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FAILURE OF IMAGINATION?

Rationalism, Pacifism, Memory, and the Writing of Jean de Bloch and Norman Angell (1898–1914)

On July 31, 1914, with Europe teetering on the brink of war, much of the Parisian fourth estate could be found in the Café du Croissant, one of the establishments of choice among local journalists. The tight knots of diners were anxiously discussing the thing on everyone's mind: the likelihood of a European conflict. Around 9:30, heated conversations were interrupted by a series of gunshots. At first, those present thought that unrest had erupted outside, in the rue Montmartre. However, it quickly became clear that the shots were intended for a specific target. That target was the French socialist leader, Jean Jaurès who was assassinated by the young French nationalist, Raoul Villain. As one eyewitness put it, »[i]t is impossible to one who knew M. Jaurès […] to write about it calmly with the grief fresh upon one«[1].

Even amongst Jaurès' political enemies, the import of the assassination was immediately recognized. In eliminating one of the most eloquent and respected proponents of peace, this single act did a good deal to blunt French opposition to war. It also underlined the extent to which the bold act had supplanted reasoned debate across the continent that summer. Clearly, the undertaking of an assassination is not the same as the formulation of foreign policy or the response to a declaration of war. Nevertheless, the murder of Jaurès shared something vital with the opinion expressed by Erich von Falkenhayn (future chief of the German Army), who, in evaluating Germany's gamble on limited war in July and August 1914, concluded: »Even if we are ruined by it, it was still beautiful[2].« It was also of a piece with the enthusiasm of the English poet, Rupert Brooke, who greeted Britain's declaration of war with the lines: »Now, God be thanked Who has matched us with His hour, / And caught our youth, and wakened us from sleeping, / With hand made sure, clear eye, and sharpened power, / To turn, as swimmers into cleanness leaping[3].« While varying in degree of recklessness, all of these examples attest to a willingness to embrace risk, arguably founded on a failure of imagination when it came to the potential devastation of war.

The observation that a form of madness appeared to have descended upon the people of Europe, great and small, prior to 1914 is hardly novel[4]. Even as more recent initiatives in what has been called the cultural anthropology of war have shaded this portrait more finely, calling into question the idea of global war enthusiasm, it remains clear that the roots of »war culture« – that »mental furniture men and women draw on to make sense of their world at war« – pre-

1 The Manchester Guardian, 1st August 1914.
2 Cited in Niall Ferguson, The Pity of War, New York 1999, p. 98.
3 Rupert Brooke, Peace, in: George Walter (ed.), The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry, New York 2006, p. 11.
4 H. Stuart Hughes was the first to chronicle how the irrational – be it in the works of Sigmund Freud, Henri Bergson or Igor Stravinsky – was emerging among European elites, see: Henry Stuart Hughes, Consciousness and Society. The Reorientation of European Social Thought, Cambridge 1958.

dated the opening of hostilities in 1914[5]. We might shrink from arbitrarily dating the change in »human character« – as Virginia Woolf famously did in her essay »Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown«[6] – but it remains clear that something important was taking place in the first decades of the new century that directly influenced people's conceptions of war.

Given that this was the case, understanding the writings of individuals who spoke out clearly against war prior to 1914 assumes all the more significance. The analyses of writers like Jean de Bloch (1836–1902) and Norman Angell (1872–1967), or indeed the imaginings of authors such as Herbert George Wells or Émile Driant, can assuredly help »contribute the final panel to an interpretative triptych of the Great War as a fundamental rupture in modern history«[7]. Bloch was an entrepreneur whose six volume treatise, first published in Russian in 1898, attempted to build a rational case against war by focusing on a host of factors, including innovations in weaponry, prevailing tactical orthodoxies, economic conditions and changes to social networks across the continent. Angell was a career journalist who sought to convince his audience that war was irrational in view of the economic interpenetration of the most powerful states in the world.

It is hardly surprising that anti-war activists like Bloch and Angell proved unable to prevent the coming catastrophe, even though, on some levels, their warnings were prescient. Despite their insights, their efforts can be said to represent the failure of imagination in the two decades before the Great War. Their visions of the future, firmly rooted in the assumption that humanity was rational and would heed a well reasoned argument showing the absurdity of war, failed to overcome the potent blend of insularity and arrogance among military and political elites, and fear and nationalistic pride among average citizens. But we must be clear: It was the audience, not the messengers, who ultimately proved lacking in imagination. It was they who proved unable to truly envision the consequences of the course on which they were embarking.

Paradoxically, once the war was over, once its devastation was clearly felt, there was a retroactive embrace of both Bloch and Angell on some level. As with so much else that was touched by the war – from landscapes, to songs and iconic images – these two anti-war works were invested with new, sometimes conflicting meanings as people sought to make sense of an increasingly incoherent world. The books became what the French cultural historian, Pierre Nora, has termed »sites of memory«. Nora was preoccupied with

> »[a]n increasingly rapid slippage of the present into a historical past that is gone for good, a general perception that anything and everything may disappear […] The remnants of experience still lived in the warmth of tradition, in the silence of custom, in the repetition of the ancestral, have been displaced under the pressure of a fundamentally historical sensibility […] We speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left[8]«.

Sites of memory, those places where »memory crystallizes and secretes itself« include »any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the

5 Jay Winter, Antoine Prost, The Great War in History. Debates and Controversies 1914 to the Present, New York 2005, p. 164.

6 Virginia Woolf, Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown, in: Leonard Woolf (ed.), Collected Essays, vol. 1, London 1966, p. 319–337.

7 Call for Papers »Future Wars, Imagined Wars: Towards a Cultural History of the pre-1914 Period«, Conference co-organized by the International Research Center of the Historial de la Grande Guerre Peronne and the German Historical Institute Paris.

8 Pierre Nora, Between Memory and History. Les lieux de mémoire, in: Representations 26 (Spring 1989), p. 7–24, here p. 7.

work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community«[9]. They are important because they allow us to make sense of a rapidly changing world, to cling to meaning and assert our own value as individuals.

Jean de Bloch »The Future of War«

Jean de Bloch and Norman Angell both positioned themselves as scientific observers of the European situation. They wrote works that focused on the political and social as well as the technical and economic implications of a generalized European conflict. Each man would become forever linked in the popular mind with one great master work. In Bloch's case, it was »The Future of War« (1899). In Angell's case, it was »The Great Illusion« (1910).

Jean (or Ivan) de Bloch was born into humble circumstances in Russian Poland in 1836. He made his fortune as first a manager and then an owner of railways in Western Russia and subsequently moved into banking and finance. Trained in economics, he became convinced that peace was a necessary precondition of economic growth and international stability[10]. In »The Future of War« Bloch chronicled, with scientific painstakingness, the likely impacts of a European conflict. The work included 105 diagrams, maps and tables. These examined issues ranging from the anticipated depreciation of Russian securities in the event of a new war, through suicide rates across Europe, to the impact of a bullet fired at a distance of 3500 metres on a human tibia. Bloch sought to be as dispassionate and comprehensive as possible as he amassed evidence of the folly of war. This approach won him approval in many quarters. As the military historian, Michael Howard, has pointed out, Bloch

> »had an unusual grasp of military logistics. And he brought to the study of war an entirely new sort of mind, one in which the analytical skills of the engineer, the economist, and the sociologist were all combined. His book was in fact the first work of modern operational analysis, and nothing written since has equalled it for its combination of rigor and scope[11]«.

This is high praise indeed, coming from a renowned specialist with knowledge of the work of countless other experts in the field.

Based on his meticulous research, what sort of war did Bloch envision? On the one hand, it would be a conflict in which new technologies would be paramount. Significantly, Bloch begins with an analysis of changes in the weaponry used by infantry, noting:

> »In former times bullets, for a great part of their course, flew over the heads of the combatants, and were effective only for an insignificant distance. The modern bullet will strike all it meets for a distance of 660 yards, and after the introduction of the more perfect arms now in course of preparation the effective distance will be as great as 1210 yards. And as it is most improbable that on the field of battle it will not meet with a single living being in such a distance, we may conclude that every bullet will find its victim[12].«

9 Ibid.; ID., Preface to the English Language Edition, in: ID. (ed.), Realms of Memory. The Construction of the French Past, vol. 1, transl. by Arthur GOLDHAMMER, New York 1996, p. XV–XXIV, here p. XVII.

10 Grant DAWSON, Preventing »A Great Moral Evil«. Jean de Bloch's »The Future of War« as Anti-Revolutionary Pacifism, in: Journal of Contemporary History 37 (2002), p. 5–19, here p. 5.

11 Michael HOWARD, Men Against Fire. Expectations of War in 1914, in: International Security 9 (Summer 1984), p. 41–57, here p. 41.

12 Jean DE BLOCH, The Future of War in Its Technical, Economic and Political Relations, transl. by R.C. LONG, Boston 1899, p. 3.

He goes on to discuss the significance of smokeless powder with its enhanced »explosive force« as well as the advantages that accrued with respect to concealment and ease of aiming. Meanwhile, with regard to artillery, »explosives of such strength will be employed that the concentration of armies in the open field, or even under the cover of fortifications, will be almost impossible«[13].

It is this oppressive note that dominates Bloch's analysis: Everywhere technological advances have accelerated to the point where human agency is almost eliminated. It finds its fullest expression in the author's famous prediction about the next war:

> »At first there will be increased slaughter – increased slaughter on so terrible a scale as to render it impossible to get troops to push the battle to a decisive issue. They will try to, thinking that they are fighting under the old conditions, and they will learn such a lesson that they will abandon the attempt for ever. Then, instead of a war fought out to the bitter end in a series of decisive battles, we shall have as a substitute a long period of continually increasing strain upon the resources of the combatants. The war, instead of being a hand-to-hand contest in which the combatants measure their physical and moral superiority, will become a kind of stalemate[14].«

One can hardly imagine a more accurate depiction of much of the fighting between 1914 and 1918.

Clearly, technological developments lay at the core of Bloch's vision. However, when it came to social phenomena, Bloch was no less observant. He was convinced that the martial spirit across Europe had been severely hindered by the rise of the city. This was clearly shown when he argued:

> »I am speaking of the population that is behind the armies, which far outnumbers the armies and which is apt to control the policy of which the armies are but the executive instrument. How long do you think the populations of Paris or of Berlin or of the great manufacturing districts in Germany would stand the doubling of the price of their food, accompanied, as it would be, by a great stagnation of industry and all the feverish uncertainty and excitement of war? […] What is the one characteristic of modern Europe? Is it not the growth of nervousness and a lack of phlegmatic endurance, of stoical apathy? The modern European feels more keenly and is much more excitable and impressionable than his forefathers. Upon this highly excitable, sensitive population you are going to inflict the miseries of hunger and all the horrors of war. At the same time you will enormously increase their taxes […] How long do you think your social fabric will remain stable under such circumstances[15]?«

As it turned out, while military factors were of prime importance in the defeat of Germany, the collapse of support for the war domestically proved a major factor also. The depiction of social strains in »The Future of War« is no less deftly accomplished than the enumeration of the demands of Total War on all participants.

At least as fascinating as Bloch's prescience in certain areas of inquiry, however, was the way in which his message was almost immediately misapprehended. While the legend of Bloch's master work grew in the years following the slaughter of 1914–18, it is worth noting that »The

13 Ibid., p. 3–4.
14 William T. Stead, Conversations with M. Bloch, in: Bloch, The Future of War (as in n. 12), p. XVI.
15 Ibid., p. XLIX.

Future of War« did not originally find an equally receptive audience across the continent. As Michael Howard notes in his analysis of Bloch's work, it was only the sixth volume in his massive series that was translated into English. And interestingly, as the translator R.F.C. Long later explained, the »contradictory and easily falsifiable title had been forced on Bloch by the English publishers«[16]. Indeed, one could make the argument that a more judiciously chosen title for the initial English language version of Bloch's work might have done justice to its scope and saved it from becoming enmeshed in subsequent polemics about the inevitability of war in 1914.

Howard is much more careful than Bloch's publisher in his handling of the subject matter. His restatement of Bloch's thesis underlines that »war between great states was now impossible – or, rather, suicidal[17].« The phrasing here is not accidental; each word in it must be given its due weight. Howard intuitively realizes that the two adjectives he has used to describe war are not interchangeable; to say that a thing is suicidal is not the same as saying that it cannot happen. Bloch himself concluded that, despite the powerful impact of the collected data he had gathered,

> »[i]n all countries, with the exception of England, the opinion obtains that great armies are the support of government, that only great armies will deliver the existing order from the perils of anarchism, and that military service acts beneficently on the masses by teaching discipline, obedience and order[18]«.

War made no sense in Bloch's eyes. Still, it was not him but his readers who concluded that he was arguing that, in light of its cost, war would disappear.

This misreading of Bloch's message produced a similarly tenacious misconception regarding his political orientation. Though he spoke out against the war that was on the horizon, Bloch was not a pacifist. As Baroness Bertha von Suttner is said to have observed: »Bloch was no more an apostle of peace than Newton was an apostle of the law of gravitation or Darwin an apostle of the evolution of species. He was a seeker and a savant in the domain of social science[19].« Nevertheless, there were those who, maliciously or otherwise, confused Bloch with more dogmatic opponents of war.

Among military experts, the reception of Jean de Bloch's work was decidedly mixed. Roger Chickering has noted that the majority of German officers viewed him as a »dilettante whose evident lack of first-hand military experience severely impaired the value of his work«. His conclusions could not be trusted because »they were underlain on all levels of analysis by misconceptions no seasoned soldier would make«[20]. One of Bloch's harshest critics was Hans Delbrück, the renowned German military historian. He maintained that »The Future of War« »does not have much to recommend it. It is a rather uncritical and poorly arranged collection of material; and although it is embellished with illustrations, the treatment is amateurish with vast amounts of detail that have nothing to do with the actual problem«[21].

While Bloch was rejected by many military thinkers, he was not completely ignored. Indeed,

16 Howard is referring here to the original English translation of Bloch's work, »Is War Now Impossible?«, see R.F.C. Long, Jean de Bloch, in: Fortnightly Review 77 (1901–02), p. 228–236, cited in: Michael Welch, The Centenary of the British Publication of Jean de Bloch's »Is War Now Impossible?« (1899–1999), in: War in History 7 (July 2000), p. 273–295, here p. 274.

17 Howard, Men Against Fire (as in n. 11), p. 41.

18 Bloch, Future of War (as in n. 12), p. 347.

19 G. Gale Thomas, The Bloch Museum of Peace and War, in: Chambers Journal 80 (1903), p. 258.

20 Roger Chickering, Imperial Germany and a World Without War, Princeton 1975, p. 389.

21 Hans Delbrück, Zukunftskrieg und Zukunftsfriede, in: Preußische Jahrbücher 96 (1899), p. 228, cited in Chickering, Imperial Germany (as in n. 20), p. 389.

in Britain he earned a hearing before a panel of the Royal United Services Institution (RUSI) in July 1901[22]. Nevertheless, military elites remained unshaken by Bloch's predictions of catastrophe. Major C. E. Webber, who refused to reject Bloch's work out of hand, still felt that Bloch was misguided. He wondered whether »any of the European powers [would] follow Bloch's advice and place their trust in the ›common sense‹ of their neighbours?« He concluded that »stirred up by venal and gutter newspapers« they would ignore the evidence that the »apparatus of war is too scientific, and therefore prohibitive«[23]. Webber essentially argued that rationality would be powerless in the face of national pride, fear and enmity.

It was suggested earlier that »The Future of War« and »The Great Illusion« can be seen as sites of memory. One of the defining characteristics of these sites is their volatility as subsequent generations imprint them with their own values, hopes, fears and interpretations of contemporary events. In the immediate aftermath of the publication of »The Future of War«, Bloch enjoyed considerable influence. His work helped convince Czar Nicholas II to back what eventually became the world's first peace conference in The Hague in 1899. However, Bloch's influence spread even more widely. Though he was not a pacifist himself, Bloch's book »proved invaluable to peace movements which made use of his data and arguments«[24]. Indeed, it is not an exaggeration to say that Bloch was the first superstar of the anti-war movement.

This status naturally meant that »The Future of War« would be taken up by both detractors and supporters and analysed with a view to contemporary developments. In an article designed to celebrate the book's centenary – itself a clear indication of its transformation into a site of memory – Michael Welch traces the ebb and flow of professional military opinion of Bloch. He begins with careful examination of the debates at RUSI in order to underline the more immediate reaction to his work. He then goes on to highlight the post-1918 contributions of theorists J.F. C. Fuller and B.H. Liddell Hart. He suggests that their more positive assessment of Bloch was predicated on the belief that »the British army had been fatally removed from the civilian world of science and technology« and he observed that both men »liked to portray their intellectual activity as scientific and liked to contrast this rational pursuit with the intellectual void around them«[25]. Jean de Bloch became a useful prophet, a voice whose warnings from the desert had gone unheeded by the donkeys who had led so many lions to their deaths in the First World War.

Welch attempts to balance this view, pointing out that more recent analyses have underlined Bloch's errors as well as the areas in which he was insightful. Even more interestingly, he suggests that the original debates at RUSI were more an exercise in propaganda than anything else. Bloch, convinced that the officer corps of the British Army was impervious to the logic of his arguments about the changing nature of warfare, set his sights on convincing the wider public of the correctness of his views. As Welch notes:

> »Although Bloch's thesis rested on the highly technical question, reducible to mathematical formulae, concerning the ability of troops to advance across a specified zone of fire and a statement about the expected losses, he really could not expect that this demonstration would put the professional officer corps of Europe out of business on their discovery of his thesis […] his discussion was never aimed specifically at the officers he debated with. His hope rested in showing the wider public and its politicians

22 Welch, Centenary (as in n. 16), p. 280.
23 C. E. Webber, Army Reform Based on Some 19th Century Lessons in Warfare, in: Journal of the Royal United Service Institution 45 (1901), p. 380, cited in Welch, Centenary (as in n. 16), p. 280.
24 Dawson, Preventing »A Great Moral Evil« (as in n. 10), p. 5.
25 Welch, Centenary (as in n. 16), p. 288.

> that something needed to be done about a military profession that had become absurd[26].«

Regardless of the intent of the parties, it is clear that the status conferred upon Bloch meant that evaluations of his work's merit varied widely. It is equally clear that he remains an important figure whose »engagement with the military institutions of Europe […] is still highly relevant today to the critic of these organizations«[27]. Whatever his skills as an oracle with respect to the shape of future wars, there is no denying that Jean de Bloch was well in advance of his times in his determination to study the wider ramifications of war. Those interested in the cultural history of war can see in him a kindred spirit.

Norman Angell »The Great Illusion«

Sir Norman Angell (born Ralph Norman Angell-Lane) was a journalist whose »checkered career took him to the U.S. Southwest as a prospector, a cowboy and a homesteader, then on to Paris as newspaper editor for an English-language daily there«[28]. In 1904 he became Managing Editor at the new Paris edition of the »The Daily Mail«. He was at once attracted by the supremely confident figure cut by the journal's publisher, Lord Northcliffe and appalled at his lack of knowledge of international affairs[29]. Even before »The Great Illusion«, Angell was a very productive writer with a number of tracts, articles and books to his credit. But it was »The Great Illusion« that established his reputation and to which he had to continually return during his many years as an anti-war campaigner.

In 1933 Norman Angell was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. In his introductory speech, committee member Christian Lous Lange declared:

> »Norman Angell towers as high as Swift or Cobden. But his is another kind of genius; he is not a poet as was Swift, nor a preacher as was Cobden. Norman Angell speaks to the intellect. He is cool and clear. He has a profound belief in reason and in rationalism. He is convinced that at long last reason will prevail when we succeed in sweeping away the mists of illusion and intellectual error[30].«

Even before the astonishing success of »The Great Illusion«, Angell had established himself as a proponent of rationalism. Indeed, his first, more modest success came with a work written in response to the Boer War entitled »Patriotism under Three Flags: A Plea for Rationalism in Politics«[31].

Like Jean de Bloch before him, Angell's work was subject to a variety of interpretations. If anything, he faced even more significant and widespread misreading of his work, given the fevered climate at the time he wrote. He too was credited with having written that war had become »impossible«. Martin Ceadel has noted that Angell must have been frustrated by the need, pressing throughout his entire career, to »defend or gloss a hastily written journalistic

26 Ibid., p. 293.
27 Ibid., p. 273.
28 Philip D. Supina, The Norman Angell Peace Campaign in Germany, in: Journal of Peace Research 9 (June 1972), p. 161–164, here p. 161.
29 Ibid.
30 Presentation Speech by Christian Lous Lange, member of the Nobel Committee, on December 10 1934, available at: http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1933/press.html.
31 Ralph Lane, Patriotism Under Three Flags. A Plea for Rationalism in Politics, London 1903.

tract as if it had been a considered academic treatise«[32]. Angell confirmed this supposition himself. A measure of his frustration with his lot was demonstrated in a note he sent to the editor of the journal »The Scotsman«. »Quite a considerable part of a very busy life«, he declared, »has been absorbed in trying to track down through the press of four or five countries grotesque distortions of ideas which I hoped, and still hope, might contribute to the better understanding of facts which concern us all[33]«. As the most high profile of the pre-1914 Anglophone writers who spoke out against war, perhaps it was only natural that Angell would be cast in the role of naive idealist by a public that misinterpreted »The Great Illusion« as having argued that war would soon vanish from the arsenal of diplomatic tools.

»The Great Illusion« was published in 1910. It was an expanded version of a pamphlet that Angell had produced approximately a year earlier entitled »Europe's Optical Illusion«[34]. Angell's approach in »The Great Illusion« is similar to Bloch's in »The Future of War« in that he seeks to construct a rational case against war. Given this shared objective, one would be forgiven for assuming that Angell had read Bloch's work. However, this appears not to have been the case. Indeed, at the end of 1910, in the course of a letter suggesting persons to whom he could send his manuscript for review, Alfred Fried, the founder of the German Peace Society, took Angell to task for not making sufficient reference in his work to previous anti-war writers and specifically mentioned Bloch[35].

In reality, while a common rationality underpins their efforts to unmask the folly of war, Angell's emphasis differs from Bloch's focus. Angell concentrates largely on war's economic implications. The centrality of these considerations is underlined by the book's subtitle »A Study of the Relation of Military Power in Nations to their Economic and Social Advantage«[36]. Angell very quickly lays out his purpose in »The Great Illusion«, opening his work by stating:

> »The author boldly challenges this universal theory [that war produces economic benefits], and declares it to be based on a pure optical illusion. He sets out to prove that military and political power give a nation no commercial advantage; that it is an economic impossibility for one nation to seize or destroy the wealth of another, or for one nation to enrich itself by subjecting another[37].«

He reaches the conclusion that the economic interpenetration of European states, demonstrated most clearly in the role of credit in ensuring economic vitality, makes a general European conflagration equally harmful to both victor and vanquished.

Angell, like Bloch, was no absolutist. In fact, he was keen to distance himself from religious pacifism (arguably stronger in Britain than elsewhere in Europe) in particular. Thus, in a corrected proof of »The Great Illusion«, he speaks of the fanaticism of Jesus Christ and the prophets when it came to violence, then adds the handwritten addendum to the effect that, while

32 Martin Ceadel, Semi-Detached Idealists. The British Peace Movement and International Relations 1854–1945, Oxford 2000, p. 178.

33 Angell to the Editor of »The Scotsman« July 3, 1911, in: The Norman Angell Fonds [hereafter NAF], Box 1 (SW621), Correspondence, Mills Memorial Library, McMaster University, Hamilton, ON Canada.

34 Martin Ceadel, Living the Great Illusion. Sir Norman Angell 1872–1967, Oxford 2009, p. 104 (see p. 91–95 for details of the genesis of the pamphlet).

35 Alfred Fried to Norman Angell, December 5 1910, Angell Papers, Ball State University, cited in: Ceadel, Living the Great Illusion (as in n. 34), p. 111.

36 Corrected proof copy of the manuscript of »The Great Illusion«, p. X, see: NAF Box 4 (SW622) File 1.

37 Norman Angell, The Great Illusion. A Study of the Relation of Military Power in Nations to their Economic and Social Advantage, New York 1910, p. VII.

many pacifists have striven to be objective in their activism »in the eyes of the average sensual man pacifism is still deeply tainted with this self-sacrificing altruism«[38]. For Angell, rejection of the coming cataclysm was not a matter of altruism at all but of sensible self-preservation.

Unfortunately, this distinction was lost on the majority of readers and the vehemence with which Angell insisted that all war, even victorious war, was economically ruinous led to him being identified as an absolutist[39]. Angell himself, in the final section of his text, in which he considers the policies to be inferred from his earlier arguments, »acknowledges that they might be thought to be non-resisting ones« given his insistence that there was no real material gain to be had from launching aggressive war[40]. However, on the question of whether the folly of war meant that even defensive preparations were misguided, Angell's response is a resounding »No«. He maintains that »so long as the misconception we are dealing with is all but universal in Europe [...] we all do, in fact, stand in danger from [...] aggression« and he therefore concludes that as long as »current political philosophy in Europe remains what it is, I would not urge the reduction of the British war budget by a single sovereign«[41].

If Jean de Bloch was the first superstar of the pre-1914 anti-war movements, it can be argued that Norman Angell was the last. »The Great Illusion« sold over two million copies and was translated into twenty-five languages[42]. Angell's fame was sufficient that his publisher could suggest that remarks by Sir Edward Grey that he heard at the National Liberal Club were a »réchaufée« of »The Great Illusion«[43]. And yet, though both Bloch and Angell laid out a case for the absurdity of war, Angell suffered from far more negative reviews, even in the immediate aftermath of the book's publication. While it is true that »The Great Illusion« gained some currency among the elites of Britain – thanks in large measure to behind-the-scenes efforts by Lord Esher – it is equally true that Angell encountered detractors right away. One especially interesting debate took place in the pages of the »North American Review« between Angell and American Rear-Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan.

Mahan noted that Angell's thesis was predicated on the assumption that material self-interest was the bedrock of foreign policy. He questioned this assumption, writing in his review of »The Great Illusion«: »I hold that the interest of the nation is indeed the business of the government, but that the danger of war proceeds mainly from the temper of the people, which, when roused, disregards self-interest[44].« Angell took up the cudgels, replying that he had »never taken the ground that that all international action can be explained in the terms of one narrow motive« and contending that »if you can profoundly modify the bearing of a constituent so important as that to which Admiral Mahan himself in his own work attributed great importance, you will profoundly modify the whole texture and character of international relations«[45]. As

38 Corrected proof copy of the manuscript of »The Great Illusion« (as in n. 36), p. 7.

39 Ceadel has pointed out that, with the appearance of »The Great Illusion«, Angell »was obliged both to defend a thesis that was overstated in certain respects and under-explained in others and to clarify policy implications that, pulling as they did towards both pacifism and strong defences, were highly ambivalent.«, see: Ceadel, Living the Great Illusion (as in n. 34), p. 87.

40 Ibid., p. 96.

41 Angell, The Great Illusion (as in n. 37), p. 343–344.

42 Norman Angell Biography, available at: http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1933/angell-bio.html.

43 Thomas Fisher Unwin to Angell, June 2, 1911, NAF, Box 1 (SW621).

44 Rear Admiral A.T. Mahan, Review of The Great Illusion, in: The North American Review 195 (March 1912), p. 319–332, p. 320–321.

45 Norman Angell, »The Great Illusion«. A Reply to Rear-Admiral A.T. Mahan, in: The North American Review 195 (June 1912), p. 754–772, p. 755.

one observer subsequently put it, this exchange could be said to represent »the closest thing there is to ›a first Great Debate‹ between the schools of idealism and realism«[46].

Unfortunately, there was insufficient time for the debate to fully run its course. Within a couple of years of the appearance of »The Great Illusion«, the European conflict Angell had worked so hard to avoid flared up. In its aftermath, Angell was often ridiculed for *naiveté*. Given the sort of critical response that his work had elicited, one might forgive Angell for later confessing that he felt himself »an imbecile to suppose that the flood of human imbecility could ever be stemmed by efforts of reason«[47]. However, it was not entirely a misreading of Angell's work that contributed to negative evaluations of it. More recently, respected student of war and peace Martin Ceadel has taken him to task for a number of deficiencies, concluding that »[d]espite Angell's high intelligence and good intentions, his over-exuberance and under-education produced both an impatience with fact checking and a propensity to combine incompatible opinions«[48]. Ceadel enumerates a number of significant flaws in Angell's work. These include: too sweeping a statement about the failure of annexation to bring economic advantage to the victor; inability to explain why, if the above was true, he still unreservedly supported defence; failure to *clearly* signal the book's intent, which led to it being consistently misinterpreted; the extension of his rationalistic approach to emotional and moral issues that were less well suited to his style of analysis; lack of clarity regarding the prospects for change through educational processes; and the assumption that economic conditions in Europe just prior to 1914 were permanent[49]. Clearly, observers have found much to criticize over the years in Angell's approach to the question of war.

Despite all of this, there have also been those in recent years who have sought to rehabilitate Angell, seeing in his work the roots of subsequent analyses of international relations. One student of the field has suggested that »The Great Illusion« »represents a major development in the tradition of liberal internationalism. In losing touch with it, international relations has lost touch with an important part of its own historical and theoretical development«[50]. She also points out that Angell's work was significant in that it emphasized that the economic system was not the product of natural law. Open markets certainly »were beneficial in that they gave rise to a ›more civilized‹ and rational life than what had gone before«. Still, as this same commentator reminds us, it is worth remembering that »there was nothing natural about them. They were created at a specific historical moment by specific historical conditions, and they depended for their maintenance on those conditions«[51]. This made Angell a structural functionalist and an early proponent of the modernization theory that went on to have a significant impact on thinking about the role of conflict in international affairs. Clearly, Angell has had a much more profound impact on thinking regarding war than those who would dismiss him as a *naïf* would have us believe.

46 Torbjørn L. Knutsen, A Lost Generation? IR Scholarship before World War I, in: International Politics 45 (2008), p. 650–674.

47 Norman Angell, After All. The Autobiography of Sir Norman Angell, New York 1952, p. 145–146.

48 Ceadel, Living the Great Illusion (as in n. 34), p. XI. Another historian aptly characterizes »The Great Illusion« as a work »often criticized by scholars for superficiality but universally understood as influential«, see: Sandi E. Cooper, Patriotic Pacifism. Waging War on War in Europe 1815–1914, New York 1991, p. 156.

49 Ibid., p. 98–103.

50 Cornelia Navari, The Great Illusion Revisited. The International Theory of Norman Angell, in: Review of International Studies 15 (1989), p. 341–358, here p. 341.

51 Ibid., p. 342.

Conclusion

There can be little doubt that, if measured by their success in achieving their ultimate goal of averting a European war, Jean de Bloch and Norman Angell were failures. It is wrong, however, to assess their efforts so harshly. Both men achieved a good deal of insight into the costs of war. Bloch's warning against the horrors of a war of stasis dominated by new killing machines was prescient. Angell's insistence that the economic demands of warfare could easily outstrip even the most martial nation's appetite for sacrifice proved insightful also. Equally importantly, it is clear from contemporary reviews of both »The Future of War« and »The Great Illusion« that many of their central arguments were only partially understood. Expert and uninitiated alike misinterpreted or appropriated these works for their own purposes, transforming them in the process into true sites of memory in their volatility.

The fascinating thing about such sites, of course, is that they are extremely difficult to control. Like so much associated with the Great War, these two anti-war works became sites of contestation. They were conceived in the belief that a cool, dispassionate accounting of the real cost of war would convince those in positions of authority of the folly of another great conflict. But they themselves became immersed in the passions that dominated public debate, both in the two decades leading up to the Great War and the two decades between it and its sequel. Given the passions they aroused, it is all the more impressive that the treatises written by Bloch and Angell wielded some salutary influence. Martin Ceadel has tellingly written of Angell that:

> »[his] greater popular impact during 1909–14 than any other peace campaigner, and his post-1919 rehabilitation as the man who had been right about the war, show that his contemporaries credited him with conveying a number of important truths: that international relations were worthy of serious study in their own right; that this applied even to Britain and the United States, despite their isolationist traditions; and that in the twentieth century realists had to factor the international economy, as well as geopolitics, into their thinking[52].«

Bloch was also accorded praise that had eluded him prior to 1914 once the impact of the Great War was recognized.

Nevertheless, praise was far from universal. In the wake of the carnage of the First World War some commentators derided Jean de Bloch, Norman Angell and other rationalists for their faith in human reason, this despite the fact that the diplomatic efforts of a Briand or Stresemann in the inter-war period were no less built upon a foundation of rational self-interest than the analyses of these writers. It seems that it was the experience of a second bloody conflict that marked the decisive break with the past. It was only after the Somme and Stalingrad, Anatolia and Auschwitz that an approach to international relations that failed to take into account the power of the irrational became, like poetry in the famous observation of Theodor Adorno, impossible.

52 Martin Ceadel, The Ambiguous and Altering Great Illusion of Norman Angell. Paper presented at the British International Studies Association, University of Leicester, December 14–16 2009, available at: http://www.bisa.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_bisa&task=view_public_papers_author_char_search&char_search=C.