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1919

Rebuilding Civilization

At 3 pm on 25 January 1919, Woodrow Wilson rose to address the gathered delegates at the Paris Peace Conference about the establishment of a League of Nations. The formation of a general association of nations was the key desire of the American president in Paris; it had been the centrepiece of his famous fourteen points and an essential element of his vision to craft global peace.¹ The first piece of business that afternoon was to appoint a commission to draft a covenant for the League. Given his personal stake in the project, Wilson would chair this committee and personally oversee the drafting process.² In his address to delegates drawn from twenty-six states and territories, Wilson initially touched upon what were by then familiar themes; the establishment of the League would, he asserted, complete the work of the peace conference and was deemed urgent because the burden of modern warfare touched the ‘heart of humanity’ itself.³

The American president then turned to matters of the mind. Wilson decried the wartime mobilization of one of the great markers of civilizational progress, science, and its subversion by destructive forces. ‘Is it not a startling circumstance’, he asked, ‘that the great discoveries of science, that the quiet study of men in laboratories, that the thoughtful developments which have taken place in quiet lecture rooms, have now been turned to the destruction of civilization?’ Wilson felt that the victorious allies had a responsibility to ensure that intellect was never again corrupted in the same manner, and thus he urged greater international cooperation as a safeguard against further regression. ‘Only

¹ Adam Tooze, *The Deluge: The Great War and the Remaking of Global Order* (London, 2014), p. 255.

² Margaret MacMillan, *Peacemakers: The Paris Conference of 1919 and Its Attempt to End War* (London, 2001), p. 94.

³ Speech of Woodrow Wilson, 25 January 1919, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States: The Paris Peace Conference, 1919*, vol. 3 (Washington, DC, 1943), p. 178.

the watchful, continuous co-operation of men', he claimed, 'can see to it that science, as well as armed men, is kept within the harness of civilization'.⁴

Perhaps it should not come as a surprise that Wilson would speak in such terms. After all, before he was a politician, initially as governor of New Jersey and then as president of the United States, he was a successful historian, political scientist, and president of Princeton University.⁵ However, the American president was not alone in taking up this theme in making the case for the League of Nations. Léon Bourgeois, the veteran French politician and a long-time advocate of a world association who had attended the pre-war peace conferences at the Hague, also touched upon the connection between science and war. Global interdependence in the 'economic, financial, moral and intellectual spheres' meant that that 'every wound inflicted at some point threatens to poison the whole organs'. For Bourgeois, the application of science towards warfare turned the former away from its 'proper object' of furnishing 'hope for the future'.⁶

Wilson and Bourgeois articulated a widespread sense of unease with matters of the mind that had gathered pace during the war and came to a crescendo upon its conclusion. This can be seen as part of a general loss of faith in the idea of 'civilization', which had been premised upon the idea of progress in history and which was, in turn, used to emphasize Euro-American political, racial, and cultural superiority.⁷ By the end of the First World War, many authors voiced anxieties about the consequences of the conflict for Europe's high culture and intellectual achievement, which was, in turn, frequently portrayed as an emblem of civilization itself. As people began to take stock of the damage wrought by the war, intellectual life emerged as a distinct field that required

⁴ Speech of Woodrow Wilson, 25 January 1919, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*, vol. 3, p. 179.

⁵ John Milton Cooper, *Woodrow Wilson: A Biography* (New York, 2011); A. Scott Berg, *Wilson* (London, 2014).

⁶ Speech of Léon Bourgeois, 25 January 1919, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*, vol. 3, pp. 183–4.

⁷ Jan Ifversen, 'The Crisis of European Civilisation after 1918', in Menno Spiering and Michael Wintle, eds., *Ideas of Europe Since 1914: The Legacy of the First World War* (Basingstoke, 2002), pp. 14–31; Mark Mazower, 'An International Civilization? Empire, Internationalism, and the Crisis of the Mid-Twentieth Century', *International Affairs* 82.3 (2006) pp. 553–66; Paul Betts, *Ruin and Renewal: Civilising Europe after the Second World War* (London, 2020), pp. 1–29.

reconstruction, and one which simultaneously provided the tools to effect the wider reconstitution of civilization. By the summer of 1920, extreme food shortages in Central and Eastern Europe meant that the need to aid intellectual life had taken on greater urgency and engendered a new humanitarian preoccupation: the salvation of European intellectuals.

Intellectual reconstruction was conceptualized as both a metaphorical and a material issue from the start of 1919 until the middle of 1920, by which time many humanitarian initiatives had begun to take shape. It was metaphorical in the sense that the events of the war led to much introspection among intellectuals about how a previously deeply held belief in the idea of progress – as they understood it – had come to a grinding halt with the global cataclysm of 1914. Framed in this manner, reconstruction was an intellectual process, which posed difficult questions about ideas and the nature of knowledge itself, as well as about the function of intellectuals in their respective societies. There were also more tangible issues at stake in the immediate aftermath of the war; physical institutions, many of which had been destroyed by fighting, needed to be rebuilt, while international connections required cultivation after over four years of bitter cultural warfare. The year 1919 was a time for taking stock and enumerating the material losses of wartime as well as interpreting their meaning for the worlds of learning and high culture. In the words of historian Jörn Leonhard, the end of the war marked a point ‘between the past and the future’.⁸

Nineteen nineteen was the year of the Paris Peace Conference, when politicians, diplomats, lobbyists, intellectuals, journalists, and observers descended upon the French capital. The conference itself had the daunting aim of ensuring peace in Europe and, given the breadth of issues involved and the scale of the problems, it acts as a prism through which post-war issues, be they political, social, or cultural, can be viewed. The mood of the time was somewhat paradoxical. Pessimism was widespread across Europe as contemporaries grappled with the scale and significance of wartime losses and sought to imbue them with a wider meaning for their individual nations and civilization more generally. At the same time, 1919 was a chance to remake the world

⁸ Jörn Leonhard, *Der überforderte Frieden: Versailles und die Welt, 1918–1923* (Munich, 2018), p. 22.

anew in order to ensure enduring peace, and thus there was a fleeting sense of hope and possibility. This was encapsulated in the aspiration of Wilsonian self-determination and the promise of a League of Nations.⁹ In this way, the formal end of the First World War afforded contemporaries a moment to contemplate the meaning of what had been lost while also mapping out visions of how things might change in the years ahead. Intellectuals were deeply involved in these processes as thinkers, embodiments of wartime decline, and potential agents of better futures.

The immediate post-war period was marked by three related developments which saw Europe's cultural crisis transformed from an intellectual matter to one that required large-scale material assistance. First, many prognostications of civilizational decline followed the end of the war and contributed to a widespread sense that Europe was experiencing, in the resonant words of the French poet Paul Valéry, a 'crisis of the mind'. The second development was the way in which intellectual reconstruction was discussed at the Paris Peace Conference as both a measure of wartime loss and reason for reparation as well as a means of building a lasting peace. Furthermore, the discussions in Paris demonstrated a preoccupation with the rise of Bolshevism and the fear, widely held by many politicians and diplomats, that it might take root in the emerging successor states of Central and Eastern Europe. This fear of Bolshevism was linked to a third dynamic – the emerging humanitarian crisis in Central Europe and the growing realization that hundreds of thousands of people faced starvation and required immediate aid. Early 1920 saw organizations like the British Quakers providing bespoke assistance to intellectuals in Central Europe and many others followed. The post-war crisis of civilization had, by the middle of 1920, become a humanitarian issue whereby aid to Europe's intellectuals was formally organized and justified as a means of stabilizing European societies in order to ward off the collapse of civilization itself.

Crisis of Civilization, Crisis of the Mind

The American ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Henry Morgenthau, argued in late 1918 that had Germany emerged victorious from the conflict, 'civilization would have been set back in its march of progress

⁹ Jay Winter, *Dreams of Peace and Freedom: Utopian Moments in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, CT, 2006), pp. 48–9.

possibly one thousand years, at least five hundred'.¹⁰ The total violence of the First World War led to a wave of cultural pessimism and widespread claims that European civilization was on its last legs. While thinkers had been preoccupied with ideas of civilizational decline before the First World War, the conflict's culmination saw a resurgence of reflection on the issue.¹¹ From passing comments in diplomatic correspondence at the peace conference to metaphors that underscored the importance of a particular issue or elaborate tracts that sought to explore the issue systematically, invocations of civilizational collapse were widespread in 1919.

The crisis of civilization has been dealt with extensively by historians but provides important context for the intellectual reconstruction that emerged in the aftermath of the First World War.¹² Discourses of civilizational decline usually sought to historicize the present crisis through comparison to dead civilizations of antiquity. The best-known articulation of the crisis of civilization was Oswald Spengler's *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (*The Decline of the West*), the first volume of which was published in April 1918. Spengler argued that civilization was in its old age and on the cusp of inevitable decline, as many historic civilizations before had declined.¹³ Although the majority of the book had been written before the war, its publication at the end of the war resonated in Germany and it had sold 100,000 copies by 1926, as well as being translated into many languages.¹⁴ Other authors

¹⁰ 'Hold High the Light of Liberty', *Wisconsin State Journal*, 15 December 1918, p. 14.

¹¹ Richard Overly, *The Morbid Age: Britain and the Crisis of Civilization, 1919–1939* (London, 2010), p. 10; Fritz Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community, 1890–1933* (Cambridge, MA, 1969), p. 2; Zeev Sternhell, *The Anti-Enlightenment Tradition* (New Haven, CT, 2010), pp. 369–70.

¹² Ifversen, 'The Crisis of European Civilisation after 1918', p. 14; Mark Hewitson and Matthew d'Auria, 'Introduction: Europe during the Forty Years' Crisis', in Hewitson and d'Auria eds., *Europe in Crisis: Intellectuals and the European Idea 1917–1957* (New York, 2012), pp. 1–11.

¹³ Oswald Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes: Umriss einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte* (Munich, 1963; orig. 1918); Peter Watson, *A Terrible Beauty: The People and Ideas that Shaped the Modern Mind* (London, 2000), pp. 171–2; Christophe Charle, *Discordance des temps: une brève histoire de la modernité* (Paris, 2011), pp. 339–42; Leonhard, *Der überforderte Freiden*, pp. 622–38.

¹⁴ Philipp Blom, *Fracture: Life and Culture in the West 1918–1938* (London, 2015), pp. 45–6.

made similar dark comparisons. In his book about post-war social reconstruction, the American sociologist Charles A. Ellwood claimed that ‘careful students of civilization’ had pointed out the ‘disturbing resemblances’ between contemporary Europe and the deposed civilization of ancient Rome.¹⁵ The Italian historian Guglielmo Ferrero published widely on this topic in the immediate aftermath of the war, offering comparisons between post-war Europe and ancient Rome.¹⁶

Civilization has been defined in myriad ways since the Enlightenment. The term emerged in the eighteenth century in the context of jurisprudence but had, by the century’s end, become synonymous with advancement and refinement. All of these qualities were held to be antithetical to barbarism, and the binary quality of civilization existing in opposition to a barbaric other remained an important characteristic into the early twentieth century.¹⁷ The nineteenth century saw the emergence of a ‘standard of civilization’, a legal framework utilized to denote the global extent of international law, all of which was premised upon European superiority. This facilitated, according to Mark Mazower’s recent analysis, a ‘cultural mapping of the world’ which placed Europe at its heart.¹⁸ The legal utilization of the term meant that civilization could be invoked as both a claim to power and a rationale for colonial violence.¹⁹ By the start of the twentieth century, civilization was frequently cited as a justification for European imperial rule, while also becoming increasingly fractured according to national characteristics, traditions, and cultures.²⁰

¹⁵ Charles A. Ellwood, *The Social Problem: A Reconstructive Analysis* (New York, 1919), p. 3.

¹⁶ Guglielmo Ferrero, ‘La ruine de la civilisation antique: réflexions et comparaisons’, *Revue des deux mondes*, 53 (1919), pp. 311–29; Guglielmo Ferrero, *The Ruin of the Ancient Civilization and the Triumph of Christianity: With Some Consideration of Conditions in the Europe of Today* (London, 1921).

¹⁷ Betts, *Ruin and Renewal*, pp. 11–12; Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, CA, 1994), pp. 4–5.

¹⁸ Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea* (London, 2012), p. 71.

¹⁹ Mazower, ‘An International Civilization?’ p. 554.

²⁰ Betts, *Ruin and Renewal*, p. 12; Sternhell, *The Anti-Enlightenment Tradition*, pp. 316–70.

Writing in 2019, Eric D. Weitz claimed that the term contained ‘both humanitarian and exterminatory possibilities’.²¹

The First World War was fought and portrayed in allied countries as a struggle to defend civilization; days after the German invasion of Belgium, the French philosopher Henri Bergson who would later chair the League of Nations’ International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation (ICIC), proclaimed that ‘the struggle against Germany is the struggle of civilization against barbarism’.²² For the Allies, their war for civilization meant fighting for a number of (sometimes contradictory) concepts, such as the ideas of 1789 and the rights of man, democracy, universalism, Christianity, and the heritage of ancient Greece and Rome. In opposition, German intellectuals claimed to be fighting to defend German *Kultur*, which was more rooted in regionality, encompassed civic ideas like self-sacrifice and heroism, and viewed civilization as materialistic.²³ These opposing visions of the war had the effect of popularizing the idea that the war was being fought in defence of not only territory but also a cultural ideal.²⁴ The Inter-Allied victory medal, issued in 1919, proclaimed that the conflict should be known as ‘the Great War for Civilisation’ and ensured that the association of the allied cause with that of civilization would be cast in bronze for eternity.

Intellectual Responses to the Crisis of Civilization

While civilization held multiple meanings in different contexts, it was frequently associated with high culture and intellectual life. Seen this way, the problems facing the world of intellect following the First World War symbolized the wider perceived threat to European civilization itself. This was the argument of Paul Valéry, who wrote, as the peace conference was sitting in April 1919, that ‘a civilization is as fragile as a life’.²⁵ For Valéry, the war had not only grievously damaged

²¹ Eric D. Weitz, *A World Divided: The Global Struggle for Human Rights in the Age of Nation-States* (Princeton, NJ, 2019), p. 109.

²² Irish, *The University at War*, p. 24.

²³ Wolfgang J. Mommsen, ‘German Artists, Writers, and Intellectuals, and the Meaning of War 1914–1918’, in John Horne ed., *State, Society and Mobilization in Europe During the First World War* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 21–38; Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *14–18: Understanding the Great War* (New York, 2002), p. 116.

²⁴ Rasmussen, ‘Mobilising Minds’, p. 396.

²⁵ Paul Valéry, ‘The Spiritual Crisis’, *The Athenaeum*, 11 April 1919, p. 182.

European culture through its destructiveness and the ‘thousands of young writers and young artists who are dead’, but also presented the troubling phenomenon whereby the accumulated knowledge and science of Europe – formerly evidence of its supposed civilizational superiority – had been applied to warfare.²⁶ Valéry identified three crises threatening Europe by 1919: military, economic, and intellectual.²⁷ For Valéry, Europe’s crisis of the mind was also linked to a more general fear of European decline and the rise of Asia.²⁸

Many thinkers reflected on the fate of civilization in the same period. The influential Belgian historian of science George Sarton wrote that intellectual reconstruction was just as important as material reconstruction in order to ‘preserve the sacred ideals which are the essence of our civilization’.²⁹ Other writers engaged in discussions of civilizational collapse in a more critical manner. In June 1919, the French pacifist Romain Rolland wrote sarcastically of the decline of civilization, seeing it as euphemism for colonial rule: ‘goodbye, Europe, queen of thought, guide of humanity. You have lost your way, you lie trampled in a cemetery. Your place is there. Go to sleep! And let others lead the world.’³⁰ Conservative Germans were also critical of the idea of civilization (or *Zivilisation*) because it was antithetical to the *Kultur* for which they had fought the war; the novelist Thomas Mann argued at the conflict’s end that civilization was un-German and thus equated to support for the allied cause.³¹ Writing a number of years later, the historian Arnold Toynbee, who attended the Paris Peace Conference as part of the British delegation and spent much of his career preoccupied with the study of civilizations, was critical of ‘the rational Western intellectual’ because, while they could admit the fallibility of civilization after the war, they had not identified its fragility before 1914.³²

The crisis of civilization was, for the most part, an intangible, intellectual construct; it was given primary expression in the world of books and journals which discussed the fallibility of a culture

²⁶ Valéry, ‘The Spiritual Crisis’, pp. 182–3.

²⁷ Valéry, ‘The Spiritual Crisis’, p. 183.

²⁸ Paul Valéry, ‘The Intellectual Crisis’, *The Athenaeum*, 2 May 1919, pp. 279–80.

²⁹ George Sarton, ‘War and Civilization’, *Isis*, 2.2 (1919), pp. 317–8.

³⁰ Romain Rolland, ‘Aux peuples assassinés’, *L’Art Libre*, 15 June 1919, p. 66.

³¹ Thomas Mann, *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man* (New York, 1983), p. 36.

³² Arnold J. Toynbee, *The World After the Peace Conference* (London, 1926), p. 88.

which was built upon ideas of perennial progress and argued that examples from antiquity formed instructive precedents. It was, in that respect, an imagined crisis, but one which would provide a crucial part of the lexicon utilized to explain the material threat posed to intellectual life thereafter. The language of civilizational crisis would also be used to explain and justify the imperative of humanitarian relief in the early 1920s.

By the end of the First World War, intellectual life was seen as both a symptom of Europe's wider decline and also as a unique resource that could bring about its recovery. As Valéry wrote in his diagnosis of Europe's 'spiritual crisis', the world faced a problem of disorder.³³ While the war had disrupted intellectual life, many felt that intellectuals could also play a particular role in helping to re-establish European order. Alongside pessimistic assertions of the imminent decline of intellectual life, schemes emerged which sought to leverage organized intellectual life to build stable and peaceful societies. The key issue which most of these initiatives encountered was their international composition and the (un)willingness of participants to cooperate with the former enemy. Before the war, intellectual life was characterized by its international mindedness; after the conflict, the international community of scholars and writers was theoretically well-placed to rebuild international links, symbolically making peace with the former enemy and providing an example to their wider communities.³⁴

International pacifists saw a distinct role for intellectuals in salving the wounds of the war. This line of thinking developed during the conflict itself, where international appeals specifically targeted intellectuals as agents of peace. In October 1914, a petition drawn up by the German scientists Georg Friedrich Nicolai and Albert Einstein identified 'those who are esteemed and considered as authorities by their fellow-men' as crucial in salvaging European civilization in the face of destruction.³⁵ In early 1915, the International Peace Bureau in Berne issued an appeal 'to intellectual leaders in all nations' which urged them to 'bear aloft the banner of civilisation' and remain aloof from national hatred. It mapped out a special role for these intellectual leaders on the conclusion of peace when their

³³ Valéry, 'The Spiritual Crisis', p. 184.

³⁴ Fox, *Science Without Frontiers*, pp. 11–44.

³⁵ Georg Friedrich Nicolai, *The Biology of War* (New York, 1919), p. xix.

'words and deeds' would 'help to heal the wounds which are bleeding today'.³⁶

Following the formal cessation of hostilities, pacifist intellectuals were quick to propose international organization as a means of repudiating war and as a demonstration of transnational solidarity. Many of these proposals, while international in scope, centred on the French capital. On 26 June 1919, two days before the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, an appeal called the 'Proud Declaration of Intellectuals' appeared in the French socialist newspaper *l'Humanité*.³⁷ The petition was authored by the Romain Rolland, who had been an outspoken opponent of the conflict while it was ongoing. In 1914, Rolland wrote *Au-dessus de la mêlée*, a tract that was deeply critical of the recourse to aggressive nationalism by his erstwhile colleagues in the course of the war. Rolland addressed his appeal to 'workers of the mind, colleagues dispersed across the world and separated for five years by armies, censorship and the hatred of nations at war'. His declaration called on not only the reconstruction of the world of the mind that had existed before the war, but also its re-imagining as something 'more solid and more sure than that which existed before'. Rolland argued that the shared humanity of intellectuals ought to override everything else. His appeal was signed by more than 140 intellectuals representing nations such as France, Germany, Britain, Belgium, Italy, Russia, Switzerland, Greece, the United States, Austria, Argentina, Sweden, Hungary, India, Spain, and Hungary.³⁸

Rolland's appeal sparked a debate in France where conservative authors challenged the internationalism of the pacifist proposal and a reignited debate from the Dreyfus Affair of twenty years prior.³⁹ On 19 July 1919, a counter-appeal was published on the front page of *Le Figaro* by the conservative Catholic author Henri Massis. He criticized Rolland's 'bolshevism of the mind' in appealing to universal humanity over national identity. For Massis, the task of reconstruction should

³⁶ Henri La Fontaine and Henri Golay, 'To Intellectual Leaders in All Nations', January 1915. Harvard University Archives (HUA), Cambridge, MA, Charles W. Eliot Papers, UAI 15.894, Box 101, War Societies, 1915–18, M-P, 5 of 7.

³⁷ Romain Rolland, 'Fièvre déclaration d'intellectuels', *L'Humanité*, 26 June 1919, p. 1.

³⁸ Romain Rolland, 'Déclaration de l'Indépendance de l'esprit', in Rolland ed., *Quinze ans de combat (1919–1934)* (Paris, 1935), pp. 7–9.

³⁹ On the Dreyfus Affair, see Ruth Harris, *The Man on Devil's Island: Alfred Dreyfus and the Affair that Divided France* (London, 2011).

focus on defending French intellectual values, which would, in turn, be beneficial to humanity. ‘Victorious France wishes to retake its sovereign place in the order of the mind’, he claimed, suggesting that it was too early to talk about reconciliation with former enemies.⁴⁰ In a similar vein, the right-wing author and politician Maurice Barrès wrote a series of articles in the conservative *Écho de Paris* newspaper in 1919 on the theme of ‘the intellectual reconstruction of France’. Rather than seeing it as evidence of a collapsing civilization, Barrès praised the application of French science to warfare during the conflict.⁴¹ For Barrès, the war proved French intellectual superiority because it had salvaged ‘the accumulated treasures of high civilization’, meaning that there was no reason for the establishment of equal international intellectual relations.⁴² Both Masis and Barrès were opponents of universal ideas of the Enlightenment and French Revolution and their positions in 1919 were consistent with this.⁴³ For both, civilization was a national, rather than a universal endeavour, and a means by which France could lead the world.

Other pacifists viewed the war as an opportunity to reorganize intellectual life. The French socialist Henri Barbusse fought in the conflict and wrote one of its most famous anti-war treatises, *Le Feu*.⁴⁴ During the conflict he began to collaborate with a number of fellow combatants, as well as figures like Rolland, in the hope of creating an intellectual movement that could create a better social order.⁴⁵ Barbusse, like so many other intellectuals of the period, justified the need for action in terms of civilizational decline, writing: ‘we are the same as these hopeless and paralysed witnesses from antique

⁴⁰ ‘Pour un parti de l’intelligence’, *Le Figaro*, 19 July 1919, p. 1. Julien Benda later criticized Masis for his position, which Benda claimed was no different to that of Germany in 1871. Julien Benda, *La trahison des clercs* (Paris, 1927), pp. 297–8.

⁴¹ Maurice Barrès, ‘Le rôle de la science française pendant la guerre’, *L’Écho de Paris*, 26 May 1919, p. 1.

⁴² Maurice Barrès, ‘La reconstitution intellectuelle’, *L’Écho de Paris*, 7 April 1919, p. 1.

⁴³ Sternhell, *The Anti-Enlightenment Tradition*, pp. 316–8; Robert Wohl, *The Generation of 1914* (Cambridge, MA, 1979), pp. 5–18.

⁴⁴ Henri Barbusse, *Le Feu* (Paris, 1916).

⁴⁵ Henri Barbusse, *La lueur dans l’abîme: ce que veut le Groupe Clarté* (Paris, 1920), pp. 130–1; Nicole Racine, ‘The Clarté Movement in France, 1919–21’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 2.2 (1967), pp. 195–201; Raymond Lefebvre, ‘L’organisation de l’internationale intellectuelle’, *l’Art Libre*, 15 November 1919, p. 185.

cataclysms'.⁴⁶ The result was a group called *Clarté*, which felt that the international organization of intellectual life was key to ensuring global peace. Charles Richet, a pacifist, eugenicist, and physiologist, wrote in 1919 that *Clarté* aspired to create an 'internationalism of intelligence', by which he meant the adoption of inclusive international modes of thinking in science and art irrespective of whether one had been belligerent in the war. For Richet, the idea of nationalism in art and science was 'just as absurd as if the animals in a zoo or the plants in a botanic garden had national claims'.⁴⁷ *Clarté* held its first meeting in Paris in September 1919, by which time it had the support of writers with international reputations such as H. G. Wells, Upton Sinclair, Thomas Hardy, E. D. Morel, Rabindranath Tagore, and Stefan Zweig.⁴⁸ However, *Clarté* was short-lived; it planned to hold an international congress in Switzerland in 1920 but had fractured by that point over the issue of its adherence to the Third International and the use of violence.

The pacifist Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) also saw an important role for international intellect in the reconstruction of the world. Its position was mapped out at a conference held in Zurich in May 1919, which overlapped with the peace conference in Paris and was intended as an alternative to it. The Zurich conference was attended by 146 women from fifteen different countries and, unlike the gathering of victors in Paris, ex-enemy states were well-represented. Despite these differences, the Zurich conference proceeded from the same point of departure as so many post-war analyses, asserting that 'the events of the past five years have proved that our civilization has completely failed'. The conference resolved to set up an educational committee under the leadership of the Norwegian zoologist Emily Arnesen, with the goal of creating an international spirit in young people through education.⁴⁹ In a more detailed proposal written the following year, Arnesen stated that members of this committee needed to be selected carefully to imbue it with 'prestige and authority' with which to counter chauvinism. Such a committee, once

⁴⁶ Barbusse, *La lueur dans l'abîme*, p. 5.

⁴⁷ Charles Richet, 'L'internationalisme de l'intelligence', *L'Art Libre*, 15 October 1919, p. 165.

⁴⁸ Barbusse, *La lueur dans l'abîme*, p. 148.

⁴⁹ 'Proposals: Educational Programme', in *Rapport du congrès international de femmes* (Geneva, 1919) pp. 267–268, 314–315.

functioning, would constitute a ‘civilizing institution’ engaged in a ‘great communal civilizational task’.⁵⁰

Pacifists could articulate a vision for the full cooperation of international intellectuals as they had not engaged in the divisive discourse of wartime. For those who had been belligerent in their attitudes during the conflict, the task was much more complicated. Many international academic organizations dissolved following the outbreak of war in 1914, fracturing much of the intense internationalization that had taken place over the preceding half-century.⁵¹ Around the midpoint of the conflict, allied nations began reviving international collaboration while ensuring the ongoing exclusion of scholars from the Central Powers and instead casting the new bodies as inter-allied, rather than fully international bodies.⁵² This inter-allied emphasis continued into the post-war period, often becoming embedded into the structure of larger organizations.

Two major international organizations were established in 1919, the International Research Council (IRC) and the International Union of Academies (IUA), which represented the sciences and the humanities, respectively. The example of the IUA demonstrated the difficulties of resuming international cooperation after the war. In the spring of 1919, the Institut de France contacted their counterparts at the British Academy (BA) with a proposal to form a new body to replace the pre-war International Association of Academies. The proposal called for the continued exclusion of scholars from the Central Powers in the new organization. While the British Academy worried about ‘Europe being divided into two intellectual leagues’, it ultimately agreed to participate in the French initiative until such time as ‘it may be possible to readmit Germany and Austria to fellowship of civilized nations’.⁵³ It was

⁵⁰ Emily Arnesen, ‘Conseil international d’éducation et d’instruction publique’, *La contemporaine* (LAC), Nanterre, Fonds Duchêne, F/DELTA/RES/244/6, pp. 1–6.

⁵¹ A good overview of this phenomenon can be found in Martin H. Geyer and Johannes Paulmann, ‘Introduction: The Mechanics of Internationalism’, in Geyer and Paulmann eds., *The Mechanics of Internationalism* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 1–26.

⁵² Tomás Irish, ‘From International to Inter-allied: Transatlantic University Relations in the Era of the First World War, 1905–1920’, *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, 13.4 (2015), pp. 311–25.

⁵³ Sir Frederic Kenyon to President of Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres, 19 July 1919, British Academy Archives (BAA), London, Minutebook of the British Academy, 1912–1919, 189–90; 204.

a similar story with the IRC, which was established following two inter-allied conferences towards the end of the war.⁵⁴ The IRC's statutes explicitly excluded the former Central Powers and allowed neutrals to be admitted only by a three-quarters majority vote.⁵⁵ The non-inclusion of German scholars from many international intellectual organizations mirrored the wider exclusion of Germany from the League of Nations, which persisted until 1926.⁵⁶

The discourse of civilizational decline was widespread in 1919 and framed how many thought about post-war reconstruction, from issues of building peace, to the practice of intellectual work, to the issue of who was and was not admitted to the circle of 'civilized' nations after the war. Valéry's 'crisis of the mind' was a symptom of a wider malaise that had come to the fore during the war. The association of high culture and intellectual life with civilization meant that intellectuals could play an important and highly symbolic role in re-establishing European stability. The impediments to the stabilization of international relations, especially when it came to the reintegration of the former enemy, would present an ongoing challenge. All of these issues were apparent at the Paris Peace Conference.

The Paris Peace Conference

In his famous account of the Paris Peace Conference, John Maynard Keynes described Europe as exhibiting the 'fearful convulsions of a dying civilization'.⁵⁷ When the peace conference opened in January 1919, the victor states were tasked with building peace from Europe's ruins. The challenges facing the conference were exceptionally complex; four empires had collapsed in the course of the war and new polities had emerged to fill this power vacuum. The conference was to

⁵⁴ Fox, *Science without Frontiers*, pp. 72–82.

⁵⁵ A. G. Cock, 'Chauvinism and Internationalism in Science: The International Research Council, 1919–1926', *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London*, 37.2 (1983), p. 249.

⁵⁶ Daniel J. Kevles, "Into Hostile Political Camps": The Reorganization of International Science in World War I, *Isis*, 62. 1 (1971), pp. 47–60; Elisabeth Piller, *Selling Weimar: German Public Diplomacy and the United States, 1918–1933* (Stuttgart, 2021), p. 134; Horne, 'Demobilizing the Mind: France and the Legacy of the Great War, 1919–1939', pp. 101–19.

⁵⁷ John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (New York, 1920), p. 4.

agree the specific boundaries of many new states, while also deciding what to do with the vanquished powers of the war and determining what reparations they might pay for war damage. Woodrow Wilson was committed to the idea of setting up a League of Nations to prevent the outbreak of future wars. The Paris conference led to the drafting of peace treaties with the five defeated powers which were signed between June 1919 and August 1920, although the last of these, with the Ottoman Empire, was superseded in 1923 by the Lausanne Treaty.⁵⁸ Paris in 1919 was thronged with delegations, journalists, interested observers, and lobbyists who sought to influence the peace treaties on myriad issues. The French capital became the centre of the international world, minus formal representatives from vanquished states and Bolshevik Russia.

The Russian Civil War, a series of conflicts fought between reds, whites, and nationalists and other groups across Russia's western borderlands, constituted an ominous backdrop to the discussions in Paris, as did the associated fear that Bolshevism would spread into Eastern and Central Europe.⁵⁹ Bolshevism quickly came to take place of the barbaric 'other' in the allied imagination that had been occupied by the Central Powers during the war.⁶⁰ Throughout 1919, the struggle to 'save' Western civilization was both a matter of dealing with the vanquished powers in Europe as well as ensuring that Bolshevism did not advance further, especially into the new and unstable successor states. As the delegates were assembling in Paris in January 1919, the Spartacist uprising in Germany had just been suppressed. In London, the Fabian socialist Beatrice Webb wrote at the start of the peace conference in her diary that the 'future of the civilised world' depended upon the successful reconstruction of Germany.⁶¹ Bela Kun's communist revolution in

⁵⁸ On the peace conference, see: MacMillan, *Peacemakers*; Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford, 2007); Smith, *Sovereignty at the Paris Peace Conference*; Zara Steiner, *The Lights that Failed: European International History, 1919–1933* (Oxford, 2005). On Lausanne, see Jay Winter, *The Day the Great War Ended, 24 July 1923: The Civilianization of War* (Oxford, 2022).

⁵⁹ Gerwarth, *The Vanquished*, p. 86.

⁶⁰ John Horne and Robert Gerwarth, 'Bolshevism as Fantasy: Fear of Revolution and Counter-Revolutionary Violence, 1917–1923', in Horne and Gerwarth eds., *War in Peace: Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 42–3.

⁶¹ Beatrice Webb, diary entry for 14 January 1919, London School of Economics Archives and Special Collections (LSEASC), London, Beatrice Webb Typescript Diaries, LSE Archives/PASSFIELD/1/2/3666.

Hungary in May, while short-lived, further exacerbated fears of Bolshevism among allied peacemakers.⁶² In his memoir of the conference, the American Secretary of State Robert Lansing described Eastern Europe as ‘a volcano on the very point of eruption’. Without swift action to ward off revolution, Lansing warned that ‘it threatened to spread to other countries and even engulf the very foundations of modern civilization’.⁶³

The peace conference was a site of many lofty aspirations, none more so than Wilson’s doctrine of self-determination, which inspired hopes in many anti-colonial nationalists and other national groups but was ultimately applied unsatisfactorily – where it was applied at all.⁶⁴ Because the conference was a magnet for activists and lobbyists from across the world, many proposals were received which had the intention of reorganizing international intellectual life in different ways, but few were seen as priorities and consequently they went unfulfilled. Many years later, the British classical scholar and internationalist Gilbert Murray argued that the statesmen at Paris ‘paid far too little attention to economics and none to education’.⁶⁵ Intellectual and cultural issues were, however, treated seriously in discussions about wartime culpability and reparations. Here, national delegations cited the damage done to intellectual capital in wartime, in the process ensuring that the wartime destruction of Europe’s high culture was laid bare.

The peace conference was a moment to consider the extent of wartime damage to sites of cultural and intellectual importance as well as being a forum to facilitate their reconstruction. These issues generally emerged at bodies established to deal with other issues, such as the Commission on the Responsibility of the Authors of the War and on Enforcement of Penalties (CRAWEP) and the Commission on the Reparation of Damage (CRD). Both of these commissions were presented with detailed evidence of the cultural destruction of wartime which was submitted by

⁶² Gerwarth, *The Vanquished*, pp. 118–52.

⁶³ Robert Lansing, *The Peace Negotiations: A Personal Narrative* (New York, 1921), p. 111.

⁶⁴ Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*, and Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton, 2019), pp. 37–70.

⁶⁵ *Education and the United Nations: A Report of a Joint Commission of the Council for Education in World Citizenship and the London International Assembly* (Washington, DC, 1943), p. 4.



Figure 1.1 French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau addresses a session of the Paris Peace Conference, 1919 (Mondadori Portfolio/Hulton Fine Art Collection/Getty)

states to make the case for criminal prosecution and moral compensation, respectively. The evidence assessed by these commissions detailed instances of damage done to churches, schools, libraries, universities, books, and artworks and cumulatively constituted proof of the enemy's wartime conduct but also amounted to a detailed record of the harm done to the fabric of cultural and intellectual life during the conflict.

The CRAWEP was set up in January 1919 to enquire 'into the responsibilities relating to the war' and breaches of existing international law during the conflict.⁶⁶ Its purpose was to ascertain culpability for the war with a view to bringing the perpetrators to trial. The submissions to this commission were all framed by the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907, in order to demonstrate where

⁶⁶ 'Commission on the Responsibility of the Authors of the War and on Enforcement of Penalties', *American Journal of International Law*, 14.1/2 (1920), p. 95.

breaches in international law took place. Article twenty seven of the Hague rules explicitly prohibited war being waged upon buildings dedicated to religion, art, or science, while article fifty-six of the 1907 convention forbade the wilful destruction or seizure of the property of institutions ‘dedicated to religion, charity and education, the arts and sciences’.⁶⁷ A wide range of evidence of cultural damage of different types was submitted to the commission, including claims by the Belgian, Serbian, and Romanian delegations of deliberate destruction of libraries and educational institutions by invading and occupying forces during the war.⁶⁸ The commission concluded that among the crimes that should be prosecuted was ‘wanton destruction of religious, charitable, educational, and historic buildings and monuments’.⁶⁹ Political disagreements meant that the post-war trials, which began in Leipzig in 1921, fell short of the aspirations of many of the parties at the Paris Peace Conference; criminal prosecution for cultural destruction remained unfulfilled.⁷⁰

It was within the realm of compensation, rather than criminal responsibility, that the cultural excesses of the war became more apparent. The CRD was the primary forum for these discussions.⁷¹ When different national delegations submitted their list of claims in February 1919, they were not bound by the specific language of the Hague conventions and thus cultural damage was elaborated upon in greater detail to make the case for moral redress. The French and British submissions both made reference to artworks as a category of war damage.⁷² The Serbian document referenced damage to libraries, museums, theatres, and physics and chemistry

⁶⁷ O’Keefe, *The Protection of Cultural Property in Armed Conflict*, p. 24. ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/ART/195-200066?OpenDocument [accessed 8 June 2021].

⁶⁸ The Belgian, Serbian, and Romanian claims can be found in *La paix de Versailles: responsabilités des auteurs de la guerre et sanctions* (Paris, 1930), pp. 69–85; 110–5; 216–7.

⁶⁹ ‘Commission on the Responsibility of the Authors of the War and on Enforcement of Penalties’, pp. 114–5.

⁷⁰ John Horne and Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities 1914: A History of Denial* (New Haven, CT, 2001), pp. 330–55.

⁷¹ Wayne Sandholtz, *Prohibiting Plunder: How Norms Change* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 108–25.

⁷² ‘Mémoire de la délégation française’, *La paix de Versailles: la Commission de Réparations des Dommages*, I (Paris, 1932), p. 190, ‘Mémoire de la délégation britannique’, p. 206.

laboratories.⁷³ The Czechoslovak submission discussed ‘intellectual and moral damage’ while the Belgian document had a separate category for ‘science and art’, which included universities, observatories, churches, monuments, and pieces of art ‘belonging to the state’.⁷⁴ The language of cultural damage and reparation reflected the differing national experiences of the war and the relative value of different cultural and intellectual sites and practices within them.

New states also appealed to the peace conference to arrange the restitution of intellectual capital to them not because of wartime damage, but as a consequence of the collapse of empire. The new Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes wrote to the CRD to request that the new Yugoslav state be sent a share of collections of state universities, academies, and scientific institutions in Austria in proportion with the number of inhabitants who were incorporated into the new state from the former Habsburg Empire. It also called for the return of ‘archives, books, manuscripts, museum pieces, artworks, removed or taken away, from any period’ belonging to the territory now comprising the new Yugoslav state, as well as all ‘writings and documents constituting a source of the history of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes’.⁷⁵ In this manner, intellectual capital was portrayed as essential in the creation of new, post-imperial states.

The submissions to both the CRAWEP and the CRD enumerated, in clear and legally informed language, the cultural excesses of wartime violence. The work of the CRD proved protracted and contentious, with the commission itself, as well as the Council of Four (made up of leaders of the major allied states), adding different provisions to the final treaties which meant that they were not consistent in terms of what damage to intellectual property required reparation.⁷⁶ The results

⁷³ ‘Projet de la délégation serbe’, *La paix de Versailles: La Commission de Réparations des Dommages*, I (Paris, 1932), p. 188.

⁷⁴ ‘Classement des dommages de guerre de la République tchécoslovaque’ and ‘Projet de la délégation belge’, *La paix de Versailles: La Commission de Réparations des Dommages*, I, pp. 204, 207.

⁷⁵ Copies of Yugoslav proposals (dated 17 May 1919), communicated by John C. Shvegel to Sumner, 21 May 1919, The National Archives (United Kingdom, TNA), FO 608/308.

⁷⁶ Erik Goldstein, ‘Cultural Heritage, British Diplomacy, and the German Peace Settlement of 1919’, *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 30 (2019), pp. 336–57; Andrzej Jakubowski, *State Succession in Cultural Property* (Oxford, 2015);

were mixed but demonstrated a clear Western-centrism whereby damage done to Western sites – as well as damage done by Germany – was held to a higher moral standard and thus required reparation. For this reason, article 247 of the Treaty of Versailles required that Germany restore manuscripts and incunabula to Louvain library in Belgium.⁷⁷ At the conference, a disgruntled John Maynard Keynes claimed that the punitive reparation settlement would ‘sow the decay of the whole civilized life of Europe’.⁷⁸

Intellectual Reconstruction and the Post-war Settlements

Having visited the peace conference in April 1919, Guglielmo Ferrero wrote that what the world needed to avert the collapse of civilization was ‘an Esperanto of the spirit if not of the flesh’.⁷⁹ Beyond the formal commissions, a considerable range of petitions and proposals were submitted to the conference for consideration. Some of these came from representatives of national groups, while others came from transnational associations or private individuals. Most were united in the conviction that Paris was the place where the world would be rebuilt for the better.⁸⁰ Much as intellectuals were pre-occupied with the issue of reconstruction in 1919 and fostering international intellectual cooperation to build stability, the peace conference was a forum for discussions about how intellectual life might be rebuilt and, in turn, contribute to global stability. However, despite the prevalence of rhetoric regarding civilizational decline and the prominence of scholars in national delegations, the peacemakers did not generally address

Ana Filipa Vrdoljak, ‘Enforcement of Restitution of Cultural Heritage through Peace Agreements’, in Francesco Francioni and James Gordley eds., *Enforcing International Cultural Heritage Law* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 22–39; Sandholtz, *Prohibiting Plunder*; Jeremiah J. Garsha, ‘Expanding Vergangenheitsbewältigung? German Repatriation of Colonial Artefacts and Human Remains’, *Journal of Genocide Research*, 22 (2020), pp. 46–61.

⁷⁷ Tomás Irish, ‘The “Moral Basis” of Reconstruction? Humanitarianism, Intellectual Relief and the League of Nations’, *Modern Intellectual History*, 17.3 (2020), p. 769.

⁷⁸ Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, p. 225.

⁷⁹ Guglielmo Ferrero, ‘The Crisis of Western Civilization’, *The Atlantic Monthly*, 125.5 (1920), p. 710.

⁸⁰ Thomas R. Davies, ‘The Roles of Transnational Associations in the 1919 Paris Peace Settlement: A Comparative Assessment of Proposals and Their Influence’, *Contemporary European History*, 31.3 (2022), pp. 353–67.

intellectual or cultural matters in the treaties beyond the category of reparations.⁸¹

Ideas for intellectual reconstruction abounded in Paris. The American educator Fannie Fern Andrews was appointed to represent the American Bureau of Education at the conference. Andrews had travelled to The Hague in 1915 to attend a meeting of political activists working for peace and one of the key ideas that she developed called for the establishment of an international bureau of education as part of a post-war settlement. In Paris in 1919, she drafted an article for the Covenant of the League of Nations to establish an educational institution but this was not adopted in the final settlement. While unsuccessful in Paris, Andrews' proposal was influential in the creation of the International Bureau of Education at Geneva in 1925.⁸²

A similar initiative was proposed by the Belgian internationalist and peace activist Paul Otlet. Before 1914, Otlet and his collaborator Henri La Fontaine were involved in many schemes that sought to categorize international knowledge. This began with international bibliographical projects and ultimately led to the establishment of the Union of International Associations (UIA) in 1910.⁸³ In February 1919, the UIA proposed the creation of a 'Charter of Intellectual and Moral Interests'. This advocated for the inclusion of a 'charter of intelligence' alongside a labour and economic charter to guide the League of Nations and made the case that any exercise in world government would need to take account of intellectual matters.⁸⁴

⁸¹ On expert membership of national delegations see: Tomás Irish, 'Scholarly Identities in War and Peace: the Paris Peace Conference and the Mobilization of Intellect', *Journal of Global History*, 11.3 (2016), pp. 365–86; Volker Prott, 'Tying up the Loose Ends of National Self-determination: British, French and American Experts in Peace Planning, 1917-1919', *Historical Journal*, 57.3 (2014), pp. 727–50.

⁸² Fannie Fern Andrews, *Memory Pages of My Life* (Boston, MA, 1948), pp. 112–8; Jan Stöckmann, *The Architects of International Relations: Building a Discipline, Designing the World, 1914–1940* (Cambridge, 2022), pp. 1–3.

⁸³ W. Boyd Rayward, 'Creating the UIA: Henri La Fontaine, Cyrille van Overbergh and Paul Otlet', in Daniel Laqua, Christophe Verbruggen and Wouter van Acker, eds., *International Organizations and Global Civil Society: Histories of the Union of International Associations* (London, 2019), pp. 17–35; Alex Wright, *Cataloguing the World: Paul Otlet and the Birth of the Information Age* (New York, 2014).

⁸⁴ Daniel Laqua, Christophe Verbruggen, and Wouter Van Acker, 'Introduction: Reconstructing the Identities of an International Non-Governmental Intelligence Agency', in *International Organizations and Global Civil Society*,

Otlet further developed on these ideas later in 1919, calling for the creation of a Global Intellectual Centre to serve the League of Nations. He argued that the League would need to be equipped with political, economic, and intellectual organs, with all three 'forming the framework of the civilization of tomorrow'.⁸⁵ 'Our generation must call upon intelligence', Otlet claimed, to address the problems of the future, and this required the establishment of a centre to bring together national representatives from around the globe to exchange information and conduct, conserve, and disseminate research.⁸⁶ Otlet's proposal built upon much internationalist work which had taken place in the world of science and letters over the preceding half century and, more specifically, the efforts which the UIA had been making since 1910. The Belgian foreign minister Paul Hymans argued that international intellectual relations should be included in the Covenant of the League of Nations, a proposal that was, in the words of one account, received 'coldly'.⁸⁷ These proposals later became influential in the establishment of the League's International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation (ICIC) in 1922.⁸⁸ Otlet's proposal demonstrated that intellectuals and intelligence were seen as potentially important in helping to restore order to the world.

The American historian James Shotwell took a different approach. He felt that intellectual life might contribute to post-war stability through the writing of history. As a member of Woodrow Wilson's team of experts at the peace conference, Shotwell worked on the establishment of the International Labour Organization.⁸⁹ He also developed a project to make official war documentation accessible to researchers. During the war, Shotwell had become convinced of the idea that historical research should be directly applicable to the modern world, with its influence on public opinion being a key measure of its

p. 1; Daniel Laqua, *The Age of Internationalism and Belgium: Peace, Progress and Prestige* (Manchester, 2015), p. 194.

⁸⁵ Paul Otlet, 'Centre intellectuel mondial au service de la Société des Nations', LNA/R1027/13B/4675/4646, p. 5.

⁸⁶ Otlet, 'Centre intellectuel mondial', p. 6.

⁸⁷ Gwilym Davies, *Intellectual Cooperation between the Two Wars* (London, 1943), Gwilym Davies Papers, National Library of Wales (NLW), Aberystwyth, V/8/21, p. 4.

⁸⁸ League of Nations, *Ten Years of World Co-operation* (Geneva, 1930), p. 313.

⁸⁹ Lawrence E. Gelfand, *The Inquiry: American Preparations for Peace, 1917–1919* (New Haven, CT, 1963).

success.⁹⁰ Raising the ominous spectre of civilizational decline, he claimed in 1918 that ‘unless a systematic effort is made to deal with the problem of preserving the records of the present, our age will leave no more record than that which saw the fall of Rome’.⁹¹ In Paris, Shotwell advocated for ‘all existing official papers and documents of Germany’ to be accessible to researchers, authorized by the League of Nations.⁹² He also urged the British government to make its war archives available to researchers.⁹³ ‘Without documents’, he argued in a lecture at the Sorbonne in May 1919, ‘there can be no history’.⁹⁴

While Shotwell’s project was ultimately unsuccessful, archives did appear in a number of the post-war treaties. The collapse of empires presented difficulties as new states made claims upon archival records formerly held centrally by imperial governments, as was the case with the Habsburgs in Vienna. In the years following the peace conference, Austria signed a series of agreements for the return of archives with Czechoslovakia and Romania, before a general convention was agreed between Austria, Italy, Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia, and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1922.⁹⁵ These agreements were a measure of the present-day administrative importance of archives as well as their value in providing historical substance to claims of national difference. They did not seek to foster international understanding of the conflict as Shotwell’s proposal had envisaged and this meant that, as he wrote in 1924, ‘vast masses of source material essential for the historian were effectively placed beyond his reach’.⁹⁶ The American instead turned his attention to working with individuals who had direct experience of war government.⁹⁷ He was appointed editor of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace’s (CEIP) *Economic and Social History of the World War* project while in Paris and used his time there to recruit contributors, with the series eventually running to

⁹⁰ Josephson, *James T. Shotwell and the Rise of Internationalism in America*, p. 105.

⁹¹ ‘Favors trade research’, *New York Times*, 29 June 1918, p. 7.

⁹² Shotwell, *At the Paris Peace Conference*, p. 300.

⁹³ Shotwell, *At the Paris Peace Conference*, p. 357.

⁹⁴ Shotwell, ‘The Social History of the War: Preliminary Considerations’, p. 292.

He repeated this line in the preface to Hubert Hall’s Carnegie volume on *British Archives and Sources for the History of the World War* (London, 1925), ix.

⁹⁵ Jakubowski, *State Succession in Cultural Property*, p. 78.

⁹⁶ Shotwell, ‘Preface’, p. x. ⁹⁷ Josephson, *James T. Shotwell*, pp. 106–7.

152 volumes.⁹⁸ In a speech in Belgrade in 1925, Shotwell justified his vast project because it would ‘preserve for future generations all documents that relate to the late war’.⁹⁹

Shotwell’s initiative was part of a wider concern to preserve war documents. In 1917, the French government announced the creation of a Library and Museum of the War. Building upon a private initiative, its purpose was to bring together and catalogue war documents and to make them available to researchers to ‘later write the history of current events’.¹⁰⁰ Herbert Hoover, too, felt a keen desire that the war should be documented in full. In 1918, he put up \$50,000 for the creation of a war library at Stanford University, and paid for a team of researchers led by E.D. Adams to gather documents in Paris.¹⁰¹ At the peace conference, Hoover made an unsuccessful request that Adams be allowed to read and make copies of ‘documents of historical interest to the Peace Conference’, with a view to them being sent to Stanford.¹⁰² Another of Hoover’s scholars, Frank A. Golder, was a member of the Inquiry and was later appointed to a ‘special mission’ by Hoover to collect documents for Stanford while working with the American Relief Administration in Russia.¹⁰³ Archibald Cary Coolidge, a historian and director of the Harvard University Library, also served on Wilson’s Inquiry and later worked with the ARA in Russia; he used his time in Europe to buy up books for his institution’s new Widener Memorial Library.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ Katharina Rietzler, ‘The War as History: Writing the Economic and Social History of the First World War’, *Diplomatic History*, 38. 4 (2014), pp. 826–39.

⁹⁹ James Shotwell, ‘The Effects of the War’, 9 October 1925, CURBML, Shotwell Papers, Box 280, Economic & Social History of WW I, Reviews, General, Part II.

¹⁰⁰ ‘Notice sommaire’, c1919, CURBML, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (CEIP) Centre Européen, Box 144, Folder 1; Camille Bloch, ‘Centres d’études et de documentation pour l’histoire de la guerre: bibliothèque et musée français de la guerre’, *Révue de synthèse historique*, 33.7 (1921), pp. 37–44.

¹⁰¹ *Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace* (Stanford, CA, 1963), pp. 1–2.

¹⁰² Minutes of the daily meetings of commissioners plenipotentiary, Tuesday, 24 June 1919, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States: The Paris Peace Conference, 1919*, vol. 11 (Washington, DC, 1945), pp. 245–6.

¹⁰³ Golder to Bowden, 2 October 1920, HILA, Frank A. Golder Papers (FGP), Box 22, Folder 5, Reel 28.

¹⁰⁴ Gerald M. Rosberg, ‘Leon Trotsky’s Personal Papers’, *Harvard Crimson*, 3 July 1967.

The peace conference was a magnet for myriad ideas about how to build a stable post-war order. Drawing on wider discourses of civilizational decline, intellectual life featured in many proposals to the conference but, as the peacemakers prioritized other issues, few of these proposals made their way into post-war treaties or the Covenant of the League of Nations. While there was a widely articulated desire among intellectuals to rebuild Europe's cultural life following the war, this was generally considered in abstract and intangible terms that related to the resumption, reorganization, or reconceptualization of intellectual activities. While the peace conference was sitting, a more tangible threat to intellectual life emerged which linked fears about the spread of Bolshevism, the decline of civilization, and the wellbeing of those involved in intellectual pursuits. This new crisis became a major pre-occupation of the politicians and diplomats assembled in the French capital and was the spur for the reconstruction of intellectual life to begin in earnest.

The Post-war Humanitarian Crisis

Having toured Europe in October 1919, Sir William Goode, the British Director of Relief, reported back to his government on the conditions in Central Europe, paying particular attention to the deprivation in Vienna. 'For the first time in my life', he wrote, 'I found a whole nation, or what was left of it, in utter, hopeless despair'.¹⁰⁵ Central Europe had experienced extreme hunger in wartime but this became acute in 1919 and was not helped by the decision of the allied powers to continue their blockade of the Central Powers until the signing of the Treaty of Versailles in June 1919.¹⁰⁶ The peace conference was inundated with reports of famine in Central and Eastern Europe, which became more graphic and more insistent as the year progressed.

The imperative of providing food aid to those who were starving was connected to wider perceived fears regarding the advance of Bolshevism after the war and the salvaging of civilization. At the peace conference, Robert Lansing, the American Secretary of State, famously remarked that 'full stomachs mean no Bolsheviks', and

¹⁰⁵ Dispatch from Sir William Goode, 1 January 1920, *Miscellaneous Series No. 1* (1920). *Economic Conditions in Central Europe* (London, 1920), p. 9.

¹⁰⁶ Nicholas Mulder, *The Economic Weapon: The Rise of Sanctions as a Tool of Modern War* (New Haven, CT, 2022), pp. 88–108.

many allied politicians held similar views.¹⁰⁷ Goode argued that ‘it is inconceivable that the conditions I have witnessed over half of Europe . . . can be allowed to continue without a daily risk of political conflagration such as that which now isolates Russia from the civilized world’.¹⁰⁸ And while many believed that the post-war settlement was a means of salvaging civilization, critics argued that it could achieve the opposite. ‘To aim deliberately at the impoverishment of Central Europe’, claimed Keynes in his critique of the allied reparations policy, would lead to a ‘final confrontation’ between reaction and revolution, which would destroy ‘the civilization and the progress of our generation’.¹⁰⁹

Nineteen nineteen saw both the creation of new humanitarian organizations and the reconfiguration of more longstanding entities, both in order to address Europe’s post-war crises. These actions were rooted in a desire to counter Bolshevism as well as a general sense of moral responsibility to feed Central Europe, motivations which sat uncomfortably alongside a reticence among some to help former Central Power states.¹¹⁰ The American Relief Administration (ARA) was established in February 1919 following an executive order by Woodrow Wilson. Armed with a \$100 million appropriation from Congress, it began food distribution in April 1919.¹¹¹ Under the leadership of Herbert Hoover, the ARA would become the key relief organization in Europe in the years that followed, although its federal mandate expired in June 1919 meaning that it then became a private body rather than a state-led one.¹¹² The ARA was, in the words of Tammy M. Proctor, an experiment in ‘the exportation of American values through food aid to most of Europe by the 1920s’.¹¹³ Staffed by well-educated young Americans, many of whom were themselves veterans of the war, the ARA’s network would prove important not just in its own rights but as a vessel through which smaller humanitarian initiatives could function.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁷ John M. Thompson, *Russia, Bolshevism and the Versailles Peace* (Princeton, NJ, 1966), p. 222.

¹⁰⁸ *Economic Conditions in Central Europe*, p. 14.

¹⁰⁹ Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, p. 268.

¹¹⁰ Irwin, *Making the World Safe*, p. 142.

¹¹¹ Cabanes, *The Great War and the Origins of Humanitarianism*, pp. 189–239.

¹¹² Irwin, ‘Taming Total War’, pp. 771–2.

¹¹³ Proctor, ‘An American Enterprise’, p. 30.

¹¹⁴ Bertrand Patenaude, *The Big Show in Bololand: The American Relief Expedition to Soviet Russia in the Famine of 1921* (Stanford, CA, 2002), p. 7.

At the same time as the ARA was coming into being, many organizations which had been active in relief during the war, such as the American Red Cross (ARC), the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), and Near East Relief (NER), began to transition out of their wartime activities in order to address the post-war crises.¹¹⁵ The reconfiguration of relief activities after the war sometimes took on distinct intellectual contours. The work of the Commission for Relief in Belgium (CRB) left a balance of 150 million francs outstanding by the time its work came to an end in September 1919. Herbert Hoover proposed that a proportion of this surplus be used to establish an educational foundation managed by Belgians and Americans. Accordingly, the Fondation Universitaire was established and given fifty-five million francs with a mission statement to fund travelling scholarships for needy scholars and support the endowment of libraries and laboratories.¹¹⁶

As post-war humanitarianism took shape in 1919, Austria and Poland, and their child populations, were the focus of significant efforts.¹¹⁷ However, it was not until early 1920 that intellectual life was identified as a distinct and important problem amidst the wider humanitarian crisis. The work of the British Friends in Vienna formed an important precedent in the development of intellectual relief and ultimately led to the establishment of bespoke organizations that aimed at providing aid to the educated middle classes. The Quakers had been active in humanitarian aid during the First World War through distinct British and American organizations. The British Friends' relief mission had workers in Vienna by the summer of 1919.¹¹⁸ Unlike the ARA, the Quakers, for whom pacifism was a core belief, saw no issues in engaging with ex-enemy states such as Germany.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Julia F. Irwin, 'Taming Total War: Great War-Era American Humanitarianism and its Legacies', *Diplomatic History*, 38.4 (2014), p. 772.

¹¹⁶ Walter Montgomery, *Educational Reconstruction in Belgium: Department of the Interior Bureau of Education, Bulletin*, 1921, no. 39 (Washington, DC, 1921), pp. 9–11. Kenneth Bertrams, 'The Domestic Uses of Belgian–American "Mutual Understanding": The Commission for Relief in Belgium Educational Foundation, 1920–1940', *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, 13.4 (2015), pp. 326–43.

¹¹⁷ Rodogno, *Night on Earth*, pp. 38–9; Jaelyn Granick, *International Jewish Humanitarianism in the Age of the Great War* (Cambridge, 2021), pp. 80–8.

¹¹⁸ Proctor, 'An American Enterprise', pp. 34–5.

¹¹⁹ Proctor, 'An American Enterprise', p. 31; Guy Aiken, 'Feeding Germany: American Quakers in the Weimar Republic', *Diplomatic History*, 43.4 (2019), pp. 597–617.

By the spring of 1920, the Friends' Emergency and War Victims' Relief Committee began providing breakfasts for 'the most necessitous students', a task in which they were assisted by the Student Christian Movement.¹²⁰ The mission in Vienna distributed aid to students and professors that had been raised by a committee in Oxford; Agnes Murray, daughter of Gilbert Murray, was a crucial figure in this initiative. In a contemporary report, the British Quakers claimed that the wider humanitarian crisis now had a more specific intellectual focus: 'the hunger and poverty which is now spread wide over Central Europe threatens to overwhelm the Universities, which have been such important centres of learning for the Western World'.¹²¹ Another account claimed that 'students have gone to bed from hunger and exhaustion and have been found dead some days later'.¹²² The work of the British Friends was the first alarm bell that highlighted the impact of the hunger crisis on Europe's intellectual communities.

While the British Quakers highlighted and oversaw early intellectual relief in Vienna, they expressed some reluctance about maintaining a permanent institution with this focus. In the spring of 1920, the Friends issued an appeal calling on British universities to help their suffering colleagues elsewhere; it argued that 'we believe that in the interests of humanity and learning alike, the Universities of the more fortunate countries should come to the rescue of those in Central Europe'.¹²³ The appeal stated that 'one of the hardest hit sections in Vienna is found amongst the members of the university'.¹²⁴ In July 1920, a Universities' Committee was set up under the umbrella of the Imperial War Relief Fund, centralizing the work that had been initiated in Vienna by both the Friends' mission and the Student Christian Movement.¹²⁵ Chaired by Sir William Beveridge, the committee stated its aims as being to 'deal with distress among university

¹²⁰ The SCM had been active in Vienna since February 1920. 'Outlines of a scheme for assisting the universities of Central Europe', cMarch 1920, LSF/YM/MfS/FEWVRC/4/3/8/1. Ruth Rouse, *Rebuilding Europe: The Student Chapter in Post-War Reconstruction* (London, 1925), pp. 14–22.

¹²¹ 'Outlines of a scheme for assisting the universities of Central Europe', March 1920, LSF/YM/MfS/FEWVRC/4/3/8/1.

¹²² 'Appeal for the Universities', 4 March 1920, LSF/YM/MfS/FEWVRC/4/3/8/1.

¹²³ 'Outlines of a scheme for assisting the universities of Central Europe'.

¹²⁴ 'Appeal for the Universities'.

¹²⁵ Georgina Brewis, *A Social History of Student Volunteering: Britain and Beyond, 1880–1980* (New York, 2014), pp. 51–2.

and secondary teachers and students in Central Europe'; accordingly, it sought to raise money for those in need through appeals to the British academic community.¹²⁶ The Universities' Committee worked closely with the secretary of the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF), Ruth Rouse, and its student relief programme.¹²⁷ Much like the Friends' mission or that of the WSCF, the Universities' Committee provided aid to ex-enemy states such as Germany and Austria.¹²⁸ Meanwhile, the WSCF itself formalized its commitment to intellectual relief in August 1920 by establishing European Student Relief (ESR).¹²⁹

Across the Atlantic, the spring of 1920 also saw the emergence of intellectual relief as a discrete and organized element of wider humanitarian programmes with the backing of philanthropic foundations. These foundations were united in their belief in the cause of liberal internationalism and American global leadership.¹³⁰ The years that followed the end of the First World War provided many instances for American investment of this nature; the philanthropist Anson Phelps Stokes remarked that there were considerable opportunities available for 'philanthropically disposed Americans with large means to invest money [...] in the educational reconstruction of Europe'.¹³¹

A major American funder of intellectual relief was the Commonwealth Fund (CF). Founded in October 1918 following a bequest from Anna M. Harkness, its broad mission was to do 'something for the welfare of mankind'. In its first year of operation, the fund articulated a desire to contribute to a 'specific piece of reconstruction

¹²⁶ 'Universities Committee: The Work of the Past Year and the Future Outlook', October 1921, LNA/R1032/13C/25541/14297; IWRF, Inter-University Conference, 7 July 1920. LSEASC/BEVERIDGE/VII/90/66.

¹²⁷ Tara Windsor, "'The Domain of the Young as the Generation of the Future": Student agency and Anglo-German exchange after the Great War', in Marie-Eve Chagnon and Tomás Irish, eds., *The Academic World in the Era of the Great War* (London, 2018), p. 166.

¹²⁸ IWRF, Inter-University Conference, 7 July 1920. LSEASC/BEVERIDGE/VII/90/66.

¹²⁹ Brewis, *A Social History of Student Volunteering*, p. 53; Benjamin L. Hartley, 'Saving Students: European Student Relief in the Aftermath of World War I', *International Bulletin of Mission Research*, 42.1 (2018), pp. 295–315.

¹³⁰ Inderjeet Parmar, *Foundations of the American Century: The Ford, Carnegie and Rockefeller Foundations in the Rise of American Power* (New York, 2012), pp. 58–68.

¹³¹ Anson Phelps Stokes to Wickliffe Rose, 7 May 1923, Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC), Sleepy Hollow, New York, International Education Board (IEB), FA062, Series 1, Subseries 1 (hereafter 1.1), Box 1, Folder 17.

work' in Europe.¹³² On the recommendation of the ARA, the CF decided that this special focus would be Europe's intellectuals. Being a foundation rather than a humanitarian organization, the Commonwealth Fund made an appropriation of \$500,000 in 1920 with specific instructions that the money be used for 'food drafts for intellectuals'.¹³³ The administration of this money was put in the hands of the ARA. The story of how this money was spent will be taken up in Chapter 2.

Conclusion

In 1920, Herbert Hoover spoke of the terrible material situation facing over 100,000 students and professors, which would, without immediate action, lead to 'decadence in the intellectual fibre of Europe'. Hoover justified aid to universities facing difficulties by arguing that 'to allow these institutions to disintegrate would be a disaster not only to their own nations, but to the whole civilised world'.¹³⁴ In the aftermath of the First World War, civilization was a malleable term which could be utilized as a shorthand for a variety of ills threatening Europe. In this case, it simultaneously encapsulated fears about Europe's intellectual and cultural traditions, the destructiveness of modern warfare, and the desire for stability in Central and Eastern Europe in the face of the Bolshevik threat.

Nineteen nineteen is a hinge from one period of crisis to another; it was in this period that politicians, diplomats, and intellectuals sought to take stock of the destruction of wartime, enumerating the losses of gifted scholars and destruction of sites of cultural importance in order to cumulatively assess the consequences of these tribulations for Western civilization. The Paris Peace Conference was a microcosm of this

¹³² Max Farrand report, 7 October 1919, *The Commonwealth Fund: First Annual Report of the General Director for the Year 1918–1919* (New York, 1920), pp. 5–11.

¹³³ Max Farrand, No 364. American Relief Administration – Food Drafts for the Intellectual Class in Central Europe, 10 June 1920, RAC, Commonwealth Fund Records (CF), FA290, SG 1, Series 18, Subseries 1 (hereafter 18.1) Box 12, Folder 119. Report by Max Farrand, *The Commonwealth Fund: Second Annual Report of the General Director for the year 1919–1920* (New York, 1921), p. 8.

¹³⁴ 'Chain of Expert Testimony on the Federation European Relief Scheme', LSF/YM/MfS/FEWVRC/MISSIONS/10/5/2/3.

process, with issues of intellectual decline and cultural destruction appearing in plenary sessions and discussions ostensibly focused on other matters, such as reparations. Everywhere, journalists, politicians, diplomats, and intellectuals cited the fragility of civilization to explain the great convulsions being experienced across Europe. At the same time, as 1919 moved into 1920, the humanitarian crisis facing Central and Eastern Europe became a central concern for politicians and intellectuals. Framed against the backdrop of advancing Bolshevism, the new crisis threatened intellectual communities too, but was prospective rather than retrospective; here, aid could be organized, and disaster could, theoretically, be mitigated. Whereas Valéry's 'crisis of the mind' largely described a cultural, or imagined, decline, in that it related to the corruption of modes of thought and its implications for Western civilization, Europe's post-war humanitarian crisis was tangible and very real.

By the middle of 1920, a distinct thread of post-war reconstruction and humanitarian relief had emerged which placed Europe's intellectual communities at its core. However, the material conditions that underpinned intellectual relief were not fixed at this point; they would evolve in the months and years that followed, as a consequence of the Volga famine in Russia of 1921–22, hyperinflation in Germany in 1922, the ongoing displacement of people as a result of the Russian Civil War, and deportations by the Bolshevik government. The chapters that follow will explore the discrete dimensions of this intellectual relief, showing how European intellectual life was rebuilt as a distinct humanitarian project.