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# From the Private to the Public and Back Again: The International Thought of David Mitrany, 1940-1949.

**Keywords:** Civil society, Functionalism, Corporate governance, History, Ideas, Supranationalism.

## **Abstract**

This paper looks at the international thought of David Mitrany in the 1940s. The Second World War spurred many to outline a new world order that would guarantee peace and prosperity. Mitrany, an influential economist and public intellectual, saw international private cooperation as the foundation of a new world order. He developed the notion of "functionalism" to explore the diffusion of practices from the private to the public sphere, and define a new global political space which would 'make frontiers meaningless'. In an increasingly interconnected world, the private domain of business and entrepreneurship offered successful models of global cooperation, and had a unique social function in the nascent welfare state. Mitrany promoted this idea not only in theory but also as political adviser to the international corporation Unilever. This paper analyses his claim that the diffusion of collaborative practices from the private to the public sphere would revolutionize international relations and could become the basis for European unity. It assesses Mitrany's theory of the diffusion of concepts, institutions and practices like "human rights", "democracy" and "welfare" from the private to the public and back. Finally, I argue that Mitrany's original "functionalist" theory can shed light on the role of private companies and organizations in enhancing cooperation and unity in today's European Union as well.

## **Résumé:**

*Cet article propose une étude de la pensée internationale de David Mitrany pendant les années 1940. La période de la Seconde Guerre mondiale a conduit un grand nombre d'acteurs à imaginer un nouvel ordre mondial qui garantirait la paix et la prospérité. David Mitrany, économiste influent et intellectuel engagé, considérait que la coopération internationale privée pouvait être au fondement d'un nouvel ordre mondial. Il a développé la notion de « fonctionnalisme » pour explorer la diffusion de pratiques de la sphère privée à la sphère publique, et définir un nouvel espace politique mondial dans lequel les « frontières n'auraient plus aucun sens ». Dans un monde de plus en plus interconnecté, la sphère privée, qu'il s'agisse de l'entreprise ou de l'entrepreneuriat, offrait des modèles de coopération globale, et remplissait une fonction sociale unique avec l'émergence de l'État-providence. Au-delà de ce apport théorique, David Mitrany souhaitait mettre ses idées en pratique en tant que conseiller politique à la société internationale Unilever. Cet article analyse l'affirmation selon laquelle la diffusion des pratiques de collaboration de la sphère privée à la sphère publique pourrait révolutionner les relations internationales et devenir la base de l'unité européenne. Il étudie la théorie de David Mitrany sur la diffusion des concepts, des institutions et des pratiques comme les « droits humains », la « démocratie » et le « bien-être », depuis le privé vers le public et vice-versa. Enfin, l'article montre que la théorie originale du « fonctionnalisme » de David Mitrany peut aussi faire la lumière sur le rôle que les entreprises et les organismes privés peuvent jouer aujourd'hui dans l'amélioration de la coopération et de l'unité dans l'Union européenne.*

## Introduction

We need a study of political relativity: of the relation between power and function at the seat of government. Such a line of inquiry would be scientific rather the juridical, and its conclusions would have to be states not in constitutional doctrines but rather in sociological formulae.

*The Scope and Method of Political Science*, 1933.

During the late 1930s many scholars of international relations thought that a new approach to world politics was needed. The League of Nations' inability to deal with international crises became increasingly apparent. Moreover, following the economic crisis of 1931 greater attention was devoted to the financial and economic aspects of international relations. By the end of the decade, debates on international affairs had become more attuned to the relations between the social, economic and political spheres. Many internationalists envisioned a new world order in which the nation-state would be stripped of its political powers (at least partially) to the benefit of a global political organization, or a world state.<sup>1</sup> While this view was by no means universally accepted, there was a growing awareness that the study and analysis of politics should look beyond the state to provide useful and relevant theoretical and practical insights. Thus, the postwar period saw an influx of visions for a new prosperous and peaceful world order based on a balance between the economic and social interests in the national and international spheres. Yet the question of the desirable and possible relation between the existing states and a new international order remained open for debate. This is the problem that David Mitrany targeted in his forty years of scholarly research on international affairs.

This paper looks at the attempts of the political scientist David Mitrany to identify in the private sphere the necessary tools and concepts for a theoretical and practical reform of the relations between the states and a new international order. Mitrany's 'functionalist approach' was extensively studied and commented on, especially in the context of European integration and the neo-functionalist ideas of Ernst B. Haas.<sup>2</sup> However, the relationship between Mitrany's contribution to political thought and his interest and activities in the business sector has been overlooked. For Mitrany, functionalism was not merely about international cooperation through inter-governmental agencies. Rather, functional organization should also take into account the business and entrepreneurial dimension of

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<sup>1</sup> See for example the diverse range of internationalist proposals in John A. Hobson, *Selected Writing of John A. Hobson, 1932-1938: The struggle for the international mind*, edited by John M. Hobson and Colin Tyler (London: Routledge 2011); Lionel Curtis, *Civitas Dei* (London: Macmillan, 1934); Alfred E. Zimmern, *The League of Nations and the Rule of Law, 1918-1935* (London: Macmillan, 1936); E. H. Carr, *International relations since the peace treaties* (London: Macmillan, 1937); Quincy Wright, *The Causes of War and the Conditions of Peace* (New York: Longman, 1935); Clarence Streit, *Union Now: A proposal for a federal union of the democracies of the north Atlantic* (New York: Harper, 1939).

<sup>2</sup> On functionalism see for example Lucian M. Ashworth and David Long, eds., *New Perspectives on International Functionalism* (London: Macmillan, 1999); Lucian M. Ashworth, *Creating International Studies: Angell, Mitrany and Liberal Tradition* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999); Per A. Hammarlund, *Liberal Internationalism and the Decline of the State: The Thought of Richard Cobden, David Mitrany, and Kenichi Ohmae* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Mark F. Imber, 'Re-Reading Mitrany: A Pragmatic Assessment of Sovereignty', *Review of International Studies* 10, no. 2 (1984): 103–123; Roger Tooze, 'The Progress of International Functionalism', *British Journal of International Studies* 3, no. 2 (1977): 210-217.

international relations as a fundamental part of a new world order. He argued that economic and social needs could set the basis for a functional system of international relations guided by practical 'needs' instead of political ideology and propaganda. Interestingly, Mitrany envisioned a two-step process of international change. Initially, mechanisms inspired by private sector practices would be adapted to, and implemented in the public sphere. In the second phase, the reformed public arena would have direct regulatory impact on the organization of private enterprise at the local and global levels. Thus, Mitrany's functionalism explored the diffusion of practices from the private to the public sphere, and defined a new global political space which would 'make frontiers meaningless'. In an increasingly interconnected world, the private domain of business and entrepreneurship offered successful models of global cooperation that could have a unique social function in the nascent welfare state.

One of the goals of this paper is to analyze the claim that in a functional system the diffusion of collaborative practices from the private to the public sphere could pave the way for a new conception of international relations. My intention here is not to assess the practical or normative desirability and viability of functionalism, or to discuss Mitrany's political thought as a whole. Rather, I propose a more limited goal of understanding the relationship between the public and the private spheres according to Mitrany's writings on functionalism in the 1940s. I argue that Mitrany's professional path can shed new light on his international thought, and offer insights into an often-ignored aspect of the functional world order. In 1943, while a prominent professor of Politics and Economics at the LSE and the Institute for Advanced Studies, Mitrany accepted a position as political advisor on international affairs to the multinational corporation Unilever. The link between Mitrany's theory and his career choices has often been overlooked. However, in this paper I will use this perspective to examine Mitrany's thought, claiming that his functional theory should be understood as an interpretation of the political space between the private and public sphere, and not merely as an approach to international integration. The paper includes four parts. The first section provides a brief biographical introduction and explores Mitrany's role as advisor to Unilever. The following part delves into Mitrany's functionalist theory and his interpretation of the relations between the public and the private spheres. The third section assesses the new political spaces of functionalism between the private to the public spheres by focusing on Mitrany's concept of 'human rights'. Finally, I explore some of the limitations of his arguments and briefly discuss his possible contribution to thinking about devolution in the international and the European spheres today.

## **1. Political Theory and International Business**

David Mitrany was born in 1888 in Bucharest, Romania. In 1912, he relocated to London, where he completed his doctoral studies in Sociology and Economics at the London School of Economics with Leonard Hobhouse and Graham Wallas. At the LSE he also met Harold Laski, who became a close personal friend. Laski's writings inspired Mitrany's pluralist

understanding of politics, although Mitrany rejected Laski's later international thought as too doctrinaire and conceptually conservative in focusing on the state and its sovereignty. During the First World War Mitrany did intelligence work for the Foreign Office. Later, he joined the editorial staff led by C.P. Scott at the *Manchester Guardian*, where he met other influential social and economic thinkers like John A. Hobson and Henry Brailsford. Mitrany became an expert on foreign affairs and collaborated with various think-tanks and political organizations, including the League of Nations Society, the Labour Party Advisory Committee (although he refused to join the Party), the Institute for Pacific Relations, Chatham House and the PEP (Political and Economic Planning).<sup>3</sup>

In 1922 Mitrany started what would become a long-term relationship with American academia. He was appointed assistant editor of a series of publications on the social and economic history of the war, financed by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. By acquiring detailed knowledge of various aspects of contemporary European problems he came to appreciate the close links between politics and economics. He spent the 1930s in the United States. First, he accepted an invitation to a visiting fellowship at Harvard. Mitrany's well-received Dodge Lectures at Yale on 'The Progress of International Government' then paved the way to his appointments in 1933 as Professor of Politics and Economics at the LSE, and as the first professor at the School of Economics and Politics at the prestigious Institute of Advanced Study (IAS) in Princeton, NJ.<sup>4</sup> With the support of leading intellectuals like Wallas and Ernest Barker, Mitrany became a well-known thinker about international politics in the US and Britain alike.<sup>5</sup> His interests were interdisciplinary, ranging from sociology to political theory and economics. When he joined the IAS, it was still mainly focused on scientific disciplines. Thus, he had the opportunity to meet world-famous scientists like John von Neumann, Robert Oppenheimer (whom he disliked) and Albert Einstein who became a close friend. Living in 1930s America, Mitrany had firsthand experience of the economic crisis and its devastating impact on social and economic living conditions. He also avidly followed the great social and economic experiment of the decade, the New Deal. He became an expert on the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), which he considered an inspiring success in public administration. Both became cornerstones of his future international thought.<sup>6</sup>

When the war broke out, Mitrany returned to London as a member of the Foreign Research and Press Service (FRPS), a Foreign Office study group that Chatham House operated. He sought to contribute to the war effort and to participate, along with many other British intellectuals and scholars, including J. M Keynes, William Beveridge, Lionel Curtis, James Meade and Barbara Wootton, in planning the postwar economic, social and political

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<sup>3</sup> D. Anderson, 'David Mitrany (1888-1975): An appreciation of his life and work', *Review of International Studies* 24 (1998): 577-592.

<sup>4</sup> David Mitrany, *The Progress of International Government* (New Haven, Con.: Yale University Press, 1933).

<sup>5</sup> R. J. Harrison, 'Review of David Mitrany, *The Functional Theory of Politics*', *Millennium* 5 (1976): 200-202.

<sup>6</sup> Mitrany wrote about his – generally positive – impression of the New Deal in *American Interpretations: Four Political Essays* (London: Contact publications, 1946).

reconstruction.<sup>7</sup> In Chatham House committees and in dialogue with other influential proposals for a postwar order including regional and world federalism, Mitrany proposed his functionalist ideas, which he continued to develop after his resignation from the FRPS in 1942.<sup>8</sup> His publication of his pamphlet on a functionalist world order, *A Working Peace System*, was well-received by the general public and academics alike.<sup>9</sup> It offered a broad description of his ideas, engaging with the leading federalist proposals and the existing political situation, without offering many practical details. Mitrany was not the only proponent of a functionalist international order; Mary Parker Follett, Leonard Woolf and G.D.H. Cole also proposed theories of international organization with functional elements.<sup>10</sup> However, in Britain Mitrany came to be known as a major functionalist thinker who inspired public debate on international organizations and later influenced the foundation of specific social and economic agencies of the United Nations.<sup>11</sup>

In 1943, as his functionalist treatise was being published, Mitrany made a significant career move that reflected his growing interest in the private business sector: he decided to accept an offer by Unilever Ltd to become its advisor on international politics – a position he held for the next twenty years alongside his academic activities at Princeton. As I suggest, Mitrany's decision was not motivated by personal economic interests – he insisted that Unilever not pay him more than he would have earned in academia – but by his longstanding belief that the key to international reform was forging closer relations between the private and the public sectors. Mitrany argued as much in a letter to his friend, the Columbia Law professor Joseph Chamberlain: 'it is a very important point that people working in our field are to accept connections with business concerns. As I see it, it is a real form of public service.'<sup>12</sup>

Mitrany's appointment as an 'advisor on social and political questions' to Lever Bros. and Unilever Ltd in October 1943 resulted from an initiative of Unilever vice Chairman Paul Rykens, a Dutchman residing in London and serving as a consultant to the Dutch government in exile.<sup>13</sup> A few months earlier Rykens had sent Mitrany a letter on the newly

<sup>7</sup> During the war, many public intellectuals and scholars actively participated in efforts to plan postwar reconstruction in Britain and Europe, and Chatham House (Royal Institute for International Affairs) played an important role in this context. On Chatham House committees on postwar reconstruction see Andrew J. Williams, *Failed Imagination? New World Orders of the Twentieth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998). On postwar reconstruction plans in Europe see Mark Mazower, Jessica Reinisch, and David Feldman, eds., 'Post-war reconstruction in Europe: international perspectives, 1945-1949', *Past and Present* 6 (2011).

<sup>8</sup> The federalist campaign was particularly prominent in Britain at the time, supported by William Beveridge, Barbara Wootton, Lionel Robbins, Lionel Curtis, and Harold Wilson, all members of the political organization Federal Union. See Richard Mayne, John Pinder, and John C. Roberts, *Federal Union, the Pioneers: A History of Federal Union* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990).

<sup>9</sup> David Mitrany, *A Working Peace System* (London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1943).

<sup>10</sup> See for example Mary Parker Follett, 'Individualism in a Planned Society' [1932] in Mary Parker Follett, *Dynamic Administration* (London: Pittman, 1973); 'The Process of Control', in *Papers on the Science of Administration*, L. H. Gulick, ed. (New York: Institute of Public Administration, 1937); Leonard S. Woolf, *International Government* (London: Fabian Society, 1916); G. D. H. Cole, *Social Theory* (London: Methuen, 1920); Ashworth, *Creating International Studies*, 87-106.

<sup>11</sup> Lucian Ashworth, 'A new politics for a global age: David Mitrany's *A Working Peace System*', in *Classics of International Relations: Essays in Criticism and Appreciation*. Henrik Bliddal, Casper Sylvest and Peter Wilson, eds. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 59-68.

<sup>12</sup> David Mitrany to Joseph Chamberlain, 3 Feb 1947. MSS Mitrany, London School of Economics Library, box 78.

<sup>13</sup> 'No 1 "Political Advisor"', *The Daily Express*, 16 Oct. 1943.

published *A Working Peace System*, commenting on the role of business in Mitrany's theory. This started a long correspondence between the two, propelled by Rykens' belief that the private and public sectors should work in close collaboration for the society's common good.<sup>14</sup> Their shared concern about the impact of postwar economic and political instability on the private sphere of business and entrepreneurship, and about the impact of big business on social relations at the individual, communal and global levels, led to a sustained discussion on international politics, and eventually to the job offer that Mitrany gladly accepted. Reactions to the appointment were generally positive. Mitrany received letters of congratulations from his acquaintances at the *Manchester Guardian*, the Bank of England, and from Ivison Macadam of Chatham House.<sup>15</sup> Leonard Woolf was also enthusiastic about Mitrany's innovative and unique job.<sup>16</sup>

While at Unilever Mitrany primarily liaised with Rykens, who became a personal friend, and with the chairman, Geoffrey Heyworth, who took great interest in Mitrany's intellectual and public activities. According to Sir Frederick Pedler, a former director at Unilever Ltd, Mitrany attended all Board meetings and devoted time to discussing international affairs with other senior and junior members of the company.<sup>17</sup> He published articles in the Unilever publication *Progress*, and served as scientific advisor to the editorial board. Evidently, until his retirement in 1960, Mitrany was a constant presence at Unilever's London headquarters, and he obtained impressive inside knowledge of the international corporation, and its interests and activities.

In his memoirs, Mitrany suggested that his appointment to Unilever was an experiment for both the employer and employee. He thought Unilever took a considerable risk allowing a 'left-of-centre professor' to actively participate in the board meetings and discussions. For his part it was a 'humbling' experience, offering an 'exceptional vantage point for a fresh view of political problems in the raw and the chance to test one's 'functional' answers to them.'<sup>18</sup> The multinational ownership and interests of the corporation made almost every part of the globe relevant to its activities. Perhaps Unilever hoped to apply Mitrany's extensive knowledge of politics in the Balkan countries and Eastern Europe to its business interests there. But for Mitrany, the most interesting area of Unilever activities was the colonial world, where new forms of government were being created and established in the postwar years, with direct impact on the global economy and business. Mitrany felt that the multinational company allowed him to get in-depth knowledge of emerging economies and of the continuous struggles of new political regimes to take part in the world economy. To his mind, the immediate postwar period was characterized by great instability – even more so than the pre-1914 'international anarchy' – that was often ignored or misunderstood by Western people who did not have direct relations with the colonial world. In this respect, he felt that the efforts of Chatham House to plan a new 'world order' were relatively futile: no

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<sup>14</sup> Paul Rykens to David Mitrany, 4 March 1943, MSS Mitrany, box 62.

<sup>15</sup> See MSS Mitrany, box 78.

<sup>16</sup> David Mitrany, 'The Making of Functional Theory: A Memoir', in David Mitrany, *The Functional Theory of Politics* (London: London School of Economics & Political Science, 1975), p. 33

<sup>17</sup> Fredrick Pedler, 'Mitrany in Unilever', *Millennium* 5 (1976): 196-199.

<sup>18</sup> David Mitrany, 'The Making of Functional Theory: A Memoir', p. 31.

universal order would be possible in the postwar complex new world. While the West embraced human rights, welfare, freedom and equality thought the newly established United Nations, other parts of the world had little role in forging the new world order, and remained politically – but mostly economically – marginalized. Writing in the 1970s, Mitrany argued that his experience at Unilever made him even more skeptical of the prospects of a federal world democracy and more convinced of his own functional approach.<sup>19</sup>

In adopting this position, he recognized that ‘the intermingling of economic and political problems is here to stay, and that at the end of the war we shall be faced by new social problems.’<sup>20</sup> These problems could only be resolved by close collaboration between the business and government sectors, through functional organizations and building on the experience of the private sphere. At Unilever Mitrany produced reports on various political regions where the company had economic interests, initiated the foundation of the company’s international division, and orchestrated the company’s policy-making at the global level. While he sought to forge closer cooperation between the private and public sectors, Mitrany was not uncritical of the company, and he also offered his insights into its internal organization. Specifically, he pointed out that the same obstacles prevented the successful and efficient operation of private and public organizations alike: excessive bureaucracy and lack of managerial responsibility. While not an official spokesman of the company, he liaised on its behalf with international politicians, including the Indian district of Bikaner’s Prime Minister, the scholar Sardar K.M. Panikkar, with whom he discussed Unilever’s investments in India. Such encounters enhanced Mitrany’s understanding of the relationship between the world’s political order and international business, and helped him develop his functionalist theory in the ensuing years.

## 2. Mitrany’s functionalist theory

Mitrany’s functionalist theory, as articulated in *A Working Peace System*, was influenced by other contemporary thinkers who proposed similar international arrangements. As Ashworth argues, the idea of political government by agencies and institutions set up with specific functions to meet particular needs was hardly new. It had already been discussed by some of Mitrany’s teachers at the LSE, like Hobhouse and Laski, who even applied it to the international sphere. Moreover, left-leaning thinkers like Cole promoted a version of functionalism based on guild socialism as an alternative to state-centered government.<sup>21</sup> However, I argue that Mitrany was particularly interested in the international public role of private business and enterprise, rather than workers’ organizations and trades unions. Obviously, international business performed a different social and economic role than

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<sup>19</sup> Mitrany, ‘Retrospect and Prospect’, in Mitrany, *The Functional Theory of Politics*, pp. 262-265.

<sup>20</sup> David Mitrany, ‘Memorandum on proposed section for political and social problems’ 1946, MSS Mitrany, Box 78.

<sup>21</sup> On the functionalism of Laski and Hobhouse see L. T. Hobhouse, *Social Evolution and Political Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1911); Harold Laski, *Authority in the Modern State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1919). On the functional theories of Cole, Woolf and Follett see note 10. On guild socialism see G. D. H. Cole, *Guild Socialism* (London: Fabian Society, 1920).

socialist guilds: while guilds were instrumental in building a system of bottom-up political participation and decision making, international business and multinationals forged a network of globe-spanning economic enterprises anchored in the global private sphere that ran parallel to states' international relations. The particular relationship between international business and the public sector and its potential contribution to a world order will be explored in more detail in the next section.

It is evident that Mitrany shared his intellectual predecessors' strong doubts about the proper role of the state as a political institution. With the Second World War, these ideas became more widespread, as many political thinkers sought to create mechanisms to limit – if not abolish – the power of sovereign states.<sup>22</sup> Yet instead of trying to prove that the state-system was obsolete, or that the new international system should be based on a revised concept of national sovereignty that would allow the establishment of a federation or world state, Mitrany tried to circumvent the problem by discussing international order with little reference to the state. In his earlier writings he suggested abandoning 'traditional dogma' when thinking about international relations. A persistent dogmatic term was, for him, the 'state', both as a political concept and as a practical unit of social organization. Hammarlund suggests that Mitrany pushed for a wholesale rejection of the state as an obsolete political unit that had lost its sovereign power and would best be replaced with an international network of agencies.<sup>23</sup> It would be wrong to see Mitrany as a theorist of the 'decline of the state' as a political institution, because in his vision states would continue to exist as powerful and sovereign political territorial units. At the same time, some of their functions would be complemented by an international network of economic and social institutions. Mitrany argued that in some respects – like social welfare – the state was too weak to fulfill its duties to citizens, while in other respects – like warfare and propaganda – the state was too powerful.<sup>24</sup> He recognized the need to reinforce some of the state's powers by establishing parallel institutions, and to weaken other tendencies by transferring some responsibilities to the non-territorial authorities.

The Second World War no doubt reinforced Mitrany's ideas about the belligerence of nation-states and their limited ability to respond to public demands for welfare and rights. However, these ideas had already emerged in 1933, when Mitrany wrote a paper about the 'International implications of national economic planning'.<sup>25</sup> While researching this topic he came to the conclusion that the study of political science was too rigidly linked to certain political structures, like the territorial state or legal pacts as the basis of international

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<sup>22</sup> On 1940s internationalism see for example Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), chapter 3; Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea* (London: Allen Lane, 2012) chapters 7-8.

<sup>23</sup> Hammarlund, *Liberal Internationalism and the Decline of the State*. Earlier international thinkers, like J. A. Hobson, were more vociferous in their rejection of the state as a political unit. Hobson hoped to replace the state system with a world federation with centralized powers. See Hobson, *Democracy and a changing civilization* (London: John Lane, 1934). In the 1940s, however, many like Mitrany saw the state as the main player in a new international order. See for example E. H. Carr, *Nationalism and After* (London: Macmillan, 1945).

<sup>24</sup> Similar ideas were proposed by the British economist Barbara Wootton, who nonetheless disagreed with Mitrany's functionalist conclusions and supported federalism instead. See 'Socialism and Federalism', in *Studies in Federal Planning*, Patrick Ransome ed. (London: Macmillan, 1943).

<sup>25</sup> Published in the *Yale Review* in 1947.

relations. In a letter to IAS director Abraham Flexner, he stated that he ‘became aware of the curious fixation which has cast its spell upon political writers. Whether they like it or not, none appear to be able to get away from the State. Hence the need, in my opinion, of a study of Politics from a purely sociological angle, untrammelled by any a priori association with existing political divisions and institutions or by any impulse to provide argument for or against them.’<sup>26</sup> The need to formulate a new approach to political science, and to international relations in particular, guided Mitrany’s research in the ensuing years, when he sought to look beyond existing political institutions for successful collaborative arrangements in the international sphere. Although the result was not a comprehensive theory of politics, which he had initially hoped to produce, Mitrany identified new sources of political order for the postwar world. By looking beyond the state, he found merit in the private sector and particularly in the managerial culture of the business sector.

Mitrany’s functionalism emerged from a set of observations on world politics and made a series of assumptions about the desired nature of postwar order. Mitrany intentionally sidestepped specific discussion of the institutional apparatus of the functionalist world order: institutions were the product of practical necessities like transportation or currency exchange, and not of theoretical goals like peace and security. Like many others, including his friend, the British historian E. H. Carr, Mitrany argued that the failure of international organizations like the League of Nations was largely due to the inherent limits of international constitutionalism: it was impossible to impose a theoretical set of rules on an unruly world.<sup>27</sup> A political system based on legal pacts was bound to fail because member states’ willingness to enforce them was weaker than their immediate national interests.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, as he had previously suggested, legal agreements depended on artificially perpetuating and strengthening political actors – such as the territorial state – that were evidently not up to the task of addressing all of their political, economic and social challenges. Finally, Mitrany recognized that the growing power of nationalistic sentiment undermined the force of shared human reason as a cosmopolitan quality that could unite mankind in a neo-Kantian legal system.

Mitrany’s explanation of this deficiency was more implied than explicit. He argued that political nationalism undermined states’ ability to attain economic prosperity because political reasons prevented them from collaborating with other interested states for the common good. Nationalism compounded the tendency of states to opt for policies promoting their own interests even if doing so came at the cost of other states. At the same time, he argued that national economies increasingly depended on international relations – especially in trade and currency policies – thus undermining the state’s ability to control and regulate its internal

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<sup>26</sup> David Mitrany to Abraham Flexner, 14 Jan 1933, in Records of the Office of the Director, Faculty files, box 23: Mitrany/David, The Shelby White and Leon Levy Archives Center, Institute of Advanced Study, Princeton, NJ, USA.

<sup>27</sup> See Edward H. Carr, *Twenty Years’ Crisis: 1919-1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* [1939] (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001).

<sup>28</sup> Mitrany, *Working Peace System*, pp. 5-7.

finances and provide internal economic stability.<sup>29</sup> International business also cut across national spheres, forming relations that the state was not always able to control or direct for domestic needs. In another important observation Mitrany asserted the growing demand for better socioeconomic conditions within the states, implying that more national planning was necessary.<sup>30</sup> Yet, he argued, no national planning was possible in an international economy dominated by the principle of *laissez-faire*. These concerns were shared by other social-democrats and internationalists in Britain at the time, such as Barbara Wootton, who was an active leader of the political organization called Federal Union.<sup>31</sup> While Wootton believed the consequences of these assumptions on the international economy and national planning meant that there should be a global federal planning agency to direct national economies, Mitrany dismissed this idea as impractical and politically undesirable. Importantly, he shared Wootton's opinion that science and rationality could help identify the specific social economic needs of individuals and communities across national boundaries, but he suggested that the institutions responsible for addressing these problems would be created ad-hoc, specifically geared to each situation. In his mind, such 'functional' solutions would be more flexible, more limited, and easier to set up and thus more politically acceptable than any other arrangement, especially a federal union.<sup>32</sup>

As I have suggested, Mitrany believed the postwar order should take into account the potential contribution of the international functions of multinationals and private companies, given their different qualities from those of individuals and public organizations. He argued that public demands for welfare and social reforms were articulated in a political language emphasizing 'services' over 'rights', thus shifting the discussion away from the legal sphere to the administrative one, where private business could play a significant role. Moreover, national social and economic policies often had strong repercussions on private businesses operating in an international network of production and trade that could not be limited to the national territory. Mitrany suggested there are certain rationally-identifiable common needs, which are common to people, communities and organizations across the world. A new international order would only be effective if it built transnational institutions responding to these various social-economic needs, in coordination with the world of corporate business, which could create a bottom-up political order to address these needs. The contribution of the private sector did not merely lie in its crucial importance to economic and social development as a major employer and investor. There was also great affinity between the rational organization of the business sector, following Frederick Taylor's ideas of scientific

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<sup>29</sup> Similar ideas were proposed by Wootton, in 'Federalism and Socialism'. Wootton and Mitrany may have met during the war at the Chatham House committees on postwar reconstruction in which they both took part.

<sup>30</sup> See Mitrany's introduction to Political and Economic Planning, *Economic Development in S. E. Europe: Including Poland, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Hungary, Rumania, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Greece* (London: PEP, 1945).

<sup>31</sup> Barbara Wootton, *Freedom under Planning* (London,; G. Allen & Unwin, 1945).

<sup>32</sup> The debate between supporters of federalism and functionalism on the viability of their proposals for economic development continued after the Second World War. See Mitrany, 'The Functional Approach to International Organization', *International Affairs* 24 (1948): 350-363. In particular, see the summary of following Mitrany's presentation at Chatham House, and Lionel Curtis' comments on the viability of functionalism and federalism, *ibid*, 360-363.

management, and the basic principles that guided Mitrany's international sphere.<sup>33</sup> The emphasis on scientific research and expertise as the basis for a rational – and thus peaceful and effective – international order was similar to the fundamental principles of corporate business management in the mid-twentieth century. Although Mitrany did not specifically refer to Taylor's ideas, the two shared a clear commitment to scientific rationalism as the basis of social and economic order.

When Mitrany developed his functionalist theory, visions of world or regional federations commanded great public interest and support. Mitrany shared many of the federalists' concerns – namely the belligerence of nation-states, growing international interconnectedness, and the need for supranational authority to guarantee peaceful economic cooperation – yet he opposed the federal solution, which in his mind replicated the deficiencies of the state on a larger scale. In a sense, he shared Friedrich Hayek's fear that a federal authority with too much economic and political power would limit rather than enhance individual liberty by enforcing policies that lacked legitimizing popular consent.<sup>34</sup> Mitrany opposed the idea that a new world order would have to emerge *en bloc*, and preferred a gradualist, pragmatic approach with fewer risks of instability and chaos.

In 1941 Mitrany had already anticipated some of the ideas later expressed in his better-known pamphlet.<sup>35</sup> Functionalism received its name from Mitrany's assertion that men would cooperate in those areas where they saw a common need that could only be addressed by collaborative institutions.<sup>36</sup> Needs would create international agencies that derive their authority from their functions, to which their activities would be limited. Functionalism arose from Mitrany's doubts about federalist solutions, which in his mind sought to resolve new – mainly social and economic – problems using old-fashioned constitutional means. Mitrany saw functional organization as practical and free of any ideological current or of territorial limits.<sup>37</sup> These two characteristics would make functionalism succeed where federalism could not. Mitrany's goal was to emphasize the novelty of popular demand for social reform – articulated in terms of services rather than rights – and the need for new structures to address these issues. The necessary institutional apparatus would focus on the aspect of human activities that most needed a remedy: society and economics, not politics.

Mitrany was therefore critical of the federalists who sought to resolve the social and economic crisis of their times by establishing new transnational political institutions. In the 1940s, federalist movements became increasingly popular in both Britain and the United States, yielding a variety of regional and global federalist visions. The British organization Federal Union received great public and intellectual attention, and enjoyed the support of

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<sup>33</sup> Daniel Nelson, *Frederick W. Taylor and the Rise of Scientific Management* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980).

<sup>34</sup> F. A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (London: Routledge, 1944), pp. 163-174.

<sup>35</sup> David Mitrany, 'Wartime Submission' (1941) in *The Functional Theory of Politics*, pp. 108-125.

<sup>36</sup> Mitrany, *Working Peace System*, p. 19.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 25-34.

some leading politicians as well.<sup>38</sup> In the United States, a number of popular and student movements formed to call for a federal union on a global or regional level, with the idea of a democratic world or regional federation garnering growing support.<sup>39</sup> Mitrany sought to check such thoughts by pointing out the inherent limits of federalism. In his mind, functionalism did not share these deficiencies and therefore had better chances of success. He distinguished between two kinds of federations: geographic and ideological. The 'geographic' federation, like the European Union, was built upon territorial continuity between member states. The 'ideological' federations were united by a common political ethos, like Lionel Curtis' imperial federation, or the union of democracies promoted by the American journalist Clarence Streit.<sup>40</sup> Mitrany argued that both kinds would be ineffective or even potentially dangerous to world peace. The geographic federations based on physical proximity could not guarantee stability because location and geopolitical position did not necessarily imply the presence of key common interests or a shared political outlook to cement political unity and allow for political and economic collaboration. A union based on common ideology, like political democracy, was necessarily based on the assumption that all member states were united by the same vision of democracy and characterized by the same kind of democratic institutions. For Mitrany, this assumed a much greater degree of internal unity than really existed.<sup>41</sup> The democratic federation would be weakened by its constitutional rigidity and could be dissolved if any member state decided to alter its internal political or legal structure. Mitrany believed the experience of European totalitarianism proved that a democratic constitution could not prevent the rise of anti-democratic movements, thus risking the coherence of the entire democratic federation. Finally, he added that while the essence of democracy was difficult to define as the basis for common action, its rhetoric could be easily identified and opposed by ideological counter-groups. Thus, a simplistically defined ideological federation would necessarily encourage the emergence of an ideological other – an anti-democratic nemesis that would compromise world peace through rivalry and hostilities.<sup>42</sup>

Mitrany's main argument was that 'functionalism' did not share the limitations of federalism because it sought to 'weld together the common interests of all without interfering unduly with the particular ways of each'.<sup>43</sup> Rather than dissolving the sovereign nation-states by constitutional and legal means, the functionalist system would circumvent the states by promoting a closer interaction between the private and the public spheres. Quoting Burke's dictum that 'government is a practical thing', Mitrany proposed to provide worldwide social reform by suggesting that the needs of individuals and communities could be solved by agencies with specifically tailored functions located in both the private and the public sphere.

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<sup>38</sup> On Federal Union see Richard Mayne, John Pinder, and John C. Roberts, *Federal Union, the Pioneers: A History of Federal Union* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990).

<sup>39</sup> On world federalism see for example the sympathetic account of Joseph P. Baratta, *The Politics of World Federation: From World Federalism to Global Governance* (New York: Greenwood, 2004).

<sup>40</sup> Lionel Curtis, *Faith & Works* (London: Oxford University Press, 1943); Clarence K. Streit, *Union Now: A Proposal for a Federal Union of the Democracies of the North Atlantic*. (New York: Harper & brothers, 1939).

<sup>41</sup> Mitrany, 'A Wartime Submission', pp. 109.

<sup>42</sup> Mitrany, *A Working Peace System*, pp. 10-17.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

What kind of ‘functions’ did Mitrany's idea of international functionalism include? Mitrany never clearly defined the terms ‘need’ or ‘function’. The strongest advantages of functionalism – its flexibility and vagueness – rendered his vision theoretically weak and susceptible to many interpretations. Yet he evidently thought that functions were responses to specific and contingent needs and did not consider it necessary to outline the relevant agencies in a functional system because the specific needs to address could not be known in advance. The obvious ones were transportation agencies to control railways, airways, maritime transportation and so on. Food related agencies, to regulate fishing and agricultural activities, were also advisable. Natural resources could also be administrated by international agencies that would include all the interested states. Security and legal functions could be administered beyond the national level through agreement between different regional or continental components. Interestingly, Mitrany thought that human rights would also be better administered by international functional agencies on the basis of need, rather than nationally.<sup>44</sup> The role of the public authorities would be to guide and regulate services and activities that could be provided by private enterprise. Thus, Mitrany insisted that functionalism merely implied a new pragmatic organization of structures that were already in place, like the Postal Service, regional transportation systems and communication technologies. Building on the experience of existing agencies, new transnational collaborative institutions could be established on the basis of the common needs of the relevant communities and states. For him, the trend of modern politics was pragmatism: to ‘organize government following specific ends and needs, according to the conditions of their time and place’. Only the very general formal rules of the system could be pre-established. Subsequently, the function ‘determines the political instrument suitable for its proper activity and [...] provides for reform at every stage’.<sup>45</sup>

Mitrany's attitude towards schemes of international organization and world order was therefore one of substantial pessimism. He was disillusioned with the abilities of political and legal institutions to create a cooperative, peaceful and prosperous world order. But unlike other internationalists his pessimism extended to politics in general, which he thought were imbued with ideological considerations that precluded any possibility of wide-ranging agreement.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, a federal solution would only transfer the problems of politics to a larger geopolitical scale without offering a real remedy. Mitrany's disillusionment with politics was nonetheless accompanied by a subtext of optimism concerning the effectiveness of non-political agents, like private business or economic agencies, in providing order and stability. Yet, any claim that Mitrany was anti-political would be wrong: he did not wish to abolish the political sphere but to offer a recipe for international political change using non-political ingredients. While Mitrany's theory aimed at lowering expectations about the political arrangements of the postwar world order, it had high expectations about the international private organizations that would set the model for functional agencies, and collaborate with

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<sup>44</sup> More on human rights in the next section.

<sup>45</sup> Mitrany, *A Working Peace System*, p.118.

<sup>46</sup> Compare, for example, to Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis: 1919-1939*; Zimmern, *The League of Nations and the Rule of Law, 1918-1935*.

public sector agencies in providing the much demanded social services to individuals around the world.

### 3. From the Private to the Public and back again

The previous section explored Mitrany's attempt to outline an approach to international relations taking into account the relationship between the private and the public sectors. He argued that the world had become increasingly divided by political national boundaries but that from the social and economic perspectives there was evident unity of interests and needs. This unity was underscored by people's demand for better living conditions and by the global interests of business companies. Yet in view of the basic liberal assumption that the private and public spheres are distinct, what impact would Mitrany's vision have on freedom and rights? Mitrany did not develop a coherent and well-argued theory of the relations between the public and the private sphere, unlike other political thinkers of his generation, including, famously, the Oxford philosopher Isaiah Berlin. However, Mitrany's insistence on value pluralism, on the growing interplay between the private and the public, and on the need to safeguard the 'negative' liberties of the private sphere as a fundamental part of a free world order echoes some of Berlin's later claims.<sup>47</sup> Mitrany was more optimistic than Berlin in assuming that scientific and rational research could provide the grounding for a common conception of 'liberty' and 'human rights' that could form the basis for functional cooperation around the world. Unlike Berlin, Mitrany was not so concerned with defending the private sector from intervention by the public authorities. Writing in the early 1940s, Mitrany might have been less aware of the dangers that fascist regimes posed to individual freedom. Instead, he emphasized the need for public-private international cooperation, through business initiatives and public regulation. Nonetheless, Mitrany did not neglect the question of individual liberty, which he examined in the context of 'human rights'. In this section I will explore Mitrany's ideas on human rights and their articulation in the functional world order from the perspective of private-public interaction. Moreover, I will discuss the possible limitations that Mitrany's interpretation of rights entails for the relationship between the private and public spheres.

After 1945, in view of the new postwar geopolitical relations between the West and the non-West, Mitrany became increasingly interested in the global articulation of human rights. His idea of 'human rights' emerged from his attempt to ground international interactions in the social and economic relations between various actors in society, rather than in political and legal agreements. As decolonization proceeded at an increased pace, he recognized that the nineteenth century 'rights of man' were no longer universally adequate in a diversified and pluralistic world in which 'rights' were interpreted as entitlements of

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<sup>47</sup> For Berlin's argument about the distinction between the private and the public sphere and its implication for individual and collective liberty see Isaiah Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' [1958], in Isaiah Berlin *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969). On Berlin's concept of liberty in the context of cold war liberalism see Jan-Werner Müller, 'Fear and Freedom: On 'Cold War Liberalism'', *European Journal of Political Theory* 7 (2008): 45-64.

territorially-detached individuals rather than of minority groups. In 1947 Mitrany wrote an article on 'human rights and international organization' for *India Quarterly*, the newly launched journal of the Indian Council of World Affairs in New Delhi.<sup>48</sup> The Indian Council, founded in 1943 by the pro-British intellectual Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, was part of the Institute for Pacific Relations (IPR) global network, which also included Chatham House. Mitrany attended some of the IPR international conferences, and contributed regularly to publications of the various IPR-related institutes. Through this network, he made the personal acquaintance of prominent political thinkers in non-Western societies who helped him acquire information about societies beyond the West and think about a truly global world order.

Although Mitrany did not explicitly distinguish between the various political spaces of his international functional system, he did give implicit indications of the types of interactions between the private and public spheres in a functional system. Human rights are a good example because Mitrany argued they should develop in civil society and not be imposed by a state-issued legal declaration of rights. He thought that the public demand for social and economic betterment was matured through individual experiences in the private sector, in the labor market and in inter-class social interactions. The concrete experiences of individuals, groups and organizations in the private sphere set the terms for a practical discussion of socio-economic entitlements, often articulated in terms of social services, such as free education and unemployment relief. Mitrany thought these social practices should inspire public debate on rights. The public sphere could then draw on ideas and demands developed in the private sphere, including 'human rights', and implement them through legal measures. In this framework, economic and social rights linked to labor relations, welfare, social equality and economic opportunities, would be regulated and directed by the political apparatus. From the private sphere to the public sphere and back again, social and economic rights would be enforced by the public authorities in the private sphere as well.

Mitrany identified an inherent tension in the concept of 'human rights': despite being individual entitlements, they were rarely discussed separately from 'national freedom' or communal association. The reason for this was that individuals often recognized a political group as the source and expression of their individual liberties. Mitrany's solution was to adopt a weak form of cosmopolitanism. He grounded human rights in social and economic interactions in the private sphere and not in national organizations, and argued that in the postwar world, the subject of human rights should be the individual and not minority groups. The international system that emerged from the nineteenth century political trend of constitutionalism was unable to deal with minority claims without causing individual and communal strife through unsuccessful intervention or traumatic transfers of population. Mitrany's personal knowledge of Eastern Europe made him particularly sensitive to the political distress caused in the region by forced transfers of minority populations. Two other factors hampered the international protection of community rights. First, the lack of local 'political experience, traditions and personnel' in crisis areas, compounded by economic

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<sup>48</sup> David Mitrany, 'Human rights and international organization', *India Quarterly* 3 (1947): 402-430.

difficulties, left domestic authorities in non-Western countries incapable of protecting local minorities. Secondly, policies protecting minority rights necessarily hinged on distinguishing particular groups from the rest of the population, thus perpetuating discrimination and preventing future political integration. A minority group singled out by those seeking to secure its rights would also become an easy target for intolerance and abuse. Thus, Mitrany believed minority rights were a lost cause and envisioned securing human rights at an individual rather than a communal level.<sup>49</sup>

Mitrany's discussion of human rights distinguished between negative and positive individual rights in a manner that largely corresponded to Isaiah Berlin's notion of negative and positive liberties, developed ten years later.<sup>50</sup> For Berlin, negative liberty was the absence of obstacles to individual action. Positive liberty required the presence of individual control, a pre-meditated will to realize certain activities or a life project. For Mitrany, negative rights were universal and socio-biological because they depended on man's shared humanity and not on historical contingency. They created a space of individual liberty that the state authority could not penetrate. These rights included for instance the freedom of speech and religion, freedom of association, and free trial. Mitrany believed negative rights were almost taken for granted: there was no novelty in this already-established concept of liberty, which set the foundation for the nineteenth century political order of liberalism and laissez-faire. By contrast, positive rights could provide a new basis for the postwar world order. These rights were in essence social and economic, based on individual needs and life-choices. Therefore, positive rights could be interpreted in myriad ways, determined by individuals or communities.

Mitrany anticipated some aspects of Berlin's concept of positive rights as individual action towards completing a certain life project. However, despite Mitrany's apparent cosmopolitanism, his idea of positive rights embodied a strong social and communal component, emphasizing the importance of structural and institutional provisions for their actualization and enforcement. Positive rights were an imminently political act, not only individual psychological disposition. Despite their multiple and diverse interpretations, Mitrany argued that positive rights could more easily be defined and enforced than negative rights, because they depended upon actual contingent and concrete 'needs' or desires. In this way, he underscored the difficulty for political authorities to identify and respond to individual needs and desires. It is not clear how states could discover what individuals needed or desired and help them attain these life goals without giving way to authoritarianism, as Berlin feared. Berlin suggested that the idea of self-realization – or the realization of one's needs and desires – could be twisted and distorted by authoritarian regimes. Mitrany believed that positive rights and the fulfillment of individual needs and desires should form the basis of the state's social system. For him, the public campaigns for welfare in Britain that swelled after the publication of the Beveridge Report on unemployment in 1944, made positive rights an innovative and essential part of the postwar order – a

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<sup>49</sup> Mitrany, 'The Protection of Human Rights' [1947], in Mitrany, *The Functional Theory of Politics*, pp. 187-190.

<sup>50</sup> Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty'.

concrete desire and an evident need.<sup>51</sup> Mitrany hoped to tackle the threat of authoritarianism by dividing political power across a range of agencies, both public and private, because he felt that the postwar state could no longer provide them to its citizens. The new system would have to transcend state boundaries and the private-public divide to be successful. However, Mitrany evidently failed to consider the authoritarian and repressive potential of private sphere organizations and did not envisage a mechanism to guarantee the democratic accountability of this sector.

In a sense, Mitrany was surprised by the rediscovery of negative rights, 'the rights which a generation ago were taken for granted now had to be proclaimed anew'.<sup>52</sup> For him, these rights were the foundation of the existing liberal world order as the outcome of nineteenth century constitutionalism rather than postwar invention. He refuted the claims of the American political scientist Quincy Wright that only 'negative rights' were universal in scope and meaning and thus universally enforceable by an international organization. He quoted Wright as claiming that negative rights to cultural and religious freedom and political participation would be more easily accepted worldwide than positive social and economic rights.<sup>53</sup> Mitrany, by contrast, claimed that the assumed universality of negative human rights was false: their vagueness and imprecision rendered them more controversial and less effective. He pointed out that different peoples might have different ideas of what 'freedom of speech and religion' meant in practice. He argued that the negative 'universal human rights' hardly reflected a consensus, and would be much more difficult to define and enforce than positive social rights, based on actual practical needs. Moreover, he pointed to lack of attention to 'present trends in government', of which the President of the United States Franklin D. Roosevelt's 1944 bill of economic rights was a famous example.<sup>54</sup> Local attempts to formulate and enforce positive rights would, he hoped, highlight the need to integrate different communities under a universal regime of positive rights. However, he did not indicate any precise mechanism to integrate into a coherent universal system of human rights the variety of articulations and interpretations of social-economic rights, each emerging spontaneously from a different cultural and geopolitical environment.

The concept of positive human rights, by contrast, constituted a universal novelty. He referred to Roosevelt's speech on the economic bill of rights as an explicit statement consolidating his view of social provisions as rights. Roosevelt's economic rights were not human rights, as Mitrany noted, because they belonged to American citizens rather than to humanity as such. He argued that social provisions should be implemented universally for moral as well as economic reasons. He believed that all men had the right to protection from hunger and strife and that no national provision could be effective in a chaotic system of international relations. This apparent universalism brings Mitrany's thought closer to

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<sup>51</sup> William Beveridge, *Report on Social Insurance and Allied Services* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1944).

<sup>52</sup> Mitrany, 'Human Rights and International Organization' (see also unpublished preparatory notes in MSS Mitrany, Box 75).

<sup>53</sup> Yet Wright himself in his 1945 article referred also to 'social security, food and housing' as universal human rights. Quincy Wright, 'Essential Human Rights and East Asia' in *Far Eastern Survey* 14 (14 March 1945).

<sup>54</sup> President Franklin D. Roosevelt, message to the Congress of the United States on the State of the Union, 11 January 1944.

cosmopolitanism in its advocating for individual rights to well-being regardless of political affiliation. At the same time, this position reveals an internal tension in his international thought. He excluded the possibility of a central global authority that would dictate the meaning of positive rights to the whole world because it would posit the existence of a 'single' version of individual welfare, thereby contradicting the main thrust of his functional pluralism. Instead, he envisaged a multilayered functional system of international organizations responsible for determining and enforcing positive rights.

Mitrany's thesis lacked a universal vision for a system of positive rights, but this omission might have been intentional. From Mitrany's perspective, the outcome of the recognition of social and economic provisions as human rights would not be a new constitutional bill of rights. Instead, an international system endowed with power to protect positive human rights would have to be both universal and pragmatic. Mitrany found examples of public action promoting positive human rights in administrative law and ad-hoc legal provisions, rather than in constitutionalism. He argued that administrative law successfully implemented effective changes in minority and individual rights policy in the United States without requiring a more complex constitutional amendment. Specific administrative legal provisions aimed at solving a particular social problem in the public sector, such as labor regulations, often offered pragmatic solutions that more ambitious laws, like a bill of rights, failed to provide. Public commissions like the 'The Fair Employment Practices Commission', implementing Roosevelt's executive order to ban discrimination in the national defense industry, succeeded in promoting civil and social rights by providing a functional remedy without controversial earth-shattering change.<sup>55</sup> Mitrany argued that such organizations, bridging the private and the public sector, had more chances of success than top-down constitutional laws that were more difficult to enforce. He thought that 'much of what the [American] Constitution has been unable to assure effectively to the negroes as citizens, the Fair Practice Act has secured to them as workers'.<sup>56</sup> The fact that the committee's rules were never legally implemented was proof to Mitrany of the limits of politics, where controversy and discord obstruct effective change.

Similar social reforms were promoted by trade unions and workers organizations. For Mitrany these bottom-up changes were also crucial to promoting the idea of 'rights' within the private sphere. He gave as an example the 1944 seafarers' conference, which passed the International Seafarers' Charter to regulate labor relations in the maritime profession by providing not only social rights but also effective economic sanctions.<sup>57</sup> Like his fellow liberal-internationalists Hobson and Brailsford, Mitrany emphasized the important contribution of expert knowledge to creating an international network of administrative institutions that would have the power to project and enforce specific legislation related to positive rights like accommodations, nutrition, education or labor conditions.<sup>58</sup> However, in contrast with

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<sup>55</sup> William J. Collins, 'Race, Roosevelt, and Wartime Production: Fair Employment in World War II Labor Markets', *The American Economic Review* 91 (2001): 272–286.

<sup>56</sup> Mitrany, 'Human Rights and International Organization', p. 407.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 408.

<sup>58</sup> See for example Hobson, *Democracy and a changing civilization*; Henry N. Brailsford, *Olives of endless age: A study of this distracted world and its need of unity* (London: Harper, 1928).

Brailsford and Hobson, Mitrany did not plan to integrate experts into the political system and saw them as part of the functional administrative international body coordinating and defining concrete social policies within the inter-state social order. Importantly, an expert-based functional agency would not be directed by any national government and its functions would be essentially regulatory. Thus the significant and central role of private entrepreneurial initiative would be safeguarded within the framework of rights created by the international agency. Mitrany concluded by arguing that when social rights were clearly defined – by political discussion and specialized research – an international organization could legally enforce them not only in the public sphere but also in the realm of private enterprise. His conclusion indicates two means of discovering what positive rights might entail for different people: scientific expert-led research, along with practical data gathered from people with direct knowledge of the problems at hand. By focusing on practical issues and relying on scientific data Mitrany hoped to avoid the controversies of ideology and nationalistic feelings which in his mind beset the international sphere and were the main obstacle to a peaceful world order.

Mitrany might be considered a cosmopolitan because his vision of rights focused on the individual rather than on groups or communities, and it assumed that all individuals belonged to a single community sharing a moral outlook regardless of national, ideological or political affiliation. Yet his moral cosmopolitanism was not atomistic, because he embedded his political vision in the view that individuals can only lead a good life in a community. Mitrany argued that international 'humanitarian intervention' should not only aim to assist individuals, but also to improve the society in which they lived. His functional vision of positive rights sought to strike a balance between an emerging pro-active liberal 'international society' based on the practical experience of functional agencies and the rights and initiatives of individuals.

By and large, he sought to find a compromise between social provisions and liberalism at the global level. This was not an easy task and it also implied rethinking the foundation of democracy and authority – something Mitrany did not do. Therefore, the tension between liberalism and positive rights is probably the weakest point in his political thought. It is interesting that Mitrany believed the greater threat to individual liberties and initiative was not the powerful international agencies in which private sector players collaborated with public authorities without any provision for democratic control and accountability. Rather, for Mitrany the insufficient capability of the state to guarantee welfare and well-being and the risk of ideological radicalization set by nationalism, proved to be a greater threat for individual rights than the obfuscation of the boundaries between the private and the public sphere.<sup>59</sup> This might have been an understandable conclusion to draw from the two world wars he lived to see. He was less concerned with means to control and limit the activities of multinationals and private enterprise, which could breach human rights just as they could – as he hoped – advance them. Mitrany thought the main threat to democracy was excessive state power – rather than a powerful private sector – and highlighted the

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<sup>59</sup> Mitrany, 'The Protection of Human Rights', p. 194.

balancing role of political devolution, which would distribute power across a range of agencies. He thought that the outcome of his functional system would be a multilayered, complex and interconnected network of relations between various private and public agencies. This geopolitical and economic complexity would prevent the concentration of political power at any one point, distributing authority across states and communities. In this manner he hoped to tackle, if indirectly, the problem later posed by Berlin regarding the authoritarian danger of positive rights and liberty. If the state was no longer the sole provider of individual positive rights, but was assisted by a myriad of international agencies, the risk of authoritarianism could be diminished. Mitrany did not see a risk in the distribution of power to agencies over which the peoples had no democratic control. Instead he suggested that private sector-based initiatives would be more effective in implementing social changes to accommodate positive human rights, and public regulation of private enterprise would guarantee their protection.

## Conclusion

This article highlighted a neglected aspect of David Mitrany's writings on functional international order: the interaction between the private and the public international spheres. Mitrany did not provide a *theory* of functionalism and his writings are characterized by an undeniable degree of vagueness. However, the thrust of his argument was that the private sphere – in which he included workers, entrepreneurs and big business, but also 'civil society' – had much to contribute to international political change. Mitrany's optimism regarding private-public cooperation sharply contrasted with his pessimism about politics. Why did Mitrany have such faith in the capacity of private-sphere initiative to bring about a new order at the European and global levels? He seems to have thought that the modes of behavior of individuals and organizations in the private sector – like trade, work, commerce, and production – were based on ideology-free practical interests. In the realm of politics, by contrast, decisions were often directed or obstructed by ideologically partisan concerns, irrelevant to the matter at hand. Clearly this picture of private interactions is idealized and does not take into account the influence of many 'irrelevant' factors like culture, social constraints, and irrational personal preferences.

Importantly, Mitrany assumed that efficient decision-making processes, rationality and scientific management techniques were the primary drivers in the private sphere. Administrative power was directed by rational concerns and empirical value-free observations that grounded unbiased decision-making in cold facts. In his mind, while politics were beset with irrationality and emotional undercurrents that reinforced divisive ideologies like nationalism and undermined practical cooperation, the private sphere was free of such concerns. The importance of scientific research is central to his functional vision, which was based on the idea that 'needs' could be rationally discovered and understood, and that experts could efficiently plan 'functional cooperation' by using scientific methods. It is unclear why he thought that as a rule individuals were more rational when making business decisions

than when lending their support to political plans. Perhaps his interpretation of decision-making process and scientific research was slightly naïve, assuming that external interests, beliefs and traditional values played no part in directing human decisions.

By focusing on scientific planning and rationality, Mitrany neglected the democratic aspect of international organization. He did not discuss in any detail a means of democratic control over the functional system of international relations. Moreover, there was no provision for democratic discussion of the definition of ‘needs’ and ‘functions’, which were supposedly discoverable through scientific – and therefore unassailable – means. Mitrany obviously did not think that there should be no distinction between the private and the public. Successful private sphere techniques for social interaction could be applied to international relations, but the goal of public action should be kept distinct from the motivations of private enterprise. Thus, he hoped functional arrangements could promote the public good without provoking ideological conflicts. However, the impact of decision-making practices in the private sphere on democratic interaction in the public sphere was not taken into account. Evidently, ‘big business’ is not run according to democratic principles, like transparency, equality and participation. Thus, it is not clear if Mitrany seriously considered the implications on democracy of applying managerial norms in the public functional world order. Similarly, he thought the private sphere was the realm of individual interaction where new interpretations of human rights could emerge. The labor relations, economic exchanges, and social interactions of individuals and families were the foundation of a new concept of rights, rather than a top-down definition elaborated in a political declaration of rights. He chose to disregard instances of private-sector abuse of rights, which were no rarity in his days, or in ours. Moreover, Mitrany did not address how various definitions of rights would be discussed and debated, and what kind of decision-making process would be used to choose between different – and possibly conflicting – interpretations or rights.

This private-public distinction had particular implications for Europe, since Mitrany saw European politics as a source of conflict, strife and war. The European business sector, by contrast, was based on transnational commercial, industrial and financial cooperation. It is impossible to know whether Mitrany influenced later European leaders like Jean Monnet and Robert Schumann whose ideas seemingly echoed his.<sup>60</sup> However, functionalist ideas have penetrated the discourse on European unity since the 1960s’, and, as Paul Robinson argues, ‘to date, the functionalist approach has had great success in the European context.’<sup>61</sup> Mitrany’s ideas returned to center-stage in the late 1950s and 1960s, when the political scientist Ernst B. Haas developed neo-functionalism as the foundational theory for European integration. Although Mitrany distanced himself from neo-functionalism, this approach to European politics became increasingly influential with the foundation of the European Coal and Steel Community (1951), the European Economic Community (1957) and the European

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<sup>60</sup> There is no direct evidence that Monnet or Schumann read any of Mitrany’s writings, although he praised their visions of Europe as similar to his own. Peter L. Lindseth, *Power and Legitimacy: Reconciling Europe and the Nation-State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 95-97.

<sup>61</sup> Paul Robinson, ‘Governance of the European Union Historical lessons for Europe’s future in the wake of the EU Convention.’ *Economic Affairs* 24, No. 1 (2004), p. 9.

Atomic Energy Community (1958). Political scientists like Haas and Inis Claude Jr. contributed to shaping later discussions on functional order in Europe, while others, like James Sewell, sought to give functionalism a global dimension.<sup>62</sup> The neo-functionalist approach focused on inter-state cooperation and somewhat overlooked the potential contribution of non-state actors to the process of integration, especially in economic matters, and the interplay between the public and private spheres has not been the primary focus. These issues have been revisited in recent scholarship on 'new public management' highlighting the role of the private sphere as a model for public sector organization. This scholarship is generally based on the assumption that market-based approaches to the public sector can render government more efficient and less costly.<sup>63</sup> While Mitrany's early contribution to this debate has not been recognized by recent authors, there is some similarity between their proposals, especially with respect to the desirability of interaction between the private and public sectors. It is however safe to assume that Mitrany, as a great supporter of social and economic planning, would not have considered the economic market a complete model for international cooperation in the public sector, and he might have argued that some aspects of public life required a greater degree of public intervention than the market model would allow.

Despite Mitrany's disagreements with some later interpretations of functionalism, his ideas provided the initial inspiration for other conceptualizations of functionalism as a potential strategy for international peace. In the European context, he hoped to provide the builders of postwar Europe with the structural and conceptual tools to avoid the ideological controversy and political conflict that led to wars. The advantage of functionalism was, for Mitrany, its neutrality. Yet Mitrany's functional approach has also been accused of ideological bias.<sup>64</sup> He clearly embraced an ideological stance that prioritized rationalism and international socioeconomic planning over a national sense of belonging, emotionality, or laissez-faire free market economy. Despite its aspirations, functionalism was not value-free or ideologically neutral.

If we consider Mitrany's writings from a private-public relations perspective, a certain pattern of thinking emerges, promoting more interactions and less clear-cut divides between the components of the system. Yet, at the same time, Mitrany did not advocate the idea that the public sector should be shaped in the same way as the private sector (or the market

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<sup>62</sup> For neofunctionalist scholarship see for example Ernst B. Haas, *The Uniting of Europe; Political, Social, and Economic Forces, 1950-1957*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958); *Beyond the Nation-State: Functionalism and International Organization*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964); Inis L. Claude Jr., "The Functional Approach to Peace", in *Swords into Plowshares*. 4th ed. (New York: Random House, 1971); James P. Sewell, *Functionalism and World Politics*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966). On Mitrany's contribution to this scholarship see Erin Delaney, Julie Smith, 'Introduction: Europe's constitutional future – Federal lessons for the European Union', *Regional & Federal Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (2005); Brent J. Steele, 'Revisiting Classical Functional Theory: Towards a Twenty-First Century Micro-Politics', *Journal of International Political Theory*. Vol. 7, pp. 16-39.

<sup>63</sup> See for example E. Ferlie, L. Ashburner, L. Fitzgerald and A. Pettigrew, *New Public Management in Action*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). J. Boston, J. Martin, J. Pallot, and P. Walsh. *Public Management: The New Zealand Model* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>64</sup> Robert I. McLaren, 'Mitranyan Functionalism: Possible or Impossible?', *Review of International Studies* 11 (1985): 139–152.

economy, for example). Instead, he focused on the interaction and devolution of social and economic practices from the private to the public and back again. This movement of ideas and practices can help us reconsider the political tools available for rethinking the European Union today, at a time when globalization has made the relations between the private and the public increasingly relevant. Mitrany's ideas can also help us rethink the advantages and pitfalls of the functionalist approach, which had a defining impact on the structural, political and economic shape of the European Union. This examination of the early contribution of functionalism to international thought gives a historical dimension to the ongoing discussions. Mitrany's writings and professional experience emphasize the malleability of the private-public distinction in international relations and the two-way interaction between these sectors. Despite its inconclusiveness, Mitrany's work should be recognized as an early invitation to critically rethink the potential of post-national regional politics in terms of the possible and desirable interactions between the public and private spheres.