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CHURCHILL, ANGLO-AMERICANISM, AND EXCEPTIONALISM

“If I were to be born again, there is one country in which I would want to be a citizen. There is one country where a man knows he has an unbounded future.” When his companions [accompanying him on the train from Washington, D.C., to Jefferson City, Missouri in 1946] asked Churchill to name his country he replied: “The USA, even though I deplore some of your customs.” “Which customs,” he was asked. “You stop drinking with your meals,” Churchill replied.¹

Distinguishing between the role of ideology and pragmatic common sense in the recovery of European order after 1945, Eric Voegelin contrasted the difference in temperament between Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill. Both statesmen, Voegelin said, confronted national and foreign policy issues that could not be properly resolved by ideological formula, these dilemmas being concrete political cases “where the problems you have to handle are commonsense problems on the pragmatic level within contexts about which you perfectly well know what pragmatically can be done.” The misfortune for the Allies at the end of the Second World War was that “the same stupidities as after the First were done again.” Churchill’s wartime memoirs provide abundant testimony to the fact that he tried to make clear to President Roosevelt “that one shouldn’t, for heaven’s sake, surrender to the Russians every capital in Europe. But it was done. Bucharest, Budapest, Belgrade, Berlin, Vienna—everything is surrendered to the Russians.”² Churchill looked to the past, to the history of great power politics, whereas Roosevelt looked to the future that (not long after Roosevelt’s death) would come to betray the President’s moral idealism and naïve internationalism. Historical common sense, Voegelin suggested, was on the side of Churchill.

Churchill’s understanding of history, however, traversed both Old and New Worlds. Anglo-American unity was more than a political or military necessity for two peoples and nations suddenly thrown into a life and death struggle against tyrants and dictators bent upon extinguishing the flame of freedom throughout the world. The cause of the English-speaking peoples, as Churchill would speak and write about it in years before and after 1945, embraced

¹ Kay Halle, ed., Irrepressible Churchill (London: Robson, 1985), p. 223.

² The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin: Published Essays 1953-1965, 34 Vols.(Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press), 11:

the defense of constitutional government and individual liberty, linked the promotion of democracy to universal ideas about justice, and provided both the inspiration and willpower to create a peaceful world order that would temper, however precariously, the asperities of power through new forms of international organization. To Churchill the statesman, often depicted as a self-absorbed realist who defined interests (his own as well as those of his country) in terms of power, must be added an awareness of Churchill the public historian whose moral and historical imagination gave shape to the struggles, reversals, and triumphs of the English-speaking peoples. This paper makes the case that both sides of Churchill, the politician and the moralist, are indispensable for a greater understanding of the whole statesman. Moreover, the intellectual boundaries within which Churchill chronicled the historical experiences of Britain and America allow one to rethink the fabric of American exceptionalism (especially as it relates to the meaning of freedom), the arguable duty of English-speaking peoples to promote democracy in the world, and the interplay of power of morality in statecraft in a way that looks to consequences of actions as much as the intentions affixed to particular ideas and personalities.

Churchill, History, and Moral Judgments

Knowing Churchill's judgment about various historical episodes in America and Britain begs the larger question of grasping the historical and moral patterns of Churchill thought as a historian and what he conceived to be the purpose of historical exposition. While the full range of Churchill as historian is beyond the limited scope of this essay (and has been treated with care elsewhere), attention to his role as a public historian cannot be easily separated from the history that he himself was to make. His career included an early embrace of "Tory Democracy," the symbol of Lord Randolph Churchill's opposition to Gladstone ("the Moloch of Midlothian")³ as well as to the backward-looking Toryism of Lord Salisbury, and his later literary depiction of Whig history⁴ as the nucleus of a new national history of consensus. To Lord Linlithgow, he explained: "I have come to think. . .one should always look back upon the history of the past, study it and meditate upon it. Thus one learns the main line of advance."⁵ An indication of Churchill's outlook was illustrated clearly in the way he reacted to Hitler's various intimations of building an Anglo-German alliance.

If [Hitler's] proposal means that we should come to an understanding with Germany to dominate Europe I think this would be contrary to the whole of our

³ Winston S. Churchill, Lord Randolph Churchill, 2 Vols. (London: Macmillan, 1906), I: 274-75

⁴ Peter Clarke writes that Whig history has been defined as "a story written from hindsight and by taking sides, whose sense of what is relevant is determined by a future end to which the story is advancing, probably represented by the historian's own time." Whig history celebrates an unbroken continuity of national institutions and the growth of liberty. See Clarke, Mr. Churchill's Profession: The Statesman as Author and the Book That Defined the "Special Relationship" (Bloomsbury: New York, 2012), p. 98.

⁵ Sir Martin Gilbert, Winston Churchill Companion 5, part 3 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979), p. 828.

history. We have on all occasions been the friend of the second strongest power in Europe and have never yielded ourselves to the strongest power. Thus Elizabeth resisted Philip II of Spain. Thus William III and Marlborough resisted Louis XIV. Thus Pitt resisted Napoleon, and thus we all resisted William II of Germany.⁶

Churchill took seriously the balance of power, judging the Fuhrer to be latest incarnation of Continental despotism.⁷

Tory Democracy, as understood by father and son, was devoted to the proposition that the Conservative party ought to be “willing and thoroughly competent to deal with the needs of democracy and the multiplying problems of modern life; and that the British Constitution, so far from being incompatible with the social progress of the great mass of . . . people, was in itself a flexible instrument by which that progress might be guided and secured.”⁸ Only two years after his father’s death, and at the age of twenty-two, he wrote to his mother from India: “I am a Liberal in all but name. . . . Were it not for Home Rule—to which I will never consent—I would enter Parliament as a liberal. As it is—Tory Democracy will have to be the standard under which I shall range myself.” At the same time, he advocated manhood suffrage, universal education, payment of members and a progressive income tax.⁹ Although Churchill, over a period of sixty years, expressed numerous reservations about modern democracy—especially on issues relating to equal franchise, women’s suffrage, socialist egalitarianism, democratization in developing countries, mass opinion and jingoism—he judged it to be “the worst form of Government except all those others that have been tried.”¹⁰ Sir John Colville—who served as Private Secretary to Churchill, Neville Chamberlain, and Clement Atlee—depicted Churchill as an uneasy blend of the radical and the traditionalist, a facsimile of Lord Randolph, who had wished, in the son’s words, to “reconcile the old glories. . . of King and country. . . with modern democracy.”¹¹ Another writer has pointed out that his view of democracy “was essentially late Victorian in character,” that he favored a democracy that was “evolutionary, not revolutionary; parliamentary, not plebiscitary; monarchical, not republican, liberal not socialist.”¹² Churchill may have trusted the people, but one of his favorite definitions of

⁶ *Ibid.*, part 2, p. 1170.

⁷ Jeremy Havardi, The Greatest Briton: Essays On Winston Churchill’s Life And Political Philosophy (London: Shephard-Walwyn Publishers, 2009), p. 285.

⁸ Churchill, Lord Randolph Churchill, 1: 293. See also Martin Gilbert, Churchill: A Life (New York: Henry Holt, 1991), p. 69.

⁹ Churchill’s 1897 letter to Lady Randolph Churchill cited in Randolph S. Churchill, Winston S. Churchill: Companion I, part 2 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967), p. 751. See also Roland Quinault, “Churchill and Democracy,” Transactions of the Royal Historical Society 11 (2001): 202.

¹⁰ Hansard 444 (11 November 1947): 207.

¹¹ John Colville, The Fringes of Power (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1985), p. 128.

¹² Quinault, “Churchill and Democracy,” p. 220.

democracy encompassed “the association of us all through the leadership of the best.”¹³ His role as a historian merely reinforced his own political ambitions, with his literary productions serving not just as a badge of authority but (through the telling of great historical events) to demonstrate the reliability of his character, to underscore a larger loyalty to nation beyond party or class.

Victor Feske points out that Churchill surpassed George Macaulay Trevelyan in setting out to make English history “known to a generation,” to exercise a “definite and practical influence upon the future of our country” by helping young readers “realize they are heirs to a great tradition.” Churchill, when compared to the Cambridge historian, “possessed the confidence in the essential truth and eternal value of his message of ordered progress that eluded the dour and pessimistic Trevelyan after 1914, a confidence that allowed Churchill to return unashamedly to the rhetorical hubris of Macaulay.”¹⁴ Evidence of this can be seen in the way each historian explained the meaning and significance of the Magna Carta in British history. From the pen of Macaulay, one reads that the barons were acting selfishly, and with the ordinary sort of class jealousies that were also pervasive with “other English classes and parties who in successive centuries have taken part in developing ‘our happy constitution’ by self-assertion in a practical compromise.”¹⁵ Trevelyan’s account of Runnymede, following Feske’s analysis, has the structure of private vices over time fortuitously culminating in public good fortune by some invisible hand, a process whereby liberalism (“defined as the ideological and philosophical counterpoint to the slow growth of constitutional practice”) was devalued by the disjunction between intentions and results.¹⁶

Writing at a time of increasing cynicism about liberalism after 1918 (typified by John Maynard Keynes’ *Economic Consequences of the Peace*), Churchill retold the story of Runnymede to revitalize a connection between liberal motives and outcomes. On the one hand, Churchill acknowledged the mixed motives of the English barons. In the first volume of *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples*, he described the Magna Carta as “a redress of feudal grievances extorted from an unwilling king by a discontented ruling class insisting on its own privileges.” Enough there perhaps for the even the most jaded and cynical, but Churchill, on the other hand, moved on to the exempt the Great Charter from the indictment of being “a monument of class selfishness.” Rather the leaders of the Barons in 1215 “groped in the dim light towards a fundamental principle.”¹⁷ Even if only half understood, the idea of government would henceforth mean something more than arbitrary rule of any man” as “custom and law

¹³ Winston S. Churchill, Stemming The Tide: Speeches 1951 and 1952 (London: Cassell, 1953), pp. 82-83.

¹⁴ Victor Feske, From Belloc To Churchill: Private Scholars, Public Culture, And The Crisis Of British Liberalism, 1930-1939 (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), pp. 186-87.

¹⁵ G. M. Trevelyan, History of England (London: Longmans, Green, 1926), p. 169.

¹⁶ Feske, From Belloc To Churchill, p. 187.

¹⁷ Winston S. Churchill, The Great Republic (New York: Random House, 2001), p. 419.

must stand even above the king.¹⁸ What is important here is how Churchill sought to identify a spark (however dim) of public virtue, amid the turmoil of instability and conflict, as central to the self-understanding of liberalism and the quest for freedom in British constitutional history. “If the thirteenth century magnates understood little and cared less for the popular liberties or Parliamentary democracy, they had all the same laid hold of a principle which was to be of prime importance for the future development of English society and English institutions.”¹⁹

Maurice Ashley, the Oxford historian who assisted Churchill with historical materials used in the writing of *Marlborough*, pointed out that his colleague was not only concerned to find out precisely how politics worked in the past but also how wars were won or lost. Rather than simply distill the lessons of history, however, he often reversed the sequence of investigation and used his own knowledge of modern politics and warfare to illumine what happened in the past.²⁰ “Battles are the principal milestones of secular history,” Churchill once wrote, while also noting “modern opinion resents this uninspiring truth.” Churchill usually took exception with academic historians who too often treated “decisions of the field” as mere “incidents in the dramas of politics and diplomacy,” whereas he insisted that “great battles, won or lost, change the entire course of events, create new standards of values, new moods, new atmospheres, in armies and in nations, to whom all must conform.”²¹ The employment of military force in history, the mobilization of power and resources by the state to safeguard English liberties (e.g., the wars fought by the British people since the sixteenth century), “constituted neither futile historical detours nor insignificant diversions from the primary movement of national history as the unfolding of liberty and democracy.”²² Churchill drew attention to the “remarkable similarities” between Marlborough’s battles against Louis XIV and the defense of liberal democracy in the early part of the twentieth century. In the first volume of *Marlborough*, published in 1933, he wrote:

The wars of William and Anne were no mere effort of national ambition or territorial gain. They were in essentials a struggle for the life and liberty not only of England, but of Protestant Europe. . . . In no world conflict have the issues, according to modern standards been more real and vital. In none has the duty to defend a righteous cause been more compulsive upon the British nation. In none have the results been more solid, more precious, more lasting. The triumph of the France of Louis XIV would have warped and restricted the development of the freedom we now enjoy, even more than the domination of Napoleon or of the German Kaiser.²³

¹⁸ Feske, *From Belloc To Churchill*, p. 188.

¹⁹ Winston S. Churchill, *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples*, 4 Vols. (London: Cassell, 1956-58), 1: 199-201

²⁰ Maurice Ashley, *Churchill As Historian* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1968), p. 16.

²¹ Winston Churchill, *Marlborough: His Life And Times*, 4 Vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 2: 381.

²² Feske, *From Belloc To Churchill*, p. 208.

²³ Churchill, *Marlborough*, 1: 4-5.

Churchill claimed the same moral underpinning of military force was at work in allied armies who rallied to defend the liberal open society against German autocracy and militarism during the First World War. He rejected revisionist explanations for the war that pinpointed either cause or blame on a morally suspect international system (that made of all belligerents co-conspirators) or to the machinations of secret diplomacy or to unskilled foreign office functionaries across the continent. Conflicting national and geopolitical interests, as Churchill saw it, could not be disconnected from the moral foundations of German culture and intellectual life that made possible Bismarck's *Realpolitik* and the Kaiser's *Weltpolitik*. In the *Great Crisis*, he suggested that the various diplomatic episodes that foreshadowed war prior to 1914 were but "symptoms of the dangerous disease, and are only important for that reason. Behind them lies the interests, the passions and destiny of mighty races of men; and long antagonisms express themselves in trifles. 'Great commotions,' it was said of old, 'arise out of small things, but not concerning small things.'"²⁴ Professor Ashley, observing that Churchill "certainly did not possess a philosophic habit of mind," nevertheless found that he did "have a philosophy of history of a kind." John Lukacs writes that Churchill was not a "religious man." However, he certainly had a profound sense of his own destiny and saw himself as defending Christian civilization from tyranny "at a dramatic moment in the twentieth century." He himself was his own reassuring proof that men were on earth to serve a purpose. Writing in January 1900, deep in the Transvaal following his harrowing escape from Pretoria, Churchill the fugitive offered a rare confession:

I find no comfort in any of the philosophical ideas which men parade in their hours of ease and strength and safety. They seemed only fair-weather friends. I realized with awful force that no exercise of my own feeble wit and strength could save me from my enemies, and without the assistance of that High Power which interferes in the eternal sequence of causes and effects more often than we are prone to admit, I could never succeed. I prayed long and earnestly for help and guidance. My prayer, as it seems to me, was swiftly and wonderfully answered.²⁵

His view of history was one in which man was the master of his fate and that outstanding men had their roles to play and their duties to fulfill. Clearly, Churchill rejected economic and materialist interpretations of history that would deliver up individual choices of statesmen to impersonal forces beyond human control.²⁶ In one of his most important essays, probing "mass effects in modern life," the nature of individual agency and freedom are central to his preoccupation with whether "collectivist processes" of modern life produce eminent

²⁴ Winston Churchill, *The World Crisis* (London: T. Butterworth, 1923-31), 1: 52. See Feske, *From Belloc To Churchill*, pp. 209-210.

²⁵ Winston Churchill, *London to Ladysmith Via Pretoria* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1900), pp. 197-98; Ashley, *Churchill As Historian*, pp. 18-19; John Lukacs, *Churchill: Visionary. Statesman, Historian*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 17.

²⁶ See, for example, *The World Crisis*, 1: 19.

leaders whose courage, freedom, and honor are remembered across the generations. Is history, he wondered, merely the laborious “chronicle of famous men and women, or only of their responses to the tides, tendencies, and opportunities of their age?” While acknowledging the “active part which accident and chance play at every moment,” in the lives of individuals and nations, Churchill aligned himself “with those who view the past history of the world mainly as the tale of exceptional human beings, whose thoughts, actions, qualities, virtues, triumphs, weaknesses and crimes have dominated the fortunes of the race.”²⁷ He recalled a 1911 lecture by the liberal statesman John Morley, who spoke of “the vacant Thrones” in literature, politics, and philosophy. The one throne, “neither vacant nor occupied by pygmies” was science, proceeding as it does “from fact to fact” and “where knowledge ever accumulating is immediately interchanged and the quality and fidelity of the research never flags.” Yet “there is no advance of making politics into a science,” inasmuch as (contrary to science) “politics travel in a circle, and we can match the follies and the fallacies of the present day down to the minutest shades with examples from both Greece and Rome.” Although Churchill was prone to sing the praises of former times, his larger preoccupation was with how forces of collectivization and standardization (typified by companies, trusts, monopolies, and unions) impact on national character and leadership in a democracy. Mass effects and reactions of modern industrial life, he insisted, were “no less applicable to the United States.”²⁸

The fortunes of citizens and statesmen alike, no less than the prestige of great powers, depend upon the conditions of freedom or suppression in modern communities. Churchill lamented the loss of “independent people who had some standing of their own” and with reasonable resources could (as Kipling put it) “live by no man’s leave underneath the law.” The extra money and comforts to be had from moneymaking or by “the salaried officials of great corporations” had to be measured against the risk that citizens and workmen will have “lost in forethought, in initiative, in contrivance, in freedom and in effective civic status.” He found a certain “remorseless persistency” which was the price to be paid for the enjoyment of “material blessings which scientific and organized civilization is ready to bestow in measureless abundance.” No less troubling was the obliteration of the personal factor in war as well as the increasing anonymity of fighting and dying. Generals and military commanders (“entirely divorced from the heroic aspect”) increasingly are removed from “all the drama of the battlefield,” often to be found on the “day of battle at their desks. . . [many] miles from the front,” no longer able to “rekindle spirits and restore the day” or through the firmness of ‘character to rule the storm. No small measure of irony accompanied his expectation of a day when “some spectacled ‘brass hat’ of a future world-agony has extinguished some London or Paris, some Tokio [*sic*] or San Francisco, by pressing a button, or putting his initials at the bottom of a piece of foolscap. . . [and] he will have to wait a long time for fame and glory.”²⁹

²⁷ Winston Churchill, Amid These Storms (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1932), pp. 255-56.

²⁸ “Lord Morley On Literature,” The Mercury, 24 March 1911, p. 4. Churchill, Amid These Storms, pp. 256-57.

²⁹ Churchill, Amid These Storms, pp. 259-64.

Freedom and autonomy were menaced in an age whereby “public opinion is formed and expressed by machinery” and when the “newspapers do an immense amount of thinking for the average man and woman” (though Churchill proved himself a master manipulator of news during his wartime leadership). What he deplored was the “continuous stream of standardized opinion, borne along upon an equally inexhaustible flood of news and sensation, collected from every part of the world every hour of the day,” leaving neither the leisure nor the need for personal reflection. Individuality was trumped by a throng of faceless citizens “all equipped with regulation opinions, prejudices and sentiments, according to their class or party.” While the diffusion of knowledge and information could “bring new pleasures to humanity,” the very wealth and technology that makes this possible detracts from “those conditions of personal stress and mental effort to which the masterpieces of the human mind are due.”³⁰ Churchill’s preoccupation with whether communities can do without great men, or hero worship, proved to be far more than a last-minute summons to lion-hearted warriors or a perverse yearning for the robes, wigs, and ceremonies that fortified public men and ruling functionaries of former centuries. The mass effects of modern life, the inquiry into the conditions of human freedom (his question “can the spirit of man emit the vital spark by machinery?”) proved to be the spark animating his powerful moral imagination that would incorporate Whig historical paradigms (gradualism, the righteous use of force, imperial expansion, the growth of the liberal state, and the compatibility of efficiency and democracy).³¹

As Isaiah Berlin wrote, Churchill’s dominant category, “the single central organizing principle of his moral and intellectual universe,” was “an historical imagination so strong, so comprehensive as to encase the whole future in a framework of a rich and multi-colored past.”³² Notwithstanding Herbert Butterfield’s critique of Whig history for its indiscriminate moralism (i.e., the tendency to exhume principles of progress from the past that serve as a justification and glorification of the present),³³ Churchill would often recur to the “judgments” of history and, as Ashley pointed out, write about how leaders will be brought “before the Bar of History when the Great Judge or Jury will have moral precedents to aid them in reaching their verdicts.” He understood that to avoid value judgments in the name of scientific detachment and objectivity would surrender the essence of public history. Churchill, especially when employing the heroic prose of *Their Finest Hour*, projected a vision of life upon his countrymen, a dramatization of citizens on their own battlefields, engaged in a struggle “between conflicting forces or principles, between truth and falsehood, good and evil, right and wrong. . . or between what is ephemeral and what is permanent.” At the same time, however, Churchill also knew that the statesman or diplomat could not simply exercise power, or engage in workable political trade offs, based on Manichean-like choices between what is righteous and what is wicked. His attachment to first principles included a corresponding sense of the tragic possibilities in human affairs, recognizing as well that “circumstances alter cases and that

³⁰ Churchill, Amid These Storms, pp. 257-58.

³¹ Feske, From Belloc To Churchill, p. 227.

³² Isaiah Berlin, “Mr. Churchill,” The Atlantic (September 1949): 35-44.

³³ Herbert Butterfield, The Whig Interpretation Of History (New York: W. W. Norton, 1965), pp. 64-66.

when one appears before the judgment seat it is not enough to appeal only to principles” as “one must also present all the evidence.” And it is to the evidence, at least as it relates to Berlin’s assertion that Churchill’s “belief in and predilection for the American democracy. . . are the foundation of his political outlook,”³⁴ that we turn to now.

Churchill, America, and the Anglo-American Legacy

Any attempt to draw a connection between the ideals of American nationhood (however exceptional they may be) and Winston Churchill’s inclusion of the United States as part of the legacy of the English-speaking peoples will precipitate rancor and outrage within the groves of Academe and beyond. On the one hand, there are those who would see in Churchill the racist, the paladin of imperialism, the militarist, the get-rich-quick journalist whose fascination with war was tied to his own self-promotion, the ultimate flip-flopper in terms of party loyalty, and the troubled mastermind who orchestrated the horrors of Gallipoli in 1915. Similarly, there are many who would see in Churchill’s celebration of “Anglo-Americanism” the artifice of propaganda and myth-making so as to minimize key differences that divided the national interests of America from those of Great Britain during the first half of the twentieth century (the emphasis here less on philosophical nuances than on geopolitical conflicts of competitive great powers). What Prime Minister Churchill welcomed as progress in the long talked-about prospect of an English-speaking peoples’ re-union, the Americans regarded as only a temporary alliance soon displaced by the need for an understanding with Russia.³⁵ British diplomat Harold Nicolson recollected how Anthony Eden, in July 1944, believed that the wartime relationship with America was strained because the semi-American Churchill regarded with almost religious awe an American president who was an opportunistic politician of great vanity and obstinacy.³⁶

Against the proposition that the connection between Britain and America was sustained only by momentary crises, or by the political vagaries of *Realpolitik*, other commentators recall Churchill’s final injunction to his cabinet in 1955, just before his retirement: “Never be separated from the Americans.”³⁷ To the politics of the wartime “special relationship,” and in years after the Second World War, must be added Churchill’s unwavering conviction that close

³⁴ Ashley, Churchill As Historian, pp. 228-29; Feske, From Belloc To Churchill, p. 222; Berlin, “Mr. Churchill,” pp. 35-44.

³⁵ Manfred Weidhorn, “America Through Churchill’s Eyes,” Thought 50 (March 1975): 31-32.

³⁶ Harold Nicolson, Diaries and Letters, ed. Nigel Nicolson, 3 vols. (New York: Atheneum, 1966-68), II: 385. See also Gordon K. Lewis, “Mr. Churchill as Historian,” The Historian 20 (August 1958): 402-405; Peter de Mendelssohn, The Age of Churchill (New York: Knopf, 1961), pp. 75, 256; Max Beloff, “The Special Relationship: an Anglo-American Myth,” in The Intellectual in Politics (New York: Library Press, 1971), p. 219; and A. J. P. Taylor, English History 1914-45 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 325.

³⁷ Sir Martin Gilbert, “When Churchill went to war—with America,” The Telegraph, 6 November 2005.

Anglo-American relations were indispensable if democratic values were to be upheld and peace preserved in world politics. Although Churchill's *A History Of The English-Speaking Peoples* left off at the end of the nineteenth century, Andrew Roberts now takes up the cause beginning in 1901 and details how Anglo-American amity triumphed by working together—whether facing the Kaiser's Germany, Axis aggression, and Soviet expansion. Even by the dawn of the twenty-first century, the struggle would continue against Islamic fundamentalist terrorism. Roberts' lengthy account, in *A History Of The English-Speaking Peoples Since 1900*, explores how the British Empire would wane to extinction during that period, while the American Republic would wax to such hegemony that it would become the sole global hyper-power. Not only does Roberts contend "that they ought to be regarded as a single historic entity," he acknowledges that (like other hegemonic powers) "they would at times be ruthless, at times self-indulgent, and they would sometimes find that the greatest danger to their continued *imperium* came not from declared enemies without but rather from vociferous critics within their own society." Despite their military and material success, it remains arguably the case (following in Churchill's footsteps) that the "beliefs. . . they brought into the twentieth century largely actuate them yet; their values are still the best available in a troubled world; the institutions that made them great continue to inspire them today."³⁸

From the vantage point of biographical circumstances and bloodline alone, Churchill's embrace of America was practically inevitable. As the seed was planted with his American mother's marriage to Lord Randolph in April 1874, Churchill's pedigree included three ancestors who fought against the British in the American Revolutionary War. He could even count lineal descent from George Washington (the father of a great-great-great grandfather through the Jerome line—Major Libbeus Ball—was a cousin of George Washington's mother), all of which entitled Churchill to be invested with the Eagle and Diploma of the Society of Cincinnatus (limited to direct male descendants of army and naval officers serving in the War of Independence)) in 1952.³⁹ He made sixteen journeys across the Atlantic to America, four prior to the Second World War, five during the war, and seven during the postwar years. Even before being honored by President Kennedy with honorary American citizenship in 1963, he had traveled to more American states, and met more American leaders (from Hollywood to the Hudson) than had most Americans.

Churchill's comments on American "exceptionalism," or what might be taken as foundational ideas, norms, and habits of the American people, more often take the form of summary statements, often unsystematic and leaving much to inference, in various parliamentary or public speeches, occasional essays, as well as in the longer narrative of a common heritage throughout the third and fourth volumes of the *History*. Given the time constraints imposed on him by the onset of war in 1939, and the amount of research he

³⁸ Andrew Roberts, *A History Of The English Speaking Peoples Since 1900* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), pp. 1-3.

³⁹ Genealogical Table, Richard Harperry and Ralph G. Martin, *Man of the Century, Churchill* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1962), p. 23. Martin Gilbert, *Churchill And America* (New York: Free Press, 2005), p. 2.

delegated to younger historians (who partly succeeded, Ashley claims, in “muffling his exuberance”), some reviewers have been left with the impression that the *History* has the read of a “manufactured” book, thereby prompting uncertainty about exactly what Churchill believed and what he was told to be true.⁴⁰ One cannot help but wonder what Churchill would have thought about late nineteenth and early twentieth century immigrants to America (from eastern and southern Europe, Asia, and Ireland) who might be less than enthralled with, or connected to, the English-speaking world? The final volume of the *History* ends with America’s era of “reconstruction” and role as a “great power” at the close of the century. The lingering issue for Churchill scholars is sorting out differences in Anglo-American relations from the elements of the common heritage. Fewer still have explored at length Churchill’s numerous references to the shortcomings of American democracy and culture, his historical imagination issuing more from Runnymede and Cr  cy than from Plymouth Rock and Valley Forge.⁴¹

One of Churchill’s first references to the Anglo-American world dates back to 1898. “As a representative of both countries—the idea of an Anglo-American *rapprochement* is very pleasant. One of the principles of my politics,” he allowed, “will always be to promote a good understanding between the English-speaking countries.”⁴² There followed that same year a piece in the *North American Review* in which he exhibited unabashed pride in writing as a citizen of the “Great Empire” reaching out to the citizens of the “Great Republic,” and “with whom we are united by the sympathy of a single language and consciousness of a common aim.”⁴³ Over forty years later, speaking in the House of Commons (February 1943), Churchill alluded to Bismarck’s assessment (made in the closing years of his life) that the “dominating fact of the modern world was that the people of Britain and of the United States both spoke the same language.”⁴⁴ Bismarck, earlier than Churchill, was far-sighted enough to anticipate a potential and powerful alliance secured by an accident of history. Churchill’s infatuation with the fraternal link across the Atlantic was utter nonsense to the Conservative Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister Lord Salisbury, who disliked America and most Americans. No evangelists of religious liberty were those much-heralded Founding Fathers, Salisbury had written many years earlier, that “sought to Christianize the country by the simple expedient of slaughtering all who were not Christians.”⁴⁵

At this juncture, and before moving further with Churchill, brief notice must be given to literary and political expressions about the English-speaking people before Churchill. Peter

⁴⁰ Ashley, *Churchill As Historian*, p. 212.

⁴¹ For some notable exceptions, see Justin D. Lyons, “Winston Churchill’s Constitutionalism: A Critique of Socialism in America,” in *First Principles Series*, No. 25 Heritage Foundation (Washington, D.C.: May 18, 2009): 1-15; and Weidhorn, “America Through Churchill’s Eyes,” pp. 5-34.

⁴² Randolph Churchill, *Winston Churchill Companion 2*, part 1, pp. 2, 834, 903, 922.

⁴³ Winston Churchill, “The Fashoda Incident,” *North American Review* 167 (December 1898): 736-43.

⁴⁴ *Hansard* 386 (11 February 1943): 1475.

⁴⁵ Salisbury cited by Andrew Roberts, *Salisbury: Victorian Titan* (London: Phoenix 1999), p. 46.

Clarke's new and important book, *Mr. Churchill's Profession: The Statesman As Author And The Book That Defined The Special Relationship*, traces the concept of the English-speaking people over the last three decades of the nineteenth century (often in contexts ignored by Churchill later), noting that it emerged from the political left rather than the right. Clarke finds the provenance of the new catchphrase to lie with the efforts of liberals, on both sides of the Atlantic, to heal the wounds of the Civil War (especially after the damage caused in the United States by the confederate warship *Alabama* and lingering American resentment over hostility to the North among the British political class).⁴⁶ British politicians—such as W. E. Forster (Gladstone's chief lieutenant during the Liberal government of 1868-74), John Bright, and Richard Cobden—condemned the pro-Southern folly of the “fashionable drawing rooms” and reached out to the people themselves, over the heads of their out-of-touch governments to create a noble populist myth: The English-speaking peoples—as distinct from the British ruling class to which the Churchills belonged—had shown themselves in this hour of trial to be upright, true, and moral.⁴⁷ Emphasizing strong popular support in Britain for the North “helped to Americanize British politics” and built upon peace-preserving links of evangelical Anglicans, Quakers, and abolitionists. Yet it was not one meek and lowly in heart, but Ulysses S. Grant, who visited Newcastle-upon-Tyne in 1877 and told his audience: “I entertain views of progress to be made in the future by union and friendship of the great English-speaking people. . .for I believe that it will result in the spread of our language, our civilization, and our industry, and for the benefit of mankind generally.”⁴⁸ Moreover, arbitration of the *Alabama* claims, as provided for in the 1871 Treaty of Washington, added international arbitration to the common principles of the English-speaking peoples.

The destiny of the English-speaking people was sometimes conflated at the end of the nineteenth century with Anglo-Saxon characteristics as a superior racial stereotype. The telling of English history given by such authors as Edward Augustus Freedman, William Stubbs, J.R. Green, and J. A. Froude did not depend on common party allegiance; however, as Clarke points out, “it was always the same story. . .of the Teutonic origins as the foundation of Anglo-Saxon superiority and an Anglo-Saxon mission.”⁴⁹ Anglo-Saxonism would hit a responsive chord in the United States often cloaked in the ideological language of Social Darwinism or moralistic appeals to carry on the white man's “civilizing burden.” Senator Albert Beveridge, energized by the British mission to subdue Boer republics and the American campaign to subdue Filipino revolutionaries, offered a full-throated endorsement of Anglo-Saxon imperialism: “God has not been preparing the English-speaking and Teutonic peoples for a thousand years for nothing but vain and idle self-admiration. No! He has made us the master organizers of the world to establish system where chaos reigns.”⁵⁰ In the second of four volumes about *Winning The*

⁴⁶ Clarke, *Mr. Churchill's Profession*, pp. 84-86.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ James D. McCabe, *A Tour Around The World By General Grant* (Philadelphia: National Publishing, 1879), pp. 177-78.

⁴⁹ Clarke, *Mr. Churchill's Profession*, p. 97-99.

⁵⁰ Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism In American Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), p. 180.

West, Theodore Roosevelt devoted a lengthy section to “the spread of the English-speaking peoples over the world’s waste spaces.” And Roosevelt’s friend Alfred Thayer Mahan, who associated national greatness with sea power and a forward naval policy, called for “breaking down the barriers of estrangement which have too long separated men of the same blood.”⁵¹

The “blood is thicker than water” template, inscribed on a draped banner at an 1894 banquet honoring Mahan in London, was one that Churchill never really embraced, with his references to race not much more than “a synonym for ‘nation’ or ‘people’,” and having “little further force as a systematic means of explanation.”⁵² Writers and politicians from both countries would lift the idea of the English-speaking people above cruder forms of Anglo-Saxonism (of the German woods) to encompass the institutions and laws that defined a common ancestry. The habitual or residual nature of Anglo-Saxon terminology, as it became hollowed out over time, was exemplified by the way George Burton Adams (a co-founder of the *American Historical Review*) described the English constitution as the bedrock of American society.

The civilization of the United States is essentially Anglo-Saxon, for civilization and “race” are matters of institutions, not of mere blood. With the Anglo-Saxon race, progress in the main has been slow and steady, and its “constitution,” the body of institutions by which it governs itself, has grown out of practical need and not to serve any theoretical purpose. So far as general institutions are concerned, English constitutional history begins with the Norman Conquest.⁵³

A more inclusive mission for the English-speaking people was driven by fresh waves of immigration (Mediterranean Europeans, Slavs, and the Irish), new patterns of cultural adaption, and (after 1914) the way the wartime allies universalized their commitments to international principles of arbitration and conciliation. The need to garner political support for a League of Nations prompted British and American supporters to translate their national histories into moral imperatives about promoting institutions of political freedom that would provide, as Arthur Balfour declared, “the great foundation of the future liberties of the human race.”⁵⁴ The fly-in-the-ointment, as explained by one historian, is this “stepping stone theory: from ‘race’ in its historic sense, via Empire in Great Britain, to the common institutions of the English-speaking peoples, to the universalization of such aspirations. . . was a theory that had more British adherents than American.”⁵⁵ But this was not to detour Churchill!

⁵¹ Alfred T. Mahan, “Possibilities of an Anglo-American Reunion,” *North American Review* 44 (1894): 551.

⁵² Clarke, *Mr. Churchill’s Profession*, p. 102.

⁵³ Anthony Brundage and Richard Cosgrove, *The Great Tradition: Constitutional History and National Identity in Britain and the United States, 1870-1960* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 160; Clarke, *Mr. Churchill’s Profession*, p. 106.

⁵⁴ *Manchester Guardian*, 29 May 1917. See also Clarke, *Mr. Churchill’s Profession*, p. 108.

⁵⁵ Clarke, *Mr. Churchill’s Profession*, pp. 108-109.

By 1918, Churchill's position as Minister of Munitions enabled him to develop a close working relationship with the United States, and his negotiating skills were put to good use in the transport and preparation of American troops for battle in France. But he was concerned about morale as much as military preparedness. In a March 1918 minute to the War Cabinet, he emphasized that beyond military necessities "the intermingling of British and American units in the field of battle and their endurance of losses and suffering together may exert an immeasurable effect upon the future destiny of the English-speaking peoples, and, as a matter of strategy, would afford Britain the only guarantee of safety if Germany emerges stronger from the War than she entered it."⁵⁶ Speaking at the Albert Hall in London on July 4, 1918, commemorating American independence and the public launch of the English-Speaking Union, Churchill insisted that the "Declaration of Independence is not only an American document" inasmuch as "it follows on the Magna Charta and the Bill of Rights as the third great title-deed on which the liberties of the English-speaking peoples are founded." The ideas embodied in the Declaration "are the same as those expressed at the time by Lord Chatham and Mr. Burke and handed down to them by John Hampden and Algernon Sidney."⁵⁷

While Churchill sometimes complained about President Wilson's "fine phrase" that "the world would be saved for democracy," not objecting to the idea so much as to the delay in "translating these statements of war aims. . .into war achievements," he could match Wilson's moral altruism in depicting Anglo-American resolve. Suggesting that "the essential purposes of the war do not admit of compromise," that the allies were not fighting "for mere territorial gains" or to interfere "in a dynastic or commercial quarrel," he claimed the traditional perquisites of war "are matters utterly subordinate to the moral issues and moral consequences of this war." Rallying the faithful, his rhetoric sailed every higher:

. . .this war has become a conflict between Christian civilization and scientific barbarism, between nations where peoples own Governments, and nations where the Governments own peoples—between systems which faithfully endeavor to quell and quench the brutish, treacherous, predatory promptings of human nature, and a system which deliberately fosters, organizes, arms, and exploits them to its own base aggrandizement.⁵⁸

The causes of the war Churchill traced to "the Prussian military class and autocracy" and, while recognizing that "no race, country or individual has a monopoly of good or evil," still saw the struggle as "a conflict between the forces of good and evil."⁵⁹

No Churchillian, however, could ever doubt for a moment that the Great Vindicator of Marlborough completely lost sight of geopolitical realities and the preservation of some

⁵⁶ Churchill, The World Crisis: 1916-1918, Part 2, p. 469; Gilbert, Churchill And America, p. 73.

⁵⁷ Winston S. Churchill, His Complete Speeches, 1897-1963, 8 Vols. (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1974): 3: 2614.

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 2585, 2615.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

measure of European equilibrium. In fact, judging the Peace of Paris in 1919, he held that any punishment of Germany must not enslave the entire population to grinding poverty or involve territorial penalties that would remove an important bulwark against Russian power in the East. He warned the victors about getting “into extravagances by the fullness of their victory.” And, should any Americans be apathetic on this point, he reminded them that, in any postwar settlement, and whatever the extent of victory, the “Declaration of Independence, and all that it implies,” did not afford the victors the right to treat the Germans “as they have treated Alsace-Lorraine, or Belgium, or Russia.” Still, Churchill’s central fear was that Bolshevik Russia, rather than Germany, constituted the central threat to European civilization.⁶⁰ Not only did he support the White anti-Bolshevik armies in their attempt to overthrow Lenin’s regime in 1919, but, just a year later, he proposed a “binding alliance” of “Great Britain, France and Germany” which could “defend the Western Front in the event of an unprovoked attack by Russia.”⁶¹

The same concern—balancing alliance politics with moral choices in foreign policy—would resurface after victory in 1945. Meeting with former U.S. Ambassador Joseph Davies less than a week after the surrender of German forces, he could not accept any American position that treated Britain and the Soviet Union as nothing more than “two foreign Powers, six of one and half a dozen of the other, with whom the troubles of the late war have to be adjusted.” Any diminution in the Anglo-American relationship, he told Davies, would be “an ill day for all the world,” and that both countries “are united at this time upon. . .the principles set out in the American Constitution and. . .reproduced with modern variations in the Atlantic Charter.” Seen beyond the mere calculation or projection of power, “there is no equality between right and wrong. The great causes and principles for which Britain and the United States have suffered and triumphed are not mere matters of the balance of power. They in fact involve the salvation of the world.”⁶²

Churchill’s commentary on the U.S. Constitution, much like his observations on the Declaration, reflects a mix of larger principles as well as wartime exigencies. One of Churchill’s Private Secretaries recalled a memorable remark from the Prime Minister just prior to December 7, 1941: “The American Constitution was designed by the Founding Fathers to keep the United States clear of European entanglements—and by God it has stood the test of time.”⁶³ In the third volume of his *History*, Churchill celebrates both the Federalists (Ashley pointing out that “he clearly prefers Alexander Hamilton to Thomas Jefferson”) and the Federalist Papers, the latter a fund of “practical wisdom” that dealt not “with abstract arguments about political theory” but with “the real dangers facing America” owing to “the weakness of the Articles of Confederation, and the debatable advantages of the various provisions in the new Constitution.” He quotes at length from *Federalist* #10 to illustrate “the eternal problem with breadth and power” and to give some depth to “the collisions of Federalist and Radical mobs!” Churchill devoted little attention to constitutional provisions or

⁶⁰ Havardi, *The Greatest Briton*, p. 100.

⁶¹ *Winston S. Churchill Companion* 4, part 2, p. 1193.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 8: 26. Gilbert, *Churchill And America*, p. 355.

⁶³ Sir John Peck is quoted by Sir Martin Gilbert in *Churchill And America*, p. 239.

to debates in the Federal Convention, though he noted that political and sectional differences did not restrain the framers' agreement on one point—i.e., “the importance of creating a collective faith in the Constitution as the embodiment of the American ideal.” Still, in his mind, the American ideal was in harmony with the British ideal (even if the Constitution was to create a form of political democracy rather different from that prevailing in Britain):

At first sight this authoritative document presents a sharp contrast with the store of traditions and precedents that make up the unwritten Constitution of Britain. Yet behind it lay no revolutionary theory. It was based not upon the challenging writings of the French philosophers which were soon to set Europe ablaze, but an Old English doctrine, freshly formulated to meet an urgent American need. The Constitution was a reaffirmation of faith in the principles painfully evolved over the centuries by the English-speaking peoples. . . .A prime object of the Constitution was to be conservative; it was to guard the principles and machinery of State from capricious and ill-considered alteration.⁶⁴

Speaking years later before a meeting of the American Bar Association (July 1957), he pointed out “that the 5th and 14th Amendments of the American Constitution are an echo of Magna Carta,” testimony to the “great truth” that “Law and Equity stand in the forefront of the moral forces which our two countries have in common.”⁶⁵

International relations scholars tend to focus on either the heroic romanticism of Churchill (often depicted as a holdover from his own pursuit of martial glory across perilous colonial terrain) or the hardheaded realism of the statesman who had to compromise and negotiate with Roosevelt, Stalin, and Truman.⁶⁶ An alternative explanation would deny the exclusivity of each and, instead, see viable moral choices at work in balancing power and principle in the way democratic nations define their national interests. Speaking before the National Liberal Club in 1943, Churchill sounded every bit the righteous crusader extolling “the sword drawn in generous justice” as it is joined to the cause of liberating “all of these subjugated and enslaved countries.” This was a duty for “every man in whose breast liberal instincts are implanted,” though not only in wartime, but in the days to come. The challenges of fascism and communism accentuated the need for “much more exact definitions. . .of the rights of the individual and of the relations of the individual to the. . .framework of the State.” The state had no morality of its own, no *raison d'état*, apart from “its highest purpose. . .[of] safeguarding. . .those individual rights, and the reconciling of the freedom of each with the broad general interests of the community.” The political aftermath of the war was certain to

⁶⁴ Winston S. Churchill, A History Of The English-Speaking Peoples, 4 Vols. (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1957), 3: 256-58; Ashley, Churchill As Historian, p. 218.

⁶⁵ Churchill, Complete Speeches, 8: 8682.

⁶⁶ For example, see Michael S. Fowler, Winston S. Churchill, Philosopher and Statesman (New York: University Press of America, 1985), pp. vii-viii, 1-29.

bring other “great tasks” of “securing the advance of ideas” and not allowing them to “be swept back by mere tides of lassitude, exhaustion, or reaction.”⁶⁷

Two months later, when visiting Harvard University, he told his American audience that the new world order to come will require the United States to jettison the paralyzing illusions of secure isolation or safe withdrawal from the distant business of other great powers. There was no use in saying, “We don’t want it; we won’t have it; our forebears left Europe to avoid these quarrels; we have founded a new world which has no contact with the old.” He exhorted Americans to accept the fact that “the price of greatness is responsibility.” New and growing patterns of economic and military interdependence meant that no leading nation could remain “forgotten and undisturbed” behind increasingly obsolete geographical barriers. Americans, Churchill believed, had to own up to the reality that their responsibility and prestige in the world could not be realized in full measure without “being involved in its problems, without being convulsed by its agonies and inspired by its causes.” It is not the language of *Realpolitik* that Churchill resorted to in saying that the choice for the Anglo-American powers in the coming years was one between “world anarchy or world order.” The cause of international peace depended on “common conceptions of what is right and decent, a marked regard for fair play, especially for the weak and poor. . .and above all a love of personal freedom.” At the same time, however, the fate of democracy and freedom would run afoul by going to “war primarily with races as such” and when the common foe is tyranny “whatever trappings or disguises it wears, whatever language it speaks, be it external or internal.” The man who insisted that he had not become the King’s First Minister to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire (November 1942), but who also knew his audience only too well, would proclaim “the empires of the futures [*sic*] are the empires of the mind!”⁶⁸

Arriving in Fulton, Missouri with President Truman in 1946, Churchill spoke about the daunting international issues looming in the coming years but within the context of America’s “primacy in power” along with “its awe-inspiring accountability to the future.” The former Prime Minister and his military commanders had learned during the war “that our American military colleagues” typically began operations with an “overall strategic concept” and, then, move to a consideration of practical implementation. Churchill’s concern was with the viability of the new United Nations as a diplomatic and political mechanism to resolve differences between Western and Eastern blocs. The question, he pointed out, was not the desirability of the U.N., especially given “the decisive addition of the United States,” but insuring “that it is a force for action” and not merely a “frothing of words” or a “cockpit in the Tower of Babel.” World courts and international law were well and good, but “courts and magistrates. . .cannot function without sheriffs and constables.” Just as Theodore Roosevelt in 1919 called for an international *posse comitatus* to put force behind a “league of righteousness,” Churchill too called for an international police force (complete with air squadrons and a system of rotation for military contingents supplied by members of the new world body). Although Churchill considered the fraternal association of English-speaking peoples as a *sine qua non* to prevent

⁶⁷ Churchill, Complete Speeches, VII: 6808.

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 6823-24, 6826.

war and insure “the continuous rise of world organization,” he also understood that even like-minded peoples also have multiple and competing political interests that could not be easily harmonized with moral slogans. “It is not our duty. . .when difficulties are so numerous,” he said, “to interfere forcibly in the internal affairs of countries which we have not conquered in war.”⁶⁹

Political realists who judge Churchill’s Fulton speech to be the clever invocation of soothing moral compliments to assuage doubting Americans, and to bolster the postwar geopolitical designs of the two wartime allies (which undoubtedly was in play), unfairly dismiss his insistence that “we must never cease to proclaim. . .the great principles of freedom and rights of man which are the joint inheritance of the English-speaking world.” For Churchill, as for Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, words and ideas are part of the currency of a nation’s political power. Political and military calculations about national security ought not detract from the reality that “all embracing police governments” or “compact oligarchies” are apt to be as lawless and aggressive against their neighbors as they are toward their own subjects. Churchill’s “Naughty Document,” by which he and Stalin divided up Eastern Europe according to a percentages agreement on the back of a napkin (at the Fourth Moscow Conference) in 1944, adds considerable irony to the message about the “title deeds of freedom” he brought with him to Fulton.

All this means that the people of any country have the right, and should have the power by institutional action, by free unfettered elections, with secret ballot, to choose or to change the character of any form of government under which they dwell; that freedom of speech and thought should reign; that courts of justice, independent of the executive, unbiased by any party, should administer laws which have received the broad assent of large majorities or are consecrated by time and custom.⁷⁰

Final Thoughts

Churchill’s legacy as historian and statesman provides some helpful guideposts for understanding what the political scientist Arnold Wolfers characterized as the Anglo-American tradition of foreign affairs. Wolfers claimed that Anglo-American practitioners embraced a “philosophy of choice” (in relating domestic values to the external projection of power) as opposed to continental theorists who emphasized *raison d’état* and the structural determinacy of international outcomes.⁷¹ Whether referring to the American Union, or a prospective Union of Europeans, Churchill believed constitutional governance extends well beyond written covenants and encompasses a larger historical and organic process by which a people affirm the truth and order of their existence. “Human beings and human societies,” he once said, “are

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 7287-88.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Arnold Wolfers, Discord and Collaboration, Essays on International Politics (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1962), p. 5.

not structures that are built, or machines that are forged. They are plants that grow and must be tended as such.” For Churchill, life itself “is a test and this world a place of trial. Always the problems, or it may be the same problem, will be presented to every generation in different forms.” Human nature, in Churchill’s universe, reveals man to be a “a tough creature who has traveled here by a very long road,” and whose virtues have been “ingrained by millions of years of struggle, fear and pain,” and whose spirit has, from the earliest dawn of history, shown itself capable of mounting to the sublime, far above material conditions or moral terrors.” Simple references to optimism or pessimism fail to do justice to a Churchillian perspective on the human condition. Better still, as he mentioned in an address at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1949, are the lines from Alexander Pope’s *Essay on Man*:

Placed on this Isthmus of a middle State,
A being darkly wise and rudely great, . . .
Created half to rise and half to fall;
Great Lord of all things, yet a prey to all;
Sole judge of truth, in endless error hurled;
The glory, jest and riddle of the world.⁷²

Churchill’s clarity of vision in world politics, as Kenneth W. Thompson points out, depends “on a scaffolding of thought founded on certain bedrock principles concerning man, politics, and society.”⁷³ Churchill himself wrote about the statesman’s need for organizing principles in dealing with the myriad contingencies of world politics. “Those who are possessed of a definite body of doctrine and deeply rooted convictions on it will be in a much better position to deal with the shifts and surprises of daily affairs.”⁷⁴ One principle particularly important for the British leader was distinguishing between methods and purposes in foreign policy. Although Churchill would often proclaim, “justice knows no boundaries,” he was clear that the policy-maker cannot rely on abstract ideas to address in concrete and practical ways the varied dimensions of time, place, and cultural milieu.

During the Second World War, and with the onset of the Cold War, a political settlement among the major powers required a framework of diplomacy, a relationship between power and negotiations. “What is needed,” he said in 1946, “is a settlement and the longer it is delayed the more difficult it would be and the greater our dangers will become.” He emphasized the point two years later before the House of Commons: “I have frequently advised that we should endeavor to reach a settlement with Russia on fundamentally outstanding questions. . . . I believe that in this resides the best hope of avoiding a third world war.” Against parliamentary critics who cried appeasement, he responded that appeasement “may be good or bad depending on circumstances.” Clearly, Churchill’s aim was to leverage American and Western strength at the war’s end in order to obtain a favorable settlement that would counter

⁷² Churchill, *Complete Speeches*, VII: 7801-7810.

⁷³ Kenneth W. Thompson, *Winston Churchill’s World View: Statesmanship and Power* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), p. 5.

⁷⁴ Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, 6 Vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1948), I: 210.

Soviet gains in Central and Eastern Europe. Diplomacy, politics *par excellence* among nations, offered peace-preserving procedures whereby nations, whose conflicting interests appear irreconcilable, “seek to discover if their vital interests are also incompatible and how far they can compromise on non-vital interests.”⁷⁵ War remains the final solution if the willingness to compromise and conciliate is found wanting or if foreign policy goals are defined with unyielding ideological zeal.

Finally, Churchill reminds us that the study of history remains the school for statesmen and diplomats as it has been since the days of Thucydides and Machiavelli. Yet one cannot study the unities and recurrences of history, and generalize about them, as one would explain patterns of voting behavior and electoral outcomes. “Events happen from day to day,” he told the Commons, “but they all happen as a result of long chains of causation which one must bear in mind.” Still it is not through *a priori* principles or statistical formula that the statesman must determine “where the next link comes or closes.”⁷⁶ Knowledge of a people’s customs and culture, particularly in an era of accelerated change, remains an essential requirement in thinking about the national interest at home and abroad. He called upon the English-speaking people to remember the words of Lord Beaconsfield:

In a progressive country change is constant and the great question is not whether you should resist change, which is inevitable, but whether the change should be carried out in deference to the manners, the customs, the laws, the traditions of the people, or in deference to abstract principles and arbitrary and general doctrines.⁷⁷

American leaders and thinkers may learn much from what Leo Strauss had to say about Churchill’s enduring example—i.e., “the contrast between the indomitable and magnanimous statesman and the insane tyrant” as well as the “higher duty. . .to remind ourselves and our students. . .of the political greatness, human greatness, of the peaks of human excellence.” At the same time, however, Strauss remarked upon “Churchill’s failure which is too great to be called tragedy.” His failing (“though no fault of Churchill’s”) was “to increase the threat to freedom which is posed by Stalin or his successors.” Strauss’ eulogy reminds us of the provisional and prudential character of even the most courageous statesmen who must cope with the tragic proportions of life and politics, where life itself can involve a choice between lesser evils, where lofty humanitarian aspirations are easily attenuated by political needs and tactics that are immediate and tentative. The words of Strauss are congruent with Churchill’s long life and experience of heroism and shame, darkness and light. If tragedy remains an important theme for understanding Churchill, so do forces of tradition and the way Churchill

⁷⁵ Hansard 459 (10 December 1948): 721; Thompson, Winston Churchill’s World View, pp. 3, 227-28; Churchill, Complete Speeches, p. 7288.

⁷⁶ Hansard 458 (1 December 1948): 2019-20.

⁷⁷ Quoted in Winston Churchill, “Hope for 1945: Speech to the Primrose League,” December 31, 1945, War Speeches, 1940-1945 (London: Cassell, 1946), p. 226. See also Thompson, Winston Churchill’s World View, p. 101.

the traditionalist advised Americans to think about their past and future. In the early years of the Second World War, he pleaded: "Do not let spacious plans for a new world divert your energies from saving what is left of the old." America's present and future could be apprehended through its history.

Americans should not fear to march forward unswervingly upon the path to which Destiny has called them, guided by the principles of the Declaration of Independence, all written out so carefully and so pregnantly, in the balanced, well-shaped language of the 18th century, by the founders of the greatest State in the world. All is there, nothing can be abandoned; nothing need be added, nothing should be denied.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Daily Telegraph and Morning Post, April 12, 1947. Thompson, Churchill's World View, p. 102.