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Heresy in Action:

James Lorimer's Dissident Views on War and Neutrality

by

Stephen C. Neff

James Lorimer, of the University of Edinburgh, was the foremost intellectual heretic of Nineteenth-Century international legal thought. He was an outspoken dissenter from the mainstream positivist outlook, which he condemned as being excessively narrow and negative in character, with its obsessive focus on the independence of states from one another. In certain respects, he appears as a modern figure, foreshadowing some of the most important developments of the Twentieth Century. This was the case in two areas especially. One was in the high status that he accorded to individuals in international law. The other was his support for international organisation (which apparently extended even to the coining of the term).¹

The truth (as so often) is more nuanced. Lorimer was certainly no modernist by temperament. He was a supporter of natural law and a systematizer in the hypothetico-deductive style of the writers of systematic jurisprudence of the preceding centuries. His writing and general outlook bore more traces of the meticulous medieval scholastic than of the impatient modernist. The recent scholarship of the Nineteenth Century that most influenced him was speculative and idealist philosophy – first that of William Hamilton from Scotland, and later that of the German political scientist Christoph Dahlmann.² So strongly was Lorimer's thought in this idealist mould that he was sometimes referred to as the 'Scotch Hegelian.'

¹ Pitman B. Potter, 'Origin of the Term International Organization', *AJIL* (1945) 39, at 803-06 (1945).

² On Dahlmann, see Leonard Krieger, *The German Idea of Freedom: History of a Political Tradition* (1957), at 305-09.

A major goal of Lorimer's was to embed international-law doctrine in a comprehensive system of general jurisprudential thought. In this sense, he was indeed a thoroughgoing professor of the law of nature *and* of nations (as the title of his chair at Edinburgh indicated). Central to this framework were two sets of ideas. One was a double classification of acts as 'jural' and 'non-jural' on the one hand, and as 'normal' and 'abnormal' on the other. The second key feature was the central role accorded to the concept of recognition.

The present discussion will focus on the natural-law character of Lorimer's thought, and on the implications that it had in the important area of war and neutrality. Initially, there will be a discussion of certain salient features of Lorimer's over-all legal outlook. It will then be demonstrated how these ideas were applied to key issues of war and neutrality – and how they led Lorimer to adopt positions that were sharply at variance with mainstream international legal thought and practice.

Lorimer and Natural Law

For present purposes, the most salient feature of Lorimer's thought was his commitment to a natural-law approach to international law, and his concomitant disdain for the positivist outlook that was then dominant in the field. '[J]urisprudence,' he insisted, 'contains deeper roots than mere formalism.'³ Two elements of his natural-law outlook should be appreciated from the outset. One was that his approach to natural law was predominantly in the rationalist tradition which descended, ultimately, from Thomas Aquinas and the medieval Aristotelians. This version of natural law was hypoethico-deductive in character, with basic propositions, or a basic framework, devised, with conclusions on specific questions then derived by logical deduction, broadly in the manner of mathematical proofs or demonstrations.

The other key feature of Lorimer's natural-law outlook – also harking back ultimately to medieval Aristotelian thought -- was a committed belief in the basic sociability of the

³ 2 James Lorimer, *The Institutes of the Law of Nations: A Treatise of the Jural Relations of Separate Political Communities* (1883), at 48-49.

human species. In the Middle Ages, this belief contrasted sharply with the traditional Christian view of human nature as inherently depraved and sinful. In the more immediate context of the Nineteenth-Century, this belief in human sociability contrasted with the prevailing positivist emphasis on the independence of states from one another. Positivist writers tended to see a world in which the states were perpetually locked in jealous rivalry with one another – a vision that Lorimer condemned as a ‘negative’ picture of international law. His own theory was pointedly contrasted with this one, in emphasising the *interdependence* of states with one another as the fundamental feature of international life. Lorimer was emphatic that his vision of international law laid great stress on ‘the active duties of humanity in the jural relations between separate communities.’⁴

These basic natural-law principles had direct and important applications in several areas of international law. For present purposes, three are worth particular attention: the role of individuals in international law; the continuing vitality of just-war thought; and the basic principles governing neutrality.

The role(s) of individuals in international law

Natural law spoke chiefly to individuals – albeit to individuals who were seen as living a social rather than a solitary existence. Natural law, to be sure, was *relevant* to inter-state relations, but only in the somewhat indirect sense that certain individuals who wielded sovereign powers in their communities naturally interacted in the course of their activities with other sovereigns. In principle, though, the same basic norms applied to sovereigns as to humbler folk – meaning that natural law was primarily a law regulating the conduct of individuals, and only secondarily, or by extension, a law regulating relations between states.

It is therefore hardly surprising that individuals would play a larger part in Lorimer’s system than they would (or could) in mainstream positivist thought, which was strongly state-centred. Lorimer had some original thoughts on this subject, though, which played an important part in shaping his unorthodox ideas about war and neutrality. Most importantly,

⁴ *Ibid.*, at 123.

he saw individuals as functioning in a dual capacity: on the one hand, as citizens of their respective states; and on the other hand, as ‘citizens’ of the world at large. In this latter capacity, individuals are seen ‘as existing independently of the States to which they belong.’⁵ The concrete illustration that he gives, interestingly, is of pirates, whom he refers to as ‘cosmopolitan criminals’ (i.e., offenders against humankind in general) as opposed to ‘citizen criminals’ (who offend only against the law of their home state).⁶ Moreover, Lorimer made it clear that these two capacities were governed by two distinct sets of legal rules, which had distinct sources. ‘[An individual’s] citizen rights and duties are municipal, or *juris gentis*,’ he explained, while ‘his personal rights are international, or *juris gentium*.’⁷

Lorimer was therefore a forthright dualist, in that he made a sharp distinction between international law and national law. It should be noted, though, that his dualism referred to the *sources* of the legal rules, and not to their sphere of application. The most thorough-going form of dualism sees national and international law as being distinct not only with regard to their source or origin, but also with regard to their field of application. In this radical form of dualism, the possibility of a clash between the two systems of law cannot occur, because of their application to different persons – international law applying only to states and not to individuals, and national law applying only to individuals and not to states. Lorimer’s version of dualism was not of this radical sort. National and international law were seen as having different sources; but *both* kinds of law were applicable to the conduct of individuals. In this sense, it would be fair to say of Lorimer’s system – though he does not put it in these terms himself – that it posits individuals as subjects of international law.

The two sets of rules were seen distinct bodies of law, independent in their content and operation – but also as operating simultaneously. ‘His allegiance to his own State,’ Lorimer maintained, ‘does not deprive [an individual] either of the rights, or relieve him from the duties, of a citizen of the world.’⁸ The inevitable result was that an individual’s two legal roles could be sharply inconsistent with one another. ‘Whilst neutral as a citizen,’ Lorimer contended, ‘[an individual] may thus be belligerent as a person, and whilst belligerent as a citizen he may be neutral as a person.’⁹

One particular natural-law right of individuals was especially relevant to Lorimer’s thinking about war and neutrality: the right to freedom of trade. This did not mean a right on

⁵ *Ibid.*, at 131-32.

⁶ *Ibid.*, at 132.

⁷ *Ibid.*, at 137.

⁸ *Ibid.*, at 137.

⁹ *Ibid.*, at 137.

the part of individuals to trade freely without regard to the prevailing laws of the states where transactions took place (e.g., to import goods into a country which the law of that country prohibited, or to import goods without paying prescribed customs duties). What it meant was that, once two individuals had arrived at an agreement between themselves on some commercial transaction, no third party had a right to step in and disrupt that arrangement. Just as third parties were seen as having neither rights nor duties under a given contract, so third parties had no right to intrude into the contractual relations of others. It will be seen presently that this principle played a large role in Lorimer's thinking on neutrality.

Lorimer's commitment to just-war thought

Lorimer's view of war was, in all its essentials, a straightforward endorsement of traditional just-war thought. In his somewhat idiosyncratic terminology, a just war was labelled as 'jural' and an unjust one as 'non-jural.' A jural (or just) war was seen by Lorimer in strictly traditional terms as a conflict waged in the cause of 'objective freedom,' i.e., for the enforcing or vindicating of legal rights. As Lorimer put it, such a war was 'waged for jural objects and sanctioned by necessity.'¹⁰ Such a war was, at the same time, 'abnormal,' meaning that war was not the usual means of pursuing legal rights. An unjust war, such as a war of aggression, was, in contrast, *both* non-jural *and* abnormal.¹¹

Natural-law modes of thought are apparent, too, in Lorimer's opinions about the conduct of war. That meant that law on the conduct of hostilities emanated from two basic propositions. One was that the unjust side in a war has no right to use military force against the just side. The other was that the just side is entitled to employ whatever means are necessary, under the particular circumstances of each case, to bring about victory. The combatants in war, insisted Lorimer, should be 'free to bring their whole resources into play' for the successful prosecution of the struggle.¹²

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, at 49.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, at 49-50.

¹² *Ibid.*, at 157.

This stubborn loyalty to just-war modes of thought led him to reject the prevailing trend in the international law of war towards regulating the conduct of war by means of a context-independent code of conduct, rather than by the single principle of necessity. The way towards this code-of-conduct approach to war had been adumbrated by the Swiss natural-law writer and diplomat Emmerich de Vattel in his famous treatise on *The Law of Nations* in 1758.¹³ But it was only in the Nineteenth Century that the actual drafting of specific rules even began in earnest – in the generation prior to Lorimer’s penning of his *Institutes of International Law*. A first step had been the adoption of the Declaration of Paris in 1856, which fixed rules on capture of property at sea, blockades and privateering.¹⁴ This was followed by the first Geneva Convention of 1864, drafted by the newly established International Committee of the Red Cross, which provided for immunity of medical personnel from attack.¹⁵ The Declaration of St Petersburg of 1868 prohibited the use of exploding bullets in warfare.¹⁶

Contrary to this trend, Lorimer held fast to the natural-law position that there is basically only one principle governing the conduct of hostilities: the principle of necessity, which allows the just side in a war to employ any and all means that actually conduced to bringing about victory. Lorimer’s views on the capture of property in war illustrate the point particularly clearly. He pointed out that the majority of commentators held private property to be subject to capture at sea, but not on land. The prohibition against the capture of private property in land warfare had long been hailed as one of the signs of the laudable growth in moderation in warfare. Lorimer disagreed. It was illogical, in his opinion, to allow capture of private property at sea while prohibiting it on land. It should either be allowed for both, or prohibited for both. Of these two choices, he opted for allowing capture in all cases. The reason, he explained, was that it was the very essence of warfare that a just belligerent is entitled to choose whatever means of war ‘by which the objects of war can be attained at the smallest cost’ – and if that means capturing private property on land and sea alike, then so be it.¹⁷

Humanitarian arguments on the subject did not impress Lorimer. He doubted that the Nineteenth-Century campaign to ban the capture of private property at sea was really

¹³ See Stephen C. Neff, ‘Vattel and the Laws of War: A Tale of Three Circles’, in Vincent Chetail and Peter Haggenmacher (eds), *Vattel’s International Law in a XXIst Century Perspective* (2011), 317-33.

¹⁴ Declaration of Paris, Apr. 16, 1856, 115 C.T.S. 1.

¹⁵ Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded, Aug. 22, 1864, 129 C.T.S. 361.

¹⁶ Declaration of St Petersburg, Dec. 11, 1868, 138 C.T.S. 297.

¹⁷ 2 Lorimer, *supra* note 3, at 152, n. 1.

motivated by humanitarian concerns, suspecting instead that it was driven by ‘considerations of immediate self-interest’ on the part of commercial parties.¹⁸ If humanitarian concerns were really uppermost, Lorimer suggested – possibly with tongue in cheek -- then efforts might more profitably be directed towards allowing *only* the capture of property in war, while prohibiting the shedding of blood.¹⁹

It is not difficult to see Lorimer’s commitment to just-war ways of thought at work here. Given that *only* the just side has an actual legal *right* to wage war, it can easily seem perverse to place arbitrary limitations on its ability to vindicate its legal rights against a wrongdoer. The code-of-conduct approach to war, in contrast, positively supports the placing of arbitrary limits onto the waging of war in support of a general programme of moderating suffering in armed conflict. But this is on the thesis that the justice of going to war is regarded as altogether independent of rules governing the conduct of war. If neither side is regarded as having a legal right to prevail over the other, then imposing an arbitrary set of rules on the conduct of the struggle is easily justified. (It should be appreciated that the laws of war are ‘arbitrary’ in the rather special sense that they are man-made and are independent of context, i.e., they are required to be obeyed even if breaching them in a given instance would make a material contribution to military victory. The analogy with the rules of a sporting event are apt here.)

Neutrality

On the subject of neutrality too, Lorimer hewed strictly to the traditional just-war position, holding that neutrality is, in principle, *not* permissible. He referred scornfully to neutrality as a decision ‘to let ill alone.’²⁰ In this regard, Lorimer’s commitment to the concept of the natural sociability of humans, and to the centrality of interdependence in international law, came to the fore. States, in his opinion, are under a duty to assist one another. That meant, concretely, that they are under a positive duty to intervene in jural wars

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, at 152.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, at 152.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, at 122.

(i.e., in wars in which a just side was arrayed against an unjust one) – provided, crucially, that intervention is possible in practice in the particular case. If a given state is fighting a just war, then other states which recognize it as a state are obligated to assist it to the extent that they are able.²¹

Such interventions, Lorimer contended, are ‘moral necessities.’ That meant, in turn, that they are ‘jural necessities also,’ on the basic natural-law thesis that moral imperatives are necessarily at the root of legal obligations.²² This duty of intervention was seen as closely tied to the fundamental institution of recognition – to the extent that, in Lorimer’s words, the duty of intervention is merely ‘the doctrine of recognition reversed, negative being substituted for positive propositions.’²³ Thoroughly in the spirit of natural-law and just-war thought, Lorimer explicitly rejected the view of Vernon Harcourt, that intervention was only a moral obligation and not a legal one.²⁴

Lorimer therefore defined *lawful* neutrality as ‘the *involuntary* abstention from war in behalf of objective freedom’ (i.e., from participation in a just war).²⁵ *Voluntary* neutrality, in contrast, he defined as a ‘failure to intervene in behalf of objective freedom’ (i.e., of war in a just cause).²⁶

Lorimer as a Dissident

In his commitment to natural-law values and analyses, Lorimer was an explicit – and proud – dissident in the Nineteenth-Century international legal community. It is hardly surprising, then, that his views led him to adopt sharply different positions from those of mainstream writers on a number of important questions. Five of these may be singled out for particular attention. The first was in the matter of discrimination between contraband of war and ordinary goods. The second concerned the basic neutral duties of abstention and impartiality. The third dealt with the right of neutral individuals to trade with belligerents

²¹ *Ibid.*, at 42.

²² *Ibid.*, at 48-49.

²³ *Ibid.*, at 50.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, at 45-46.

²⁵ 1 *Ibid.*, at 225. (emphasis added)

²⁶ *Ibid.*, at 226.

free from any regulation by their home states. The fourth concerned support for military necessity as the foundation of belligerents' rights *vis-à-vis* neutrals. The fifth concerned the duty of neutral states to police their territories to ensure that their nationals did not engage in certain forms of unneutral conduct.

On contraband and its contraries

By the Nineteenth Century, the dichotomy between contraband and non-contraband goods was deeply ingrained into international legal thought and practice. The distinction between them was simple enough at the level of general principle, if sometimes difficult to apply in particular cases. Contraband goods were goods employed in the prosecution of war, with arms and ammunition as the archetypal examples. Non-contraband goods were those whose use bore no relation to the war.

With the promulgation of the Declaration of Paris in 1856, the distinction between the two categories became more important than ever. This was because the Declaration laid down a general rule that *non*-contraband materials that were carried to a belligerent state on a neutral ship were not subject to capture and confiscation by the opposing belligerent. Contraband goods, in contrast, were subject to capture and confiscation (by way of prize-court adjudication), even if they were being carried on neutral vessels.

Lorimer had scant regard for the dichotomy between goods that were of contraband character, as opposed to ordinary goods. The important division, for legal purposes, he insisted, lay elsewhere: in the principle of military necessity. A just belligerent was entitled to capture *any* item which contributed to the augmentation of his enemy's armed strength, regardless of its nature. There is, in other words, no such thing as goods that are *inherently* of contraband quality, nor any such thing as goods that are inherently of *not* of contraband quality. Everything depended on the context and circumstances of the particular struggle – and, in particular, on the state of the just side's military needs from time to time. This line of

reasoning led Lorimer to conclude that ‘[a]ll objects are munitions of war if a belligerent is in want of them; and no objects are munitions of war unless, or until, he is in want of them.’²⁷

Some difficulty arises in discerning just what Lorimer’s point was. There is, it might be said, a strong and a weak interpretation of his stance. The weak interpretation would hold Lorimer to be contending merely that it is not possible to have a fixed, *à priori* list of goods that are contraband of war – that what constitutes contraband must always be context-dependent. On this interpretation, there is a real distinction between contraband and non-contraband goods – but the boundary between them is not fixed and inflexible. Rather, the distinction is functional and contextual, with contraband not being reducible to a fixed and permanent list.

The strong interpretation would see Lorimer as altogether denying, in principle, the very existence of a dichotomy between contraband and non-contraband goods. Anything that a belligerent state is seeking to import must be presumed to be of benefit to it. Otherwise, it would not bother with the expense and trouble of importing. It may then be further contended that anything that ‘benefits’ the importing state must make at least some positive contribution to its war effort. And if that were so, then the practical effect would be that any and all imported goods must be regarded as contraband.

On abstention and impartiality

Traditional neutrality law was – and continues to be – seen as resting on two fundamental foundational principles: the duty of abstention and the duty of impartiality. The duty of abstention referred to war-related activity. According to this, a neutral state must not allow the use of its territory for belligerent operations, such as the provision of sanctuaries for the armed forces of one side from which attacks were launched against the other. Similarly, a neutral state must not supply war-related materials to either belligerent. The duty of impartiality, in contrast, referred to non-war-related activities, sometimes referred to as ‘offices of humanity,’ such as the use of port facilities to repair warships. Whatever

²⁷ 2 *Ibid.*, at 135.

courtesies are extended to one belligerent must be made available, on an even-handed basis, to the other.

It will be noted that these two principles are importantly different in character. Abstention is essentially prohibitive, or negative, in character. It tells neutral states that they must not do certain things. Impartiality, in contrast, is permissive, or positive, in character. It allows neutral states to do various things, subject to the key proviso that what is done must be done even-handedly for both belligerents.

To the duty of abstention, Lorimer had no fundamental objection. But he did insist that it was applicable *only* to states and not to individuals. Individuals, he insisted, were entitled to trade with or lend to belligerent states, or even to enlist in their armed forces and fight in the war – subject only to the proviso that ‘they did so on their own responsibility, and at their own risk, in virtue of the international status which belonged to them as persons.’²⁸ In other words, individuals were seen to have, in their capacity as subjects of *international* law, a natural-law right to take sides in foreign if they so wished – at their own risk, meaning that they would not be entitled to protection from their state in the event of action taken against them by the opposing belligerent, and conversely, that their home state would incur no legal responsibility for their actions. It will be seen that Lorimer was intensely concerned that this key state of affairs be scrupulously maintained in international law.

Regarding the question of impartiality, on the other hand, Lorimer harboured a deep-seated scepticism. This was on the thesis that what was actually being sought by the principle of impartiality was equality between the belligerents as to the *material effect* of neutral policies. It would be easy enough to devise policies on ‘offices of humanity’ that are even-handed, as between the belligerents, on their face. But they would never, in *practice*, be even-handed in their actual material impact. It is inevitable that one belligerent would always derive a greater benefit than the other from *any* policy that a neutral state might choose to adopt – including a total ban on trade with both sides. ‘By forbidding [the purchase of goods by] both belligerents,’ Lorimer maintained, ‘we consequently favour the belligerent who either does not want them or who cannot pay for them; and in so far as the effect of our municipal legislation extends, we fight on his side.’²⁹ Impartiality, in short, is a will-o-the-wisp, an unrealisable goal.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, at 164-65.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, at 161.

The right of individual freedom of trade in international law

It will be recalled that, in Lorimer's theory, individuals have dual capacities – with different rules of neutrality applicable to the two roles. When the individuals are considered in their capacity as citizens of their state of nationality, they are prohibited from *any* trading, of any character, with either belligerent. This is simply a mechanical application of the fundamental principle of abstention. This duty of abstention is easily seen to be applicable to the state itself when it is acting in its corporate capacity, i.e., as a subject of international law. Less obvious is the application of this principle to individuals. But Lorimer maintained that, insofar as individuals are regarded in their capacities as citizens of their state of nationality, they are subject to the very same restrictions on their normal freedom as the state itself. In effect, citizens are seen as components of their state apparatus, with the logical consequence that any legal restrictions that apply to the state apparatus per se must necessarily apply with equal force all of the components of that apparatus. Lorimer was, however, quite prepared to concede that this way of looking at things was 'at variance both with dogma and usage.'³⁰

Regarding individuals in their cosmopolitan capacity, however, the position was seen by Lorimer to be radically different. Viewed from this standpoint, individuals were at liberty to trade with belligerent states in goods of *any* kind – here too, with no distinction between contraband and non-contraband materials. His insistence on the simultaneous applicability of both national and international law to the activities of individuals enabled him to achieve the impressive intellectual feat of being an advocate, simultaneously, of a radically restrictive set of rules on neutral trading and also of a radically permissive set of rules.

Lorimer went so far as to contend that neutral states actually had no legal right to constrain their nationals from freely trading with belligerents. The reason lay in his thesis that individuals operate simultaneously under two separate and *independent* legal regimes – of national law and international law – with international law conferring the right of free trade. 'The State,' insisted Lorimer, 'has no more right to constrain its subject, in his private capacity, to be neutral, than the subject in his private [capacity] has a right to constrain the

³⁰ *Ibid.*, at 135.

State, in its public capacity, to be belligerent.³¹ For a state to restrict the freedom of its nationals in this respect would pose a direct threat, Lorimer feared, to the principles of freedom of speech and freedom of trade.³²

Lorimer readily admitted that the radical laissez-faire policy that he advocated would not, and could not, be truly impartial. As explained above, he believed that, in principle, *no* neutral trade policy ever *could* be truly impartial, in the sense that neither belligerent would benefit more than the other. The best policy was therefore one which combines a minimal infringement of the individual natural-law right of freedom of trade, with a policy that is neutral on its face and simple to administer – in short, a policy of complete laissez-faire for trading by neutral individuals, free from any supervision or interference by neutral governments. ‘[T]he best and fairest rule,’ asserted Lorimer, ‘is that which shall leave [a given belligerent] and his antagonist, whoever he may be, to spend their money in their money’s worth in open market. No rule but this can ever be impartial.’³³ As Lorimer put it in his proposed codification: ‘Trade, in every species of commodity, between neutral and belligerent citizens in their private capacity, shall be absolutely free, without distinction between such commodities as may or may not possess the character of munitions of war.’³⁴

The laissez-faire policy of any given neutral state, Lorimer conceded, would be of greater benefit to whichever belligerent had the greater need for resources from that state. His response to this, though, was to hold that, over the longer run, different states would benefit from the laissez-faire policy in different circumstances, so that there would be no infliction of a permanent disadvantage onto any given state.³⁵

Lorimer conceded that, theoretically, this radical laissez-faire approach should be applicable to states as well as to individuals. In reality, though, it only applied to individuals. The reason was that, in Lorimer’s natural-law approach, a state is not allowed to be neutral in the first place unless it was actually not *possible* for it to make a contribution to the cause of the just side. Therefore, the right to trade without limitation with both sides will, in practice, be a prerogative of individual neutral traders and not of their states.³⁶

³¹ *Ibid.*, at 145-46.

³² *Ibid.*, at 146.

³³ *Ibid.*, at 168.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, at 176, art. 2(a).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, at 165-67.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, at 161-62.

Necessity as the basis of belligerents' rights

It should be appreciated that Lorimer's championship of individual freedom of trade only meant that neutral individuals must be left free *by their own governments* to trade with belligerents without restriction. He did not suggest that the belligerents themselves were under a duty passively to allow such trade. On the contrary, each belligerent had a right to interrupt trade between neutrals and its adversary which bolstered its enemy's war-waging capacity. Moreover, the absence of any sharp distinction (and perhaps of any distinction at all) between contraband and non-contraband goods meant that the belligerents' right to interrupt trade between neutrals and their enemies was, potentially at least, very great. The necessary result, then, was a particularly chaotic situation: one in which neutrals had an outstandingly large degree of freedom in which to trade with belligerents, but in which belligerents also had a very high degree of freedom to interrupt that trade. That is to say, the degree of overlap between the rights of neutrals and the rights of belligerents was particularly great in Lorimer's system.

In this regard, Lorimer's views – consistently with his general just-war approach -- were a throwback to earlier modes of thought. The prevailing tendency in the Nineteenth Century was to forestall conflicts of rights between neutrals and belligerents by way of resort to a code-of-conduct approach. That meant, in essence, that the rights and duties of neutrals and belligerents would be carefully delimited so as to ensure that no overlapping would occur. Where the rights of neutrals stopped, those of belligerents would begin; and vice versa. This approach to the law of neutrality had been first championed by the Danish lawyer Martin Hübner in 1759.³⁷ In the course of the Nineteenth Century, it gradually gained the upper hand. Admittedly, the drawing of a sharp line between the rights and neutrals and those of belligerents inevitably involved an element of arbitrariness. But this was generally held to be an acceptable price to pay for the rewards of certainty in the law and the avoiding of clashes of rights.³⁸

³⁷ See Martin Hübner, *De la saisie des bâtiments neutres; ou Le droit qu'ont les nations belligérents d'arrêter les navires des peuples amis* (2 vols, 1759).

³⁸ See generally Stephen C. Neff, *The Rights and Duties of Neutrals: A General History* (2000), at 86-142. For the summation of this approach to the law of neutrality, see generally Richard Kleen, *Lois et usages de la neutralité d'après le droit international conventionnel et coutûmier des États civilisés* (2 vols., 1898-1900).

Lorimer disagreed and held instead to the older position, which founded the rights of belligerents on the principle of military necessity – once again, consistently with traditional just-war thought – and thereby accepting the inevitability of overlapping rights. This approach to the law of neutrality was that of Vattel – who, interestingly, did *not* extend his code-of-conduct approach to the laws of war to the area of neutrality. Instead, Vattel candidly recognized the existence of a key dilemma: a clash of rights between belligerent states and neutral individuals. Neutral individuals had a natural-law right to engage in trade with either belligerent (or, for that matter, with both), simply on the basis that the neutral individual was, by definition, at peace with both belligerents *and* that third parties had no general right, under natural law, to disrupt peaceful relations between two entities that were voluntarily trading with one another. On the logic of that argument – also readily recognized by Vattel – neutral individuals must be allowed to trade in any goods at all with belligerents, including things such as arms and ammunition that played a direct and obvious part in the waging of the war.³⁹

Vattel did not actually deny the existence of such a natural-law right on the part of neutral traders. Instead, he pointed out the existence of an overlapping right possessed by the belligerents: a right to take any steps that were necessary under the circumstances to bring the war to a successful conclusion. This was simply a restatement of the general principle of military necessity, which guided the conduct of war according to natural law. In one important respect, though, this general principle of military necessity was now expanded: it now was held to apply even-handedly to *both* sides in a war, and not (as in classical just-war doctrine) to the just side only. This principle of military necessity obviously allowed each belligerent to kill and capture enemy soldiers, to occupy enemy territory and so forth. But it also allowed each belligerent to interrupt trade between its enemy and neutral parties. This right, however, by its nature, only allowed the disruption of trading activity which contributed to the enemy's war effort. Trade that had no connection with the war must be allowed. That is to say, belligerents were entitled, in Vattel's view, to put a stop to trade in goods that were contraband of war, such as arms and ammunition.

Having broad-mindedly acknowledged the existence of *both* the neutral's right to trade *and* the belligerent's right to put a stop to contraband trading, Vattel's next task was to find some way of reconciling these incompatible rights. This he did *not* do. Each right was left intact – with some curious results. A belligerent had a full right to capture a neutral ship

³⁹ Emmerich de Vattel, *The Law of Nations; or, The Principles of Natural Law*, trans. by Charles G. Fenwick (1916 [1758]), at 271-72.

that was trading contraband of war with the enemy, to take that ship into a port for adjudication by a prize court and to confiscate the contraband goods. At the same time, however, it was conceded that the neutral party was not in violation of any law in carrying on (or attempting to carry on) this trade. The neutral was therefore not being punished for any wrongdoing. That meant that no corporal or personal punishment, such as imprisonment, could be inflicted upon him. The neutral suffered, it is true, the loss of his anticipated trading opportunity – but that must be regarded as a mere misfortune rather than a delict, somewhat in the nature of the loss of a trading venture to storm or shipwreck. Consequently, the neutral's home state had no ground to complain of the confiscation, which was merely an exercise by the belligerent of its rights under the principle of military necessity.

A similar reasoning applied to the situation in which the neutral trader succeeded in delivering his contraband shipment and receiving payment in cash or kind for it from his belligerent trading partner. He could not be regarded as having thereby committed any violation of international law, since he was merely exercising his natural-law right of freedom of trade. It is true that his exercise of that right caused a worsening of the other belligerent's material position in the conflict (by virtue of having his opponent's war-waging capacity augmented). But that too must be regarded as a misfortune rather than an infringement of any legal right. That meant that no punishment or penalty of any kind could be inflicted onto the neutral party by the belligerent after the contraband was delivered (e.g., during the neutral party's homeward voyage).

The essence of Vattel's necessity-based approach to the question of contraband trading was therefore simply to leave each party to exercise its respective set of rights to the fullest extent possible under the circumstances. To some extent, it was clearly biased towards belligerents, since they had might on their side, in the form of naval vessels that could capture neutral contraband traders. The traders, on the other hand, could only trust to their luck and hope that they were not caught.

There was, however, a certain element of even-handedness, in that the necessity-based reasoning underlying the belligerent right of capture, by its nature, allowed capture and confiscation only of goods that were actually related to the prosecution of the war – i.e., to contraband of war. Non-war-related goods must be allowed to be freely traded in the usual manner, as if no war were in progress. For this reason, it was necessary to make as sharp a distinction as possible between contraband goods and 'ordinary' goods. Since about the middle of the Seventeenth Century, the principal European maritime powers had been doing that, by way of bilateral treaties of friendship, commerce and navigation, which commonly

specified goods that would be regarded as contraband – with all other goods then being left to be freely traded.⁴⁰

Lorimer, however, as observed above, denied – even on the weak interpretation of his views -- that there could be any fixed and permanent dichotomy between contraband and non-contraband goods. The implication of his ideas, then, was to apply the necessity-based reasoning in a more thorough fashion than even Vattel had done. A belligerent must be seen as entitled, under Lorimer’s system, to capture any and all goods which, in the particular circumstances prevailing at the time, would make a contribution to its enemy’s war effort. If the strong interpretation of Lorimer’s position was adopted, then the conclusion would be more drastic still: that a belligerent would be entitled to capture any and all goods shipped from neutral countries to the territory of its enemy.

It is interesting to note, though, that Lorimer did not actually carry the necessity-based analysis to its fullest logical conclusion. If it were, then belligerents would be allowed to capture enemy-owned goods even if they were being carried on neutral ships. Lorimer did not, however, propose to allow this. He adhered to the rule stated in the Declaration of Paris, that ‘free ships make free goods’ – and indeed, even extended it by removing the exception made for contraband goods. In Lorimer’s view, a neutral flag should protect all enemy goods from capture, with no exceptions of any kind.⁴¹

Opposition to the Washington Rules of 1871

The British government had readily conceded that the construction of warships for a belligerent power should not be allowed. It even had domestic legislation in place which criminalized this activity, in the form of the Foreign Enlistment Act 1819. During the American Civil War of 1861-65, however, the Confederate States took great care to circumvent this law, by ensuring that *only* the ship *itself* was constructed in a British port, without armaments or a belligerent crew on board. The ‘bare’ ship was then sailed outside of British territorial waters, where the armaments were installed and a crew formally engaged

⁴⁰ Neff, *supra* note 38, at 32-34.

⁴¹ 2 Lorimer, *supra* note 3, at 177, art. 2(e). *See also* art. 2(m), *id.* at 178.

(often the same crew which had sailed the ship out of the British port). The British government itself took a dim view of this practice and contended that the 1819 Act was violated if the builders of the ship acted with *knowledge* of the use to which their handiwork would later be put. A prosecution that was instituted on that theory, however, failed to win acceptance by the courts.⁴² The Act was violated, it was held, only if the actual arming and equipping of the vessel took place in British territory. The American government contended that, by failing effectively to stop this ship-building activity, the British government was in violation of its duty of abstention as a neutral power.

In 1871, Britain and the United States concluded the Treaty of Washington, which set out the rules which an arbitral panel was to apply in resolving the dispute.⁴³ These Washington Rules (as they came to be called) set out a different, and more stringent, duty than the British courts had. A neutral government, it was stated, was bound to employ 'due diligence' to prevent the fitting out of a warship when it had 'reasonable ground to believe' that a vessel under construction was 'intended' to be employed in belligerent operations. Moreover, this duty was applicable whenever a vessel was 'specially adapted, in whole or in part,' in the territory of the neutral state.

Lorimer emerged as an outspoken foe of this rule. He condemned it for its failure to respect the important distinction between, on the one hand, the right of individuals under international law to trade freely and, on the other hand, the duty of neutral states to abstain from participation in wars. Under the old (and preferable) law, he maintained, there had been complete freedom of action on the part of neutral individuals (in the exercise of their natural-law rights under international law), coupled with a complete absence of responsibility of the part of the neutral state for any of their nationals' acts.

The admirable simplicity and clarity of this approach, Lorimer lamented, was being fatally undermined by the Washington Rules, which restricted the freedom of the individuals and also made the state responsible for their conduct.⁴⁴ The result, in his view, was the worst of both worlds. Individuals were having their natural-law freedoms unjustly curtailed. And states were saddled with the impossible task of overseeing and controlling the conduct of their nationals. In sheerly practical terms, this oversight could not be exercised properly, since it was envisaged that individuals were to be placed under restrictions not only, or even primarily, on the basis of their overt actions, but rather on the basis of much more subjective

⁴² A-G v. Sillem, 2 H & C 431 (1864).

⁴³ Great Britain-U.S.A., Treaty of Washington, May 8, 1871, 143 C.T.S. 145, art. 6.

⁴⁴ 2 Lorimer, *supra* note 3, at 164-65.

factors such as degree of knowledge or intentions as to the future.⁴⁵ So the only effect of laws such as those in the United States and Britain was, in Lorimer's opinion, 'to make neutral States responsible for transactions which they cannot prevent.'⁴⁶

Such restrictions on the freedom of individuals could not be justified, Lorimer maintained, on the basis of the neutral state's duty of impartiality, since (as noted above) he essentially denied the very possibility of impartiality. Forbidding the sale of warships (or, more strictly, of warships-to-be) by neutral individuals to belligerent powers amounts to 'forbidding to the belligerent . . . the use of his money; and as money is proverbially the sinews of war, we are favouring his adversary by thus tying his hands.'⁴⁷ If such a rule was seen to be justified, Lorimer contended, there was no logical reason for it to be applied only to warships. Belligerents should be prevented from acquiring any commodity at all from neutral parties – thereby marking the complete destruction of the natural-law right of individuals to freedom of trade.

His proposed alternative was that '[n]eutral citizens in their private capacity' should be free to construct warships for belligerent powers – though with the proviso that the actual arming and equipping of them in the territory of the neutral state should not be permitted.⁴⁸ That is to say, he supported the policy of the British Act of 1819, as interpreted by the courts. There should be no obligation on the part of a neutral government, he maintained, to take action against citizens – i.e., to infringe the natural-law rights of their citizens under *international* law – on the basis of mere knowledge of the use that someone else would later make of their work.

Lorimer candidly conceded that allowing neutral individuals to bolster the war efforts of belligerents would have the practical effect of prolonging wars, by keeping weaker belligerents in the field longer than would otherwise have been the case. In defence of his position, he offered the rather speculative argument that, even if the war was prolonged, the peace – when it eventually came about – would be more durable.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, at 169-70.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, at 155.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, at 161.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, at 178, art. 2(k).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, at 147-50.

Final Comments

The views of Lorimer on the key questions of war and neutrality that have been discussed here provide an excellent illustration of the strengths – and also, it must be said, the weaknesses – of logic when applied to the messy and chaotic events of the real world. Like his intellectual ancestors – the medieval Aristotelians and the systematic-jurisprudence writers of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries – Lorimer sought to bring reason relentlessly to bear on the world of contemporary international relations. It was not, of course, reason ‘in the raw,’ completely divorced from any connection to reality. His system involved reasoning outward from a set of first principles, with a view to constructing (or at least advocating the construction of) a world in which those first principles would have the fullest possible expression.

His opponents, the positivists, in sharp contrast, accepted that the world was not, and probably never could be, a single, coherent whole, as the natural lawyers (such as Lorimer) hoped. The international law of the positivists – and especially those of the empiricist persuasion – accepted that international law is a jerry-built, ad hoc system, hammered together by way of treaties and customary practices that owed far more to the vicissitudes of power politics and history than to the austere ratiocination of scholars.

In the event, the future belonged more to the empiricists than to the scholastics. That meant that, for the most part, Lorimer’s unorthodox ideas failed to win support. It should be noted, though, that two of the positions discussed here did go on to win widespread support. One was his stance on contraband, i.e., his contention that a sharp line could not be drawn between contraband and non-contraband goods. The wars of the Twentieth Century would bear this out. The other belief that went on to win acceptance was his insistence that individuals have various rights under international law which are independent of the law of their states of nationality. To these may be added Lorimer’s support for international organisation. Lorimer therefore can be said to have made some lasting contributions to international law. But it may also be said that these lasting contributions are in the nature of fragments or shavings from a much broader conceptual edifice – an edifice to which the history of international law has not been kind.

It may be speculated, though, that Lorimer himself would prefer to be remembered for the grand edifice rather than merely for the fragments or shavings. From the standpoint of a historian, it is fitting a writer's ideas be looked at in full and in their context, and that 'cherry-picking' of individual morsels be eschewed. Lorimer's grand vision of international law may have failed to take hold. But that does not detract from its grandeur.