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# Educational internationalism, universal human rights, and international organization: International Relations in the thought and practice of Robert Owen

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*Abstract*

Robert Owen, the early nineteenth century social reformer, made a greatly more significant contribution to the theory and practice of International Relations than has hitherto been assumed. This article shows how Owen helped to develop an understudied but distinctive form of internationalist thought focusing on the role of education in the pursuit of peace. Owen's previously neglected contributions to human rights norms and to international organization are also explored, including his promotion of universal rather than nationally-oriented human rights standards, his role in the nascent movement towards the formation of international non-governmental organizations, and his contribution to international federalist ideas. Following an introduction to Owen's place in the literature, this article discusses each of these contributions of Owen to the theory and practice of International Relations in turn. The analysis reveals that Owen's contributions in each of these aspects are as significant for their limitations as for their insights.

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**Introduction**

Few individuals have been hailed as pioneers in so extensive a range of fields as Robert Owen. He has been considered to be 'the founder of socialism in England',[1] the 'father of co-operation',[2] the progenitor of the rationalist and factory reform movements, and inspirer of the trade union movement.[3] More recently, it has been claimed that he pioneered feminist and environmentalist ideas, infant education, social science, and corporate social responsibility.[4] Owen's important contributions to the theory and practice of International Relations (IR), however, have all too commonly been neglected. This article addresses this deficit, and explores in turn Owen's development of a distinctive form of internationalist thought centred around the role of education, his promotion of universal human rights, and his contributions to the theory and practice of international organization.

Consideration of Owen's work in these three areas sheds important new light on key debates in IR today. Amongst the most significant of these is the call for greater understanding of the role of the nineteenth century, since it was an era of 'global transformation' characterised by the development of 'industrialisation, the rational state and ideologies of progress' during which 'novel institutional formations' developed.[5] As this article will show, Owen was to make a vital contribution not only to ideologies of progress but also to new institutions, not least the development of the modern international non-governmental organization (INGO). Recent work has challenged traditional assumptions of the twentieth century roots of INGOs by exploring their development since the *late* nineteenth century.[6] The penultimate section of this article, on the other hand, reveals Owen's central role in a previously neglected transformation

that took place in the *early* nineteenth century by which ancient forms of INGO were to be superseded by modern, secular INGOs.

Attention to Owen's work is also important given its relevance to the growing bodies of literature on nineteenth century international thought and the peace movement.[7] A major theme for recent work has been Victorian proposals for international federation, but to date this literature has neglected Owen's important contributions.[8] Owen's writings are also pertinent to the contemporary revival of interest in world federation.[9] The penultimate section of this article reveals in its discussion of Owen's work not only models of global federation extending beyond those in existing discussions, but also Owen's significant contribution in respect of the dynamics by which federations may develop.[10]

Owen's work also challenges conventional understandings of the evolution of universal human rights norms. A common theme in existing literature has been emphasis on how 'nationalism had repulsed universal human rights by 1815 and continued to do so throughout the nineteenth century'.[11] For others, notably Moyn, a sharp contrast must be drawn between eighteenth and nineteenth century understandings of the 'rights of man ... predicated on belonging to a political community', and 'human rights' discourse from the 1940s onwards which 'established no comparable citizenship space'.[12] Owen's 1834 Charter of the Rights of Humanity discussed in this article influenced the Chartist movement and is a significant omission from existing accounts of the evolution of human rights, since it put forward an exceptionally broad range of rights and an examination of its content challenges preponderant narratives given the Charter's conceptualisation of rights as universal rather than contingent upon notions of national citizenship.

Underpinning all of Owen's diverse contributions to IR was his educational approach to internationalism, with which the analysis in this article commences. In contrast to the traditional focus in IR literature upon variants of internationalism

including commercial, institutional, socialist, sociological and republican approaches, a significant recent development has been growing but still limited attention to cultural internationalism.[13] Studies of key internationalists such as Angell and Murray have pushed forward understanding of aspects of this topic,[14] but the educational internationalist perspective in the work of Owen is significant not simply in terms of presaging themes elaborated in later writings, but more importantly for its comparatively rich elaboration of the dynamics by which education may contribute towards pacific IR, particularly its role in facilitating peaceful change.

Owen's contributions to IR were shaped by the transformative context within which he lived, including the social effects of the first industrial revolution, the new international institutions of the Concert system, and the developing associationalism of the early nineteenth century, all of which Owen endeavoured to influence. The aspects of Owen's international thought evaluated in this article are distinct from many of the themes that have been explored in the work of earlier authors such as Bentham, whose promotion of, *inter alia*, free trade, disarmament, open diplomacy, an international court, the notion of a harmony of interests among states, and the eschewing of alliances and colonialism, have been recognised as influential in the development of liberal perspectives on IR and the peace movement.[15] The dimensions of Owen's international work considered here are also distinct from themes explored to date in the international thought of one of his greatest influences, Godwin, whose discussion of, *inter alia*, 'a world of loosely federated, independent local communities' has been evaluated in the broader context of exploration of 'polite anarchy' in the theory of IR.[16] As Bell has argued, existing studies of nineteenth century thought on IR have tended to be dominated by discussions of liberalism, at the expense of alternative perspectives.[17] An exploration of Owen's work will help address this deficit.

As this article will show, an evaluation of Owen's thought on educational internationalism, universal human rights and international organization is significant

not only in respect of the previously under-explored themes to which he made a vital contribution, but also in respect of revealing important flaws which are relevant to understanding contemporary debates on these issues.

**Existing perspectives**

Scholarship on Owen has tended to concentrate on the many aspects of his work other than his contribution to IR, such as his 'Communities of United Interest', and his role in the development of socialism, the co-operative movement, feminism, secularism, infant education, and domestic political thought.[18] With respect to political economy, Owen has been credited with presaging later Marxian ideas,[19] and his work influenced Polanyi.[20]

Although references to some of the international dimensions of Owen's work such as his role in developing international socialism[21] and ideas of transnational democracy[22] and global citizenship[23] have appeared in specialist literature on Owen, references to Owen in IR literature are surprisingly rare. Discussions of the historical development of global governance have made brief reference to Owen's attempt in 1818 to lobby the delegates of the Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle, and in this context Owen has been viewed as a pioneer of initiatives for international labour legislation.[24] There are also occasional references to Owen in works on the historical development of IR theory, with Wilson noting Owen's influence on Woolf,[25] and Knutsen making brief reference to Owen's 'radical internationalism'.[26]

In his *Twenty Years' Crisis,* Carr dismissed Owen as a 'utopian socialist' who 'simply made unverified assumptions about human behaviour and, on the strength of these, drew up visionary schemes of ideal communities in which men of all classes would live together in amity, sharing the fruits of their labours in proportion to their needs'.[27] Harrison has noted how 'Marxists ... popularized the epithet "utopian" as a derogatory label for Owenite socialism'.[28] As Harrison argues, perspectives such as these are too limited: they 'do not accord with the tone or feel of much of what Owen wrote

and said and did' and they ignore much of his significance.[29] Claeys has noted that although there may be a 'need to reject what was patently impossible in Owen's politics,' other aspects of his political thought deserve serious attention.[30] While authors such as Claeys and Tsuzuki have advanced considerably our understanding of aspects of this thought, the international dimension remains understudied.

In recent years, there has developed a significant body of literature casting new light on authors critiqued in Carr's *Twenty Years' Crisis*, including writers of both the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but despite being one of the few authors specifically described by Carr as 'utopian', Owen has until now escaped attention in the study of IR.[31] This article will explore three of Owen's most notable contributions to the study of IR, in broadly chronological order, starting with his educational internationalism.

**Educational internationalism**

Discussions of internationalist thought have had a tendency to disaggregate a limited range of perspectives, such as the quadripartite selection of 'liberal internationalisms' often repeated in introductory texts on the issue: a 'commercial' perspective 'linking free trade with peace', a 'republican' perspective 'linking democracy with peace', a 'sociological' perspective 'linking transnational interactions with international integration', and an 'institutionalist' perspective focusing on international regimes and organizations.[32] There have further been noted 'religious' perspectives emphasising the role of religion in contributing towards peace, as well as 'socialist', 'feminist' and 'ecological' perspectives targeting capitalism, male domination and destruction of the natural environment respectively.[33]

Aspects of Owen's work could be seen as contributing towards the nineteenth century development of many of these perspectives. As discussed later, Owen put forward multiple ideas with respect to international organization; and as mentioned

earlier, Owen is noted for having helped develop socialist internationalism. This article follows Harrison in arguing that typecasting Owen's work solely in terms of its contribution to working class movements and Marxism is misleading.[34] Instead this section of the article will explore an understudied strand of internationalism on which Owen's work sheds important light: the role of education in facilitating the development of a more peaceful world.

Owen's educational internationalism may be considered to be an aspect of 'socio-educational internationalism' and 'cultural internationalism', two related strands of internationalist thought that have recently attracted renewed attention. In his comprehensive disaggregation of internationalisms, Holbraad includes a 'socio-educational' strand emphasising the rationality and perfectibility of human behaviour and 'educated public opinion' as a preventer of war.[35] Holbraad notes the importance to this strand of internationalist thought of underlying assumptions of a harmony of interests, but does not elaborate further, noting that socio-educational internationalism has been overshadowed by legal-organizational internationalism.[36]

Closely related to the concept of socio-educational internationalism is 'cultural internationalism', defined by Iriye as 'the fostering of international cooperation through cultural activities across national boundaries'.[37] As Wilson has argued, Iriye's work has 'received scant attention in IR' despite outlining 'one of the most significant international developments of the last 150 years'.[38] While Iriye's focus is largely upon providing an account of the evolution of cultural internationalism in practice, and does not extend back to Owen's era, the recent work of Wilson on Murray has advanced understanding of the dynamics of cultural internationalist thought. For Murray, the liberal notion of an international harmony of interests was not inevitable, but 'required manufacture' through 'leadership and education', a perspective with much in common with the 'cautious idealism' of Alfred Zimmern.[39] Wilson has identified limitations in Murray's thought including his 'top-down' understanding of progress as 'privileged

groups gradually extending their privileges'.[40] As the ensuing discussion will show, while anticipating a number of themes later seen in the work of Murray and Zimmern, Owen's writings on the role of education in internationalism go further in specifying its dynamics, and are greatly more radical.

A turn to Owen's educational internationalism is also significant given the attention given to the role of education in the peace movement. Recently, Ceadel has highlighted the tension in Angell's work between two understandings of the role of education in promoting his perspective, whether through 'unaided intellectual merit' or through 'a campaign of education', as the peace movement had aimed to put into practice for a century.[41] Education was important to the founders of first peace associations that developed in the early nineteenth century and Bentham had this in mind in proposing the creation of a 'Pacific or Philharmonic Society' in 1789. Allen of the Peace Society founded in 1816 supported both Owen's New Lanark 'model factory' and Lancaster's monitorial system of education.[42]

It is in the context of the emerging peace movement and the educational ideas of Lancaster that Owen's educational internationalism developed. At the core of Owen's work was his 'principle of the formation of character' by which 'the character of every human being is formed for, and not by, the individual',[43] which drew from Godwin's statement that 'the characters of men originate in their external circumstances'.[44] For his part, Godwin viewed monarchy and aristocracy as the sources of war, and his understanding of 'democracy' as the alternative. The educational internationalist perspective identified in this article in Owen's work, on the other hand, associates the sources of war with ignorance, and the solution to the problem of war in education.

In these respects, Owen's educational internationalism had much in common with that of his contemporary, Marc-Antoine Jullien de Paris, who in the mid-twentieth century came to be seen as the intellectual progenitor of the League of Nations' International Committee of Intellectual Cooperation and UNESCO, but whose thought on

educational internationalism, like Owen's, has been neglected in existing analyses of internationalism. Owen and Jullien knew each other, and Jullien was one of many international visitors to Owen's New Lanark establishment.

There were three significant commonalities of approach of Owen and Jullien to the role of education in the promotion of pacific IR. The first was their emphasis on the role of ignorance amongst other factors as a cause of war. In 1816, Jullien stated: 'It is ignorance, forgetfulness, or … degradation of minds and hearts, which have produced … wars, so cruelly prolongued, of which the horrible results have successfully desolated all the countries of Europe.'[45] A similar claim can be identified in Owen's later works elaborating on his proposals for a 'rational system of society', in which Owen argued that war consisted 'of ignorant man in his blindness, punishing ignorant man'.[46] Owen claimed that existing societal arrangements divided along class, national and religious lines had ensured that 'the population of the world having been so classified and divided as continually to require force and fraud to keep it, hitherto, in a bearable state of existence, and so opposed and excited, universal war became an almost unavoidable result'.[47] In contrast to Jullien, Owen's rationale for this argument stemmed from his claim that existing societal arrangements had rejected his principle of the formation of character, which led him to ask: 'Where, in what part of the world, has despotism, limited monarchy, oligarchy, aristocracy, republicanism, or democracy, ever produced a superior character or happiness for the people governed by either of these forms?'[48]

The second commonality of approach of Owen and Jullien is their advocacy of education as a solution to the problem of war. Jullien claimed that it was 'by bringing man back to a sort of primitive purity through the influence of an education better suited to his nature … that one can hope to put an end to the misfortunes of individuals and of countries.'[49] For Owen, education in his principle of the formation of character was required: he argued that 'man may be trained from infancy to know no other language than that of truth; - to have no other feelings for all of his race than pure

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genuine charity for the thoughts, feelings and conduct of all, of every clime and colour ...

This is the spirit which alone can insure peace on earth'.[50] As this article later shows,

Owen asserted that the industrial revolution had made possible provision of such an

education to all.

The third commonality of approach of Owen and Jullien is their proposals for

international educational commissions. Whereas Jullien advocated an international

'special educational commission' to compare the educational systems of different

countries,[51] Owen at Aix-la-Chapelle advocated a more limited international commission

simply to observe his educational practices at New Lanark. Two decades later, however,

Owen's proposed role for education in the transformation of IR was greatly more

radical. In 1841, Owen stated that 'the change is intended, ultimately, to terminate all

existing religions, governments, laws and institutions – all the existing external

arrangements of man's formation – to give an entire new character to the human race'.[52]

Owen subsequently put forward in the immediate term that 'the most powerful and

influential nations of the world ... should unite ... in order that peace and good will may

become permanent and universal over the earth' and 'that this union should be first

directed to form substantive arrangements to rationally train and educate physically,

mentally, morally, and practically, every child that shall be born', alongside provisions

for life-long employment.[53]

While Owen shared with Jullien a concern that ignorance was a cause of war, a

belief in education as a solution to conflict, and proposals for international educational

commissions, Owen's work on educational internationalism went further. In particular,

Owen surpassed Jullien in elaborating the dynamics of education's significance. A key

aspect of Owen's work – and an important contrast with Marx and his followers – is his

emphasis on peaceful change. He argued: 'Surely the experience of the governments and

people of Europe during the French revolution is sufficient to turn all parties from

thinking for a moment the world can be improved by the immoralities of violence and

war'.[54] Education provided for Owen the mechanism for facilitation of peaceful change: he argued that change 'must be effected, of necessity, by gradually convincing the population of one country after another'.[55] He argued that those who had adopted his principles 'could be now made easily to be emancipated from ignorance, poverty and division, and soon be made … to force all the nations of the earth to imitate their example.'[56] In sum, the 'gradual convincing' of country after country, together with the power of example, constituted for Owen the dynamics of education's role in peaceful change.

Owen's educational internationalism may therefore be summarised as consisting of four key components: (i) an emphasis on the role of ignorance as a cause of war; (ii) promotion of education as a solution to the problem of war; (iii) proposals for international educational institutions; and (iv) elaboration of the dynamics by which education may bring about peaceful change in international affairs. Aspects of Owen's educational internationalism anticipated key elements of later internationalist thought, including emphasis on the need to 'manufacture' pacific IR through non-nationalist education and international educational institutions later seen in the work of 'cautious idealists' such as Murray and Zimmern.  It is not surprising, therefore, that the critiques of later internationalists also apply to Owen's thought. In particular, in common with later authors Owen's educational internationalism involved a 'top-down' perspective, in his case envisaging universal adoption of his principle of the formation of character. Moreover, Owen's educational internationalism was undermined by the common weaknesses of all his international thought, which will be returned to in the conclusion. There is a sharp contrast between the objectives promoted by later 'cautious idealists' and Owen's radical rejection of existing political institutions, which was to limit considerably the appeal of his ideas. More significantly, Owen's educational internationalism rested on his assumptions that people's characters were shaped by their circumstances and education, and that the industrial revolution had made possible

provision for the education and welfare of all: if either of these assumptions is invalid, his argument that education may facilitate a more peaceful world can be seriously called into doubt.

**Universal human rights**

Recent discussions of the international promotion of human rights in the nineteenth century have commonly considered separate efforts 'to free the enslaved', 'to assist the exploited', 'to care for the wounded' and 'to protect the persecuted', rather than efforts towards the *general* promotion of universal human rights.[57] Traditionally, Owen's contribution to the evolution of human rights norms has been considered to have been confined to the 'assist the exploited' category.[58] As this section of the article will show, Owen's promotion of 'the rights of humanity' not only extended beyond the limited category of labour rights with which he is traditionally associated, but also challenges recent understandings of the nature of the evolution of human rights discourse.

Two key narratives have emerged in recent years with respect to the evolution of international human rights norms. The first draws a contrast between the universalism of eighteenth century rights declarations and the national frameworks of the nineteenth century. Hunt and Davidson argue respectively that the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man related to 'all men, and not just French men' and promoted 'universal human rights, not simply rights for nationals' in that 'they were rights created against the notion of duty to some legal regime which was higher'.[59] For Hunt and Davidson, by the nineteenth century 'talk of universally applicable natural rights subsided' and was replaced by 'national frameworks' of 'constitutionally guaranteed rights of various sorts', with 'universal human rights … buried and consigned to a memory hole after 1815'.[60]

The second key narrative on the evolution of human rights discourse to have developed in recent years is that associated especially with the work of Moyn, who

argues that the 'rights of man' of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries need to be 'rigorously distinguished' from the notion of 'human rights' that acquired prominence in the late twentieth century. Acknowledging that rights for some Enlightenment thinkers 'may have been natural or even "human"', Moyn argues 'even then, it was universally agreed that those rights were to be achieved through the construction of spaces of citizenship in which rights were accorded and protected'. While differing from Davidson and Hunt in his approach to eighteenth century understandings, he shares with them the characterisation of rights claims in the nineteenth century as 'at root … a justification for states to come about' rather than 'the protection of "humanity."' For Moyn, it was not until the late twentieth century that 'the move from the politics of the state to the morality of the globe' took place, bringing it with it an apparently new understanding of human rights detached from the notions of citizenship of the past.[61]

Davidson propounds the traditional characterisation of Owen's significance as limited to the exposition of labour rights, while Moyn fails to mention Owen's work altogether.[62] Both of the narratives in the previous two paragraphs highlight the preponderance of state-centric understandings of rights discourse in the nineteenth century, which contrasts sharply with the perspective put forward by Owen in his 1834 'Charter of the Rights of Humanity' launched at a 'great meeting of the productive classes' in London in February 1834.[63] As the ensuing paragraphs will show, this Charter not only put forward a perspective on human rights that was exceptionally broad, but also anticipated later human rights discourse in its explicit detachment of the rights of 'humanity' from state-centric citizenship spaces. In so doing, Owen's Charter reveals lacunae pertinent to understandings of human rights in the present day.

Whereas the 'People's Charter' of 1838 has become a standard reference point in accounts of the evolution of international human rights, Owen's 'Charter of the Rights of Humanity' of four years before has not.[64] This is surprising for two reasons. First, Owen's Charter was highly influential among leading Chartists, not least Bronterre

O'Brien, who published Owen's Charter alongside the Declaration of the Rights of Man two years before circulation of the People's Charter.[65] Second, and crucially, Owen's Charter was greatly more international in perspective than the 'People's Charter'.

When introducing the Charter, Owen emphasised its international nature, urging 'the producers of wealth and knowledge, to … induce the non-producers of wealth or knowledge to agree peaceably to introduce these rights into the general practice of all civilized nations' and arguing that the Charter was 'beneficial for all, and now necessary for the peace and prosperity of all'.[66] This is significant for two reasons: (i) in contrast to both the American and French declarations of the eighteenth century and the later Chartist endeavours in Britain, it was a charter aimed at adoption in all 'civilized' nations rather than primarily one nation; and (ii) an explicit link is made between the promotion of the 'rights of humanity' and the facilitation of a more peaceful world.

Furthermore, the universality of Owen's perspective is implicit in the name of the charter as embodying the rights of 'humanity' rather than of 'citizens', as well as in the prefacing of the Charter with the claim that 'the period has arrived, when the producers of wealth and knowledge have decided that they will not waste any more of their time or labour on objects of minor importance … but that, *overlooking the local advantages of class*, and considering only the *general and permanent interest of humanity*, they will henceforward devote all their energies to the attainment of those superior objects and advantages, developed in their charter [emphasis added].'[67]

Some of the components of Owen's Charter undoubtedly concerned the labour issues and 'positive' liberty with which he is traditionally associated. The seventh to eleventh articles of the Charter, for instance, advocated that each nation should provide for the education and employment of all unable otherwise to obtain education and employment. The thirteenth article pressed for 'a change of the vicious and degrading circumstances by which the productive classes are now surrounded, for others,

possessing a virtuous and superior character', while the first article promoted a 'graduated property tax' to cover governments' expenditures.[68]

On the other hand, much of Owen's Charter also promoted what are now considered to be universal civil and political rights. The fifth and sixth articles, for example, promoted 'liberty of expression of conscientious opinions, upon all subjects, without limitation' and 'all to be equally protected in the rights of [religious] conscience' respectively. The fifteenth article promoted gender equality, stating 'the just rights of both sexes to be universally established'.[69] Elsewhere in Owen's work, he may be regarded as pioneering environmental human rights: the third volume of his *Book of the New Moral World,* for example, promoted 'decisive measures ... to ensure to all a pure atmosphere, in which to live during their lives'.[70]

Some of the rights promoted in the Charter went beyond what are considered to be universal rights in the present day, such as the abolition of all customs duties in the second article, and a universal second language in the sixteenth article. The third article promoting free trade also promoted 'free and protected ingress and egress for all persons into and out of all countries', and the final (seventeenth) article urged 'an end to individual and national competition and contest'. The fourth article provided one of Owen's many proposals for international co-operation: 'wars to cease; and all differences between nations to be adjusted by an annual congress, to be held in rotation in each of the different states'.[71]

Owen was not optimistic about the likelihood of governmental adoption of these proposals, arguing at the meeting at which the Charter was put forward 'that it was useless to expect anything from the governments of the world' so long as 'they felt that they had an interest in keeping the working classes in bondage.' However, he referred to the role of education as a tool for facilitating long-term international change, arguing that the reason for governments' recalcitrance was that 'they were at present without the knowledge and experience which was so essentially necessary', and claiming that

workers' organizations were capable of 'working out their own emancipation' by setting an example through the adoption of the principles of the Charter in their practices.[72] In this way, Owen's promotion of universal human rights and his educational internationalism were interrelated.

With its exceptionally broad spectrum of economic and social and civil and political rights, together with its emphasis on 'the general and permanent interest of humanity' rather than national citizenship, there is a strong contrast between Owen's Charter and the traditional characterisation in existing scholarship of nineteenth century understandings of rights as vested in notions of national citizenship. Instead, Owen's charter anticipates characteristics of human rights promotion in the late twentieth century identified by Moyn, encompassing both civil and political and economic and social aspects, and associated with the 'morality of the world' rather than national citizenship. The critiques to which Owen's Charter are vulnerable are therefore pertinent to present-day understandings of human rights. Of interest in this regard is the sharp contrast between the achievements of the nationally-oriented Chartist movement in bringing about empirical change, and the failure of Owen's universally-oriented Charter to achieve a comparable response, lacking as it did a comparable citizenship space for implementation. Putting the 'rights of humanity' into practice was for Owen predicated upon ultimately universal adoption of his principle of the formation of character: without the latter, Owen argued it was 'useless to expect' progress on this matter.

**International organization**

The Charter of the Rights of Humanity was launched at the same time as Owen's Grand National Consolidated Trades Union, the precursor to an early INGO, the Association of All Classes of All Nations. This section of the article explores Owen's contributions to international organization, first in terms of his empirical contribution to the evolution of

INGOs, and second in terms of his theoretical contribution to the development of ideas concerning intergovernmental federation.

It is commonly claimed in existing studies of INGOs that they are '"new" forces in international politics'.[73] Analyses of their earlier development have tended to commence in the second half of the nineteenth century or later.[74] With the exception of explorations of transnational advocacy in the anti-slavery movement[75] and brief reference to ancient INGOs such as religious orders,[76] existing literature has tended to neglect efforts towards the formation of INGOs before the mid-nineteenth century.[77] As Wilson has noted, Woolf in his work on international government took as the starting point for the development of what he termed 'voluntary international associations' the World Anti-Slavery Convention of 1840, following the practice of the Union of International Associations.[78] Recent work on global civil society has similarly claimed that 'the earliest INGO' was the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society formed in 1839 that convened the convention.[79] Such a starting point, however, neglects the INGOs formed in the preceding decades: although these tended to be far less enduring than those created from the 1840s onwards, they were to pioneer new organizational forms that were later to be emulated on a more enduring basis. Whereas before the mid-eighteenth century, INGOs consisted largely of religious organizations and secret societies, the subsequent hundred years saw considerable diversification and secularization.[80]

Owen was critical to initiating several of the new INGOs of the early nineteenth century. Impressed by the success of the British and Foreign Bible Society, Owen created in 1822 a British and Foreign Philanthropic Society for the Permanent Relief of the Labouring Classes 'by means of education, employment, exchange of productions, &c., in communities of 500 to 2000 individuals'.[81] The Society managed to attract eminent support, its vice-presidents including Russian and French ambassadors, Spanish, Prussian and American ministers, numerous British aristocrats, the Duc de Broglie,

Baron de Stael and John Randolph of Virginia.[82] Its objective was to raise funds for the establishment of Owenite communities, but it collapsed too soon after its formation effectively to achieve this objective.[83] Just a year after its formation, it was reported that the organization could no longer continue on account of shortage of funds and 'the Committee having no tangible object and really not knowing what to do'.[84] The organization is nevertheless significant as an early effort towards international organization for philanthropic purposes on a secular rather than a religious basis, which was to be much more common from the 1830s onwards, and which is a striking contrast with earlier associations such as the British and Foreign Bible Society.

In the 1830s, coinciding with Owen's development of ideas concerning a 'New Moral World', Owen established the Association of All Classes of All Nations, which aimed 'to effect, peaceably, and by reason alone, an entire change in the character and condition of mankind, by establishing over the world, in principle and practice, the religion of charity.'[85] The Association formed part of an effort towards promotion of Owen's ultimate objective of a worldwide federation of Owenite communities which he hoped would eventually supersede the states system, believing that the example set by Owenite communities would be emulated globally.[86] Established in 1835, the Association obtained a membership in 65 branches over the next decade, the majority of which were based in Britain.[87] The scale of its activities, including the ability to circulate half a million copies of its publications per month, raised considerable concern among the British establishment, with the Bishop of Exeter in 1840 claiming that 'Mere exposure of them will have done harm unless they are put down by the strong arm of law'.[88] The Bishop further noted that 'the society ... was not merely an English society. No; it was an universal society. It professed its determination to extend itself all over the world; but at present he believed it had not gone beyond France.'[89] By the end of the year, the Association's reach extended to the US, with a New York branch; and there were members in Australia.[90] The Association also conducted correspondence with

fellow-travellers in Belgium, Germany and other countries.[91] However, the failure of the Association to attract greater international support prevented the convening of planned annual congresses of national branches, and the Association's core membership in Britain declined substantially in 1842-1845, with the Association facing financial hardship and disputes over democratic decision-making within the organization.[92]

Confronted with the failure of his own international organizations to achieve success in the promotion of his ideas for a 'new moral world', in the mid-1840s Owen promoted a range of alternative proposals for international federation aimed at existing institutions in society rather than solely Owenite groups. These proposals are worth exploration given the renewed interest in international federation in IR scholarship over the last decade.[93] These authors draw on a considerable range of pre-twentieth century peace planners, including Abbé de Saint Pierre, Bentham, Crucé, Kant, Penn, and Sully, but do not mention Owen.[94]

Peace plans envisaging models of global federation and confederation have tended to concentrate on projected unions of states.[95] Owen's proposals, on the other hand, include not only plans for intergovernmental union, but also innovative proposals for transnational union of non-state actors. In his 'Address to the Ministers of All Religions' of 1845, for instance, Owen suggested that peace could be achieved through religious union.[96] This address has been neglected in the literature on interreligious dialogue, which has tended to commence discussion with the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions.[97] It is also absent from discussions of proposals for a 'universal church' in nineteenth century international thought.[98] There is a contrast between the ideas Owen put forward in this proposal and the traditional interpretation in IR literature of the nineteenth century as a period of secularization of international theory involving the subordination of religious to secular authority.[99] Indeed there is a sharp contrast between the denunciation of religion elsewhere in Owen's work, and the proposal for religious union in this address.

Owen's proposal for religious union went further than just interreligious dialogue: he envisaged a form of universal syncretic process by which unity would be facilitated through identification of commonalities among all religions. Claiming that 'there is no religion in the world, as far as I know, that does not, as an essential part of it, recommend charity and love to all', Owen argued that 'it is the permanent interest of all that there should be perfect union and friendship between them'. He argued that religious leaders could facilitate peace though education, given 'their power for good, with their churches, chapels, synagogues, mosques, and places already prepared for instruction' through which 'a general spirit of charity' could be introduced 'and the principles of repulsion ... shall be overcome'. Owen attributed existing international divisions to the way in which 'the ministers of all religions have been ... trained in the principles of repulsion, and they have taught them to the people, and in consequence man is divided from man and nation from nation'. To address this, Owen suggested that if the ministers of various religions were to emphasise what they have in common these divisions have the potential to be overcome and peace can be achieved through international religious union. He argued that religious leaders should set the example: 'they require first to unite cordially among themselves in the true and genuine spirit of charity which extends to all.'[100] Owen is not the only author to have emphasised the role of religion in facilitating global federation: for example, Curtis was later to put forward a role for 'constructive religion' in the development of the global 'commonwealth of God'.[101] Owen's work, in contrast, emphasised the unity of all religions rather than according a privileged role to a single religion.

Owen's proposal for global religious union was largely neglected by his contemporaries. At least three factors help to explain the lack of resonance of his scheme. The first is that Owen could hardly expect to secure the adherence of religious leaders whose practices he had become well-known for denouncing. Secondly, Owen could also not expect the adhesion of the emerging secular 'social scientists' in whose

development he had played a key role. And thirdly, Owen's proposal was built on the assumption that there were commonalities to world religions that could overcome the evident differences among them.

With respect to proposals for world union through interstate federation, it has been claimed that in comparison with the eighteenth and twentieth centuries that 'the nineteenth century was a remarkably fallow age'.[102] Ladd's advocacy from 1828 of 'a Congress of Nations' has been dismissed as envisaging 'no more than what Bentham and Mill had had in mind: international meetings to make possible the establishment of an international court'.[103]  The period from the 1840s to 1914 has been described as 'the era of internationalism' for the British peace movement, in contrast to its later support for supranationalism.[104] On the European continent, federalist proposals were more common, largely based on Saint-Simon's 1814 proposal which envisaged a European federation following the US model and commencing with union of Britain and France.[105] Although building on aspects of these plans, Owen's proposals for world federation went significantly beyond the international court projected by Bentham and Ladd, and the Europe-limited proposals of Saint-Simon.

Owen's proposals also differed substantially from later nineteenth century proposals for imperial federation and Anglo-American union, which envisaged intercontinental structures limited to the British empire and English-speaking territories respectively.[106] In contrast, Owen's proposals envisaged worldwide federation through the union of continental federations or accession of a growing number of territories to an initially Anglo-American federation: two models later put forward by authors such as Trueblood.[107] As this article will show, Owen differed from later nineteenth century authors in respect of the role of race in this process.

In a 'Manifesto ... addressed to all governments and people who desire to become civilized' the year before his address to religious ministers, Owen suggested an alternative set of proposed 'measures to lay a solid foundation for the permanent peace

of the world' with governments rather than religion as the core focus. Going beyond Saint-Simon's application of the US model to Europe, he argued that the US had both 'the means to well form the character of ... [its] population' and 'the means of extending a federative union, without limit, over the western hemisphere'. He argued that the eastern hemisphere could then follow the example of the western, and that the eastern and western federations could in turn 'be also cordially united, that they might maintain peace over the earth.'[108]

Owen's proposals for intergovernmental federation underwent a series of refinements and variations over the subsequent decade. In 1851, for instance, he proposed that the US and Britain, rather than first forming continental federations, should commence by forming a federation among themselves with a constitution 'so simple and just in its provisions that it will attract all nations to desire to unite in it'.[109] The following year, Owen issued a proposed 'Treaty of Federative Union' between Britain and the US, by which they would 'become one nation', retain their empires until a more general federation had been formed, grant each state's citizens equal rights, prepare a treaty for General Federative Union of all nations, and ensure it is capable of defending itself against external aggressors. The Treaty drew a contrast between 'two principles by which the population of the world may be governed': the 'principle leading to anarchy and misery' of the past, and the 'principle leading to union, order, and happiness' of this proposed treaty.[110]

Like his proposals for religious union, Owen's proposals for governmental federation had limited impact at the time. They were against the tide in a period in which there was widespread faith in the sufficiency of instruments short of global organization such as free trade, national self-determination and arbitration as mechanisms for the promotion of peace. As with his proposals for religious union, Owen could hardly expect enthusiasm among the leaders of the governmental institutions he wished to unite given his denunciation of their activities elsewhere. Futhermore, his

proposals were underpinned by the questionable assumption that all states would view the prospect of federation as being for 'their own permanent benefit'.

Despite their limited short-term influence, Owen's proposals for intergovernmental federation are notable for their elaboration of the dynamics by which the process of federation may take place. These are worth exploring given that as Cabrera has noted a key feature distinguishing recent literature on this theme from the world federalist literature of the 1940s is a focus on explanation rather than urgent exhortation.[111]

Whereas some of the recent work on intergovernmental federation has emphasised the increasingly destructive potential of warfare in driving the process,[112] Owen focused on peaceful dynamics. His emphasis on peaceful transition also distinguishes his work from later communist writings on global organization emphasising class struggle and violent revolution.[113] In this regard Owen's work was also distinct from that of his continental European contemporaries, who viewed federation as potentially being brought about by the use of hegemonic force.[114]

Rather than violence as the mechanism by which federation would be facilitated, for Owen federation would take place through the power of example. He argued that 'as a preliminary measure to inducing weaker neighboring nations to desire to unite federatively with ... the United States in the west, and Great Britain in the east ... it is necessary that these two powers exhibit, within their territory, a state of existence for their people superior to any which is experienced by the most favored and advanced of the surrounding nations'. For Owen, such a superior state of existence would be facilitated by these states adopting 'extensive improvements devised to secure equal benefit for all classes', with all 'being well trained and educated', and 'the exchange of inferior circumstances for superior only'.[115] These 'extensive improvements' were far greater in scope than those envisaged by later socialist authors on global federation such as Hobson, who envisaged limited confederal structures that would gradually take

on economic functions stimulating federation.[116] Whereas recent authors have emphasised how global federation could help to bring about social justice,[117] in Owen's view social justice was not simply the potential outcome of world federation but also fundamental to the process by which federation was to develop.

It has been claimed in recent work promoting world federation as a means to social justice that 'We live in a bountiful world. There is plenty to go round if we organize to do so.'[118] Similar assumptions underpinned Owen's perspective. For Owen, Britain and the US were particularly well-positioned to provide the 'effective surroundings' to facilitate adoption of the 'principle leading to union'. He argued that the US possessed 'land, minerals, materials of every description, mechanical and chemical power, inventive faculties, skill and manual power more than sufficient to commence with certainty of success, this new, superior, and rational state of human existence', and he claimed that 'By a scientific new arrangement of all the elements of society in their due proportions, superior wealth of all kinds will be so easily, abundantly and pleasantly created'.[119] However, he also noted that the US had 'great errors to overcome' first, including needing to 'abandon human slavery'.[120]

Owen addressed his work on global federation to 'people who desire to become civilized' and envisaged the construction of global federation commencing with those whom he termed 'Anglo-Saxons'.[121] Owen used the term 'civilized' to refer not to the existing state of 'Anglo-Saxon' society but to the principles of his 'new view of society' that he envisaged being pioneered in Britain and the US, which he anticipated would adopt the name 'Anglo-Saxons' as a precursor to the abolition of all national labels upon universalization of the federal project.[122] Owen's use of the term 'race' is confined to references to the 'human race', the commonalities of which he was keen to emphasise, but Bell has shown how later nineteenth century authors developed proposals for Anglo-American federation expressly underpinned by notions of the 'unity of the Anglo-Saxon race'.[123] This extended to authors such as Trueblood who envisaged global

federation commencing from a 'racial federation, as of the Anglo-Saxon people'.[124] Later authors on global federation such as Kerr were also to draw a contrast between 'advanced' and 'backward' peoples.[125]

Bell and Sylvest have noted how late nineteenth century authors envisaging global federation such as Sidgwick viewed progress in industry and communications as central to driving its development.[126] The role of technology in facilitating global federation has been posited in numerous subsequent proposals from Wells and Streit through to Frankman and Deudney.[127] Technological progress was central also to Owen's earlier exposition of the dynamics facilitating global federation. Owen emphasised the benefits which he believed the industrial revolution had brought about, claiming that 'the increase of mechanical inventions and chemical discoveries ... have secured to mankind the most ample sources of maintenance'.[128] In his work on global religious union, he further argued that those still attached to 'the principles of repulsion' had 'not perceived that the progress of the sciences, and of matters of fact, are creating a revolution in the whole business of life ... [which] like the silent advance of mechanical and chemical power, is sure to be overwhelming and no partial or party efforts can stay its onward progress. ... The world itself is in the highway to be governed by the principles of union, through federation, annexation, joint stock companies, or corporations; by uniting interests and powers which, wisely combined, can effect much more conjointly than can be accomplished by isolated individual efforts'.[129] As for his work on intergovernmental federation, Owen asserted that 'The discovery of the application of steam on the ocean, and to railways on land, with that of electricity to telegraphs by land and water, has destroyed the isolation of nations ... These discoveries, making the federation of nations easy of practice, added to the incalculable advantages to be derived by all individuals in every country from such federations, will create an irresistible necessity for all nations thus to unite'.[130]

Despite his enunciation of the 'irresistible' role of technological developments in facilitating union, Owen recognised the contingency of the process by linking his work on global federation to his educational internationalism. In his exposition of 'Reasons for Federative Union', Owen elaborated on how education could help bring about the transition from the 'principle leading to anarchy' to the 'principle leading to union'. He argued that 'man, from the earliest known period, has been trained from his birth in principles and practices of disunion', with 'nations ... disunited, taught different languages, opposing religions, habits, manners, and to have contending interests'. In their place, Owen advocated 'the human race being re-educated and re-trained ... to acquire ... the pure and genuine spirit of universal charity and love ... derived from the knowledge that the character of man (whether, good, mixed or bad) ever has been, is, and ever must be, formed for him'. Such an education could be provided by those existing 'individuals whose minds and education by circumstances have been so formed as to enable them to grasp' this.[131]

Like his contemporary Ladd, Owen emphasised how private associations could play a key part in transforming opinion. Initially, he advocated establishment of a 'Universal Federation and Union Society' with British and US branches to push for 'the federation of nations'.[132] In 1857, the year before his death, Owen convened a 'Congress of the Advanced Minds of the World' with the intention of bringing together such individuals 'to prepare the governments and people of all nations ... to change ... division for union ... over the world.' Those present were charged with having 'to impress deeply on the mind of the world, that effective surroundings may be now easily executed and combined', while governments were urged 'to consider how best to form Federative Treaties'.[133]

As with the experience of the Association of All Classes of All Nations, Owen's initiatives for the promotion of global federation failed to attract widespread support. The foregoing paragraphs have revealed that some of the proposed dynamics for the

facilitation of global federation put forward in recent work on the subject, such as the role of technology and the need for a 'positive vision',[134] were anticipated in Owen's writings on the subject. In contrast to those emphasising inevitability[135] and the role of violence in bringing about federation, Owen stressed the role of education in facilitating its development through a peaceful process. Despite emphasising the welfare of all without racial or other distinction throughout his work, Owen accorded to 'Anglo-Saxon' nations a privileged role in the development of global federation, a theme which as Bell has shown was later taken up by authors placing much greater emphasis on purported racial divisions.

Underpinning Owen's proposed dynamics of federation were assumptions which are open to question, such as that the industrial revolution had provided 'the most ample sources of maintenance'. As the foregoing analysis has shown, the assumption that 'there is plenty to go round' is one that is shared by some recent work on global federation. Owen, however, went further, and assumed that adoption of his 'rational system of society' by the most powerful nations would induce weaker nations to 'desire to unite federatively with the strongest'. As with his educational internationalism and proposals for universal human rights, Owen's dynamics of global federation are undermined if his assumption of the intrinsic appeal of his 'rational system of society' is rejected.

**Conclusion**

Owen's long career and varied and voluminous work have many more dimensions than can be covered in a single article. Rather than focusing on Owen's ambitious proposals for a world consisting of small communities governed according to age group, this article has concentrated on those aspects of his thought and work which relate to themes that have since become central to the study of IR, such as internationalism, human rights and international organization. In all three of these aspects, Owen

innovated both in terms of the ideas he put forward and in terms of his efforts towards implementing them in practice. As this concluding section will show, Owen's significance lies not only in his innovation, but also the limitations of his thought and work.

With his emphasis on the transformative role of education, Owen helped to develop a form of internationalism distinct from the many more commonly-studied forms. Although not the only author of his era to promote educational internationalism, Owen went further in his elaboration of the dynamics by which education could play a transformative role in world affairs. In contrast to the advocacy of revolutionary violence among later Marxists, Owen put forward education as a mechanism for peaceful change. In addition, Owen's emphasis on the need for education is indicative of a recognition of the contingent nature of progress in international affairs, which despite the highly radical nature of many of Owen's other ideas, anticipated the 'cautious idealism' of Murray and Zimmern.

Owen made a similarly significant but neglected contribution to the development of international human rights ideas between the French revolution and the UN Charter. Contrary to conventional accounts, Owen's contribution did not simply consist of his promotion of economic and social rights. At a time when other human rights charters being promoted were nationally-oriented, Owen put forward a 'Charter of the Rights of Humanity' that emphasised universality, and which placed as much emphasis on civil and political rights as economic and social rights. Although Owen was sceptical of the likelihood of governmental adoption of this Charter, the breadth of rights put forward was to foreshadow that of the UN Declaration more than a century later. Furthermore, Owen's human rights promotion anticipated the contemporary detachment of human rights from state-centred notions of citizenship.

Of more immediate impact in his time were Owen's experiments in international organization. Although his INGOs were short-lived bodies with memberships primarily

in Britain, these organizations represented a transitional stage between ancient and modern forms of INGO. Accompanying these empirical experiments were Owen's ideational contributions with respect to models of global organization. In his promotion of a global union of religions, Owen's ideas anticipated more recent efforts towards inter-faith dialogue. In his proposals for intergovernmental federation, Owen's elaboration of the processes by which peripheral states would become attracted to core states through education and the perceived benefits of union provides an interesting contrast to balance of power theory. While Owen shared with later authors an emphasis on technological progress and putting forward a 'positive vision' in driving the process of intergovernmental federation, in contrast to authors from Considérant to Deudney he emphasised peaceful dynamics.

To dismiss Owen's international thought in Carr's words as that of a 'utopian' who 'simply made unverified assumptions' is itself too simplistic. As this article has shown Owen did not view the development of universal human rights or international federation as inevitable processes. Instead, he linked each of these to his educational internationalism, by arguing that progress in these domains was contingent upon education in his ideas. In this way, Owen had an answer to those who have put forward the 'infeasibility objection' that progress with respect to, for example, world federation, 'is very unlikely' to 'come into being'.[136]

However, there were numerous problems with Owen's international thought, which were reflected in the failures of Owen's efforts to put his ideas into practice. A significant problem was the way in which many of his ideas alienated those whom he needed to convince to bring them into practice. His attacks on religions, professions, and the nation state that accompanied his proposals for reforms limited significantly the appeal of his ideas, not all of which depended on the abolition of these institutions for their implementation. Owen's proposals for religious unity, for instance, were unlikely to attract the support of religious leaders given his earlier claim that 'all the religions of

the world were founded on … gross errors, productive of the most mischievous results to the whole of the human race'.[137]

The bold and universal nature of the ideas which Owen aimed to promote was reflected in the impractical nature of the associational mobilization he attempted to bring about. Both the INGOs set up by Owen, and his universal human rights charter, failed to attract comparable support to the much more nationally-oriented organizations and People's Charter of the Chartist movement. Harrison has noted how whereas for the Chartists their meetings were 'an instrument for action', Owen's meetings were 'for education, proclamation, or even rational amusement', limiting their capacity to generate mass support or bring about short-term change.[138] As for Owen's human rights promotion, divorced as it was from national citizenship spaces, it lacked the institutional framework by which such rights could effectively be promoted.

A further problem is revealed if one considers the way in which Owen's organizations commonly collapsed on account of concern regarding their governance, with accusations of 'despotism' being put forward.[139] While Owen's organizations were vulnerable to accusations of despotism, Owen's international thought may be critiqued for asserting a singular alternative to the arrangements of the present international order. Whereas the existing fragmented state system and plurality of religions facilitate multiple ways of life, for Owen all of these were to be replaced by a single universal alternative 'rational system of society'. This led one contemporary critic to claim that Owen was a man whose 'arrogance' was 'unbounded'.[140]

This problem with Owen's thought relates to an issue common to each of the three key aspects of IR considered in this article: educational internationalism, universal human rights and global federalism. In respect of each of these, there is the problem of defining their respective content. It has been noted that later cultural internationalists such as Murray and Zimmern were vulnerable to the critique that they put forward a 'top down' perspective, imposing a particular set of views emanating from a certain

socio-cultural context, just as Owen aimed to impose his own ideas. The same problem may apply in efforts to define universal human rights and global federal constitutions, which have also been vulnerable to critiques challenging the extent to which different cultural and political perspectives can be incorporated. This is among the reasons why, for instance, the more flexible and pluralistic notion of 'global governance' represents for many a preferable alternative to proposals for world federal government.[141]

Owen's ideas on educational internationalism, universal human rights, and global organization were all underpinned by two key questionable assumptions. The first of these was that the industrial revolution had enabled the possibility of providing suitable conditions for all such that everyone might benefit from circumstances which would lead to their development of charitable personalities. However, as his proposal for international federation with the US acknowledged, some states had much greater resources than others with which to provide such conditions. Furthermore, the assertion that industrial advances had made provision of a high standard of living for all a genuine possibility was far from proven.

Secondly, at the core of all of Owen's writings was the assumption that 'the character of every human being is formed for, and not by, the individual'. The possibility that those with the most munificent circumstances and an education in Owen's principles might nevertheless develop uncharitable characteristics is the most significant weakness of his thought. Owen's promotion of educational internationalism and in turn of universal human rights and of global federation was predicated on the assumption of the validity of this 'principle of the formation of character'. If this assumption is invalid, the viability of all three of these components of Owen's contributions to IR is thrown into doubt.

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[68] Ibid.

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[77] Iriye, *Global Community,* p. 11. Textbooks tend to introduce the development of INGOs from the late nineteenth century, for example: David Armstrong, Lorna Lloyd and John Redmond, *International Organisation in World Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004), p. 5; Volker Rittberger, Berhard Zangl, and Andreas Kruck, *International Organization* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012) p. 36.

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