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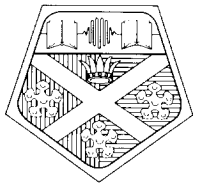

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THE BRITISH CENTRE AND "UNION": The Problem of Explanation

by

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Abstract

British policy in respect of European co-operation has for long been a problem. Often it is accounted for in terms of European and British history, the character of British politics, and numerous circumstantial factors. It is here argued that, relevant though such accounts are, a meta-analytic approach to this problem will yield a more interesting analysis and outcome.

The question of explanation in political science is addressed in order to demonstrate the short-comings of the historical and normative approaches, and to establish the meaning and relevance of meta-analysis. That approach is then employed in an analysis of the problem at the level of the UK government at the centre.

Union is identified as the political science concept most directly relevant to the UK and UK and EU. This leads to the view that a conceptually coherent application of the concept of "union" would require a change in policy in respect of the union at the level of the United Kingdom. The dichotomous nature of policy on "union" within and without the UK is identified as no more than a defence of power at the centre.

INTRODUCTION

The recent political history of British involvement with what started as the European Economic Community is, in truth, pivoted on one question and one fear. The question is: "How far is closer integration necessary for the achievement of its largely non-political objectives?", but, it is feared that the level of integration necessary might impair the status of the United Kingdom as an "independent" state. Clearly, some integration must be acceptable, else the United Kingdom cannot be a member of a larger union. The trick is to achieve an independent United Kingdom within an integrated Europe; be part of a larger whole while retaining a very hard shell around the political identity of the United Kingdom. At an abstract level, this resembles nineteenth century thinking to the effect that Britain[1] could, and would, go anywhere and do anything that was necessary to defend and sustain freedom of the high seas and, thereby, that of legitimate trade, but would not be a party to any permanent arrangement: freedom to act according to exigency, not being tied to alliances and arrangements. Of course, we hear a loud echo of this even today in respect of monetary union and the creation of a single European currency: we are told a future Parliament will decide.

It is stating the obvious to say that this represents a contradiction in British policy on European Union. But, just as we continue to live by a constitution which we proudly proclaim no sane man would have invented, we also pursue a policy at the level of Europe which is, seemingly, riddled with contradictions. When Churchill, in his famous 1946 speech in Zurich, recommended that there should be a United States of Europe but Britain need not be a party to it, he seriously meant to say that Britain would never need to join such a gathering, which notion he predicated upon three "facts": Empire, special contact and relationship with the United States of America, and a Europe "out there". While the need Churchill denied has come to pass - of course, Empire into Commonwealth had something to do with it, but other factors too were important - broadly, his thinking on the subject has not lost its attraction.

The seemingly self-defeating policies pursued by just about each and every government since Britain joined what was the European Community in 1973, but specially in the course of the 1980s, have been a favourite subject for research and analysis, be it journalistic, contemporary history type or by academic teachers of politics. And, generally speaking, analysis have been in terms of specific governments and leaders, especially the predilections of the Prime Minister for the years 1979 to 1992. Such accounts tend to offer contextualised studies of contingencies, and highlight the folly of policies which, it is argued, will, in the longer run, be detrimental to British and global interests. On the other hand, studies from the periphery have tended to focus on the cause of the periphery, looking at the wider context of the

[1] In this essay, "Britain" is used as a short-hand for "the United Kingdom", which, of course, includes Northern Ireland but, for obvious reasons, its problems are left out of account.

European dimension as one possible, and desirable, way in which to satisfy their nationalistic demands. However, the problem of explanation that will be addressed in this essay is not of either type described; the problem of British policy at the European level is defined differently, necessitating another type of analysis. Consequently, as will be shown, the contradiction evident in British European policy is, in fact, also of a different order, portending far reaching implications for the whole of British polity and its future.

Of course, in seeking to examine any problem, we must first state its broad outlines; and it is in the nature of our subject that such a statement will, inevitably, be a historical one. I shall argue here that while History is necessary, it is not sufficient. More than that, in the case of a subject the whole history of which nearly falls in the third quarter of the twentieth century, a historical approach as such is technically more of a problem than help. Inevitably, an argument of this type raises questions about the relationship between history and political science, the meaning of explanation in each, as well as larger, and more interesting, questions about knowledge and epistemology.

For some, any argument in epistemology is a bore, if not also a barren process covering the apparently familiar in pursuit of the chimera of scientific meaningfulness. Of course, there is no such thing as philosophical and epistemological argument *per se,* and any argument of that type must be located within the framework of a subject matter and conditioned by its analytic requirements. In this essay, an attempt is made to show the relevance of meta-analysis[2] to the disclosure and examination of an idea which has, seemingly, not been identified in this manner before. This is, I suggest, because the methods of history and normative analysis (political theory) are inadequate not only to such a task, but, more generally, to the requirements of political science as a discipline, which I take to be characterised by a concern with the meaningfulness of both theory and practice.

The analysis that follows is conducted in terms of the meaningfulness of policy at the centre, almost without regard to the views expressed in Europe, or indeed in the periphery; yet the outcome is a more dramatic statement indicating essential weaknesses, and drawing attention to that which requires urgent attention before certain types of problems can be tackled.

This essay is divided into two sections. It is possible to read each part separately, for each may appear to present a whole argument. However, to examine only policy issues is to give in to the short-termism of concern with the present. On the other hand, a pointed concern with the nature of political science is a barren inward gaze. Thus, the two parts of this essay should be read as presenting one whole argument, even though, at times, the connection

[2]This "method" was applied to the study of Imperialism in my *Meta-Imperialism: A Study in Political Science.* (See especially chapter 1: "Meta" Analysis.) There, too, it was possible to arrive at fairly dramatic conclusions while excluding what one would otherwise consider necessary to such an analysis, viz. detailed historical accounts of colonies and/or views of the colonised, or, indeed, episodes of history of expansion and Empire. Instead, it was enough to subject European consciousness to meta-analysis.

between the two may not be self-evident. At any rate, the object of the exercise here is not merely to identify and analyse a political impasse, but also to show, firstly, that this kind of analysis requires a break with the historical and the theoretical approaches as the two exclusive tools of political science and, secondly, that, without this break and a move to a more specifically political science - meta-analytical - tool and approach, such an analysis will not be possible.

EXPLANATION AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

In giving an explanation we seek to satisfy a question: "Why?" When asked: "Why did you win the elections in 1945", Clement Attlee said "because more people voted for the Labour Party". That was a true statement, yet, as an answer, it was quite unrelated to the proper meaning of the question, which had to do with "why" more people voted for the Labour Party. The possibility of satisfying the "why" in any question is intimately connected with an understanding of the question in the first place; it also defines the degree of "adequacy" which may satisfy.

Now, examining British policy towards the European Community, we can identify a number of questions, for each of which we must, in the first instance, find a historical answer: for instance, the question "why British politicians did not feel an urge to co-operate with European powers in the immediate post-war period" must be answered by a rehearsal of views expressed at the time; for example, the Churchillian vision and the famous three circles;[3] the traditional British desire to have a presence at the global level without becoming closely involved with any one part of the world; or the view that Britain was a victor, not a vanquished power - indeed a Great Power - with an Empire greater than any since Rome, such that Britain did not need the continental powers, although this sense of self-dependence was necessarily modified by the felt need to ensure that continental powers would not disturb her peace and commerce again. The refusal to join the spirit of the discussions at Messina (June 1955), which eventually led to the Treaty of Rome, is explained by the expectation that it would not amount to much, that it was an experiment without a precedent and was likely to fail, but also by the view that it was at best going to be a grouping of a number of small and irrelevant powers - in other words that Britain really belonged elsewhere. The decision in 1961 to seek to join is more difficult to explain: EFTA was not given much of a chance, but was, probably, expected not to succeed; British failure to create her own independent nuclear delivery system had demonstrated her economic fragility, necessitating further dependence upon the Americans and NATO; and, not least, there was the push from the Americans who believed that Britain would be more relevant inside the European system. Yet, within

[3]Spain is the only other member state in the European Union to enter a similar claim. See P. Heywood, *Spain and the European Dimension*, p. 1. What we are to make of this, and the fact that no the other member state has entered such a claim, is not very clear.

Britain, the decision to join was explained in positive terms of economic advantage and trading interests.

Such empirical statements provide circumstantial explanations in terms of the immediate conditions. But we must examine the character of such explanations.

Because the European Community, now the European Union, is no more than a few decades old, we are unlikely to be able to construct historical accounts in the proper sense of that term. British government papers are subject to a thirty year rule of non-disclosure, and, indeed, there are provisions for non-disclosure even after such a lapse of time. Because a historical account is always a construction out of what the evidence, always documentary evidence, obliges the historian to say, then unless, and until, the relevant - one refrains from saying all the relevant - evidence is available, no historical account as such may be written. This limitation is also present at the European Union level: we only have the papers for the first few years of the life of the European Community, deposited at the European University, at Florence. Therefore, any account of the immediate and very recent past - what may be called the *un-historical* past - will, at best, be journalistic and of "contemporary history" type; we do what we can in the circumstances, and accept the risk that we may be wrong.[4]

It might be said that the contours of a journalistic-cum-contemporary history account will not differ from the historical story of the same set of events when the evidence for it becomes available. And apart from some revelations - especially of matters deliberately withheld - the chances of revelations that can change the broad outlines of the story are, for all intents and purposes, nil. The difference between a historical account based on evidence, and a journalistic/contemporary history account is not evident in their outline and contours, but is rather to be found in their truth validity. And this differential in "truth validity" is a function of the type of evidence

[4]Reasonableness requires that we do what we can, but this point is not quite that simple. Two views may be envisaged. For some the fact that the greater impact of the consequences of the risks we take may only become manifest at some future time, possibly at a point beyond the span of the generation which took the risk, is entirely incidental; on this view, we live now in circumstances into which we are born, necessarily our condition of necessity. A second view will demand that taking risks as we might for ourselves must, in view of the fact that the consequences of our actions are our legacy for the next generation and beyond, be moderated by the demands of the fact that each generation owes its succeeding generation a truly paternalistic responsibility - in that each generation is the progenitor of the next - consequently, we must act with care and attention to ensure that we do not compromise the freedom of the next generation, which is, of course, similarly compromised by the demands of the generations that will follow it. The converse of this is simply mundane when stated: we are always determined by the conditions we inherit, which is also necessarily where we must begin. But we wish and hope that we do not have to begin with problems. This means that each generation must recognise that while, on the face of it, they can do a great deal, they ought in fact to exercise restraint and caution and do the minimum necessary. Of course, this argument is always conditional, for in whatever we do, we can only act in the light of what we know. The second view, therefore, enjoins caution and asks that certain risks not be taken.

that each uses. The point is that the conclusions of journalistic-contemporary history accounts are, in their nature, tentative.

It may be said that history *qua* an account is tentative too, for surely, any historical account is always subject to the discovery of some hitherto unknown evidence that might upset accepted interpretations. More than that, some claim that it is necessary for each generation to re-write history in its own way. Which is only to emphasise that all history is subject to revision of some sort. Accepting this interpretation, one must, surely, argue that the conclusions and accounts of contemporary history are inevitably more, perhaps much more tentative than are the accounts of history proper, for the possible limits of meaningful revision are radically reduced in the face of intensive and extensive scholarship based on primary sources. Besides, there is need for such a thing as historical distance from the subject for the historian to be able to claim a meaningful sense of disinterest in the subject. This is, by any definition, lacking in the case of journalistic-contemporary history accounts, and consequently a far greater degree of uncertainty attends the interpretations of the journalists and contemporary historians. More than that, belonging to the period under examination will impose a practical and personal relevance upon the analysis, such that the outcome is more than likely to be contentious and political in character. In other words, the type of historical account we can offer in explanation of contemporary issues is by definition less than adequate.[5]

But suppose we offer the best and the most well-researched "historical" account of this type in response to some "why" question regarding contemporary affairs: have we then given a meaningful political explanation? And, by necessary extension, this fundamental question can be posed in respect of our own academic discipline; we must ask: "What is distinctive about political science?" In other words, if a good contemporary history account of, say, the 1945 elections or, for that matter, the behaviour and policy of the British centre towards the European Union, can provide sufficient answers, are we, then, not really only bad, or pseudo-, historians? Are political science explanations only glorified political explanations?

The quest to know the meaning of political science raises a more real question than some might at first think. Consider a degree course in politics: just how do the various semester options come together to form a distinct

[5] "Adequacy" is a relational notion. It may be "relativised" with reference either to the question asked or the problem to be solved. Such a "relativisation" is then likely to be assumed to mean that since adequacy is in this manner contextualised, it cannot be put forward as a general and objective criteria. However, while epistemologically such a "relativisation" is understandable, if not well-nigh unavoidable, precisely because its conclusions are tentative, it is less than adequate as a basis for human action. Of course, the first retort to this would be to say that this is all that we can do. Quite so. But the point that is being emphasised is, precisely, that, because this is all that we can do, and our actions have significant consequences for human kind, we ought to exercise greater care in being sure of the bases upon which we propose action. The conditional morality of action interferes with epistemological adequacy of minimal scientific requirement. Put differently, ought we to be doing what we can do? This point is further examined in this section.

academic discipline? Is there anything about political science as a discipline which, truly, separates it from the others, especially from history? Why are we so close to History?

This last question is relatively easily answered: not only do we share a subject matter; in fact, political science - like most social sciences - has emerged out of history; we share an intellectual lineage. But this only begs the question, for we want to know in what way and to what degree we are different from History, and therefore why it is that historical answers are not enough. More positively, we want to know what a political science answer to the question about the behaviour and the policy of the British centre towards the European Union would look like.

Let me interrogate the notion of history as a discipline for a moment longer. While we must say "no evidence, no history", it is patently false to infer that "evidence is history". It might be thought that what differentiates these two assertion is the person of the historian, who crafts an account out of the evidence. This is true, but also misleading. Neither the fact that there is a historian, nor the truism that each historian is different, matters; rather, we must seek the distinguishing mark in what is necessary for evidence to be turned into an account. Given that the historian is trained in his craft and functions within the parameters of some natural language, we must concern ourselves with the next, and crucial, link in the chain: does the historian elicit meaning out of his evidence, or is the evidence meaningful in the light of some concept that the historian brings to bear on the evidence? *Tabula rasa* is a philosophical absurdity; empiricism is not meaningful without some conceptual framework within which to identify a "something" as data relevant to the situation. But, not any and every conceptual framework is relevant; yet, the concepts cannot simply arise out of the so-called "facts", for facts need some sort of conceptual framework before they can be invested with any degree of relevance. The essential events of the seventeenth century and that of the Glorious Revolution are not open to doubt, but now that the Whig interpretation of history has been displaced - though it still exerts a great deal of implicit influence - it is no longer possible to see that century and its revolutions as stages along an inevitable process of history of liberal institutions:[6] the politics of the seventeenth century was not about the creation of institutions to secure and safeguard liberty in the twentieth century. The revisionism involved here does not revise history, but the Whig interpretation of that period. Historians always carry *some* concepts to the period to be examined. So, where do Historian get their concepts from? It is surely absurd to imagine that these concepts arise out of the facts, as historical facts are a product of history. On the other hand, while political scientists are primarily concerned with concepts, historians of politics are not.

Generally speaking, the historian seeks to answer the question "why" by showing how it is that something *is* as it is - the emphasis being on the "is".

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[6]See, for instance, Conrad Russell, *Parliaments and English Politics, 1621-1629*. Russell offers a vastly different picture.

This accords well with a view of truth which equates it with what exists: that which is, is true. You might say the result is an account of reality, whatever that reality may be. Selective history is simply no history, it is myth making, and there is more of it around than we might think possible: just look at attempts to re-write the history of the second world war to exclude the tragedy of the Jewish question.

The point is that even the best account of what is, is not enough:

> Description of political reality, even explanation of that reality is not the sum of political science. Its crowning glory lies in the discussion of ideas, in analysing the purpose of institutions, in measuring reality against purpose and in suggesting ways in which the real can be changed to harmonise with the ideal.[7]

In political science we make a radical move from a pointed concern with "what *is* it" to a pre-occupation with "what is *it*".

It is common wisdom to say that history is a hard glance backwards, while politics is always about action and, therefore, it is future oriented. While this cannot be disputed, yet, it is too mundane to mean anything: for in saying this, we have only emphasised a feature, in this instance the direction of the gaze of the analyst, without saying anything substantive about the activity of being a historian or that of being a political scientist.

Now, it may be thought that, to the extent that ideas are timeless,[8] they apply to a past as well as the present and the future. Yet, this is not so. The historian must recognise a given past, as the subject of his study, as a record of actions taken and completed within a given set of conditions and, more importantly, within the limitations of a given set of ideas, rules, principles and mores operationally relevant at the time.[9] Moreover, it is more than likely that what we may currently recognise as ruling and correct ideas were, either, not accepted as such at the time, or, perhaps, they had not even been conceived: just think of the implications of "political correctness" which seeks to re-define received views and concepts. Put differently, the claim that ideas are timeless does not mean that there is a definite Platonic world out there to which we have access and therefore all ideas contained in it are potentially available to one and all and at all times. The historical and the horizontal scale of civilisation and its development - whether we accept the principle postulates of the notion of "civilisation" or of "development" is an entirely different matter - is, nevertheless, precisely a matter of differences between various

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[7] F.F. Ridley, *The Study of Government. Political Science and Public Administration.* p. 32.

[8] There is always a sense and an extent to which ideas are timeless; we do not invent the terms of discourse for each generation from a condition of nothingness, but re-configure and alter, add to or subtract from, ideas and concepts which recognisably span over time. Otherwise we would, quite literally, not be able to write a history of ideas.

[9] i.e. Historicism in the sense in which Mannheim understood it. See Karl Mannheim, *Essays in the Sociology of Knowledge,* pp. 84-133. One might call this the pre-Popperian construction of "Historicism".

constructions of world of ideas. Timelessness of ideas merely says that they are to be understood not in terms of the specificity of a given time-scale, nor as individuated instances of given sets of actions, but in terms of a set of propositions based upon a set of presuppositions located, as Aristotle would have it, in purely imaginary but not impossible conditions.[10] Two questions arise: firstly how is this to be understood, and, secondly, what are its implications for the notion of a political science?

It is clear that a concern with ideas, as in the quotation from Ridley, can only be translated into a theoretical approach. Now, the word "theoretical" is often used in a rather loose way:[11] any generalisation, which has, in some fashion, been divested of its apparent time dimension is capable of being presented as a theoretical statement. In doing politics one is concerned with actions and events, actual behaviour and policies of politicians, parties, institutions etc., all the while seeking to evaluate and judge what has been said or done in respect of its implications for action. In other words our utterances are oriented towards action and the future, seeking happiness and its constituents;[12] for the object of the exercise in an open system of government is to convince the others of the worth of one's proposals so that they may be adopted as collective goals. In "doing politics" we are inevitably concerned with an abstract "us" as nationals and citizens, payers of taxes, parents, students, teachers; that is to say about our different roles and involvements. Politics invokes our ideas about our social reality, and it cannot successfully be divorced from our person. But the purely personal, that the effect of which is not writ large, and the benefits of which apply to specific sections only, is not a concern with the abstracted citizen writ large. Publicness is quintessential to doing politics. And the theoretical is no more than the generalisation of our ideas and a recognition of their effects in respect of public issues.[13] Indeed, only when an idea is recognised to have a public face does it become a political issue; and only when practice runs into difficulties that theoretical arguments become relevant. For instance, the social place and role of the sexes issues into feminism when the traditional view is critically examined; the idea of separate

[10] Aristotle, *Politics*, 1325b, 35-40.

[11] Another way of dealing with this is to examine the distinction between "theoretician" and "theorist". See M. Oakeshott, *On Humnan Conduct,* p. 26.

[12] Aristotle, *Rhetoric,* Book 1, chapter 5.

[13] This ought not to be taken to mean that the theoretical is a limited preserve, confined to the realm of thought: far from it, for the practical is always informed by the theoretical such that problems, possibilities, limitations, and solutions are always defined in terms of how and what practical people understand the situation to be. But it is supremely important to qualify this statement; as Oakeshott would have it, to recognise a "going-on" as a conduct is to recognise it as something that we must learn, well or ill, how to do. M. Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct,* especially pp. 32-33. That theory informs practice, and without it no understanding can be meaningful, does not amount to the further claim that all understanding is therefore of the same quality and, to the same measure, "correct".

nations and races, when it is examined outside of the idea of nations,[14] issues into racism eliciting measures such as equal opportunity programmes, affirmative action, and race relations legislation; or, more to the point, "sovereignty" becomes a hot political issue within the context of the "debate" about the nature of "union" within the United Kingdom, or the proper level of United Kingdom involvement in the European "union", but not with reference to the United Nations or NATO.

But, it is not possible to seek to influence views and opinions without the device of theoretical argumentation. There is, however, a danger in this, in that there is a next step in this progression which is all too easily made, but which is yet a serious problem. Any theoretical statement, indeed all Kantian generalisations, are easily capable of becoming, or being seen, as universally valid notions. A generalisation enters the claim that a given idea is true irrespective of specific conditions of time and place but within the limitations of its own postulates, that is to say within the unspecified but all too real presuppositions that go towards defining its "culture". But, the universalisation of such a generalisation enters the further claim that it is always true in all circumstances, in other words that no known conditions can arrest its validity, which is to say, it is without a cultural home. For instance, liberty, which in the United Kingdom is said to be the result of its political institutions, may, in the light of the concept of sovereignty of Parliament, be seen as the only meaningful form of political liberty; this notion is then capable of being translated into the requirement that for liberty to exist anywhere there must be a parliamentary form of government. "Parliamentary democracy" is thus universalised. Such a belief may inform both the rhetoric of politics and the formation of policy, whereas the concern of the political scientist must be with their validity and meaningfulness.

Now, apart from the danger inherent in an uncontrolled generalisation, we must face a rather difficult epistemological question. Suppose we accept that what distinguishes history from political science is the differential emphasis on the "is" of history and the "it" of political science. Does an argument identifying and stating some theoretical understandings relevant to a situation give a political science explanation of it? Surely, in stating the conceptual understandings that have guided a political actor, we have, to that measure, also given an account of that action. We can understand their actions in terms of their objectives, meaning of the problem, and the availability of solutions relevant to the objectives. Such a statement clearly amounts to an account of the "it", but this is still a description. It seems to me, in shifting the emphasis from the "is" to the "it", we have not gone far enough. Of course each action when examined in this manner is capable of being understood within the limitations of its own postulates, and therefore accepted. But this is a rather dangerous thing to say in politics: surely we do not wish to say that all actions

[14]On the other hand, Aristotle had no compunction about such notions, and could confidently assert that "...good birth in a race or a state means that its members are indigenous or ancient:" *Rhetoric*, Book. 1, chapter 5, 1360b, line 31-32.

are always capable of being understood and accepted in this manner. Consider an example: given the postulates and the immediate circumstances of the whites and the blacks in South Africa, it is possible to understand the need for, and the relevance of, *apartheid* as a meaningful concept, which Verwoerd wished to translate into a "good neighbour policy". In which terms can we condemn *apartheid* as essentially immoral and wrong? The historian can certainly not do this, other than in an *a*historical sense, or, perhaps, in terms of the misery that was the definite consequence of *apartheid* as policy, or possibly in terms of rejecting "good neighbour policy" as a sham and a historical lie, but always in the light of the consequences of the policy. Similarly, the policy of entry into what was the European Common Market can be examined and understood in terms of the circumstances of the day, the political shape of the world, the rapidly changing international economy, and, of course, policy and political objectives of the politicians in the United Kingdom. Historically, we can proceed to examine the consequences that have flowed from this membership and examine them in terms of the explicit and implicit objectives of the politicians at the time, and, accordingly, declare the policy a success or a failure. But that is a distinctly historical approach. To identify and state the conceptual frameworks within which such policy thinking occurred is at best to enable a more than merely historical judgement to be given, but such offerings in theoretical terms will, as such, not amount to much.

It is clear, at least it appears to be self evident, that the approach of a discipline concerned with ideas cannot be just theoretical, but must be meta-theoretical, that is to say meta-analytical. Meta-analysis enables us to interrogate generalisations and putative universals and, by forcing them to divulge their level of generality and the context necessary for each to be meaningful, to reveal them for what they are; even universals which, supposedly, have no cultural base and are, by definition, content-free, require some cultural context within which they can be formulated, and, of course, they have to be expressed in the terms of some natural language.[15] And, it seems to me, this is where a political science explanation may become possible.

The distinction between the theoretical and the meta-theoretical may not be immediately clear. Each one of us is capable of generalising our views, albeit that such Kantian generalisations are often no more than enlargements of our own preferences. And if the whole world also thought in terms of *my* generalisation, then perfect understanding will not only be possible but will also be achieved, and peace would be everywhere. But even if we have such a Nirvana on my terms, even if the world should become uniformly a world of liberal democracies, it seems to me, we can, and must, ask further questions about it: "Is it meaningful?" "Is it right?" "Is this all that we need to do?" "Do its promises amount to something that we ought to pursue?" "Ought we to be doing this?" And "why?" Here, we are not concerned with policy, belief,

[15]See F. Nash, *Meta-Imperialism: A Study in Political Science*. Chapter 3, section 1, 'Europocentrism and Universalism'.

exigency, historical or legal legitimation of the policy and idea, but with the meaningfulness of action, its "doability", indeed its moral legitimation, its rightness.

The point is this: a theoretical approach, say, to the antagonism between the idea of a "wider Europe" as opposed to a "deeper Europe" is likely to lead to the dead end of opinion. And when such notions are held as opinion, there is little that can be said about them. But *qua* concepts they may be subjected to analysis: "Why is it right to endorse the idea of a wider Europe?" "What does it entail?" Clearly, at least in part, it is a defence of the idea of sovereignty of each state. It seeks to ensure that, whatever is done at the level of Europe, accords with the opinion of the governments of the individual member states. On the contrary, "deeper Europe" would mean the possibility that, at least in some areas, what is done may not accord with the intentions and desires of all the member states, and the deeper the integration, the less we can talk of the member states.

Thus, to understand the policy differences between the parties in the United Kingdom, we must, of course, accept and report their various views as *their* conceptions of Europe and the background against which they intend to act in Europe. But we must go further and treat such views as matters to be examined. But in doing so, we do not simply juxtapose them against each other and identify differences and similarities between them, rather we need to examine each in its own right and according to its own postulates to discover its coherence, the meaningfulness of its presuppositions, its relevance to perceived human condition, etc. In other words, we are involved in an analysis of the relevant concepts; our concern is not with politics, but with re-constituted politics. Here we are trying to understand the concepts and come to some sort of judgement as to whether these ideas are plausible or implausible, meaningful or nonsense, indeed, good or bad. This, of course, takes the discipline of political science some distance from the activity of politics, and, to that measure, from the concern of the contemporary historian, but not so far away from that of the historian as might be thought.

We know we ought not to take history, as such, as the guide to the future and to our actions. But History proper can provide examples and instances which will enable theoretical and meta-analytic thinking to be more fruitful. It is said that philosophical thinking needs facts, even if they are imagined facts. Well, history can certainly do this, but in this it is in the service of philosophy.

The distinctive approach of political science is to be found in the fact that it rises above the actual and the theoretical, and examines them both. More than that, it is definitely judgemental: it is an exercise to determine not the course of events, nor the thinking of those involved, but the meaningfulness of thought and action: as analysts, we need to know more about the concepts than do the practitioners.[16] And even though one speaks of an approach, it is not

[16]In an important sense this must be claimed for every science worth the name. For an example see Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance,* especially p. 15. The practitioner, engaged in the practical, must not be expected to incline in such a direction, for, as

distinguished by specific methods or tools of analysis, other than the fact that it requires the fruits of History and the methods of Philosophy. In meta-analysis we rise above the subject, suspend judgement while taking into account whatever appears to be relevant to the point at issue, avoid short term conclusion and political views, then seek to re-assemble what has been analysed in order, firstly, to discover whether we are able conceptually to "approximate" to the whole from the parts, and if not, secondly, to identify what is missing which is both necessary for the link to be made and which we did not encounter in the course of our analysis from the whole to the parts. Such missing links are, often, very important concepts which are hidden from the ordinary gaze, or which are used as though they are unproblematic, almost as though they are linguistic devices, whereas, often, they tend to be the crucial links which impart essential meaning and content to the matter in hand. It is at this stage that we must refine our understanding and arrive at judgements. That this process requires a good deal of metaphysical thinking is not at all surprising; but that this metaphysical thinking does not end in inert conclusions, merely stating what is already known but only better, is an interesting revelation. Meta-analysis is judgemental, and, it is argued, so must be political science: we are, after all, dealing with a quintessentially moral science.

There is, of course, a hidden danger in this view of political science. Plato, suspicious of the conversion of Dionysios from a bad ruler to a lover of truth, thought it simple to test his love of knowledge; the acid test was the extent to which, once introduced to philosophy, he would pursue it, and hate the kind of life that opposed it.[17] In other words, once we have embarked on such a journey, we are liable to find it impossible to stop until we have answered ultimate questions about "life, the universe and everything". So, beginning with simple questions such as "what is the political system", and leading to a more complex one such as "what is it for?" we are liable to find that even rudimentary answers to such questions will lead us into the difficult terrain of ideas about the very meaning of "being" and existence, the nature of society, and some view of human nature. But in doing this we are not merely unearthing the layers of thought and seeking the presuppositions of ruling ideas, but are concerned to examine the meaningfulness of each claim in the light of its postulates. Of course, political science is not philosophy, nor are we philosophers, nor are we concerned to expel thought into the limitless realm of self-examination. That is to say, we must at some point stop and seek to offer considered views: this cut-off point is, of course, determined by the question we seek to answer.

The danger, to repeat an important point, is that, whereas the journey forward may seem to go from idea to idea in what might appear as a natural progression of thought, we are liable to find that our journey back will reveal

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Oakeshott puts it: "An ideal character... cannot be both used and interrogated at the same time." M. Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, p. 25.

[17] Plato, *7th Letter*, especially 326a.

gaps we had simply not noticed on the way out. In other words, that we shall not be able to assemble the whole from the analysed parts. This is because we shall discover that theoretical statements about objectives and courses of action are less than comprehensive, are often based on presuppositions which cannot be sustained, or, more likely, are based on assumptions about other things which, in human affairs, are never equal. Moreover, if we go down this road, we are liable also to question the relevance of the presupposition introduced into European consciousness by Aristotle to the effect that only within the *Polis*, which in contemporary terms we often equate with the state, can "beings" be "human". Indeed he pushed this point to its utmost extremity when he further declared that "...the good of the state *(sic)* and not of the individual is the proper subject of political thought and speculation..."[18]

Properly speaking, political science ought not to accept any of these ideas as given and fixed assumptions; rather, its proper enquiry ought to be concerned precisely with their veracity and relevance. Put differently, if we are to accept that the notion of the state is a "necessity" - and necessity always demands that we begin with it - then we must arrive at that view as a conclusion, before we proceed to examine other issues based on it as an assumption. But we are not privileged, and it would be presumptuous for any one generation to equate what can be done with what ought to be done. The point is this: by all means, let us examine the question of the state as a "necessity" and determine the issue for ourselves; let us go further and point an accusing finger at preceding generations for their mistaken faith in the notion of the state as a "necessity"; but let us also remember that the next generation too must examine this notion for itself, and arrive at it as a conclusion. And if this view is accepted, it must then follow that for this to be possible, firstly, all political understanding must at all times and for each generation begin with the same raw first principles which we apply, and secondly that we must ensure that our actions do not foreclose options.[19]

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[18]Aristotle, *Politics,* Book. vii/2, 1324a, lines 19-21. This view begs the question of a citizen body. The rediscovery of Aristotle and its impact upon European political thinking is often considered to have put us in touch with the ancients. But we suffer too much from the malaise of philosophical subservience to the Greeks. Of course, it is historically true that the rediscovery of Aristotle, presented as it was in the supposed synthesis that was Thomism, had a significant impact upon European political consciousness; but our view of its true worth and relevance must be moderated by the crucially important fact that since, at least, the sixteenth century the relevance of Aristotle has been more of a problem than anything else. Indeed, it was developments of this kind, since the middle of the twelfth century, which culminated in the notion of *raison d'etat,* seriously negating the idea of civic debate relevant to the idea of a citizen body. Indeed, one must go further and say that this development has been inimical to the good sense which many since the seventeenth, but specially the nineteenth century, have accepted "democracy" to signify.

[19]This may, nevertheless, appear to foreclose some options. The essence of the argument here is that for the next generation to examine "our *thoughts"* they must have access to and understand the raw principles we have employed. This naturally applies, with equal force, to this generation examining the thought of former generations. But, we are all, in a timeless sense, subject to a number of universals *if life is to continue:* necessities to sustain life, including the essential requirement of families and groups, the ensuing fact that there is always

However, this is not to say that each generation must re-invent the wheel, and gaze at glimpses of the obvious: for on the basis of the foregoing two points, we must offer "our *thoughts*" and invite the next generation to examine, and hopefully, accept them. It is our moral duty to be active and restrained.

In the next section, the idea of "union" will be subjected to meta-analysis in order to discover its content as a political science concept, and contrast it with the use that is made of it as a concept in British politics. As ever, we must begin with a look at the *is* of the situation; thus, briefly, a historical account will be examined in order to show its inadequacy for the purpose. This will be followed by a consideration of some theoretical views about states and their relationships. But, an examination of the nature of the United Kingdom will demonstrate how misleading it is to concentrate on a theoretical account of behaviour of states or the historical antecedent of any given policy line, for when a differentiated meaning and use of "union" in the context of United Kingdom is identified and examined, a serious conceptual problem becomes apparent.

THE BRITISH CENTRE AND "UNION"

Examining the history of British politics and its form of government, we recognise a persistent reluctance of its ruling elite throughout the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries to commit this country to alliances and political combinations overseas: Disraeli once said that this country had only interests, not principles, in the conduct of its foreign policy. Lord Salisbury, though in a critical mood, felt that, generally, British policy was to drift lazily down stream, occasionally putting out a boat-hook to avoid a collision. Now, such an approach is, of course, only possible if certain conditions obtain. For instance, it would be infantile to seek to maintain a position of "splendid isolation" if one is not in an isolated position, or capable of defending it. Of course, being on a geophysical group of island,[20] we can, more easily, sustain the notion of isolation and elevate it into a national myth, but such a view also requires that no combination of powers strong enough to threaten that isolation may be tolerated. At least in part the resistance to building the channel tunnel was to

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a multiplicity of human beings in interaction, harmonious or conflictual, etc. These are content-free universals for which "our *thoughts*" provide the contents.

[20]It is true that we are on an island, but this true statement is also very misleading. It is not entirely infantile to say that all land on earth is always an island, but in the case of our islands, we have a physical unit which is also one political unit. True, since 1922 The Irish Free State, later the Republic of Ireland, has been a separate political entity, but this is a relatively recent variation in the continuity of the condition of a centralised system run on a unitary basis the authority of which encompassed the whole of the land mass within this group of islands. This condition may be traced back, at least, to the union with Scotland. At any rate, the Irish have never been seen as foreigners in the United Kingdom.

ensure that Britain[21] remained a physically separate entity; some already lament the passing of that sense of isolation as a result of it existence.

This simplified sketch has already implied a number of enduring principles of British foreign policy, such as the pursuit of predominantly commercial/trading interests; the maintenance of her security through the only instrument necessary for her defence - initially a strong navy and, later, a strong air force; [22] preventing political and military coalitions abroad which could threaten this isolation; and, equally importantly, avoiding entanglements in coalitions, except when absolutely essential in order to maintain the necessary balance of power. It has also implied an important exclusion: standing armies have never been in favour in this country, while the powerful myth of her isolation and the island character of her geography have helped dispense with the need for a large standing army in time of peace.[23] It is against this background that the story of the period between 1902 and 1945 is seen as a series of exceptions: the fact that the predominant public mood of 1945 was precisely a repeat of the mood in 1918, namely to get back to "normality", is a clear enough indication of the relevance of her perceived pattern of isolation, and the distinctly British character of her interests. But there is no going back to a historical past; and the world in 1945 simply did not resemble that of 1918, let alone 1914. Yet a number of factors helped create the illusion of continuity even after the incredible disruption, well-nigh collapse of 1945: the evident prosperity and the obvious recovery after the war, albeit within the context of Marshall Aid in co-operation with the other European states, helped perpetuate the myth of British great power status. And if the Empire was disappearing, it was yet being replaced with the British Commonwealth of Nations, which, once again, showed her pragmatism and adaptability; the Commonwealth did not even have to retain the central and unifying character of allegiance of its members to The Crown, for the new arrangement could accommodate republics, provided the British Crown was acknowledged as the titular Head of the new system.

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[21]Britain? Whose "Britain"? Surely, for the staunch United Kingdom Unionist this must include Ireland, or parts thereof. It is an interesting and significant feature of the history of Union in these islands that, even after so long, many appellations referring to the parts or the whole, and to the relationship between the parts and the whole, are still current in its political vocabulary.

[22]The significance of this becomes clear when we examine the attempts at the creation of an independent nuclear defence for this country. That failure meant, at least, technical dependence on others for her defence, which, of course, also means that Britain does not have exclusive control over the means of the defence of the realm. This failure may, indeed, be seen as the true mark of the relative decline of British economy, and political power.

[23]Historical qualifications are obviously called for here, for the army has been a particularly important element in the creation, and the maintenance of the United Kingdom Union, especially in relation to Ireland. However, in terms of political science analysis of civil-military relations, we have been, and remain, the exception that probes the rule.

Yet, the post-war period is not easy to explain: having never been occupied, the myth of isolation[24] was seen to have served her well. In 1945, Britain was one of the victors, and this further underlined the illusion of continuity in her history, so much so that the post-war period was not seen as one of necessary modernisation, but one of re-construction.[25] The reality of "decline" was not addressed, and, therefore, necessary accommodation to this new reality was, so to say, prolonged and made more difficult. And yet the accommodation that emerged showed an interesting continuity of a distinctly British type. It has been said that Britain was a great power on the cheap; in the nineteenth century India provided the bulk of her army, while in the run up to the 1914 war she used the French and Russians as her "army". Now, when we examine the period since 1942, Americans seem to take over this role: "Special relationship" has a lot to do with bringing American power to the defence of Europe. Surely, this shows the continuing success of British diplomacy; what then is this talk about decline and collapse of Britain as a major power? David Reynolds[26] has offered an interesting and convincing argument to the effect that this question of power and British decline must be seen in a broader context, in which power is understood in terms of relative positions and capabilities. If Britain was declining in its general capability to cope, the other nations were increasingly catching up with her and surpassing her in their ability to cope. But this is a trend that can be traced back to the final quarter of the nineteenth century. The obvious advantage of this approach is that it justifies the refusal to accept the declining British power thesis: Churchill's refusal to preside over the dismemberment of the Empire is matched by Ernest Bevin's refusal to accept that Britain had ceased to be a Great Power. Curiously, even the shock of awakening to the rude reality that Britain could simply not afford the instruments of modern warfare did not seem sufficiently strong to invite a re-direction and a radical re-think, but provoked a dose of playing the "Greeks" to latter-day "Romans".

Do these historical patterns explain British reluctance in becoming a member of any international union? The hullabaloo of British European Community policy and its turbulent history is apt to make one forget the fact that Britain has been, and is, an active member of numerous international

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[24]It is particularly important not to read too much into this, and, indeed, not to read the wrong sense into it: the emphasis must be on *myth* rather than *isolation*. Throughout the ages Britain has been in close contact with all manner of nations, has had colonial settlements as part of *her* empire, has claimed special relationship with the United States of America, and so on. But, significantly, all these outwards signs were located within a national ethos which, conceptually and actually, separated *high* from *low* politics, and accepted that its economic and political greatness was due to the fact that it was what it was: an industrious and innovative people inhabiting a physical island, therefore, able to take the best and avoid contamination from the unacceptable, always driven on by the fact that it had to trade to survive.

[25]It may be claimed that, despite the magnificently abstract and futuristic *Skylon* a the Festival of Britain in 1951, the larger social and cultural demands of modernity were simply ignored, at least until the early 1960s.

[26]D. Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, chapters 1 and 2.

organisations, ranging from the United Nations at the global level to NATO at the important regional level, as well as a whole number of less political but significant institutions - my favourite being the Universal Postal Union. We hardly hear anything about British policy and membership in these organisations. Britain has been at the heart of all sorts of organisations, and while the history of her involvement in such organisations would show ups and downs - for a few years Britain withdrew her membership of UNESCO because of its alleged ideological bias - yet, we shall not encounter the sort of drama that seems to characterise her policy and involvement in the European system. Even the most elementary examination of Britain and the European Community will show periods of contrasting policy ranging from an overwhelming desire to get in, to being an awkward partner, or to professing to the desire to be at the heart of Europe: Jim Bulpitt[27] detects five types of phases, each characterised by a different attitude. And now the spectre of withdrawal - the possibility of life after European Union - is beginning to haunt the Conservative Party in the run up to the 1996 Inter-Governmental Conference. Incidentally, we make a mistake in assuming that Britain is the only reluctant partner; unfortunately, however, British reluctance is visible at the top of its governmental echelon, whereas opposition to European Union in the other countries is active below that level. Moreover, the main thrust of opposition elsewhere is generally directed at aspects of the Treaty of Maastricht, whereas further integration, even after further enlargement, is not a serious political issue. Peculiarly, it is mostly in Britain that integration and enlargement are seen as mutually exclusive policy lines, pivoted on an understanding of the idea of sovereignty.

Clearly, the historical pattern I have identified would suggest that the volatility of British European policy is not only explicable, but, in fact, also predictable, simply on account of the fact that the European system is a fundamentally different kind of international organisation. The argument would run as follows: membership in strictly inter-governmental institutions is perfectly in keeping with the character of British polity, but the European Union is not an inter-governmental but a supra-national body, and this is the cause of the problem. It may help if the essential differences between these two types is tabulated:

[27] Jim Bulpitt, 'Conservative Leaders and the "Euro-Ratchet": Five Doses Of Scepticism' in *Political Quarterly*, 1992.

Intra-Governmental	Supra-governmental
Association between equal sovereign states,	Association between equal states, but...
association is voluntary but on universal terms of membership: withdrawal is an ever present option, even if it is not a good idea,	while joining is an act of will subject to negotiated agreement, there are no mechanism for leaving it; it is not a club, rather the "association" is greater than the sum of its parts,
each state sends a delegation who speak for their government but have no powers over and above that granted them by their government, i.e. each government retains ultimate control over its own policies, and over what it will agree to...	the "association" has a quasi-federal element: in respect of powers granted to the association, the members are no longer free to act as they please; rather they are bound by the decision taken at that level such that
in theory, nothing can be imposed upon any member state, at least not upon the more important powers. IGCs are unit-veto bodies, but we must not forget the rapidly changing face and role of the United Nations, as seen in the case of the conflict in Yugoslavia, and elsewhere...	member states will find they have to accept policies they would otherwise not have initiated, and cannot stop the process... Treaty of Rome created a strictly unit-veto system, but, especially since the SEA, majority vote in respect of agreed competencies is the norm.

It is clear that the essential difference between these two types is the way in which each affects the capacity of member states for independent action. It is infantile to speak of the capacity of states for independent action as though "independent action" is either capable of quantification or measurement. While it is true that no state is absolutely independent, none is also fully and totally dependent; all states are more or less dependent upon each other and on the international system. This does not tell us much about the capacity of states for independent action for a very good reason, namely that the true balance is always a contingent matter. Of course, ideally, statehood implies the recognition of three features: that of its political equality with all the other states; of the legitimacy of its authority over a given territory and people; and, of its right to expect non-intervention in its internal affairs. But these ideals belong to the "Realist" view of state sovereignty. This ideal is hardly ever achieved; instead, there are various degrees of co-operation and intervention. It is for this reason, if for none other, that sovereignty is said to be a particularly bad concept in this kind of analysis. One analyst refers to sovereignty and interdependence as "zombie concepts, fit to be employed only

by the walking dead."[28] Yet the difference between the inter-governmental and the supra-national system - which really means functional integration at the state level - is all too real for the governments involved.

But, one might well ask: "Does it really make a difference to the ordinary citizen?" Well now, there is an interesting question, but any meaningful attempt to answer it will involve us in a great deal more than merely stating the preferences of politicians or collating the views of the public in a national opinion poll. Rather, we would have to push the argument right back to the meaning of the state. Of course, it is most unlikely to be answered in this manner; it is more likely to be transformed into an emotionally charged question, such as: "Do you prefer your laws to be made at Westminster or in Brussels?", which will elicit an equally emotionally charged answer: "Yes" or "No".

The point is that the express preference of the British government[29] for the enlargement of the European Union and the desiderata of limited integration are, on the whole, a defence of the capacity to determine policy at the centre in Whitehall - in effect the freedom to respond to events according to its perceived requirements - rather than an expression of what is or is not good at the European level.

Having said all that, we can identify 8 features in British policy towards Europe:

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[28]Jim Bulpitt, 'Conservative Leaders and the "Euro-Ratchet": Five Doses Of Scepticism' in *Political Quarterly*, 1992, p 263.

[29]The phrase "British government" is a less than adequate generalisation here: as it happens, in some 21 years of British membership of the European system, the Conservative party has been in power for 16 years, and, of course, continuously since 1979. Consequently, by and large, we are here talking about the Conservative party attitude to Europe as a party of government. This also explains the fact that division within that party are far more prominently reported and examined, while divisions within the Labour party are, generally speaking, forgotten, except for electoral and rhetorical purposes. There is ironic beauty in the fact that now the Conservative party must consider the need for some measure of public consultation, one suspects, for much the same sort of reason which motivated Harold Wilson in 1974: namely, as a device to help keep the party together.
However, exclusive concentration upon Conservative Party attitudes would be misleading. Indeed, we must also consider the official Labour party views because

1. they contribute to setting the agenda of the debate on British policy towards Europe,
2. they have, to that measure, contributed to the result of elections, and have, therefore, been relevant in determining which party forms a government, and
3. without begging the question of the mandate, their utterances may be seen as indicative of what they would have done if they had a chance.

THE EUROPEAN UNION
Europe of States; no denuding their powers,
Europe of Nations; identities to be retained,
More European members; a wider, not deeper Europe,
minimal loss (sharing) of sovereign power to the European Community,
no further powers for European Community; "European Parliament": is it a Parliament?
Subsidiarity; effective power to member governments,
No European Community central bank and single currency: control of economic policy a prerogative of the state,
Contributions made to European Community budget ought to reflect realities of each economy and benefits that accrue.

It is clear that these eight points are not policy points, but policy arguments and their meaning is not clear outside of a more general view of the nature of sovereign power integral to a given view of the state. That is to say, these policy arguments by definition confine the debate to a specific view of sovereignty, which presupposes the British state and its identity, posits "Queen-in-Parliament" as the central plank of its legitimacy and power, and, indeed, claims sovereign power for all the member states. Negatively, we must notice that it does not mention the people, or make any references to any desirable condition of "civilisation" and "human life", nor does it stipulate purposes for which it would be proper to employ state power.

What are we to make of this? It certainly is a point of view predicated, as it is, upon a specific historical understanding.[30] We can present this as what the politicians in government wish to have as their guide to policy. But that does not say anything about the meaningfulness of what is being proposed. On the other hand, having examined these issues in a theoretical context, we can question the meaningfulness of the conceptual arguments embedded in them. In doing so, we shall have attempted to rise to the level of the meta-analytic, which is the proper political science level of explanation.

[30]The essentially nineteenth century ideals of free trade are very relevant here: that desiderata postulated, in the ultimate, the elimination of national frontiers and wars, the creation of one great "Commercial Republic" - notice the emphasis; minimal, care-taker national government is taken for granted - encompassing and enabling a natural division of labour and resources, such that each area ministers to deficiency of products in other areas. All this is, of course, predicated upon a unity view of the commercial interests of the entire human race. What this kind of view amounts to may be seen in such slogans as more choice, more goods, more freedom to choose a better life... very familiar to us in the contemporary un-historical period. See Geoffrey Vickers, *The Art of Judgement,* pp 127-8.

The thrust of these 8 points is, on the one hand, to defend a view of a unified British state, and, on the other, to resist integration into a union which is seen to be corrosive of the powers and the integrity of that state. In examining these two issues, we must cope with the fact that the description of the form of government in the United Kingdom as a "unitary" system hides the reality that it is in fact a "union" of four parts, which have not been properly integrated such that each retains its old "historical" identity, more or less, intact. That is to say, resisting union at the level of Europe must be set against the background of having a union at the level of British isles. But, it seems to me, the arguments against union at the level of Europe can only be sustained if the conceptual understanding of the notion of union at the level of the UK and the role it is made to play in British politics, is ignored.

Now, when we examine the features of mostly Conservative (for Labour party policy differs in certain nuances on proposed policy) views on union within the United Kingdom, we find another list of 8 features:

THE UK UNION
UK is a unitary Parliamentary Democracy: sovereign powers resides in "Queen-in-Parliament",
UK is composed of four "nations", but all are contained, in an undifferentiated and un-segregated sense, within one unitary sovereign authority,
there is resistance to any loss of its members; only some Scottish political identity is retained; in Wales it is "dormant"; in Northern Ireland it is the problem,
no loss of sovereign power to the periphery can be tolerated,
not even limited devolved powers for the periphery can work: Regional or "national" Assemblies? What are they?
central direction of policy; in effect no subsidiarity but a good deal of de-concentration,
central direction of the economy, with Sterling as THE currency
GNP the result of an un-differentiated UK economy, to be used for the benefit of whole of the UK as directed by the government at the centre

Broadly speaking, all parties - including the Liberals - have, when in government, followed the essential points contained in this list.

Now, something curious happens if we juxtapose the two lists

THE EUROPEAN UNION	THE UK UNION
Europe of States; no denuding their powers,	UK is a unitary Parliamentary Democracy: sovereign powers resides in "Queen-in-Parliament",
Europe of Nations; identities to be retained,	UK is composed of four "nations", but all are contained, in an undifferentiated and un-segregated sense, within one unitary sovereign authority,
More European members; a wider, not deeper Europe,	there is resistance to any loss of its members; only some Scottish political identity is retained; in Wales it is "dormant"; in Northern Ireland it is the problem,
minimal loss (sharing) of sovereign power to the European Community,	no loss of sovereign power to the periphery can be tolerated,
no further powers for European Community; "European Parliament": is it a Parliament?	not even limited devolved powers for the periphery can work: Regional or "national" Assemblies? What are they?
Subsidiarity; effective power to member governments,	central direction of policy; in effect no subsidiarity but a good deal of de-concentration,
No European Community central bank and single currency: control of economic policy a prerogative of the state,	central direction of the economy, with Sterling as THE currency
Contributions made to European Community budget ought to reflect realities of each economy and benefits that accrue.	GNP the result of an un-differentiated UK economy, to be used for the benefit of whole of the UK as directed by the government at the centre

The curious thing is this: in each case, the policy argument in respect of Europe is an almost exact opposite, the flip side of the policy argument in respect of the UK. The two policy arguments are mirror images of each other, along the divide of government at the centre. In other words, and in terms of the stark contrast of these tabulations, the policy arguments in respect of Europe are not "contingent" emanations of a consistent line of thinking about the political concepts involved, but rather historically defined notions forced to apply to the one side, while their relevance to the other side is being denied. Of course, in a sense, both these types are contained within a larger frame,

for, in the hands of politicians, they belong to the realm of the rhetoric of politics.

A possible retort that the two sides of this list refer to the two faces of this *janus* concept sovereignty does not help: the United Kingdom was never a unitary state, its history is distinctly one of the enlargement of the power and authority of England at the expense of the other three;[31] we are looking at a historical mini international system within the geographic confines of the British isles, which, for purposes of this account, must be recognised to have included at least France and Spain as important players in it. More than that, the perceived isolation of Britain, that most significant of British political myths, must be understood in this context: it came about as a direct result of the exclusion of all other powers from active presence on these islands, the price of which was a number of wars on and outside these islands, and, most significantly, a political union with Scotland.

This degree of inconsistency in the use that is made of the notion of "union" is incapable of being excused as the necessary ambiguity that is a feature of pragmatism. At any rate, the scale of this inconsistency is only recognised when the *supra-* and the *infra-* UK policies are juxtaposed within a larger frame of an understanding of "union" as a concept. And since the formation of the UK Union was, strictly speaking, not a process of state-building, but came about as a result of relations between distinct entities and political units, even though each had their own "internal" problems, the concept of "union" relevant to it must be one that applies to relations *between* political units. That is to say, the same concept of "union" that one must also apply to the history of relations between states in the post 1945 period, eventuating in the European Union.

Of course, if we insist on treating these two spheres of policy separately, which must, in the least, require that we ignore the history, and the meaning, of the formation of the union at the level of the UK, and, instead, take the word "union" as a mere linguistic device connecting two spheres of talk, then British governments may be supposed to have been consistent in their policies in respect of the "union" within and "union" without the United Kingdom. But to allow that we must admit to a degree of constructive pragmatism which many would, on reflection, find difficult to fathom.

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[31] England absorbed Wales and Ireland, but the union with Scotland was the result of negotiation. Two related consequences must be noted:

1. the terms of the Union imposed substantial restrictions upon the freedom of use of central powers,
2. which must mean that the terms of union had a significance over and the creation of the Union as such, in that it had constitutional implications for the future of the Union.

A great deal of obfuscation attends the history of union with Scotland: it is by no means an esoteric question to ask whether Parliament at Westminster is, in fact, the proper authority to modify the terms of the Act of Union, repeal it, or generally treat it as an ordinary Act of Parliament. This raises the difficult but interesting question of sovereignty in the United Kingdom and places a question mark against the notion of Sovereignty of Parliament, but these considerations belong in a different study.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Five points may be emphasised:

1. In the case of United Kingdom policy with regard to the European Union we encounter a significant problem of inconsistency. We may examine the two "union" views in mutual isolation, but we are liable to give contradictory accounts of the behaviour of Britain as a political unit. The difficulty with this is not that every state at all times will behave in a consistent manner, but that the inconsistency identified here is absolute in that it involves the negation and the assertion of the same set of ideas. Yet, it must be said, we can only identify this when we attempt to go beyond the merely historical and the theoretical.
2. Moreover, this degree of inconsistency is, I suggest, a mark of the crisis of the view that the nation state is the main and proper unit of human social and political organisation. In other words that even this brief analysis points to the need to examine, not so much the past and present behaviour of the British governments in respect of the European Union but, the notion of the state and the meaning of government: the idea of the "state" may be coming to the end of its useful, or useless, life; what can replace it? We must ask: "Is the European Union (movement?) a relevant context within which to examine the issue of the future organisation of human society?" And: "What form ought that future system to take"? Meanwhile, we must recognise that the longer term effect of the policy of European Regions will be to undermine the relevance of individual sovereign states as its most important political unit.
3. The British concern with the future shape of Europe is, surely, intimately connected with a ubiquitous concern with the future of the union within the United Kingdom. Admittedly, the view of the United Kingdom Union has not remained an invariant constant; one can easily distinguish between the views of the Old Tories as opposed to "new" Tories, who have been heavily influenced by aspects of Whig views and other myths. Yet it remains true that, at least since 1922, the need to attend to the question of Union at the level of the United Kingdom has been most strongly felt only in the periphery, while at the centre it has hardly been acknowledged. Moreover, often enough the question of the UK Union was seen as a mere constitutional issue, obfuscated with arguments about its putative nature as a unitary state, and hidden beneath the integument of historical continuity. More than that, any attempt even to think about these issues have been, still are, confused with institutional arrangements, the delicacy of the "unwritten constitution", and the horror generated in politicians of all colours by the mere thought of a rational approach to constitution making. Their weapon was, and still is, "hare 'em, scare 'em" generation of public fear that the displacement or the re-arrangement of any one part of the system will simply pull the whole edifice down. One example of this kind of naive thinking about these matters is the recent

and current (hardly a) "debate" about the possibility of the disestablishment of the Church of England. And, when the Prince of Wales expressed a private preference for the removal of the public identification of the "faith" which he thought was appropriate to "defend" in the context of contemporary British society,[32] His Grace the Archbishop of York threatened us with the wrath of God, and promised the total destruction of British civilisation as we know it, if any one part of the constitution was to be changed.[33]

4. The attitude of the Conservative party has been one of denying the problem: John Major has, throughout his premiership, emphasised the notion of supremacy of the UK Parliament, in effect ruling out even the thought of examining the issue of UK Union. On the other hand, the Liberal Democrats have, for long, spoken of constitutional changes; and of late, the Labour party, too, has started to move in this direction. But, once again, the emphasise in both their views is on constitutional adjustments, electoral reform, and concern with the House of Peers, not with a re-examination of the problem of the Union. Promises of tame regional assemblies for Wales and Scotland do not amount to much, for in both cases such limited proposals - though laced, as Dicey once felt, with a fear that they might succeed, with unexpected consequences - have been predicated upon the continuing supremacy of Parliament at Westminster. The newly elected leadership of the Labour Party might

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[32]He has since clarified his utterances and effectively defused the situation.

[33]The Times, 2 July, 1994. The Archbishop of York warns us that by picking out one thread we might unravel heaven knows what else. This is a clear warning to leave well alone a constitutional structure which, one must infer, His Grace now feels to be pretty fragile. Else he would not have changed his mind since last year when he appeared content with a possible disestablishment of the Church of England. His recent interview evokes four responses.

1. That those in public office should not speak until they are clear about what they say. Admittedly the proper application of this rule will silence a lot of people!
2. Secondly, His Grace may, in fact, be correct in the claim that a year ago he had not understood the full constitutional implications of the point. However, in view of his recent interview, he may well be wrong in assuming that this state of affairs is any different now. Moreover, it is now manifestly impossible to take either of his pronouncements seriously. Henceforth, we are entitled to a "believe by" date for all his pronouncements!
3. Thirdly, to assume that the terms of the Act of Settlement 1701 had a material impact upon the future union with Scotland is to show a terribly askew understanding of constitutional history of the Union. Incidentally, to say that disestablishment will estrange the Scots is also to imply that the guarantee of Protestant succession keeps the union together!
4. Finally, promising political calamity - presumably the this-worldly equivalent of the wrath of God - as wages of one's efforts at constitutional change is nothing less than the expression of a fear that the change in question is feasible, which, of course , it is - without Parliament losing all sense of proportion. The real question is not that, but, rather, should it happen, and, if so, for what reason.

One is rather inclined to demand not only the disestablishment of the Church of England, but also the re-introduction of anti-clericalism as a national duty!

wish to change the Labour Party and the Country, but, one rather suspects, given the record, it will be yet more *plus ça change* and all that.

5. It is hard to see how this rather peculiar condition can continue for long. Commitment to Europe and resistance to further integration at the level of European Union can only be consistently pursued if they reflect policy lines within the United Kingdom. And this can only be done when the obvious duality that characterises attitudes to "union" without and within the United Kingdom are brought into line with each other. Even the evidently simple and highly pragmatic idea of subsidiarity may be seen to have a "Jekyll and Hyde" life in this sense: the discovery of this largely old fashioned Catholic idea in the early 1990s appeared to solve the problem of conscience[34] for some Conservative Members of Parliament. And this has been achieved, seemingly, because they have taken it to mean that the traditional State powers of the UK centre will not be given up to Brussels without a jolly good fight on the basis of claims to subsidiarity - which incidentally only means discovering the most effective level at which a given action ought to be taken. But this is really getting one's goose mixed up with one's gander. Else it is a case of charity not beginning at home. If subsidiarity is the best thing since *raison d'etat*, may we have a dose of it in respect not only of the Union at the level of the United Kingdom, but also that decimated and largely ignored layer of government at the local level?[35] The fact is that unless some sense is injected into thinking about this issue, we shall continue to be faced with fundamental problems in respect both of European Union policy at the centre, and increasing frustration at the periphery. If this disparity is allowed to continue, it will also give rise to a state of affairs heavily pregnant with longer term problems for British politics. But, presumably, such issues are not for us and this Parliament to determine, but must be allowed to fester so as to become a problem fit for a future Parliament to determine, presumably along with the issue of a single European currency.

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[34]One is reminded of Sir Humphrey Appleby's easing of Bernard's conscience when he was instructed to write the minutes of a Cabinet meeting which showed Hacker had not tried to suppress the publication of an otherwise damaging memoirs of his predecessor. According to Sir Humphrey, it was said at the meeting that there were no *legal* grounds for suppression, and this was enough to show that no attempt was made to suppress:

> "It is not a lie. It can go on the minutes with a clear conscience. B.W. departed with his conscience feeling less bruised."

J. Lynn and A. Jay, Eds. *Yes, Prime Minister.* Volume 2, pp. 59-60.

[35]We have a history of administrative regionalism and devolution, and good examples of attempts at de-concentration, but hardly of subsidiarity and decentralisation. For a short account of regionalism since 1979 see B.W. Hogwood, *Whatever happened to regional government?*

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