.⁸⁶ And there were certainly a number of core ideas that ran through Mitrinović's writings: that achieving international peace depended on fundamental changes in the nature of individuals and societies; that a growing sense of international community depended less on organisations like the League of Nations and more on the development of a pan-human instinct that transcended nationalist loyalties; and that Britain had a pivotal role to play in leading this fundamental transformation of the international order. Mitrinović, like the better-known Petr Ouspensky, always insisted that his ideas were 'scientific', although they are perhaps best understood as poetic and visionary, appealing as much to the heart as the mind (it is worth noting that the notion of 'science' in many European languages encompasses more

forms of inquiry than is customary in English). The distinguished Slavist Elizabeth Hill rightly noted that the Serb's ideas were shaped above all by 'intuition'.⁸⁷ Nor is it chance that Mitrinović was always most at ease when dealing with a small group of devoted followers, whose sense of the Serb's genius was bound up with his compelling personality as much as the ideas he promulgated. Perhaps above all, though, Mitrinović's career showed the extent of disillusion in inter-war Britain with conventional thinking about economics and politics (both domestic and international). The idea that there might be order beyond the chaos, accessible to those ready to seek it, provided a sense of direction and comfort to some of those experiencing the bewildering challenges of the times. There were indeed elements in Mitrinović's thought that exhibited a distinctly 'gnostic' character, even though he never really addressed the vexed question of how the passing contingencies of human affairs related to his sweeping discussion of historical change.⁸⁸ It is perhaps a feature of all those who seek to understand the world *sub speciae aeternitatis*. Ideas about hidden meanings beneath the flux of events often flourish at times of disorder, providing initiates with a sense of reassurance, or at least a way of understanding the world around them.

Nikolai Roerich

Mitrinović was more adept at winning support among a small group of loyal followers than he was at influencing a broader public. The same was true in part – but only in part – of Nikolai Roerich, the celebrated Russian artist, whose life and work has over the last century become the subject of a cottage industry of research too voluminous to summarise here.⁸⁹ Roerich attracted numerous acolytes across Europe and North America, who were attracted not only by his distinctive artistic vision, rooted in a mystic sense of the deeper realities that underpinned the phenomenal world, but also by a belief that the artist himself embodied a new form of spiritual wisdom that could transform humanity. Many supporters uncritically accepted the claims of Roerich and his wife Helena that they received messages from a mysterious group of 'mahatmas' living in the depths of the Himalayas. Much of Roerich's decidedly orientalist philosophy echoed the theosophical motifs articulated a few decades earlier by Madame Blavatsky, ascribing a special significance to a mythologised East, home of a wisdom unknown to the more 'advanced' societies of the west (such orientalism was of course a standard trope in the ideas of Huxley and Mitrinović as well as inter-war 'gurus' like Ouspensky and Gurdjieff). His ideas were, like those of Mitrinović, profoundly shaped by the occult cultural

motifs that flourished in the Silver Age of Russian culture (Roerich lived in Russia until moving abroad after the 1917 Revolution, and was closely involved in artistic developments, including the celebrated *mir iskusstva* movement, among other things designing costumes and stage sets for Diaghilev's *Ballets Russe*).⁹⁰

Roerich was, though, more than simply an artist of genius and proponent of a belief system that treated the familiar material world as a carapace for something more enduring. He also made strenuous efforts to use his insights into the ineffable to shape historical events (he tellingly referred to himself on many occasions as a 'practical idealist').⁹¹ During the 1920s and 1930s, Roerich developed a distinct geopolitical vision founded on a belief in the existence of 'Shambhala', a hidden mythical realm located in the depths of Asia, which he believed could become a force inspiring Buddhists and other indigenous peoples to free themselves from subservience to outside imperial powers (a vision to which he gave the name 'The Great Plan'). While the artist recognised that pursuing his goals would benefit from the support of important governmental figures around the world, he was also shrewd enough to realise that his ambitions would need to be framed in a language that avoided reference to his more outlandish beliefs, instead presenting them in ways that made sense to those who thought of international politics in more pedestrian terms. In the years between 1925 and 1935, Roerich sought support for his vision in meetings with influential figures including Soviet politicians and Japanese officials along with two US Presidents. He also succeeded in persuading a future US Vice-President to support some of his most important initiatives. And, for good measure, he also attracted the enduring hostility of the British and Indian governments, who feared that his activities could pose a potential threat to social and political order in south Asia. Roerich's otherworldliness and esoteric beliefs found a degree of purchase even in the humdrum terrain of diplomacy and politics, a reminder that unorthodox ideas could command a surprising degree of support in the troubled years between the two world wars, at a time when the established social and political order appeared increasingly fragile.

Roerich's attempt to shape international politics was not limited to his Great Plan. Among the developments most closely associated with his name during the 1930s was the so-called Roerich Pact – more formally 'The Treaty on the Protection of Artistic and Scientific Institutions and Historic Monuments' – which was designed to preserve cultural heritage in times of war (the Treaty's key provisions subsequently shaped the UN's "International Convention for Protection of Cultural Values in the Event of Armed Conflict").⁹² A study of events leading up to the signing of the Pact in 1935 by the twenty or so states belonging to the

Pan-American Union not only casts light on Roerich's idiosyncratic views on international politics; it also illuminates wider attitudes towards humanitarian internationalism at a time of growing global tension. Roerich's support for the Pact reflected his deep-seated concern about the potential impact of war on museums and art galleries as well as historic buildings and sites of archaeological importance (he had been preoccupied with the question since the early years of the twentieth century when still living in Russia). He was, though, also hopeful that pursuing the Pact would build contacts with politicians and other public figures in Europe and North America who could help further his ambitions to advance the 'Great Plan'. Geopolitics, pacifism and spirituality were tangled together in Roerich's mind and work in ways that complicate efforts to make sense of his strenuous efforts to shape international developments.

Roerich had moved to London in 1919, appalled by the ruthlessness of the new Bolshevik government in Russia, before moving on to America the following year. Both the artist and his wife had for many years been fascinated by Buddhism, and on arriving in the USA they began to develop the doctrine of *Agni Yoga*, an elusive 'system of living ethics' which echoed many well-established theosophical tropes (though the Roerichs characteristically emphasised the originality of their ideas).⁹³ Helena Roerich in her trances channelled the ideas of one Master Morya, who as well as inspiring the system of *Agni Yoga* seems to have been influential in shaping the Roerichs' growing belief that they had an important role to play in using the myth of Shambhala to foster the creation of a new state in Asia inspired by Buddhist teachings. The elusive Mahatmas in the Himalayas sent messages to the artist and his wife telling them that Russia was destined to play an important role in shaping the future of large swathes of Asia, including Mongolia and Tibet, as well as large swathes of China and Siberia, an area which Roerich believed could become the heart of a new Buddhist realm. He and his wife travelled to northern India in 1923, where he spent his time painting, as well as convincing himself through discussions with local Buddhist monks that the times were propitious for promoting the Age of Shambhala. Roerich interpreted the burgeoning conflict between the Panchen Lama and the Dalai Lama in quasi-eschatological terms as evidence that massive changes were about to sweep across the heart of Asia.⁹⁴ The artist himself subsequently claimed to be the reincarnated fifth Dalai Lama, displaying a penchant for wearing elaborate robes hinting at his exalted status, something designed both to increase his prestige in Asia and advance his exotic image in the west.

The artist returned to America via Europe in 1924, meeting with officials at a number of Soviet embassies, including Nikolai Krestinskii in Berlin, sharply criticizing British policy

towards the region (the meetings appear to have been facilitated by the mercurial *émigré* Russian agronomist Dmitrii Borodin who was probably an agent of the Soviet secret police).⁹⁵ Roerich assured his interlocutors that the Buddha's teaching was revolutionary and that an alliance between Buddhism and Communism could fundamentally change the international balance of power.⁹⁶ He also noted that such an alliance had the support of the Mahatmas. Such words were calculated to strike a chord with a Soviet government keen to extend its influence in the region, not least because Roerich also told his interlocutors that he planned to return to there, promising that his efforts to mobilise the local population in favour of a new Buddhist state would weaken British influence (the government in Moscow was convinced that the British were about to make a systematic effort to seize Tibet in part to counter Soviet influence in Mongolia).⁹⁷

While Soviet officials were understandably bemused by Roerich, the government in Moscow was ready to offer its support to the artist's plans for a further 'Central Asian Art Expedition' to the lands north of the Himalayas. The artist and his party first arrived in the region in the spring of 1925, before Roerich travelled to Moscow, where he met with senior figures in the Soviet government including the Foreign Secretary Boris Chicherin (the two men had been loosely acquainted before the Revolution).⁹⁸ The two men discussed Roerich's pan-Buddhist schemes along with potential agricultural concessions in the lands north of the Himalayas. The artist presented letters purportedly dictated by Master Morya praising the Soviet government for its efforts to raise the material and spiritual condition of its Asian population. He also told his hosts that Buddhism was revolutionary and that an alliance between Buddhism and communism would sweep away the established order in Europe. Chicherin promised support for Roerich's plans, though he was like other senior figures in the Soviet government deeply suspicious of his intentions, suspecting (not unreasonably) that Roerich was trying to engineer Soviet support to advance his own objectives.

There was always something fantastic about the whole 'Red Shambhala' episode, but while leading Soviet officials distrusted Roerich, a surprising number of more junior figures shared his esoteric interests and obsession with the East (a fascination that was a hallmark of many Russians of all political views in the wake of the Revolution).⁹⁹ Roerich's machinations do not seem to have reflected any fundamental rapprochement with Bolshevism, but were instead a calculated attempt to use Soviet support to promote his Great Plan, in part through countering British influence in Tibet and its environs. The artist's subsequent travels through Tibet and Mongolia in 1926-27 predictably led to very little of substance, not least because of the skilful

efforts of British officials to counter his activities. Colonel Frederick Bailey, a legendary figure in the Great Game and now Political Officer for Sikkim and Tibet, used a mixture of charm and bureaucratic obstruction to prevent Roerich's party from reaching Lhasa as originally planned (Bailey had in the wake of the Russian Revolution spent considerable time underground in Bolshevik controlled central Asia monitoring the activities of the new regime there).¹⁰⁰ Roerich had by 1928 abandoned plans for building some kind of Socialist-Buddhist alliance in the East. He did not, though, abandon his hopes of building a new Buddhist state in Asia. The project continued to dominate his imagination and was once again to become the main focus of his activities in the mid-1930s. In the meantime, Roerich devoted increasing attention to the challenge of securing a treaty to protect culture in times of war, a project that was on the face of it less controversial than his Great Plan, although in the event it too raised significant concerns among those who believed such an objective was both impossible and potentially dangerous. Roerich's sense of urgency to promote the Pact may also have reflected his belief that a great war in Asia over the future of Shambhala could lead to the wholesale destruction of cultural heritage unless there were in place definite means to preserve it.¹⁰¹

A text of the proposed 'Treaty on the Protection of Artistic and Scientific Institutions and Historic Monuments' was first drafted in 1928 by the Russian émigré jurist Georges Chklaver, a long-time associate of Roerich who taught law at the University of Paris (the two men privately discussed how to encourage governments around the world to respond positively to the proposal).¹⁰² The draft was formally requested by the Roerich Museum in New York, which had been established a few years earlier both to house the artist's paintings and provide a meeting place and educational forum to advance his ideas. Roerich had long built up a devoted following on both sides of the Atlantic, including influential figures like Louis Horch, the New York philanthropist and foreign exchange speculator, who funded many of the artist's activities and played a pivotal role in planning the new Museum premises that opened in 1929. Roerich's travels in Asia over the previous few years had been widely discussed in the *New York Times* and other publications,¹⁰³ with the result that he had become something of a celebrity, testimony to the interest in all things eastern and exotic among a section of the American public. When he returned to New York in the summer of 1929, following a short trip abroad, Roerich was welcomed by the mayor and whisked through the New York streets in a motorcade.¹⁰⁴ A few days later he travelled to Washington, where he met President Hoover at the White House, hoping to convince the President to support the draft treaty on the protection of sites of culture in times of war. The meeting led to little of substance (in a near-farcical moment Roerich found

that the frame of the picture he planned to give the President was too large to take with him on the train meaning that he arrived in Washington without a gift for Hoover).¹⁰⁵ Not all the press coverage of Roerich was positive, though, not least because of his earlier dealings with the Soviet government.¹⁰⁶ While he carefully edited the English-language account of his travels, excluding descriptions of his meetings with Soviet officials,¹⁰⁷ he continued to be viewed in some quarters as a ‘Bolshevik’.¹⁰⁸ Many members of the State Department looked with scepticism at Roerich, and while they did not share the intense suspicion of their British colleagues, American diplomats struggled to make sense of his bewildering range of activities and contacts.¹⁰⁹ Opinion in the Department varied as to whether the artist was a crank or something more dangerous.

Many – perhaps most – of those who supported the initiatives that resulted in the ‘Roerich Pact’ did not share (and were almost certainly ignorant of) the more colourful views of Roerich himself. Among those was the émigré Russian jurist Baron Mikhail Taube, who had before 1917 held senior positions in the tsarist foreign ministry, where he established a reputation as one of his country’s leading experts on international law (by the early 1930s he taught the subject at the University of Paris). Taube had written numerous scholarly works reflecting his interest in the challenge of ensuring peace in the absence of a universally accepted organisation with the capacity to ensure international order. While he ascribed an important role to religion in shaping the fabric of global politics,¹¹⁰ his ideas had little in common with Roerich’s esoteric views, though he was deeply committed to practical humanitarian initiatives designed to prevent or limit the destructiveness of war.¹¹¹ Both Taube and Chklaver played an important role in building support for the Roerich Pact throughout the early 1930s, particularly in Europe, where the most important centres of Roerich’s followers were found in Paris and Riga.¹¹² Chklaver, unlike Taube, was well-aware of the artist’s distinctive views, with which he was in broad sympathy, although he was adept at using a more conventional vocabulary when seeking to win support for the Pact. Roerich, too, was ready to adapt his language to appeal to a wider audience. In March 1930, he published an article in the *New York Times* proposing that a special flag should be created (‘three spheres within a circle on a white background’) to be flown above sites of cultural importance signifying that they should not be targets in case of war.¹¹³ While Roerich’s words were at times extravagant (‘Humanity is striving in diverse ways for peace, and everyone, in his own heart, realizes that this constructive work is a true prophecy of a new era’), his rhetoric for the most part echoed the more familiar tropes of humanitarian internationalism. He suggested that the League of Nations would be well-disposed to the idea

given that the 'Banner of Peace' was a symbol of 'world unity' which he argued – incorrectly – was an objective of the League. Roerich recognised that esoteric language was more likely to alienate than attract supporters, and while he wrote enthusiastically about 'beauty and knowledge' as universal values that provided the foundation of 'civilization', any reference to all-knowing Mahatmas or eastern spirituality was missing.

The cause of the Pact was greatly advanced by a meeting of 400 delegates that took place in Bruges in the autumn of 1931 (a second meeting convened in the Belgian city the following year). Roerich himself had by now returned to Asia, but he fully endorsed the aims of the conference, organised by the artist Camille Tulpinck,¹¹⁴ sending an address to the attendees telling them that 'only the values of culture will solve the most complex problems of life'.¹¹⁵ He repeated a point he had regularly made in his previous writings, arguing that the Banner of Peace should be regarded as a counterpart to the Red Cross, protecting the buildings where it was flown in the same way that the Red Cross flag denoted medical facilities that should be spared from attack. After Tulpinck formally opened the conference, Chklaver made a lengthy speech introducing the Pact,¹¹⁶ while Taube along with several other academics spoke on the legal challenges involved in implementing the proposal. A good deal of attention was given to such questions as building up an inventory of critical heritage sites and objects.¹¹⁷ Roerich was warmly praised by delegates – Taube called him 'one of the greatest personalities of our time' – but the praise was for the artist's commitment to protecting art and architecture rather than as any kind of spiritual guru. The proceedings of the Bruges Conference were above all testimony to the spirit of inter-war internationalism, shaped by a commitment to building cooperation designed to prevent a repeat of the nationalist tensions that exploded in 1914.

While the delegates who assembled at Bruges were enthusiastic supporters of a Pact to protect heritage assets in times of war, the initiative still faced criticism from elsewhere, not least among those who pointed out that many buildings of historic value contained important government offices and would inevitably be targets in time of war.¹¹⁸ The British and Indian governments – along with a significant number of officials at the US State Department – remained suspicious of *any* activities inspired by Roerich given his former dealings with the Soviet government. And, while Chklaver assured the Bruges Conference that the League of Nations was supportive of the Roerich Pact, the reality was rather different. Officials in Geneva were already by the end of 1930 angry at claims made in the press that the 'International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation' (IIIC), an advisory body to the League headquartered in Paris, had unconditionally endorsed the idea of the Pact.¹¹⁹ The League also politely but firmly

declined to send a senior representative to the first Bruges Conference.¹²⁰ The suspicion with which the Pact was viewed in League circles continued over the next few years, not least when a further conference met at Washington in 1933 to discuss how best to advance the initiative, a move condemned by senior figures in the IIIC as both ‘impracticable’ and ‘dangerous’. The Secretary General of the IIIC’s ‘International Office of Museums’ argued that any attempt to humanise war or reduce its destructive consequences would make conflict more likely. He also suggested, as many had before, that it was impossible to identify a comprehensive list of heritage sites of particular importance.¹²¹ Such views were widely shared in Geneva. Many League officials believed that the artist had some unknown and potentially concerning motives of his own, which might if achieved undermine peace rather than preserve it.¹²²

There was as noted earlier a marked tension between the language of humanitarian internationalism which characterised most public discussion of the Pact and the private language Roerich used when talking to his closest confidantes about international politics. Yet there were times when the boundary between these two worlds evaporated (or at least became more porous). The most celebrated example concerns Henry Wallace, who was appointed as Secretary of Agriculture in 1933 by Roosevelt before later serving as Vice President during the President’s third term in office.¹²³ Wallace, who first met Roerich in 1929, had for many years been interested in theosophy and freemasonry, and was inclined in the words of one scholar to see the New Deal as ‘a harbinger of impending spiritual revolution’.¹²⁴ On a visit to New York he visited the Roerich Museum, apparently at the suggestion of Dmitrii Borodin, and was immediately transfixed by the spiritual vision he saw in the art displayed there. Although Roerich at first paid little attention to his would-be acolyte, once Wallace was appointed to Roosevelt’s Cabinet the artist quickly recognised that he might serve as a conduit to power, inducting him into his inner circle with the name ‘Galahad’ (the Roerichs gave exotic names to all their close collaborators). Wallace for his part wrote at length to Roerich at his residence in India throughout 1933-34, often addressing the letters to ‘Dear Guru’, a correspondence that many years later threatened to derail his political career when his opponents acquired copies of the letters by ‘Bubblehead’.¹²⁵ Wallace’s language echoed the kind of occult language that Roerich himself often used: ‘Long have I been aware of the occasional fragrance from the other world which is the real world. But now I must live in the outer world and at the same time make over my mind and body to serve as fit instruments for the Lord of Justice.’¹²⁶ The Agricultural Secretary referred in his letters to ‘the Great Ones’ (the mysterious Himalayans who communicated telepathically with Roerich and his wife). The Secretary of State Cordell

Hull, who often crossed swords with Wallace, was by contrast ‘the Sour One’. Helena Roerich in her diaries, which characteristically combined a tone of esoteric obscurantism with references to contemporary developments, repeatedly noted that Master Morya believed Wallace could play a critical role in furthering the Shambhala project (not least through exerting direct influence on Roosevelt who, despite his failings, had ‘some successful traits’ that could in time lead him to a fuller understanding of contemporary realities).¹²⁷ While the artist initially concealed from ‘Galahad’ the full scale of his ambitions, Wallace was well-aware in broad terms of Roerich’s Shambhala ambitions, although he carefully concealed them from the President and other senior figures in the White House. The Agriculture Secretary was on more secure ground when taking the lead to win support for the Roerich Pact, given that Roosevelt was broadly sympathetic to the language of international cooperation, although Cordell Hull was like most of his officials sceptical of the whole project.¹²⁸

The State Department’s suspicion of the principles enshrined in the Roerich Pact were rooted both in the familiar scepticism about Roerich as well as doubts about whether it would be practical to protect cultural heritage in the maelstrom of war. Wallace himself sent numerous letters to Hull asking him to support the Pact, although Hull was careful not to commit himself, and warned Wallace against taking any action that might commit the U.S. government. Wallace nevertheless continued to work closely with other supporters of Roerich to attract statements of support from prominent individuals including H. G. Wells and George Bernard Shaw as well as educational institutions including Duke University and M.I.T. He also spent a good deal of time trying to persuade leading politicians in the House and Senate to voice their approval. And, above all, Wallace worked hard to win over the President. His efforts met with considerable success when, in the summer of 1933, Roosevelt instructed the State Department to appoint Wallace as a delegate to a forthcoming international Conference to be held in Washington to discuss ways of furthering the Banner of Peace initiative. The decision effectively represented a political victory for Wallace over Hull.

The proceedings of the ‘Third International Convention for the Promotion of the World Wide Adoption of the Roerich Pact and the Banner of Peace’, that met in Washington in November 1933, were, like the earlier meetings in Bruges, free from the language of ‘Great Ones’ and service to ‘the Lord of Justice’ (the same was less true of publications aimed at Roerich’s more devoted followers which dismissed his opponents as the ‘servants of darkness’).¹²⁹ Roerich’s address to delegates – once again sent from his Indian residence – certainly included colourful language (‘The violations against creative life seduced generations

into the abyss of savagery'). It was nevertheless focused on the prosaic task of preserving important artefacts of human civilisation from destruction. Roerich firmly aligned the proposed Pact with other international organisations already in existence ('As with the case of the International Court of Justice at The Hague, the International Postal Union, the Red Cross—our Pact and Banner does not represent in its essence any international difficulties'). The language used by speakers at the Washington Conference was typically restrained. Wallace read out Cordell Hull's notably uneffusive message of support ('While there are in existence certain agencies for the protection of such works [of art], I am in entire sympathy with the objects for which the meeting you are now attending was called, and I would be gratified if these aims could be accomplished'). Wallace himself emphasised in his address how ideas of 'common humanity' required a response not just to the horrors of military conflict but also 'the deadly economic weapons of tariffs, quotas, and speculative currencies.' He called for a rallying around an 'International Flag of Cultural Unity' to help ameliorate the tensions caused by nationalism. The Agriculture Secretary praised Roerich as 'a manifold genius' who had devoted his life to 'the cause of world cultural unity'. He said nothing about Roerich's idiosyncratic geopolitical vision nor his belief in the incorporeal Mahatmas who inspired him.¹³⁰

Wallace visited the White House a few days before the Conference formally opened, handing Roosevelt a copy of the proposed Pact along with a Banner of Peace flag, following which the President 'gave assurance of his interest in the furtherance of the movement'. Nor was this necessarily untrue. Eleanor Roosevelt had publicly supported the idea of the Pact the previous year – she had also spoken at the Roerich Museum¹³¹ – while Roosevelt's mother was a longstanding admirer of Roerich. Roosevelt himself was in any case more inclined than his predecessors to support initiatives that flowed outside the normal bureaucratic channels (a theme that quickly became a hallmark of the New Deal). A few weeks after the Washington Conference, the Seventh International Conference of American States at Montevideo approved the draft Pact and urged all members of the Pan-American Union to sign it. The State Department, while not directly opposing such a move, instructed its delegates to limit discussion of the issue so far as was possible.¹³² Wallace himself spent much of 1934 trying to persuade Roosevelt that the US government should commit itself to the Pact, although his task was made more difficult by Hull's on-going scepticism. The position of the Agriculture Secretary was complicated still further by the fact that his private support for Roerich's Great Plan meant that he was acting at odds with the central tenets of Roosevelt's foreign policy.

Roerich had by now embarked on a new trip to east Asia, ostensibly to study agricultural methods, but once there he quickly sought to build links with both White Russians and Japanese officials in the hope they would provide support for his grand ambitions in central Asia. The President had by contrast recognised the Soviet government and was committed to opposing Japanese expansion. Roosevelt almost certainly knew nothing of Wallace's closeness to Roerich. And, while he knew a little about the ideas of the artist and his wife, the President was certainly unaware of the Great Plan in any of its uncertain iterations.

Roosevelt had decided by the late summer of 1934 that the USA should endorse the Roerich Pact as part of the initiative set in motion by the Pan-American Union. In August he gave Wallace the plenipotentiary authority needed to sign the agreement (a decision that was a further rebuff to Hull and the State Department). Nor was he put off his plans by letters subsequently sent to him by Helena Roerich telling the President that that 'the fate of many countries is being weighed on the Cosmic Scales' but that with her help he would be able to 'to occupy the worthiest place in the New Epoch'.¹³³ It must nevertheless be a moot point whether Roosevelt would have put so much trust in Wallace if he had known of Galahad's place in the calculations of Roerich and his wife. The treaty itself was signed on 15 April 1935 at a conference in Washington attended by representatives from twenty-one countries. At its heart was the principle that 'historic monuments, museums, scientific, artistic, educational and cultural institutions shall be considered as neutral and as such respected and protected by belligerents'. Roosevelt was present at the signing and made a short speech praising efforts to preserve 'the cultural achievements of the nations of this hemisphere'. Roerich was once again absent – he was travelling in Asia – but sent an address read out by Wallace suggesting that 'the sacred manifestations of Beauty and Science [can] merge us into one powerful union'. There was as ever nothing to hint at his occult preoccupations.¹³⁴

There is no question that Roerich was genuinely committed to preserving important items of heritage from the ravages of war. Nor is there reason to doubt that he believed the treaty which came to be indelibly associated with his name could increase international cooperation. Roerich's oriental mystique, along with his importance as an artist of real talent, undoubtedly increased his appeal to sections of European and American society at a time of widespread despair about the global political and economic situation. His suggestion that cultural artefacts in all their different forms possessed universal value seemed to provide a potential focus for agreement in a world threatened by conflict and war. The artist was by contrast always far more reticent about his ambitions to promote some form of Pan-Buddhist Federation in Asia, not

least because he knew that any such development would run directly contrary to the diplomatic priorities of both Britain and the USA, creating tensions that could make international conflict more likely. His activities in Asia consistently perplexed and concerned officials in London and Washington, as well as Moscow and Tokio, who fretted that Roerich might be the agent of a hostile power rather than a grandiloquent eccentric convinced that his elusive spiritual guides were instructing him to transform the politics of a large swathe of Asia. Yet there is little doubt that the artist did believe his own claims. Roerich's efforts to influence international politics were rooted in an unshakeable belief that he possessed insights rooted in a higher consciousness denied to most of his fellow mortals.

Both theologians and historians of utopias have long recognised the challenges of disentangling what might loosely be called the visionary and the mundane.¹³⁵ The destruction caused by the First World War led to numerous efforts to identify how a new international system could be built that would prevent a recurrence of the slaughter. Some of these initiatives, such as the search for new forms of collective security focused on the League of Nations, fell under the umbrella of what Martin Ceadel (building on A. J. P. Taylor) called *pacifism*: that is a rejection of war as irrational and inhumane combined with a recognition that *in extremis* a resort to force may sometimes be necessary to prevent something even worse.¹³⁶ Unconditional pacifists by contrast believed that the use of force was invariably wrong. Their motivations were varied. Some members of organisations like the PPU rejected war as incompatible with Christian ideals. Others believed that war was a product of the fundamental failure of an international economic system based on the principles of capitalism. Still more believed that preparing for conflict by a programme of rearmament made war more likely. Such beliefs were, for all their differences, firmly located within what might be called the mainstream discourse about questions of war and peace. The three figures discussed in this article by contrast articulated their ideas using a very different language. Each of them also recognised, though, that if their ideas were to be anything more than intellectual curiosities then they needed to find ways of engaging with wider public debates.

Aldous Huxley's pacifism was rooted in his sense of the unity of all being, and while his ideas were founded as much on instinct as intellectual reflection, he firmly believed that a resort to war was always irrational and contrary to the deeper rhythms of the world. He was nevertheless determined to influence developments in a more practical way. Both Huxley's

PPU lectures and his writings show that he was in the 1930s shrewd enough to articulate his pacifism in a language designed to resonate with an audience that had little interest in his metaphysics. The same was far less true of Mitrinović, who positively relished articulating his ideas in a language calculated to mystify his readers and listeners. Yet it is hard to avoid the impression that such mystification was a deliberate strategy, which probably helped to cement his role as a ‘guru’ to a small group of devoted followers, even as it failed to make an impression in the wider public sphere. Mitrinović’s attempts to reach beyond his immediate supporters to promote his ideas, through the establishment of a network of organisations and publications, ultimately proved a failure, in large part because he was always more comfortable in a private setting where he could exercise his force of personality. Mitrinović’s ideas about the nature of international politics were for all their complexity rooted in a powerful sense that contemporary developments could only be understood against a vast historical canvas. His ambivalence about translating his insights into the everyday vernacular of political analysis meant, though, that his ideas never penetrated the public consciousness.

The career of Nikolai Roerich is fascinating precisely because he acquired a public *persona* and influence that eluded Mitrinović. Roerich was like Mitrinović a product of the European ‘east’ who presented himself as having access to an oriental wisdom that offered knowledge inaccessible to the occidental mind. Both men cultivated a semiotics of the self that relied on their dress and personal presentation to embody the ideas they offered to the world. While this *persona* seems to have led to Mitrinović’s general marginalisation in his adopted home, even as it helped to cement his appeal with a small group of followers, Roerich’s ‘mystique’ reinforced his reputation as an artistic genius who could offer profound insights that eluded more ordinary mortals. He was well-aware that his hopes of building a new pan-Buddhist realm in Asia would be anathema to many governments, anxious to defend their interests in the region, which helps to explain why he was far more inclined to proclaim publicly the virtues of the Roerich Pact rather than the Great Plan. The ‘Treaty on the Protection of Artistic and Scientific Institutions and Historic Monuments’ faced a good deal of criticism from diplomats and officials around the world, but its objectives and language were consonant with the broader language of an international humanitarian movement that sought to prevent war and ameliorate its worst impacts. Yet even allowing for this, it is still remarkable that Roerich was able both to meet with senior political leaders in several countries and attract sustained financial support from benefactors and well-wishers. Although his influence on international political developments was limited, and his motives often the object of suspicion, the mere fact that a

man who claimed to be the reincarnation of the fifth Dalai Lama could obtain access to people of wealth and influence reveals something about the international climate of the 1920s and 1930s.

The ideas promulgated by Huxley, Mitrinović and Roerich struck many of their contemporaries as eccentric or downright bizarre. They typically feature in international histories of the inter-war years only in passing (to the extent that they feature at all). Yet the fact that their ideas commanded a degree of interest serves as a useful reminder that the international history of the years between the two world wars cannot be told simply in terms of diplomatic history and economic relations. The rational-analytical vocabulary that typically dominates such approaches sometimes struggles to fully comprehend a world constructed out of what Immanuel Kant famously called ‘the crooked timber of humanity’.

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¹ James Hilton, *Goodbye Mr Chips* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1934), 101.

² James Hilton, *Random Harvest* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co, 1941).

³ James Hilton, *Lost Horizon* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1933), 75, 188.

⁴ Hilton, *Lost Horizon*, 236.

⁵ Hilton, *Lost Horizon*, 238.

⁶ James Hilton, *To You, Mr Chips* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1938), 39.

⁷ On the book, see the review by Geoffrey West, *Times Literary Supplement*, 28 September 1933. On the film see the review in *Daily Telegraph*, 19 April 1937.

⁸ For an illuminating set of essays on the development of inter-war pacifism, see Peter Brock and Thomas Socknat (eds), *Challenge to Mars. Essays on Pacifism from 1918 to 1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999). The best history of pacifism in Britain during this period remains Martin Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain, 1914-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980). A broader perspective on the development of pacifism in Britain can be found in Martin Ceadel, *Semi-Detached Idealists. The British Peace Movement and International Relations, 1854-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). For a very different examination of the inter-war peace movements in the USA and Britain can be found in Cecelia M. Lynch, *Beyond Appeasement. Interpreting Interwar Peace Movements in World Politics* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2007).

⁹ On the impact of Tolstoy on the development of pacifism beyond Russia, see Charlotte Alston, *Tolstoy and his Disciples. The History of an International Radical Movement* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014).

¹⁰ For a useful discussion of Gandhi's views, see Peter Brock, *Twentieth-Century Pacifism* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1970), 68-103.

¹¹ Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (New York: Hope of Brothers, 1945).

¹² The conventional spelling of Roerich's name in English is used here although in more modern systems of transliteration it would typically be rendered Rerikh. The same convention is followed when talking of other well-known figures like Ouspensky, Gurdjieff and Kandinsky. Elsewhere transliteration follows the modified version of the Library of Congress system.

¹³ The terms 'esoteric' and 'occult' are used in this article to refer to ideas and practices that emphasised the search for hidden or unknown forms of knowledge. For a valuable series of essays examining changing understandings of the character and significance of 'occult' beliefs, see Christopher Partridge (ed), *The Occult World* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015).

¹⁴ There were of course many who believed that all pacifists tended to be 'cranks'. Even Robert Graves, who was not a particularly vigorous critic of pacifism, discussed the subject in his 1940 study of inter-war Britain in a chapter entitled 'Pacifism, Nudism, Hiking'. See Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, *The Long Week-End. A Social History of Great Britain, 1918-1939* (New York: Norton, 1963), 265-80.

¹⁵ Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1932).

¹⁶ Aldous Huxley, 'To the Puritans All Things Are Impure,' in Aldous Huxley, *Music at Night and Other Essays* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1931), 181.

¹⁷ Gerald Heard, *The Ascent of Humanity. An Essay on the Evolution of Civilization from Group Consciousness through Individuality to Super-Consciousness* (London: Cape, 1929).

¹⁸ The best treatment of Huxley's pacifism, which has been invaluable in preparing this article, can be found in Jake Poller, *Aldous Huxley and Alternative Spirituality* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 139-203. Also see Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain*. A good deal of useful material can also be found in Paul Eros, "'One of the Most Penetrating Minds in England". Gerald Heard and the British Intelligentsia of the Interwar Period', Oxford University D.Phil Thesis (2011), 173-242.

¹⁹ Aldous Huxley to Flora Strousse, 27 December 1935, in James Sexton (ed), *Selected Letters of Aldous Huxley* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2007), 313.

²⁰ For a selection of Huxley's letters to Sheppard, see Sexton, *Letters of Aldous Huxley*; R. Ellis Roberts (ed), *Life and Letters of H.R.L Sheppard* (London: John Murray, 1942). For a biography of Sheppard, see Carolyn Scott, *Dick Sheppard. A Biography* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977).

²¹ Aldous Huxley, *What are You Going to Do About It?* (New York, Harper and Brothers, 1936), 15,28. The pamphlet was discussed widely at local PPU meetings. See, for example, the report in the *West Middlesex Gazette*, 10 July 1937.

²² Robert S. de Ropp, *Warriors Way* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1980), 90-91.

²³ De Ropp, *Warrior's Way*, 75.

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- ²⁴ *Training for Peace. A Programme for Peace Workers* (London: Routledge and PPU, 1936). Huxley wrote an introduction to the pamphlet.
- ²⁵ Martin Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain, 1914-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980), 253.
- ²⁶ Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain*, 255.
- ²⁷ Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain*, 256.
- ²⁸ Aldous Huxley, *Eyeless in Gaza* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1936), 619.
- ²⁹ *Times*, 19 June 1936.
- ³⁰ Even C. Day Lewis, who elsewhere sharply criticised Huxley's pacifism, provided the book with a positive review. See *Daily Telegraph*, 19 June 1936.
- ³¹ Gilbert Armitage's review of *Eyeless in Gaza* in *English Review*, 63, 2 (1936), 187-88.
- ³² Poller, *Huxley*, 153.
- ³³ Ceadel, *Pacifism*, 220.
- ³⁴ Aldous Huxley, *Ends and Means* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1937). Robert Graves tartly noted three years later that Huxley had 'read too much' on the subject with the result that his material remained 'undigested'. Graves and Hodge, *Long Week-End*, 197.
- ³⁵ Aldous Huxley, *An Encyclopedia of Pacifism* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1937), 61.
- ³⁶ Quoted in David King Dunaway, *Huxley in Hollywood* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), 25.
- ³⁷ On Isherwood's views on war in the 1930s, including his book *Journey to a War* co-authored with W. H. Auden, see Paul Piazza, *Christopher Isherwood: Myth and Anti-Myth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 78-109.
- ³⁸ For a lucid discussion of this theme, see John Bramble, *Modernism and the Occult* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).
- ³⁹ H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion and Philosophy* (London: Theosophical Publishing House, 1893), 2 vols.
- ⁴⁰ Among the large literature on this subject, see Owen Davies, *A Supernatural War. Magic, Divination and Faith during the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).
- ⁴¹ D. H. Lawrence, *Kangaroo* (London: Martin Secker, 1923), 244.
- ⁴² On Ouspensky see Gary Lachman, *In Search of P. D. Ouspensky. The Genius in the Shadow of Gurdjieff* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 2006).
- ⁴³ De Ropp, *Warriors Way*, 81.
- ⁴⁴ James Webb, *The Harmonious Circle. The Lives and Work of G. I. Gurdjieff, P. D. Ouspensky, and Their Followers* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980), 400-05.
- ⁴⁵ De Ropp, *Warrior's Way*, 88.
- ⁴⁶ De Ropp, *Warriors Way*, 101.
- ⁴⁷ Poller, *Aldous Huxley*, 158.
- ⁴⁸ P. D. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous. Fragments from an Unknown Teaching* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1950), 24.
- ⁴⁹ De Ropp, *Warrior's Way*, 84.
- ⁵⁰ Dr Ropp, *Warrior's Way*, 82.
- ⁵¹ Huxley, *Ends and Means*, 127.
- ⁵² See, for example, Dušan Pajin, 'Dimitrije Mitrinović and the European Project', *Serbian Studies: Journal of the North American Society for Serbian Studies*, 22, 2 (2008), 211-26.
- ⁵³ Discussion of Mitrinović's early life can be found in Andrew Rigby, *Dimitrije Mitrinović. A Biography* (York: William Sessions, 2006), 1-38. Also see Predrag Palavestra, *Dogma i utopija Dimitrija Mitrinovića: počeci srpske književne avangarde* (Belgrade, 2003), *passim*; Dušan Pajin, *Za svecovecansku zajednicu. Dimitrije Mitrinovic, 1887-1953* (Belgrade: Pešić i sinovi, 2016), 8-17. For a brief but lively discussion of the concept of the *fin de siècle* in European culture, see Walter Laqueur, 'Fin-de-siècle: Once More With Feeling', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 31, 1 (1996), 5-47. For a discussion of the Young Bosnia movement, see Predrag Palavestra, 'Young Bosnia: Literary Action, 1908-1914', *Balkanica*, 41 (2010), 155-84.
- ⁵⁴ On Solov'ev see Jonathan Sutton, *The Religious Philosophy of Vladimir Solovyov. Towards a Reassessment* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988). Mitrinović's future brother-in-law Stephen Graham played a key role in organising the first translation of Solov'ev's *Justification of the Good* into English. See Michael Hughes, *Beyond Holy Russia. The Life and Times of Stephen Graham* (Cambridge: Open Book), 128.
- ⁵⁵ Erich Gutkind, *Siderische Geburt, Seraphische Wanderung vom Tode der Welt zur Taufe der Tat* (Berlin: Schuster und Loeffler, 1914). For an excellent article on the relationship between Gutkind and Mitrinović, see Martin Levy, 'Dimitrije Mitrinović and Eric Gutkind: Friends, False Friends, and Friendly Enemies', in Slobodan

G. Markovich (ed), *A Reformer of Mankind: Dimitrije Mitrinović Between Cultural Utopianism and Social Activism* (Belgrade: Zepter, 2023), 197-216.

⁵⁶ For a useful discussion of Mitrinović's relations with Kandinsky, especially in the context of Pan-Christian universalism, see Shulamith Behr, 'Wassily Kandinsky and Dimitrije Mitrinović: Pan-Christian Universalism and the Yearbook "Towards the Mankind of the Future through Aryan Europe"', *Oxford Art Journal*, 15, 1 (1992), 81-88. See, too, Palavestra, *Dogma i utopija*, 48-52. Palavestra's book focuses heavily on Mitrinović's life before the First World War, seeing him as a key figure in the cultural *avant-garde*.

⁵⁷ Bradford University (J. B. Priestley Library) Special Collections, The New Atlantis Foundation Archive, 1/4/35, Mitrinović to Kropotkin, 16 August 1914. For a useful essay on Mitrinović's early years in London, see Slobodan G. Markovich, 'Early London Period of Dimitrije Mitrinovic (1914-1919)', in Markovich, *A Reformer of Mankind*, 93-138.

⁵⁸ New Atlantis Foundation Archive, 1/4/45, Mitrinović to 'Ivan' (undated).

⁵⁹ Stephen Graham, *Part of the Wonderful Scene* (London: Collins, 1964), 121.

⁶⁰ For a lively memoir of Orage see Philip Mairet, *A. R. Orage. A Memoir* (New York: University Books, 1966). On Orage and the *New Age*, see Wallace Martin, *The New Age Under Orage. Chapters in English Cultural History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967).

⁶¹ Philip Mairet, *Autobiographical and Other Papers* (Manchester: Carnacet, 1981), 177.

⁶² Mairet, *Autobiographical and Other Papers*, 181.

⁶³ 'Cosmoi', 'World Affairs', *New Age*, 26 August 1920. Many of Mitrinović's writings, including his 'World Affairs' columns are usefully brought together in H. C. Rutherford (ed), *Certainly, Future. Selected Writings by Dimitrije Mitrinović* (New York: East European Monographs, 1987).

⁶⁴ Mairet, *Autobiographical and Other Papers*, 183.

⁶⁵ Cosmoi, 'World Affairs', *New Age*, 20 January 1921.

⁶⁶ Cosmoi, 'World Affairs', *New Age*, 30 December 1920.

⁶⁷ Cosmoi, 'World Affairs', *New Age*, 28 April 1921.

⁶⁸ Cosmoi, 'World Affairs', *New Age*, 26 August 1920.

⁶⁹ Edwin Muir, *An Autobiography* (London: Hogarth Press, 1954), 168; Paul Selver, *Orage and The New Age Circle. Reminiscences and Reflections* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1957), 59.

⁷⁰ Cosmoi, 'World Affairs', *New Age*, 19 August 1920.

⁷¹ For a discussion of the Adler Society, along with the Chandos Group, see Rigby, *Dimitrije Mitrinović*, 89-106.

⁷² For a useful discussion of Mitrinović's cosmopolitan projects in the late 1920s and 1930s, see Slobodan G. Markovich, 'Cosmopolitan Projects of Dimitrije Mitrinović From the 1930s and the Dilemmas of Interpretation', *Knjizevna istorija*, 52, 171 (2020), 241-60.

⁷³ Rigby, *Mitrinović*, 117.

⁷⁴ Cosmoi, 'World Affairs', *New Britain*, 31 May 1933.

⁷⁵ Anon [Dimitrije Mitrinović], Editorial in *New Atlantis*, October 1933. See, too, his lecture the previous year on 'The Principles of European Federation', delivered 6 October 1932, in Dimitrije Mitrinović, *Lectures, 1926-1930* (New Atlantis Foundation, 1995), 305-6.

⁷⁶ *New Britain*, 4 July 1934.

⁷⁷ Winifred Fraser, 'The New Europe Group and a British Revolution', *New Britain Quarterly. Organ of the XIth Hour Group*, 1, 1 (October 1932).

⁷⁸ Maj-General J. C. Fuller, 'Armageddon and the Labyrinth', *New Europe*, 1 (September 1934).

⁷⁹ Editorial ('Renaissance-Principle'), *New Europe*, 1 (September 1934).

⁸⁰ Mairet, *Autobiographical and Other Papers*, 133.

⁸¹ Alan Watts, *In My Own Way. An Autobiography* (London: Cape, 1972), 173. The distinguished Slavic scholar Elizabeth Hill firmly rejected the idea that Mitrinović was 'an occult master captivating his pupils by hypnosis', though she seems to have understood the idea of 'occult' less as a belief in the existence of deeper realities, and more in the popular sense of a form of Black Magic. See Mitrinović, *Lectures*, 6.

⁸² Rigby, *Dimitrije Mitrinović*, 129.

⁸³ New Atlantis Foundation Archive, 3/5/1/1, Roberts to editors of *New Britain Weekly*, 1 August 1933.

⁸⁴ On the growing tension of Purdom's relations with Mitrinović, see Rigby, *Mitrinović*, 134 ff.

⁸⁵ Dimitrije Mitrinović, 'Urgent Appeal to His Excellency the Chancellor of the Reich', *The New Atlantis*, 1, 1 (October 1933).

⁸⁶ Rigby, *Mitrinović*.

⁸⁷ Mitrinović, *Lectures*, vi.

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- ⁸⁸ For some interesting reflections on this theme, see Markovich, 'Cosmopolitan Projects'. Also see Slobodan G. Markovich, 'Dimitrije Mitrinović in the Quest for Gnosis. From National to Cosmopolitan Identity', *Knjizevna istorija*, 52, 171 (2020), 101-22.
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- ⁹⁰ On the interest in the occult in Russia during the Silver Age, including Theosophy, see Maria Carlson, *No Religion Higher than Truth. A History of the Theosophical Movement in Russia, 1875-1922* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).
- ⁹¹ Andrei Znamenski, *Red Shambhala: Magic, Prophecy, and Geopolitics in the Heart of Asia* (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 2011), 146.
- ⁹² The final text of the Convention explicitly noted it was 'guided by' the Washington Pact of April 1935 (a formal agreement by 21 American states to commit to the principles set out in the Roerich Pact).
- ⁹³ On the Roerichs' interest in occult forms of knowledge, and its relationship to their political views, see the useful essay by Markus Osterrieder, 'From Synarchy to Shambhala: The Role of Political Occultism and Social Messianism in the Activities of Nicholas Roerich', in Birgit Menzel *et al*, *the New Age of Russia. Occult and Esoteric Dimensions* (Munich: Verlag Otto Sagner: 2012), 101-34.
- ⁹⁴ Znamenski, *Red Shambhala*, 145 ff.
- ⁹⁵ Ben Steil, *The World that Wasn't. Henry Wallace and the Fate of the American Century* (New York: Avid Reader Press, 2024), 51, 57. For Krestinskii's views on Roerich see McCannon, *Nicholas Roerich*, 274 ff.
- ⁹⁶ McCannon, *Nicholas Roerich*, 274-75.
- ⁹⁷ For an illuminating analysis of the Soviet government's policy towards Tibet during the 1920s, including material on Roerich, see A. I. Andreev, *Tibet v politike tsarskoi, sovetskoi i postsovetskoi rossii* (St Petersburg: Izd-vo S.-Peterburgskogo universiteta, 2006), 218-323.
- ⁹⁸ On Roerich's Moscow visit, see McCannon, *Nicholas Roerich*, 303-12. For a useful summary of how the question of Roerich's relationship to the Bolshevik regime has continued to raise passionate feelings into the twentieth century, see Alexander Stetsenko, 'Protection of the Roerichs' Name and Heritage', available at https://en.icr.su/protection/heritage/Stetsenko_cae.php.
- ⁹⁹ 'Orientalism' and 'occultism' was often a hallmark of leading figures in the anti-Bolshevik movement in the wake of the 1917 Revolution, not least the infamous 'white' general Baron Ungern-Sternberg, on whom see James Palmer, *The Bloody White Baron* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008). See, too, Ferdinand Ossendowski, *Beasts, Men and Gods* (New York: E. E. Dutton and Co, 1922).
- ¹⁰⁰ For Bailey's memories of this time see his *Mission to Tashkent* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1946). Bailey subsequently described Roerich as 'a humbug ... afflicted with meglomania' but 'almost certainly not a Bolshevik'. Quoted in Meyer & Brysac, *Tournament of Shadows*, 472.
- ¹⁰¹ Alexandre Andreyev, *The Myth of the Masters Revived*, 359.
- ¹⁰² Chklaver to Roerich, 3 December 1929, https://www.roerich.org/pact/1929-12-03_chklaver.html.
- ¹⁰³ See, for example, *New York Times*, 17 February 1926 ('To Display Tibetan Art'); 21 December 1926 (Nicholas Roerich is Missing in Russia or Asia).
- ¹⁰⁴ *New York Times*, 21 June 1929.
- ¹⁰⁵ On the meeting with Hoover, see McCannon, *Roerich*, 346.
- ¹⁰⁶ See, for example, *New York Times*, 4 July 1926 ('Roerich Seeks a Composite Messiah in Tibet').
- ¹⁰⁷ Nicholas Roerich, *Alti-Himalaya. A Travel Diary* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes and Co.), 1929.
- ¹⁰⁸ The British and Indian governments were still in 1930s anxious to prevent Roerich from settling permanent in India, still suspicious of his Bolshevik credentials, believing that he had been less than honest in his accounts of his travels to Moscow. See Andreyev, *Myth of the Masters*, 344.
- ¹⁰⁹ The views of the State Department eventually came to coincide with the summary made by a US Consul in Calcutta in 1931 who – like the British – was undecided if Roerich was a 'racketeer in art' or whether such activities served as a 'cloak for deeper and more dangerous purposes'. Quoted in Meyer and Brysac, *Tournament of Shadows*, 478. The Department was generally more positive about Roerich's activities in the USA, suggesting there was nothing 'undesirable' about them. See McCannon, *Roerich*, 343.
- ¹¹⁰ See, for example, M. A. Taube, *Kristianstvo i organizatsiia mezhdunarodnago mira* (Moscow: Tip. Tovarishchestva I.N. Kushnerev, 1905).
- ¹¹¹ See, for example, M. I. Taube, *Vechnyi mir ili vechnaia voina? Mysli o Lige natsii* (Berlin: Detinets, 1922).

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- ¹¹² On the Roerich society in Latvia, see Anita Stasulane, 'Centre of Theosophy in the Baltic Region – Riga', in Jean-Pierre Brach *et al* (eds), *Capitales de l'ésotéricisme européen et dialogue des cultures* (Paris: Orizons, 2014): 133-47.
- ¹¹³ *New York Times*, 11 March 1930.
- ¹¹⁴ Roerich to Tulpinck, 24 April 1931, in Peter Barenboim and Naeem Siddiqi, *Bruges. Bridge Between Civilizations* (Grid: 2010), 34-36.
- ¹¹⁵ Roerich, 'Greetings to the Bruges Conference', in Barenboim and Siddiqi, *Bruges*, 36-39.
- ¹¹⁶ A useful detailed description of the conference can be found in the report sent to Roerich by Chkavler at <https://roerichsmuseum.website.yandexcloud.net/DD/DD-818.pdf>.
- ¹¹⁷ *New York Times*, 13 September 1931.
- ¹¹⁸ *New York Times*, 6 September 1931, citing Richard Dupierreux in *Le Soir*.
- ¹¹⁹ United Nations Archives (League of Nations Secretariat), R2215/5B/24711/788, Dufour (Geneva) to Horch, 17 December 1930.
- ¹²⁰ United Nations Archives (League of Nations Secretariat), R2215/5B/24711/788, Montenach to Tulpinck, 27 August 1931.
- ¹²¹ United Nations Archives (League of Nations Secretariat), R 3984-5B-1416-706, Foundoukidis to Coleman, 24 October 1933.
- ¹²² United Nations Archives (League of Nations Secretariat), R 3984-5B-1416-706, Coleman to Foundoukidis, 2 November 1933.
- ¹²³ On Wallace's relationship with Roerich and its impact on his work in Washington, see Stiel, *The World that Wasn't*, 51-112; J. Samuel Walker, 'The New Deal and the Guru', *American Heritage*, 40, 2 (1989). Also see Richard Dean Burns and Charyl L. Smith, 'Nicholas Roerich, Henry A. Wallace and the "Peace Banner": A Study in Idealism, Egocentrism and Anguish', *Peace and Change*, 1, 2 (1973), 40-49.
- ¹²⁴ Robert C. Williams, *Russian Art and American Money*, quoted in McCannon, *Roerich*, 508.
- ¹²⁵ On the political controversy over the 'Dear Guru' letters, which erupted in 1948 when Wallace was seeking election as President, see Stiel, *The World that Wasn't*, 462; Meyer & Brysac, *Tournament of Shadows*, 475-77. The epithet 'Bubblehead' was coined by the journalist Westbrook Pegler who obtained and published copies of the correspondence.
- ¹²⁶ Quoted in Walker, 'The New Deal and the Guru'.
- ¹²⁷ Helena Roerich's diaries (in Russian) can be found at <https://lebendige-ethik.net/index.php/biblioteka/dnevnik-i-e-i-rerikh/207-tetrad>. The quote here is taken from notebook 37, 26 May 1933.
- ¹²⁸ On Wallace's recognition of Roosevelt's ambivalence over the Pact, see Stiel, *The World that Wasn't*, 72.
- ¹²⁹ For an example of a more 'esoteric' discussions of questions to be discussed at the Washington Conference, invoking images of light and dark, see the essay 'Shanti' by Roerich in *The Banner of Peace* (reprinted from *The Scholar Annual*, 1933).
- ¹³⁰ All quotations in this paragraph are taken from *Third International Convention for the Promotion and World Wide Adoption of the Roerich Pact and the Banner of Peace* (New York: Roerich Museum, 1933).
- ¹³¹ *Annual Report of the Roerich Society* (New York, 1932).
- ¹³² On the Montevideo Conference, including numerous memoranda casting light on the views of the State Department, see *FRUS*, 1933, Vol. 4 ('The American Republics').
- ¹³³ Quoted in McCannon, *Roerich*, 548.
- ¹³⁴ *The Roerich Pact and the Banner of Peace. Ceremony of the Signing of the Roerich Pact* (New York: Roerich Museum, 1935).
- ¹³⁵ For a stimulating discussion of utopian thinking and practice between the two world wars, see Anna Neima, *The Utopians. Six Attempts to Build a Perfect Society* (London: Picador, 2021).
- ¹³⁶ Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain*, 3-7.