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Tege Imperium!: A Defence of Empire

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Abstract: ‘Empire’ is a pejorative word in contemporary political science, a term which no longer describes a system of government and social organisation but which now serves only as an unflattering term, an accusation levelled against undesirable polities and policies. In the collective minds of academia and the community, moreover, ‘empire’ is either a concept with many meanings and applications, or simply a catch-all word for the violence and oppression of previous political systems. This paper returns to the roots of the word itself in an effort to distil if not definite, then at least manageable, concepts: imperium and patrocinium. Identifying how patrocinium has begun to emerge in the twenty-first century, the paper argues that ultimately, this form of empire has much to offer, both conceptually and politically, in the modern world.

Introduction

‘Empire’ has become an unflattering word in contemporary International Relations, increasingly invoked in order to denounce states and activities deemed abhorrent by a significant section of the academic community. It is a term which no longer describes a system of government and social organisation but which now serves only as an unflattering term. Reinforced in the collective mind of the community by popular culture portrayals demonising empire, the term has become a catch-all word for anything violent, oppressive, and unwanted. But empire is far from those unflattering visions which persist in culture. In a world dominated by the declining power of unequal and increasingly impotent nation-states, rhetoric on empire is returning, and we must understand not only what the concept is but what benefits it has to offer.

This paper calls for two conceptual reforms relating to a study of empire. The first reform is theoretical, and calls for the use of the very word in an appropriate manner. ‘Empire’ is not, and cannot be, a vague category into which any unpopular polity or policy can be dumped. Neither should the word be invoked simply to catch attention. The second reform is normative – as academics, we ought to embrace the concept of empire by rescuing it from its nefarious connotations and reflecting on the collectivism and co-operation inherent to original understandings of empire. While culture may continue to reinforce unflattering images of empire in the collective imagination, both the community and academia are capable of moving beyond a monolithic view of imperialism and all its abhorrent traits, and recognising the validity of empire as a social structure for a world returning to universalistic ideals.

Subsequently, this paper will argue that empire is a good thing, when a functioning model is disentangled from the web of cultural stereotypes and malefascant connotations in which empire has been wrapped. By returning to original writings on the concept and identifying the worthwhile qualities of the idea, this paper argues that empire is a feasible and desirable political structure for the modern world.

In order to gain a greater appreciation of the need for rescuing empire as a concept, it is necessary to examine the harsh manner in which empire is continually portrayed. The meme of ‘empire is bad’ is continually reinforced in the collective imagination through popular culture, and thus it is with such depictions that the paper begins.

Empires of the Mind¹

Popular culture retains a remarkable ability to cast empire in an antagonistic role and in almost all representations, empire is portrayed as negative in the extreme. Indeed, as Stephen Howe demonstrates, contemporary popular culture continues to parade the imperial theme through a broad spectrum of works which spread the proselytising message that empire – *any* empire – is vicious, cruel, and unwanted.² And of the many unflattering imperial images repeated and reinforced in the collective cultural and academic minds, none is as influential as that archetypal image of imperial villainy: the Galactic Empire of the *Star Wars* film franchise.

As a fictional polity which is so frequently referenced in cultural and academic works – even, in academia, to the point of becoming a tired cliché³ – the militaristic, monospecies Galactic Empire provides a useful illustration of the scathing manner in which empire is typecast. The Galactic Empire is violent, evil, and decidedly unwelcome. It is an empire which appears to exist through sheer terror alone: the very *threat* of force wielded by the empire’s vast, Nazi-esque military frightens entire civilisations into cowering acquiescence, while beneficial relationships between the humanocentric imperial core and the alien peripheries are utterly non-existent. It is a woefully inaccurate portrayal of how empire works, but the image of brute force reinforces this image in the collective mind that empire is discriminatory, oppressive, and perpetuates its despotic rule through barbaric acts of violence.

To illustrate this point, let us take a peek at a pivotal moment in this fictional *imperium*’s history – one which reveals a great deal on popular imaginations of

¹ Excerpt from Winston Churchill’s speech at Harvard University, September 6th 1943: ‘The empires of the future are the empires of the mind’. See Rod Hague and Martin Harrop, *Comparative Government and Politics: Eighth Edition* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) p. 144

² Stephen Howe, *Empire: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 10-11

³ While the Galactic Empire of *Star Wars* is merely one expression of imperial violence among countless others in popular culture, both it and a particular *Star Wars* film eponymously named for it – *The Empire Strikes Back* – have become painfully over-used in political science, journalism, and popular culture. Notable recent examples include: Jean Leca, ‘The Empire Strikes Back! An Uncanny View of the European Union. Part I – Do We Need a Theory of the European Union?’, *Government and Opposition* 44:3 (2009), pp. 285-340; Rahul Rao, ‘The Empire Writes Back (to Michael Ignatieff)’, *Millennium* 33:1 (2004) pp. 145-166; and Max Hastings, ‘The Empire Strikes Back’, online article at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-439765/The-Empire-Strikes-Back.html>

empire. The scene is the Senate of the Galactic Republic, recently emerged from power struggles and civil war. Amidst political rhetoric and bombastic posturing, the Supreme Chancellor of the Galaxy is about to realise Caesar's dream:

Chancellor (to Senate): In order to ensure the security and continuing stability, *The Republic* will be reorganised into the first *Galactic Empire!* For a safe, and secure, society! [*Exalted cheering from Senate*]
Senator (to another): So this is how liberty dies? With thunderous applause.⁴

This is, of course, fiction. Yet this glimpse into the emergence of an imaginary *imperium* effectively highlights a fundamental concept underpinning the notion of empire in contemporary thought. The Galactic Empire is a polity which maintains social order not through co-operation, even from collaborators, but through terror and atrocity. Immediately, the very concept of 'empire' becomes repugnant, and it is little wonder that the viewer is supposed to sympathise with the heroes of the plot – the resistance movement rebelling against the Emperor's abhorrent new regime. And the consequence of this taking of sides is that the meme of 'Evil Empire' has expanded from the silver screen into the collective imagination, colonising our culture with the meme of imperial terror, reflecting long-established interpretations of what empire is and how empire operates.

This method of portraying empire is far from recent,⁵ and of course The Galactic Empire of *Star Wars* fame is merely one example among many. The villains of recent successful popular culture narratives are invariably empires, or at least powerful groups acting in an unmistakably 'imperialistic' fashion. In a reflection of Lenin's theories,⁶ the high-tech, militaristic imperialists of James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009) – the East India Company-esque "Corporation" – savagely slaughter Stone-Age natives in a rapacious quest for industrial resources to fuel Earth's moribund capitalist economy.⁷ A belligerent imperial vision is offered by the monospecies, viciously xenophobic "Romulan Star Empire" of JJ Abrams' *Star Trek* (2009) – a supremely hubristic state bent on aggressive expansion and the brutal conquest of its peaceful neighbours, annihilating entire worlds in the Empire's drive for astropolitical supremacy.⁸ "The Combine", imperial antagonists of the globally successful *Half-Life* (2004, 2006, 2007) series of video games, present a nightmare vision of empire – a multi-dimensional alien despotism which, in an extreme version of nineteenth-century

⁴ *Star Wars III: Revenge of the Sith*. Director: George Lucas (United States: Lucasfilm, 2005)

⁵ Howe, *Empire*, pp. 10-11

⁶ Vladimir Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (New York: International, 1977 [orig. 1916])

⁷ *Avatar*. Director: James Cameron (United States: Lightstorm Entertainment, 2009)

⁸ *Star Trek*. Director: Jeffrey Jacob Adams (United States: Paramount Pictures, 2009)

mission civilatrice and Immanuel Wallerstein's *World-Empires* thesis,⁹ forcibly moulds the surviving remnants of the enslaved human species in its own image of biomechanical perfection, while pillaging the ecological resources of a devastated and peripheral Earth to supply the inhabitants of an unseen core.¹⁰ Like The Galactic Empire, these three recent examples are merely the tip of a cultural iceberg – a perpetual trait traceable through popular culture of the last several decades, and a stereotype which will surely endure for decades to come.

In all such representations, empire is portrayed in a very harsh light: empire becomes the expression not merely of inequality and dispossession, but of slaughter, slavery, and fates worse than death. The medium may change – from the aggressive moon-based empire which invades Earth in Charles Sorel's *Francion* (1623)¹¹ and the Prussian imperial adventure of Saki's *When William Came* (1913),¹² to the belligerent *imperii* of twentieth-century *Star Trek* and the dark imperial shadows of *Rome* (2005)¹³ – the message is the same. Empire is to be feared, hated, violently resisted even when the chances of victory are pitifully poor. Empire is Voltaire's 'prison-house of nations';¹⁴ it is the visible manifestation of atrocity and terror; it is, as the fictional Galactic Senator of *Star Wars* implies, the very antithesis of liberty. As a convenient vehicle for a century of anti-imperial philosophy and the recent proliferation of alarmist rhetoric on the post-Cold War emergence of 'American Empire' and 'European Empire', popular culture has cemented the idea in both the public and the academic consciousness that, to put it simply, empire – *any* empire – is bad.

Yet in spite of the deluge of academic texts decrying empire, the very target of such derisive writing has arguably become lost. What *is* empire? This question may seem ultimately impossible to answer in a fully satisfactory way: in the face of a complete lack of academic consensus on what empire is, trying to create a single definition is an exercise in futility. Yet this inability to identify an imperial ontology does not dissuade academics, journalists, and commentators from indiscriminately invoking the word 'empire' – not to mention its etymological cousins 'imperialism', 'imperialist' and the frustratingly obscure 'imperialistic' – and applying these words to so broad a spectrum of politics and policies that the meaning of the words has perhaps become somewhat obscured. 'Empire' is no longer a word describing a particular political or social construct: rather, it has become an intellectual bogeyman

⁹ Immanuel Wallerstein, *The modern world-system; capitalist agriculture and the origins of the European world-economy in the sixteenth century* (New York: Academic Press, 1974)

¹⁰ *Half-Life 2* (United States: Valve Corporation, 2004); *Half-Life 2: Episode One* (United States: Valve Corporation, 2006); *Half-Life 2: Episode Two* (United States: Valve Corporation, 2007)

¹¹ Michael Michaud, *Contact with Alien Civilizations: Our Hopes and Fears about Encountering Extraterrestrials* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 2006); Beverly Ridgely, 'The Cosmic Voyage in Charles Sorel's *Francion*', *Modern Philology* 65:1 (1967), pp. 1-8

¹² Saki, *When William Came*, in George Chesney and Saki (Hugh Monro), *The Battle of Dorking & When William Came* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997 [orig.1871 & 1913])

¹³ *Rome* (United Kingdom and United States: BBC and HBO, 2005-2007)

¹⁴ Howe, *Empire*, p. 55

constantly invoked by writers wishing to denigrate a state or an aspect of foreign policy they simply do not like. The inevitable consequence is that an unmanageably broad spectrum of undesirable political paraphernalia are lumped together into a single catch-all concept denoted by one of political science's most taboo words, perilously over-used in a perpetual political witchhunt for surviving relics of a shameful imperial past. This is entirely inadequate, as 'empire' connotes far more, and has a much more desirable theoretical status, than this abuse of the term suggests.

Before continuing, it must be stated that while this paper offers a defence of empire, it is the *concept* of empire, and not a particular example of it, which is defended. The purpose of this paper is not, like Niall Ferguson¹⁵ or Max Hastings,¹⁶ to apologise for historical empire by parading the admittedly real – but badly tainted – benefits of Victorian imperialism. The question to be addressed is not 'Did empire work?' but rather, 'Does empire work?', an emphasis on a more modern form of the concept: a form which, as will be argued, bears only marginal resemblance to its progressive, enlightening, and civilising (yet equally savage, destructive, and abhorrent) imperial ancestors. Neither is it a defence of the foreign policy of the United States, NATO, or the UN: so frequently castigated as imperial activity. Rather, this paper seeks to extract a manageable definition of peaceful empire from the murky terminological morass into which the word has fallen, and to offer an assessment of why this particular vision of empire – which, as will be argued, has already emerged – is justified in today's world.

A defence of empire is a curious, and at first glance perhaps untenable, position to take in an apparently post-imperial world and an academic realm fiercely opposed to any effort to apologise for, or resurrect, empire. How can such a position be maintained? To answer this question, it is necessary to unpack the word 'empire' in order to distinguish the term from the conceptual vagaries which have become attached to it. It is therefore to this point that we turn.

Deconstructing 'Empire'

Is there any point in examining the word 'empire'? Surely no amount of verbal window-dressing can conceal its ugly spectre, which remains an abhorrent and archaic system of political domination no matter what name it uses, or what term is used to describe it. Is empire an example of Shakespeare's 'rose by any other name',¹⁷ a concept whose nefarious characteristics are fixed regardless of the word employed, or does the term have more fluid – and potentially more positive – meanings?

At first glance, it appears that 'empire' is indeed now inextricable from its undesirable affiliations. It is a word used indiscriminately in order to grasp attention

¹⁵ Niall Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (London and New York: Penguin, 2004)

¹⁶ Max Hastings, 'The Empire Strikes Back' *The Daily Mail* 2nd March 2007, at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-439765/The-Empire-Strikes-Back.html>

¹⁷ *Romeo and Juliet* II.1 85-86, in *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (Ware: Wordsworth Press, 1996) p. 254

or simply to castigate an entity: from Ryszard Kapuściński's searing critique of the Soviet *Imperium*,¹⁸ to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's theory of contemporary political economy,¹⁹ to Michael Ignatieff's scathing assessment of America's attempt to construct *Empire Lite*.²⁰ This semantic confusion is a problem even on its own: an intellectually sloppy tactic which only serves to confuse the term. But the problem becomes significantly worse when attempting to discuss the rebirth of political empire with such a vague word. Historian Richard Drayton poses a challenging question by asking 'Why do empires rise?',²¹ but before approaching this question it is perhaps necessary to ask a more fundamental one – just what *is* an empire?

Defining 'empire' is a labour worthy of Hercules, and the limited progress in academia towards arriving at a mutually-agreed definition is entirely understandable. Unlike geopolitical terms such as 'nation-state' or 'federation', 'empire' has no crisp characteristics unique to it, which could help define the concept against competing geopolitical constructs. Everything in empire exists in other polities. The result is that rather than describing a particular style of politics or government, 'empire' has become a term whose semantic boundaries are so vague as to be almost useless. Its terminological neighbours 'imperial' and much more noticeably 'imperialism' are words whose invocation, constantly negative, only serves to further muddy the conceptual waters. It is not only frustrating to apply a catch-all word to an almost boundless variety of polities and policies: it is intellectually sloppy to decry 'empire' when the nature of such a concept cannot be agreed upon. If we are to gain a greater awareness of empire – for better or for worse – it is arguably necessary to restrict this vague definition to a working concept by invoking the word in moderation.

At the same time, it is necessary to tease apart the myriad of ugly concepts which have become entangled with empire. 'Imperialism' is a term which, as Tarak Barkawi and Mark Laffey astutely argue, is not synonymous with empire.²² Rather, 'imperialism' is taken here to refer to an attitude, or to a policy of expansion and subordination, characterised by intimidation or outright force. This is a policy which has been pursued by all varieties of state at some point in history, and is far from unique to empires. Indeed it may even be at odds with empire. It would be difficult to argue that the isolationist Qing Empire of China or the 'empire' constructed by the Pharaohs – both examples of ethnically and culturally heterogeneous empires characterised not by universalism but rather by a scathing contempt for the outside world, and a desire to shut out all peoples who did not adapt to the self-assured

¹⁸ Ryszard Kapuściński, *Imperium* (London: Granta, 1994)

¹⁹ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2000)

²⁰ Michael Ignatieff, *Empire Lite: Nation-Building in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan* (London: Vintage Press, 2003)

²¹ Richard Drayton, 'Why do empires rise?' in Harriet Swain (ed.) *Big Questions in History* (London: Vintage, 2005)

²² Tarak Barkawi and Mark Laffey, 'Retrieving the Imperial: *Empire* and International Relations', *Millennium* 31:1 (2002) p. 111

superiority of the dominant imperial culture²³ – pursued an open system of expansionist imperialism.²⁴

A second term to be distanced from empire is ‘colonialism’. This is a multi-faceted word with multiple and contended meanings, and when qualified with the even more intricate prefixes ‘neo-’ and ‘post-’, it is a concept which is every bit as nuanced and complex as ‘empire’. Perhaps more so. A critical analysis of colonialism and postcolonialism is beyond the scope of this paper, and would fail to do justice to the rigorous and sophisticated work surrounding the concept’s many aspects. Yet it must be asserted that like imperialism, colonialism is neither synonymous with, nor exclusive to, empire. And like empire, colonialism is a word used so frequently, in so many contexts, that its meaning has perhaps become slightly obscure. Stripping ‘empire’ of its *imperial* and *colonial* baggage is not for the sake of convenience: empire far predates colonialism, and neither imperialism nor colonialism is exclusive to empire. This leaves ‘empire’, though trimmed down, still an unmanageable word.

Faced with slippery definitions, or simplified models so restrictive as to be equally frustrating,²⁵ it is perhaps little wonder that the word ‘empire’ is used so indiscriminately. Yet this is an unsatisfactory state of affairs. In a world where the word ‘empire’ is re-appearing in academic works, we must understand just what it is that we are discussing. It is certainly not my intention to construct a concept of empire applicable to all cases. This has been attempted before, but with limited utility. No single model which claims to define empire – be it through monopolistic access to violence, cultural heterogeneity, or geopolitical size – is either universal or satisfactory at distinguishing an empire from a modern nation-state. Rather than constructing an overly vague or overly specific model to defend, the intention here is to return to the roots of the very word ‘empire’ and what it originally referred to. To do so, it is necessary to return to the earliest definitions of the word as offered by the Roman orator Cicero (106-43 BC). In doing so, not only is it possible (and justifiable) to unpack the concept into different components, but to identify which elements and which models have re-appeared in recent academic imaginings and offer a defence. First though, an examination of this troublesome word’s provenance is required.

²³ The famous Amarna Letters, Egypt’s diplomatic correspondence with neighbouring empires, reveal a habit of grouping all non-Egyptians into the same scorned category, along with a remarkably contemptuous attitude even towards allies: apparently high-handedness is not unique to Victorian European empires. See William Moran, *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1992). As regards Chinese imperial contempt, Jeremy Black offers an entertaining illustration concerning Great Britain’s 1816 attempt to open diplomatic relations with Qing China: an attempt which backfired when the Qianlong Emperor invited King George to surrender his barbarian land to China and become a vassal of the Celestial Empire. See Jeremy Black, *A History of Diplomacy* (London: Reaktion, 2010) pp. 151-152

²⁴ The word ‘imperial’ presents a slightly more difficult problem. While reluctant to use the word due to its connotations with ‘imperialism’, the lack of an appropriate alternative requires terminological clarification. Henceforth, the text uses imperial purely as an adjective form of the noun *imperium*, while ‘patrocinial’ shall be used as the adjective form of *patrocinium*.

²⁵ Anthony Pagden draws attention to the frustrating difficulty of working with restrictive concepts of empire. See Anthony Pagden, ‘Imperialism, liberalism and the quest for perpetual peace’, *Daedalus* 134:2 (2005) p. 2

The very word ‘empire’ is an etymological evolution of the Latin term *imperium*, a sophisticated word with no exact equivalent in English (or indeed, any modern language) but roughly translated as ‘rule’, ‘sovereignty’, ‘power’, ‘government’, ‘command’, ‘mandate’, or ‘dignity’. This is obviously a complex term, and at first glance, this variation only intensifies the exasperating vagueness of the word. It is one problem to use a word whose meaning is contested, but it is quite a different problem altogether to rely upon a millennia-old loan word from a deceased language, the terminological intricacies and subtle complexities of which have not survived twenty centuries of linguistic evolution. Instead, these nuances have been condensed into an awkward word which is both overly narrow and overly vague – ‘empire’ – a word which woefully fails to capture the many meanings of *imperium*. What then, is the purpose of returning to Cicero for guidelines on empire? It is to this question that the paper turns.

Beyond an *Imperial Empire*

Mr Spock: Terror must be maintained or the Empire is doomed. It is the logic of history.

Captain Kirk: Conquest is easy. Control is not.²⁶

In the familiar *Star Trek* franchise, the aggressive, speciesist states opposing the apparently benign *United Federation of Planets* – the caste-based Klingons, the cryptofascist Cardassians, the chronoshifting Krenim – habitually have the suffix “Empire” added to their state’s official name, associating hard-force *imperium* and undesirable policies of xenophobia, expansion, militarism, and oppression solely with empire.²⁷ The above dialogue takes place within the evil parallel-universe counterpart of the *Federation*: the *Terran Empire*, an archetypal ‘imperial’ polity entirely reliant on barbarism and brutality to terrorise the state’s conquered minions into obedience.²⁸ Like *Star Wars*’ Galactic Empire, it is a poor representation of what empire is. But while the Terran Empire is fictional, the above exchange provides insight into the dualism inherent to – and a convenient introduction to – Cicero’s insights into *imperium* and its far less well-known counterpart.

Cicero’s writings not only make a clear distinction between the subtleties contained within the concept and establish two distinguishable – and manageable – terms, but furthermore they allow us to reject hard force as something contrary to a

²⁶ ‘Mirror, Mirror’, episode 60339, *Star Trek: The Original Series* (United States: NBC, 1967)

²⁷ Naeem Inayatullah, ‘Bumpy Space: Imperialism and Resistance in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*’, chapter in Jutta Weldes, *To Seek Out New Worlds: Exploring Links between Science Fiction and World Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003)

²⁸ ‘In a Mirror, Darkly’, episode 095, *Star Trek: Enterprise* (United States: Paramount, 2005)

Ciceronian understanding of empire. In *Against Verres*²⁹ and *De Officiis*,³⁰ Cicero distinguishes two related yet theoretically separate ideas. These are the twin concepts of *imperium* and *patrocinium*.

The first, *imperium*, can be defined as the ‘power’/‘government’/‘rule’ of Rome – the *imperium populi Romani* necessary to establish Rome’s ‘dominance’/‘mandate’/‘command’ over its non-Roman neighbours. It is critical to consider that while *imperium* may occasionally refer to brute force, *imperium* has – as we have seen – many meanings. Clearly, this is a concept far too intricate to condense into the single (in)convenient word ‘empire’. This *imperium* was not solely brute force used for the nefarious purposes of conquest and brutal coercion, but rather a combination of different policies of control necessary for the establishment of Cicero’s second concept: *patrocinium*. Like *imperium*, *patrocinium* is a difficult word to define, particularly as, unlike *imperium*, it has not morphed over the centuries into a vaguely-related modern descendant. However, it does share some relations with other words – most notably *patronage* and *paternalism*: a quality which will be examined later.

This *patrocinium*, while difficult to translate, is somewhat easier to define. Hartmut Behr translates the word into a manageable concept – an ‘an international commonwealth’³¹ of shared interests and shared power – a *patrocinium orbis Terrarum*³² (‘empire/protectorate of the world’). This distinction is critical – *patrocinium* is the end goal, the polity, while *imperium* is (one) means of reaching such a goal, the policy.

This distinction, while crucial to remember, has disappeared under the merging of *imperium* and *patrocinium* into one single word – empire. Having been stripped of its semantic complexities, ‘empire’ is now understood as the expression of *imperium*, of raw power (only occasionally) combined with a self-righteous, self-appointed mission to bring civilisation to the barbarians. *Patrocinium*, meanwhile, has been almost entirely forgotten in the distilling of *imperium* and *patrocinium* into ‘empire’, despite *patrocinium* being by far the most significant element of empire. Empire cannot exist on *imperium* – on force – alone. While *imperium* may be necessary to establish empire, *patrocinium* is necessary to perpetuate it.

For illustrative purposes, let us briefly consider the fictional *Star Trek* exchange above. In the dystopian parallel universe which is home to the Terran Empire, the humanocentric Empire fights – and is ultimately destroyed by – a perpetual rebellion among its enslaved alien societies, as the savage repressive force of the Empire is not backed up by any beneficial relationships between imperialiser and imperialised. The Empire may be able to carve out a despotic rule using

²⁹ *Against Verres* (II, 5) in Cicero, *On Government* [translated by Michael Grant] (London: Penguin Classics, 1993)

³⁰ *De Officiis* in Cicero, *The Republic and The Laws* [translated by Niall Rudd] (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 1998)

³¹ Hartmut Behr, *A History of International Political Theory: Ontologies of the International* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) p. 36

³² S.E. Smethurst, quoted in Behr, *History*, p. 45

imperium, but without a *patrocinium* to unite its peoples and foster a collective identity, the Empire quickly fades into oblivion. This is demonstrably *not* how empire operates. In this regard, the Terran Empire offers a useful summation of Cicero's imperial dualism – namely, that no amount of *imperium* will endure without the *patrocinium* that *imperium* must construct, and ultimately, become.

A second critical distinction is that while long-lasting *imperium* requires *patrocinium*, the reverse is not necessary. An example serves to illustrate this. Fiction aside, there is perhaps no empire which can be so closely associated with the raw brutality of *imperium* than the Roman Empire: a classically violent regime which, in the collective imaginations of both academia and civil society, maintained a harsh Latin rule over a quarter of Earth's then population through a regime of indiscriminate violence, oppression, and atrocity.³³ Yet as Christopher Kelly demonstrates, even the naked power of Rome's *imperium* was useless without the simultaneous construction and emergence of a benevolent *patrocinium* uniting peoples in a common identity of imperial citizens, and a common allegiance to the Empire.³⁴ Indeed as the Roman historian Livy (59 BC-17 AD) so astutely pointed out, 'an empire remains powerful only so long as its subjects rejoice in it'.³⁵ Power alone can build an empire, but as history reminds us, hard power alone cannot maintain empire for even a short time. The same exists today. While it has become fashionable among journalists and commentators to (unflatteringly) label the contemporary United States as an 'empire' reliant on hard force, commentators are quick to forget that America's peerless military *imperium* means very little without the corresponding, collaborative *patrocinium* to maintain a normative order.

Yet where does this leave the defence of modern empire? Even if *Imperium Americanum* offers an example of the need for *patrocinium*'s adhesive force (albeit with limited success), surely *patrocinium* is only a marginal factor in comparison with the *imperium* which builds empires. Moreover, as has been identified in etymology and as Cicero himself makes clear, *patrocinium* involves a not-insignificant degree of paternalism and patronage. Indeed, Cicero's own writings are rather unclear as to whether he envisaged a defined, collective government under visible Roman leadership, or a much looser arrangement in which Rome merely prodded her allies in a desirable political direction.³⁶ Regardless, the presence of paternalism is strongly visible. The *patrocinium orbis Terrarum* may have had pretensions of universalism, but it remained a political structure under the guidance, leadership, and ultimate sovereign power of Rome, with the Romans' standards of civilisation defining the norms for their conquered foreign populations. Consequently, a Ciceronian *patrocinium* is inextricable from paternalistic relations – it is not a brutal *imperium* and it is not quite a utopian *cosmopolis*. Rather, it occupies an unclear position as a

³³ Nigel Rodgers (ed.), *Roman Empire* (London: Hermes House, 2006) p. 257

³⁴ Christopher Kelly, *The Roman Empire: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) pp. 42-61

³⁵ Pagden, 'Imperialism', p. 2

³⁶ Behr, *History*, pp. 44-45

polity which promotes universalist co-operation, peace, and security – but only so far as is permitted by the patronising interference of an established core civilisation. This poses a potential problem for a defence of empire. Yet as will be argued in the penultimate section, it is perhaps possible to extricate Cicero’s *patrocinium* from the web of natural laws and standards of civilisation which defined the Roman worldview, and move towards a *patrocinium orbis Terrarum* for the new millennium.

The purpose of this section has been to establish a manageable model of empire through an assessment of what empire seeks to achieve, and how it is created. It is clear that Cicero’s vision of *patrocinium* is a far cry from what the current collective imagination defines as empire – a brutal, despotic system of discrimination and violent suppression. Such polities have of course existed, still do, and (regrettably) will almost certainly periodically re-appear throughout humanity’s future. But are they ‘empires’, at least in an etymologically and semantically sensible understanding of the word? Arguably not, regardless of whether or not they term themselves ‘empire’. *Imperium* cannot endure without *patrocinium*. Force can conquer, but it cannot control. But crucially, *patrocinium* can exist without *imperium*. Quite simply: empire can exist independently of imperialism. To take the example of a modern “empire”, it would be hard to argue that the European Union relies on American-style *imperium* to corral its component states together. This critical distinction will be examined later, and for now it is sufficient to maintain this simple yet crucial difference between the use of *imperium* and the potentially unrelated existence of *patrocinium*: a difference which forms a core defence of empire.

It could, at this point, be argued that the distinction between *imperium* and *patrocinium* is little more than intellectual nitpicking. As a political system dedicated to making other cultures fall into line with that of a paternalistic ‘core’, empire surely has no place in the modern world as it is a throwback to the discredited philosophy of universalistic thinking. Surely such an antiquated vision of universal norms, not to mention the means of uniting such apparently universal principles – paternalistic empire – is entirely out-of-place in a world of individual nation-states, cultural relativity, and particularistic thinking. It is to these issues, and the re-appearance of empire, that we turn now.

Empire’s Renaissance

Empire, in the sense of both hard-power *imperium* and soft-power *patrocinium*, may appear to be an irrelevance today. Indeed, Michael Cox all but provides an obituary of empire by remarking that it ‘ought to remain buried in the marble and sepia pasts.’³⁷ This may, on the surface, provide a weak justification for the abuse of the word ‘empire’ – with the demise of the formal polity, but the continuation of hegemonic sabre-rattling and forceful coercion by states, ‘empire’ can be understood to have evolved, as a word, into a term which now simply refers to the exercise of *imperium* as a policy rather than *imperium* as a polity. But empire is far from dead. It has

³⁷ Michael Cox, ‘The Empire’s Back in Town: Or America’s Imperial Temptation – Again’, *Millennium* 32:1 (2003) p. 1

become slightly clichéd in academia to refer to empire ‘striking back’,³⁸ and yet this prosaism adequately captures a contemporary geopolitical truth – after two centuries’ worth of nation-state governance, empire is back. But in stark contrast to the message hammered home through culture and academia that empire is bad, the return of empire – patrocinal empire – is a good thing.

The dominant political unit of the contemporary world remains, of course, the nation-state. Yet this variety of political organisation is not only relatively recent compared to the imperial systems which have dominated geopolitics since the Copper Age, it is perhaps something of an aberration. The nation-state – the experiment in ‘uniting all the members of the nationality under the same government, and a government to themselves apart’, in the words of John Stuart Mill³⁹ – is perhaps a blip in the much longer historical tradition of unifying multiple diverse peoples and cultures under ethnically heterogeneous empires. As the oldest form of government, traditionally traced to Sargon of Akkad’s multi-ethnic ‘empire’ of the 24th century BC,⁴⁰ empires that are ethnically, politically, religiously and culturally heterogeneous not only predate other forms of state, but offer unique benefits which the contemporary world’s dominant yet ailing example – the culturally and ethnically homogeneous nation-state – cannot.

Contemporary Europe offers a perfect illustration of empire’s benefits. Consider modern Europe’s lineage. Since the gradual fading-away of the Roman Empire, the European landmass has been divided into a squabbling patchwork of *imperii* and small states waging perpetual war against one another. The efforts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to establish autonomous nation-states for each perceived group of people similarly failed to bring peace. It is unsurprising, then, that in the aftermath of two cataclysmic world wars – triggered, in part, by the particularistic impulses of various nation-states – that Europe has begun moving back to empire: empire in the form of Cicero’s *patrocinium orbis Terrarum*, or rather, *Europæum*. This collective commonwealth of shared values, shared power, and shared identity is ‘empire’ in its classic, Ciceronian context – not a vicious, expansionist power bent on suppressing its neighbours but a benign empire. It differs from Cicero’s model of *patrocinium* in that, rather than a single paternalistic patron establishing its will upon its neighbours in order to establish a peace beneficial to all, the modern European supra-state combines collective patronage and collective *imperium* to establish an ethnically heterogeneous empire and a universalistic normative order upon an otherwise perpetually-feuding continent of particularistic nation-states. It is this power, this ability of the collective empire to impose order upon its component member-states, which requires a re-assessment by both the community and academia. Ultimately, it is this ability which should cause us to re-appraise empire.

³⁸ *Star Wars II: The Empire Strikes Back*. Director: George Lucas (United States: Lucasfilm, 1980)

³⁹ John Stuart Mill, *Three Essays: On Liberty, Representative Government, The Subjection of Women* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) p. 342

⁴⁰ Howe, *Empire*, p. 36

The nation-state is of course not without its benefits, but neither should it be seen as the supreme form of political organisation. The nation-state cannot offer the same security and benefits as empire – a *patrocinial* empire, rather than an *imperial* empire. As a conceptual illustration, let us again consider a European example. The Austro-Hungarian Empire, one of various successors to the Holy Roman Empire, now enjoys something of a nostalgia among many inhabitants of its old component states.⁴¹ And rightly so. Stephen Howe offers an engaging outline of the empire’s benefits – a Dual Monarchy between the two largest ethnic groups, significant political autonomy for component parts, and a high degree of security for its multicultural population which in the aftermath of the Paris Peace Conference disappeared under a rising tide of ethnic conflict and civil crisis. Indeed, Howe is arguably justified in asserting that Austria-Hungary ‘deserves some retrospective applause, even a small sigh of regret for its passing’,⁴² and it is precisely this model of shared power under a multicultural supra-state – patrocinial empire – which is to be welcomed in the modern world, as the current system of nation-states does not and cannot provide the collective stability and mutual benefit that empire can.

The nation-state is a noble ideal, but it is not a feasible system of global governance. This is particularly evident in those parts of the world which had the grave misfortune to be annexed into the haphazardly-constructed, opportunistic, and often reluctant,⁴³ part-*imperial* part-*patrocinial* empires of Victorian Europe. Subsequently left to manage their own affairs within boundaries arbitrarily demarcated in the late nineteenth century, many new nations of the twentieth century have discovered that the European-style nation-state – ‘the black man’s burden’⁴⁴ hastily dumped on young governments during Europe’s rapid post-1945 imperial retreat – is not always the most effective system of government. While the polity is not universal, its problems, rather worryingly, indeed encompass the world. *Imperium* alone, as the nineteenth century demonstrated, is an abhorrent and ineffective expression of social and political organisation – even though a brief glimpse of *patrocinium* was visible in Victorian Europe’s confused empires. And the nation-state, as the twentieth century has shown, is far from ideal – both for those states languishing in the subordinated global South and those Northern nations at the mercy of unregulated trans-boundary concerns. Is *patrocinium* – true empire – a viable alternative system? Arguably, yes.

It may seem unsettling, even repugnant, to advocate empire over the nation-state, but the failures of the nation-state pose questions that, however painful, must be answered. Contrary to the visions of 1990s globalisation discourse, the events of the twenty-first century increasingly suggest that the state will not fade away under the

⁴¹ Andrew Wheatcroft, *The Habsburgs: Embodying Empire* (London: Penguin, 1995) pp. 286-295

⁴² Sargon’s empire predated not only the Pyramids, but also all other forms of political systems bar the small city-states of Copper Age Mesopotamia. See Howe, *Empire*, p. 56

⁴³ Douglas Porch, *Wars of Empire* (London: Cassell, 2001)

⁴⁴ Basil Davidson, *The Black Man’s Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State* (New York: Three Rivers, 1993)

progressive march of economic unification. The nation-state continues to exist, despite its increasing inability to handle regional and global concerns. In 1992, Francis Fukuyama's *End of History* thesis postulated that the liberal, democratic nation-state would triumph as a worldwide system of government. But nearly twenty years of civil strife, ethnic cleansings, and the proliferation of small but vicious wars forces us to question the utility and universality of the nation-state. While the nation-state may be applicable in some cases and for a limited time, it is far from an ideal and universal system.

A personal anecdote serves to shed light upon this. Before entering academia, I worked for some time in the Republic of Ghana, and was fortunate enough to be in the country for the national celebration of fifty years' independence from the British Empire. Imagine my initial surprise and growing disconsternation when, one humid evening in the village bar while watching the capital city's celebrations on the small television, I was drawn into a conversation with several older citizens who gave what was at first a disquietingly favourable reference to the Empire. In their own words, life had been better under empire than under their own independent – yet economically impotent, internationally ignored, and ethnically fractured – nation-state with its history of military dictatorships, bureaucratic corruption, and public apathy.⁴⁵ This may appear a trite reference and of course it would be intellectually outrageous to assert that the opinions of a few people are evidence of empire's benefits, yet the exchange posed and continues to pose some unsettling questions which are perhaps more general.

Is it advantageous to discard an inefficient and ineffective system of particularistic national governments, increasingly incapable of governing an interdependent world? Is a global *patrocinium* or group of regional *patrocinii* in which all members surrender a (substantial) degree of sovereignty and individual *imperium* to a collective supra-state, better than a world of unequal nation-states in which the states of the wealthy global North increasingly wield *imperium* over their relatively powerless Southern neighbours? Quite simply, is patrocinal empire better than a chaotic tangle of perpetually-squabbling, grotesquely uneven, and frequently arbitrary nation-states whose independence is in truth little more than a flimsy façade which fails to conceal the exploitative meddling of bigger neighbours? The answer to all of these questions is: yes.

Here, it must be re-asserted that this is emphatically *not* a call for a return to *imperium*: one of the oldest but arguably one of the worst ways of organising a polity. Neither is it a call for a full return to *patrocinium*. This modern approach is not entirely the same as Cicero's unresolved model, wherein a strange mixture of Roman paternalism, patriotic particularism, and philanthropic universalism present, as Behr acknowledges, a somewhat unclear concept in which *imperium* and *patrocinium*

⁴⁵ It is a well commented-upon irony that in order to assert its unique new identity against Britain's empire, the first colony to gain independence from Britain's empire – Gold Coast – asserted its independence by adopting the name of its own distant *imperium*; the Ghana Empire of medieval West Africa. This curious phenomenon is not restricted to Ghana. It would seem that the appeal of empire is not easy to escape, even for the imperialised.

sometimes become confusingly entangled.⁴⁶ The new *patrocinium* advocated here is not a system in which a single ethnic core projects its own values and beliefs onto peripheral neighbours through a paternalistic relationship – however well-intentioned it may be. That has been tried many times in the past, by empire-builders from the Copper-Age Fertile Crescent to the Atomic-Age Soviet Union, and even a successful result is merely the transfer of particularistic ideals of patriotism to an assumed core, or the perpetuation of such un-universal and unhelpful (in the long term) concepts as the nation-state. Rather, the new empire is characterised by the shared sovereignty of multiple members, wielding collective *imperium* for the good of the collective *patrocinium*, which itself offers far more than the crude harshness of *imperium* and the restricted tragedies of the nation-state. It is an empire which benefits all: an arrangement which is called ‘empire’ as it is universalist and not particularist in its outlook: an empire in which there is neither ‘imperialiser’ nor ‘imperialised’ but the sharing of power, through collectively relinquishing a degree of sovereignty to the imperial authority, for the common good.

Has such an empire ever existed? Yes. Austria-Hungary provides the best illustration, while even the expansionist entities of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries showed a faint glimpse of *patrocinium* beneath the pompous braggadocio of their *imperial* façade. No empire can survive long without co-operation. Indeed as Dipesh Chakrabarty notes, empire cannot exist without the willing co-operation not only of those elites so often assigned the unflattering title of ‘collaborator’, but with the acceptance of the population as a whole.⁴⁷ This requires *patrocinium*, which even the most violent *imperium* must construct if it wishes to endure. But more to the point: regardless of whether such empires have existed in the past, does (and can) such a system exist today? Again, yes. Empire as defined above – a patrocinal empire of peoples sharing power for collective benefit – is alive and well in its current incarnation as the European Union. In support of the defence of empire it is to this emerging supra-state, this empire for the twenty-first century, that we turn.

‘This Realm of Europe, Is an Empire’

In his discussion of empire, Drayton references a 1533 proclamation in which Henry VIII asserted that ‘this realm of England, is an empire’.⁴⁸ Considering that England’s overseas possessions in 1533 amounted to little more than Calais and the Channel Islands, it would require quite a stretch of the imagination to claim that Henry VIII’s proclamation was grounded either in expansionist *imperium* or more modern interpretations of colonialism and core-periphery relations. What then, did Henry mean? Drayton explains that Henry’s use of ‘empire’ defined his realm as a sovereign unit against the hegemony of the Roman church, asserting the right of the English to

⁴⁶ Behr, *History*, p. 44

⁴⁷ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincialising Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000)

⁴⁸ Drayton, ‘Empires?’, p. 59

form their own collective realm of shared sovereignty and identity. Quite simply, by invoking ‘empire’ Henry touched upon precisely what *patrocinium* is, and what Drayton identifies: a space of shared peace, sovereignty, and rights. It is precisely *this* model of empire – *patrocinium* as a shared space willingly constructed, and in which *imperium* (as a policy of control) is collectively applied, rather than *imperium* (as a polity of conquest) thrust upon resistant subjects – which is visible in the European Union and provides a functional model for both the present and the future.

It can be argued that universalistic thinking, and the concept of universal morals and norms, has re-emerged in contemporary Europe. In stark contrast to the overt particularism of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European nation-states and their *imperial* empires, the modern European Union appears to promote precisely the sort of universalist thinking detectable in Cicero’s vision of empire. Yet is this a demonstrable ‘empire’ as discussed earlier, and is this desirable not only for contemporary Europe, but also as a conceptual grounding for similar *patrocinii* across the world? Again the answer is yes, as an examination of academic discussions on European Empire evidences.

Although a significant quantity of academic work on the EU as empire continues to emerge, there is – perhaps unsurprisingly – little consensus on what traits characterise the polity as empire. The three principle scholarly models – those of Hartmut Behr, Jan Zielonka, and József Böröcz, differ in their approach to European Empire. Behr conceives of the Union as an empire embedded in nineteenth-century ‘Standards of Civilization’: a political entity whereby members of a civilized Core project their standards onto a *parvenu* Periphery.⁴⁹ In a similar but distinguishable model, Böröcz’s claim that the Union defines itself through ‘claims of European universality’⁵⁰ – even if the claim is, as Böröcz argues, a flimsy veil for Western exploitation of the Eastern regions – likewise rests not on force but on a narrative of voluntary accession to a collectivising polity. The third model, that of Zielonka, posits a medieval variety of empire built on a blurred and decentralised structure in which all members are equally unable to gain dominance.⁵¹ Each model offers a profound insight into the re-emergence of *patrocinium*.

The common thread uniting each of these models is the absence of overt *imperium* as polity and *imperium* as harsh force. Even in Behr’s model, the closest approximation to an empire which coerces newcomers into adopting Europe’s norms (although still far from *imperial* in its methods of coercion), such force is employed in a ‘soft-power’ fashion and critically, is applied not against prospective peoples to be subjugated by the empire but those willing to undergo the laborious application

⁴⁹ Hartmut Behr, ‘The European Union in the Legacies of Imperial Rule? EU Accession Politics viewed from a Historical Comparative Perspective’, *European Journal of International Relations* 13:2 (2007) p. 239

⁵⁰ József Böröcz, ‘Empire and Coloniality in the “Eastern Enlargement” of the European Union’, in Böröcz, József & Kovács, Melinda (eds.) ‘Empire’s New Clothes: Unveiling EU Enlargement’, *Central Europe Review* (2001) pp. 1-305

⁵¹ Jan Zielonka, *Europe as Empire: The Nature of the Enlarged European Union* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) pp. 1-11

process to gain admission into the Union – *patrocinium*, not *imperium*. The EU is close – closer, perhaps, than any state in history – to a *patrocinium*, and this is not a political system which deserves of the fear, scorn, or resistance so commonly associated with ‘empire’.

One critical point that must be borne in mind, though, is that today’s European Union differs greatly from Cicero’s vision in one fundamental aspect – the overt paternalism and patronage of a Ciceronian *patrocinium* is not necessarily an element. It is true, as Behr reminds us, that today’s EU does exercise something of a paternalistic relationship on prospective applicants and newcomer states: in a policy unchanged from the days of Republican Rome, the European Union coerces its neighbours and members into adopting the core’s ‘standards of civilisation’. It would not be difficult to imagine Cicero’s own words cited in description of the European Parliament:

Our Senate is the harbour and refuge of kings, tribes, nations... [seeking] to obtain the highest praise from this one thing – the guarding of the interests of our provinces and our allies by equity and good faith. Our sovereignty might then be termed the patronage, rather than the government, of the world.⁵²

Yet herein lies a critical distinction between Rome and the modern Union, and one fundamental to the defence of a modern *patrocinium* – Europe does not entertain global aspirations. Cicero may have advocated a world-encompassing commonwealth in which all peoples would be united in common homage to one particular cultural and hegemonic centre – namely Rome – but modern Europe seeks neither the same breadth nor the same centralised structure. Unlike Rome, the EU has not ‘confounded [its] monarchy with the globe of the Earth’, in Edward Gibbons’ famous words.⁵³ Rather, it has established boundaries of where its own *patrocinium* must end and the result is not an expansionist empire in which a single civilisation continuously extends its own norms into neighbouring lands (however well-intentioned or ignoble such a project may be), but rather ‘an empire of exclusion’ which will eventually reach a frontier beyond which the European Empire will no longer advance. In the perpetual expansion of Cicero’s vision, paternalism and patronage must be endlessly applied in a never-ending quest to bring one civilisation’s standards to the apparent barbarians beyond the frontier. But in the culturally and territorially finite empire that is the EU, paternalism and patronage are incapable of enduring once newcomers have been assimilated into the European norm – and once the EU has reached the frontiers of what it classifies as ‘Europe’, there will be no more ‘barbarians’ upon whom to thrust the empire’s paternalism. Just as *imperium* must transform into *patrocinium*, perhaps the consequence of this will be the transformation of *patrocinium* into *cosmopolis*, in which unequal power relationships disappear among the politically integrated and culturally assimilated states of the Union.

⁵² Cicero, *On Moral Duties II.8*, quoted in Behr, *History*, p. 44

⁵³ Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire: Volume the First* (London: Penguin, 1994 [orig. 1776]), p. 55

This is a model for other *patrocinii* to emulate, and a concept of paternalistic abandonment which is perhaps visible outside of the EU. The African Union, overtly imitating the EU, will undoubtedly evolve into a similarly beneficial and benevolent *Patrocinium Africarum* in time, promoting its own universalistic vision by appealing to a common identity and common community in the same way that the EU seeks to ‘Unite a Continent’ in terms of both land and people.⁵⁴ It is even possible that Cicero’s vision of *patrocinium orbis Terrarum* may one day become manifest; albeit cosmopolitan rather than paternalistic. These emerging contemporary *patrocinii* are to be neither resisted nor feared, but accepted and indeed embraced for providing those collective benefits of true Ciceronian empire which disparate and unequal nation-states cannot offer.

It would be difficult on both logical and moral grounds to deny, in the increasingly interlinked, increasingly humanistic Digital Age world, Cicero’s assertion that ‘the whole human race... [is] considered as a single Commonwealth’.⁵⁵ The dualism of ‘Them’ and ‘Us’ has long been contended and exposed as the false dichotomy that it is. There are an infinite number of groups – or perhaps only one, ‘Us’, the species as a whole – and a particularist philosophy of political organisation and nation-states is no longer, if it ever was, an appropriate way of managing so variegated a world. Federations and alliances such as NATO and the United Nations, as noble as they are, can only go so far towards bringing peace, as they remain rooted in the particularistic thinking of the nation-state. But as *the* polity of universalist philosophy, empire is not merely desirable: it is necessary, as the most suitable system of political organisation for a world which must, for its own good, cease clinging on to the outdated principles of particularist thinking and embrace patrocinal universalism – *empire* – as a polity for the new millennium.

Conclusion

The nation-state has not failed entirely. Far from it. But it has certainly fallen short of the hopes invested in it. Not only has the unit been unable to provide the same benefits as empire, the particularist philosophy of the nation-state is untenable in a heavily linked, interdependent world. Indeed, Susan Strange is arguably justified in labelling the Westphalian nation-state system as ‘Westfailure’.⁵⁶ The small nation-state, still suffering the political hangover of imperial retreat – its fledgling economy stagnant and disadvantaged *vis-à-vis* its bigger neighbours, its international status ranging from marginal to unrecognised, and its social fabric easily fractured by the disagreements of disparate peoples arbitrarily corralled together into one artificial nationality by bumbling Victorian colonisers – is not always the best form of government. Philosophically, perhaps – national self-determination is admittedly a

⁵⁴ The Union’s motto. See http://europa.eu/abc/12lessons/lesson_3/index_en.htm, last accessed 1st June 2010.

⁵⁵ Behr, *History*, p. 45

⁵⁶ Susan Strange, ‘The Westfailure System’, *Review of International Studies* 25:3 (1999) pp. 345-354

noble ideal. But in a world divided in grotesquely unequal fashion between the increasingly borderless citizens of the global North and the impoverished inhabitants of exploited Southern countries, national self-determination is untenable. A well-intentioned political ideal, the nation-state is perhaps a short-lived social experiment which was never destined to fully work. What we are arguably seeing, though, in the emergence of the European Union and of similar young *patrocinii* across the world, is not the beginning of a stateless world or a reinforcement of national identities tied to monocultural states, but the welcome return of a greatly misunderstood political concept.

Empire, as conceived by Cicero, is an expression not of oppression and dispossession but of co-operation and unity. Patrocinial empire is benign and progressive: indeed, this interpretation of peaceful empire is closer to Cicero's original concept than the various self-proclaimed 'Empires' of human history reliant upon hard *imperium*, inevitably manifest as violence and inequality. Empire – the geopolity which has endured since Sargon of Akkad first employed *imperium* to unite a chaotic and perpetually warring world into the first ordered *patrocinium* – offers not a new form of social structure, but a modernised modification of a political system which unifies heterogeneous peoples under a common and shared sovereignty regardless of ethnicity, geography, or belief. This is an accomplishment which few nation-states – or indeed, historical *imperii* – can boast, but which *patrocinium* can offer.

To paraphrase a film whose title is now one of the most instantly recognisable clichés in academia, Empire has not Struck Back. *Imperium* has always been with us, and patrocinial empire is now emerging in a truer form than any empire that has previously existed. And in spite of a proliferation of academic texts and political commentaries decrying this imperial renaissance, empire is not to be feared, despised, or combated. Rather, we ought to embrace patrocinial empire as a universal and unifying political system which can offer so much more than the nation-state, and as the continued prosperity and power of the European and African Unions seems to indicate, may well be re-established as the dominant political system of the twenty-first century. Empire is here to stay – and we should be pleased.

Where then, does this leave academia in relation to the contemporary re-appearance of empire? In order to examine the implications of these arguments in defence of empire, a summary of points must be considered. First, empire, imperialism, and colonialism *are not the same thing*. Empire can exist without imperialism, *patrocinium* without (brute force) *imperium*: while an in-depth discussion of the politics and cultures of colonialism is beyond the scope of this paper, it can be safely asserted that colonialism is *not* the inevitable consequence of empire, and particularly not Ciceronian patrocinial empire. Secondly empire itself is a frustrating concept which ought not be used without an indication of what variety of empire is being discussed. I instead suggest that Cicero's dualism be considered when talking about empire – is the polity in question (or indeed a related policy) a reflection primarily of *imperium* or *patrocinium*? This is not intellectual hair-splitting: the two models are only vaguely related and are entirely capable of existing independently from one another. Third, writers must stop using 'empire' as a semantic bogeyman, a

label slapped carelessly upon a polity or policy which does not appeal to the analyst. It must be conceded that empire is a term with no consensual definition, but this lack of agreement on just what empire is, is not justification for taking the term out of context for the purposes of alarmism, shock value, or simply to denigrate a political system. Like the borders of a medieval *imperium*, the very concept of empire is fuzzy and unclear, with limitless definitions of just what it is. But this lack of terminological cohesion is not *carte blanche* to use the word at will without a fuller appreciation of just what is being discussed.

Similarly, in precisely the same way that postcolonial scholars have demonstrated for colonialism, it must be borne in mind that empire is emphatically *not* a simple one-way relationship in which a monoculture forces its civilisation upon others. There is no omnidirectional flow. Under patrocinal empire, multiple cultures co-exist. The system is not multicultural: rather it is what Raymond Cohen and Raymond Westbrook *et al*, in their analysis of the imperial relations of the Bronze Age empires of the Middle East, term ‘polycultural’: the equal co-existence of different cultures without multiculturalism’s implicit hierarchy of a dominant culture tolerating smaller neighbours.⁵⁷ Polyculturalism is difficult to achieve in a nation-state, and equally so under *imperium*. But in *patrocinium*, polyculturalism – as Austria-Hungary once proved and as the European Union now demonstrates with even greater effect – thrives.

Finally, and most importantly: it is time to move beyond the simplistic assumption that empire is always bad. Is *imperium* bad? Yes – although *imperium* exists with or without empires, and long-lasting *imperium* is not an end goal for a polity but merely one potential means of creating a lasting *patrocinium*. Is this *patrocinium* bad? No. A world of nation-states may be an admirable and noble aim of a modernist political project, but in reality such a system cannot provide the long-term stability and security that only patrocinal empire can.

As we approach the end, let us return to the problem with which we began: the fictional Galactic Senator’s apprehensive comment. Is the nascent Galactic Empire of which she speaks the death-knell of liberty? Perhaps so, if it is a polity reliant upon raw *imperium* to force order upon chaos. But as we have seen, not only is *imperium* a trait of all political entities, a purely *imperial* empire cannot last long without the *patrocinium* to support it. Even the cryptofascist dictators of the Galactic Empire need to construct a willing *patrocinium* if their hegemony is to endure, and as human history demonstrates, the inability to convince peoples to accept a hard-power empire results in that polity rapidly crumbling into dust. The trite two-dimensional vision of empire as barbaric and brutal to the point of nightmarish dystopia, so tirelessly replicated in popular culture, is an unrealistic political concept incapable of being perpetuated. Such brutal polities are not empires – at least in a semantically sound understanding of the word, grounded in Cicero. To endure, *imperium* must be discarded in favour of *patrocinium*, and it is this concept of empire which offers not the death of liberty but the peaceful polycultural environment in which liberty may be

⁵⁷ Raymond Cohen and Raymond Westbrook (eds.), *Amarna Diplomacy: The Beginnings of International Relations* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins Press, 2000) p. 10

exercised. Perhaps, if the Galactic Empire were a patrocinal state born not from a single preceding polity but from a contemporary Earth-like patchwork of squabbling particularist states incapable of addressing universalist problems, the Senator would have little to fear. Perhaps the Empire could indeed deliver precisely what the new Emperor promises his Senators – a safe and secure society. If only it were Cicero’s *patrocinium*.

Empire is here to stay – and this is desirable. Perhaps, as Europe continues to consolidate its benign and collective empire and as other parts of the world begin to construct their own reflections of *Patrocinium Europæum*, we will begin to finally see, that empire is good.

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