Post Taylor: Complacency Overcome

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> Every historian should, I think, write an autobiography. The experience teaches us to distrust our sources which are often autobiographical (Taylor, cited in Burk, 2000: 3).

Introduction

'If the office of history is to amuse, then Taylor stands without peer […] No doubt [students] will continue to [read him] far in the future, whilst the learned rebuttals of critics lie mouldering in the shelves'; still, such 'scholarly longevity speaks for itself' (Schuker, 1999: 50). The sarcastic undertones that the author expresses here do little to hide an obvious frustration at Taylor's monopoly on the subject of Second World War. True, many of Taylor's interpretations are problematic, yet it would be presumptuous to assume that his academic endurance is merely justified by the impressionable reader who succumbs to the populist charm of his 'pellucid prose and opaque meaning' (Schuker, 1999: 50). Taylor's longevity no doubt rests on his talent to draw striking ironies and paradoxes from history, but it is the intention of this essay to show that this is not his sole intention, nor the only reason his work continues to be studied.

In order to attempt to decipher Taylor's 'project', his general ideas will be compared to the Orthodox perspective, drawing on Gordon Martel's 'The Origins reconsidered' (1999) and Philip Bell's 'Origins of the Second World War' (1997). Before dealing with Taylor's interpretations, the uniqueness of his intellectual approach should initially be introduced. The inquiry regard-

ing his longevity and contribution to historical debate will be addressed, and Taylor's rejection of the Nuremberg trial in particular is outlined due to its importance in his project. Ultimately, it is only via the rejection of the trial that Taylor was able to struggle with his contemporaries and eventually produce an original and forceful work. The Taylor/ orthodox debate has since polarised in a seemingly irreconcilable manner and, according to Bell (1997), discussion regarding the origins of the Second World War continues to revolve around these two contrasting frameworks. The 'orthodox' view, here represented by Daniel Thompson (1966), propounds that the war developed according to a pre-determined ideological 'blueprint'. Conversely, Taylor (1963) argues the war was underpinned by opportunism and improvisation, and ignited by the paradoxical outcome of the negotiations over Danzig.

It is argued here that the success of Taylor's project is considerable, despite his dismissal of the Nazi ideology in his framework, and it this dismissal that is extremely contentious among those who study Taylor and the Second World War. However, this paper will show that Taylor's reasons for this dismissal are merited and that Taylor's sheer academic determination and refusal to shy away from what were, at the time, unmentionable matters has propelled this discussion to a different level, one which defies the intellectual complacency assigning all the negative aspects of the war on Hitler's side and hence bequeaths the subject with a much greater degree of analytical complexity. Taylor's work has, therefore, contributed to a polarisation of the subject that has proved essential to the overall elaboration of understanding and the birth of what could arguably be described as a new 'consensus', represented here by Richard Overy (1999) and Philip Bell (1997); an account combining the orthodox account with many of Taylor's insights.

The Historian of the 'uncomfortable'

'Historians often dislike what happened or wish that it had happened differently' (Taylor, 1961: vii), so states Taylor in the opening paragraph of his *Second Thoughts*. Such a propensity, he once assumed, should in principle not get in the way of historical truth, although he later concedes that this might have been a naïve supposition on his part, and that perhaps he should have been more explicit about his role in 'Origins'; for the 'moral standpoint' of historians is not to cast judgements upon historical events, but to 'state the truth as they see it without worrying whether this shocks or confirms existing prejudices' (Taylor, 1961: vii). Taylor thus seems determined to disman-

tle all partialities ensuing from the propensity to wish a different history. It is of primary importance to be aware of this prevailing impetus if we wish to appreciate what he is trying to achieve - challenging the axiomatic notions assigning total responsibility for the war to Germany and Hitler himself.

In a critique to the orthodox accounts on the Second World War Taylor observes that 'people regard Hitler as wicked; and then find proofs of his wickedness in evidence which they would not use against others. Why do they apply this double standard? Only because they assume Hitler's wickedness in the first place' (Taylor, 1961: vii). Such an analytical double standard becomes foundational for critical blindness: for it sets an *a priori* framework according to which only certain characteristics displayed by specific actors are relevant; consequently the outcome is decided before the research begins. Taylor's epistemological position finds more substantive expression in the solid rejection of the Nuremberg trial as a reliable historical source; according to Taylor most of the research gathered during the two decades following the War relied on its evidence; even though such documents were collected as 'a basis for lawyers briefs' and as Taylor rightly indicates this poses at least two problems: firstly, such briefs provide questionable historical evidence since 'the lawyer aims to make a case; the historian wishes to understand a situation.' (Taylor, 1963: 14); secondly, the documents were chosen in part to prove the guilt of those accused, but also to conceal the guilt of the prosecuting powers, for if 'any of the four powers who set up the Nuremberg tribunal had been running the affair alone, it would have thrown the mud more widely. The Western powers would have brought in the Nazi-Soviet Pact; the Soviet Union would have retaliated with the Munich conference and more obscure transactions' (Taylor, 963: 14). Interestingly, Taylor's shrewd distrust of this cosmetic consensus had been vindicated as early as January 1946: the 'latent grievances' repressed by the Nuremberg consensus were disclosed with the publishing of a volume of documents by the American state department on Nazi-Soviet relations emphasising 'the pre-war cooperation between Germany and the Soviet Union in a way that casts some of the blame for the outbreak of war in 1939 on Stalin as well as on Hitler' (Bell, 1997: 46). The Soviet Union retaliated in the same year with *The Falsifiers of History* blaming 'American bankers and industrialists for providing the capital to re-build German war industries in the 1920s and 1930s, and [accusing] Britain and France of encouraging Hitler to turn his aggressive drive towards the East' (Bell, 1997: 46).

Despite the widespread post-war conviction of Hitler's total responsibility for the disclosed horrors, and the consequent 'guilt taboos' of an epoch, Taylor's conviction of the compromise made to historical truth was such that he was not intimidated into assuming a submissive stance regarding the various cites of shared accountability for the conflict. Accordingly, Taylor hauled the 'victims'/ prosecutors (Poland, Britain, France, U.S) into a *conjuncture of combined responsibility* by, for example, exposing Polish stubbornness regarding negotiating at Danzig, which (controversially and according to Taylor) resulted in a total conflict which was undesired by all (Taylor, 1962: 81). In response to his critics' indignation at implying this 'combined responsibility', Taylor replied:

> It was not my fault that the English government, not Hitler […] took the lead in the dismembering of Czechoslovakia; nor that the British government in 1939 gave Hitler the impression that they were more concerned to impose concessions on the Poles than to resist Germany […] If these things tell in favour of Hitler, it is the fault of previous legends that have been repeated by Historians without examination (Taylor, 1963: viii).

Not surprisingly, his interpretations were untenable for 'many critics on both moral and factual grounds' (Kennedy and Imlay, 1997: 118). True, given the sheer gravity of this subject, the moral stance inevitably relies upon the extent to which the factual grounds survive subsequent analytical scrutiny, however, by denouncing the founding bias of the Nuremberg trial (and having this concern validated) Taylor immediately warrants an extremely pertinent case for a substantial revision of the subject. It is important to take into account that Taylor 'challenged an interpretation of the war's origins that until 1961 satisfied almost everyone in the post-war world […] blaming the war on Hitler certainly suited the Germans [for they now they were either dead or in hiding]' (Martel, 1999: 2). As for the Allies, it might well prove psychologically more tenable to see responsibility clearly and neatly distributed in a way that suits 'common sense, morality and expediency' (Bell, 1997: 45). However, it is an integral part of Taylor's framework to 'spread' the 'bad guy' rather 'more widely': for Taylor what is latterly reified as 'guilt' formerly circulated irregularly, unrecognised, 'diluted' in many people's hands, until the limited historian expediently solidifies 'it' on the lap of one 'evil' agent or nation. Not so for Taylor, who instead supports a conjuncture of combined and uneven responsibility.

The 'Orthodoxy' Versus Taylor

Having set out a preliminary elucidation of the ethos of 'Origins', we may proceed with an outline of the 'orthodox account' of Hitler's intentions and the importance of German Nazi ideology towards the Great War.

Daniel Thompsons' 'Demolition of Peace' (1966) provides a chilling account of the collapse of the international system before the threatening ambitions of Italian fascism and German Nazism. The account is 'Churchillian' in spirit in the sense that it manifests a restless disapprobation of the inadequate response of the League of Nations and its leaders in face of all aggressors: first with Japan's occupation of Manchuria; then Italy's hostilities against Ethiopia; followed by Hitler's occupation of the Rhineland in 1936. In the opening section the author immediately condemns the paradoxical response from the British public to the 'National Peace Ballot' issued by the League of Nations in 1934, where most people agreed that collective action should be taken against 'aggressive' countries, but insisted this should take the form of an economic, not military, response. This reflected sheer naivety on the part of the British public, furthermore as their leaders sought to accommodate public opinion so too were policies of collective security created, which 'shirked military action [and] could never give security against men like Mussolini and Hitler' (Thompson, 1966: 690). Thompson goes on to depict Hitler as a calculated individual who takes advantage of a fragile international system in order to deploy his pre-conceived plan to establish German supremacy and ultimately to dominate Europe. The intentions of such an obsessive and ruthless personality were regularly expressed, so Thompson argues, in party ideology, in works like *Mein Kampf*, and in strategic meetings such as those testified by the Hossbach memorandum, which testifies to Hitler's long-term ambitions in Eastern Europe regarding Germany's living space for the master race. Accordingly, it is imperative to the Orthodox view that Hitler should have been stopped at a preliminary stage as this would have avoided the war, had France alone undertaken 'vigorous military reprisals' during the occupation of the Rhineland in March 1936 as this 'would have checked Hitler for a time or maybe forever' (Thompson, 1966: 693). Having failed to do so has caused, in Churchill's words, 'the most unnecessary war of all' (cited in Bell, 1997: 47).

This view renders the policy of appeasement rather problematic; for not only did the League of Nations fail in its responsibility to act assertively against

those who openly challenged the contracts ensuring international stability (Versailles, Locarno), but appeasement also ignored the clearly outlined ambitions of Nazi ideology and the inevitable long term consequences. Chamberlain was therefore wrong to believe that Hitler was essentially 'reversing the wrongs' inflicted by the 'unfair peace of Versailles'; for if 'Hitler and the Nazis meant even half of what they said, then war of some kind was inevitable' unless it was naively assumed that Germany's neighbours 'would not object to their claims for living space of a master race' (Bell, 1997: 58). It is therefore central to the orthodox position that the status of Nazi ideology and its overriding aims were primary, and that it is misconceived to disregard works such as *Mein Kampf* (as Taylor does) as a blue-print for subsequently developments; for 'never an aggressor made his ambitions known more plainly beforehand, never had a party more repeatedly and consistently given warning of what it proposed to attempt. It was all set out in *Mein Kampf* in 1924, in the party program, in the speeches and writings of the leaders and above all of Hitler himself' (Thompson, 1966: 717).

As said, Taylor's position contrasts to this: in an often-equivocal account he argues that Hitler's beliefs were not original, they essentially captured the long running German impetus towards European domination, yet this was not to be achieved by total war, which was in fact undesirable following Germany's defeat in the First World. Hitler hoped in fact to resolve the problem of Germany's living space by either intimidating his opponents into submission or through small wars, such as the attack on Poland. This, argues Taylor, was more likely 'the plan', at least until Hitler had his own judgment corrupted by a string of unexpectedly easy victories: 'Hitler had no clear-cut plan and instead was a supreme opportunist, taking advantage as they came' (Taylor, 1983, cited in Overy, 1999: 94), thus Taylor controversially dismisses the high status often attributed to the notion of a 'blueprint', instead he proposes that *Mein Kampf* and Hitler's public speeches were the empty boasts characteristic of a demagogue; the symbolic content of the ideas were not even the product of Hitler's creation 'it was a common place at the time' Hitler 'merely repeated the chatter of right wing circles [and] like all demagogues, he appealed to the masses' (Taylor, 1963: xxi). milarly, for Taylor, many of the ill conceived 'plans' of the Hossbach memorandum (illustrating how Hitler expected France to go to war with Italy, or Germany's alliance with Britain) further substantiates his view that Hitler had no clearly defined plan. Overall therefore, Taylor views Hitler as not so dissimilar from many statesmen: 'He […] aimed to make Germany the dominant power […] other powers have

pursued similar aims […] other powers seek to defend their vital interests by force of arms' (Taylor, 1963: xxix). Yet despite his dismissal of the importance of blueprints, Taylor does not deny their existence altogether, he concedes that they were abundant yet argues that their ideological relevance weighs little compared to Versailles revisionism (beyond which Taylor believes Hitler had no more ambitions), and Hitler's opportunism before the feeble 'resistance' put up by those who 'did not know what to do with him' (Taylor, 1962: xxii). Taylor's position on appeasement is likewise paradoxical, however, this is something that cannot be fully analysed without first understanding the actual intentions of Hitler and the importance of Nazi ideology. The importance of this exercise is to highlight that, despite his originality, Taylor's argument displays fundamental blind spots. Ultimately the significance of his work, it is argued here, is not as a source of history alone, but as an attack on all complacency, both among the participants in the Second World War and those who sought to analyse and find reason in its trajectory.

Hitlers' Intentions: a Critical Analysis

Reading Richard Overy's concluding statement that 'Hitler did not plan the Second World War more than he planned the Holocaust, but it was not mere historical accident that found him trying to remodel the world order and slaughter Europe's Jews between 1939 and 1945' (1999: 111), one is struck with the disquieting perception that something rather more programmatic than Taylor's revelations had taken place. In truth, defining 'planning' as literally as Taylor did in 'Second Thoughts' (1963) renders the assertion that 'Hitler did not plan the war' as feasible; for obviously no one could, but despite the potentially ill-defined nature of his plans as outlined in the Hossbach memorandum, but disregarding the overriding ends of Nazi ideology and Hitler's conviction on such values is an altogether different matter: for why should one shrug off its impetus merely because its symbolic content is the product of a mainstream ideological climate? 'Borrowed' beliefs do not preclude belief in them and Taylor himself asserts that 'Hitler's unique quality was the gift of translating commonplace thoughts into action, he took seriously what was to others mere talk' (1963: 70), which further demonstrates how deeply personal Hitler's convictions were. Taylor is right to claim that Hitler's ideas were not particularly out of step with the general political and ideological climate: 'Everything which Hitler did against the Jews followed logically from the racial doctrines in which most Germans believed' (Taylor, 1963: 71), indeed Overy agrees that Hitler's foreign policy in the

1930s 'derived in almost a straight line from the radical nationalism of the pre-1914 Reich' - the pan-German longing for territorial unity and correspondent living-space for its superior culture, aggressive economic and cultural imperialism (1999: 94). Taylor is likewise correct to propound that Hitler was also a product of the 'ideas in contemporary Europe' (1962: xxiv), not just Germany, for according to Allardice 'Fascism should not be understood as singularly German or Italian, it was a European experience' (1971: 5, 7).

Unfortunately, Hitler meant what he said. For how could we otherwise explain that such vast resources were deployed towards the 'final solution' during a time in which the conflict against the allies warranted the use of every possible human and material contribution? The scenario simply begs the question: what was specific about Nazism and its relation to Hitler? Rausching (1939) argues that 'no other men played a role in the Nazi revolution or in the history of the Reich remotely comparable to Adolf Hitler' (cited in Bell, 1999: 82), he was justifiably and 'cathartically' associated with the political and ideological movement underpinned by the remarkable development of a nation with millions of unemployed and the 'double-humiliation' of the economic and territorial sanctions of Versailles. Hence, he was the champion of an aim to become the main European power and to put an end to detrimental treaties in only six years. However, this is not to forget that the political and ideological climate was already in motion: Bell claims that there is no consensus marking the beginning of Nazism (1997: 78), but that the social circumstances in which Nazism and Fascism became more manifest were in many respects similar; both were a reaction against the ensuing industrialisation and consequent loss of tradition and fragmentation of society (which inevitably created new winners and new losers); both were revolutionary and traditional in the sense that they attempted to restore national unification in order to harmonise the 'uneasy coexistence of social structures that originated in different areas, the tense overlayering of industrial capitalism social conflicts with pre-industrial, pre-capitalist social constellations' (Kocka, 1978: 281, cited in Eley, 1981: 62), such unification could be consolidated if drawn by a particularly forceful form of nationalism that 'was the common creed of all fascist organisations'. Subsequently each one 'expressed the uniqueness of its tradition and symbols' (Allardice, 1971: 50). In an expedient synthesis of what proves a rather complex analysis, Bell claims that what defines the *sui generis* characteristics of German Nazism is the 'deeply rooted racial and social Darwinism of the nineteenth century':

Fascism was more recent and less concerned with race; Nazism was 'infinitely more brutal' (Bell, 1997: 77).

There is now little doubt that Hitler was personally convinced of the beliefs he expounded in *Mein Kampf* and documents such as the *Hossbach Memorandum* (1936, 1937); he genuinely regarded life as a dialectical struggle for survival in which superior races must purge themselves from inferior ones toward the attainment of absolute racial purity. This rather sloppy adaptation of Darwin's biological arguments of 'survival of the species' ultimately culminates with the final solution. This is no contingency. Bell provides an exhaustive list of specific examples in *Mein Kampf* and Hitler's other 'Secret Book', between pages eighty-two and ninety-seven, highlighting various passages that illustrate Hitler's obsession with anti-Semitism and the need for living space for the master race. The significance of the 'four year plan' and the memorandum must also not be disregarded; the first asserted that the time had come for Germany to eradicate Europe from the evils of the French revolution and its 'natural progeny' bolshevism - Hitler claimed that 'no nation will be able to avoid or abstain from this historical conflict' (1936, quoted in Overy, 1999: 98); Germany was the heroic nemesis of the 'worldwide triumph of Judaeo-Bolshevism' (Overy, 1999: 98). The second manuscript gave a timetable for the acquisition of living space for Germany in a great power conflict. He expected to incorporate Austria and to conquer Czechoslovakia 'sooner rather than later'[1] (in Overy 1999: 114). In December 1937 Goering told a British visitor 'First we shall overrun Czechoslovakia, then Danzig, and then we'll fight the Russians'[2] (in Overy 1999: 104). Now this clearly takes Germany beyond treaty revision, rendering Taylor's vision of foreign policy by 'opportunistic revisionism' at the least problematic.

In light of all this then, what can be said about Taylor's contribution? Any observer can see that Hitler substantiated most of the 'blueprints' which Taylor seemed determined to undermine: Germany underwent a vigorous militarised program; used Eastern Europe for 'living space'; fought the 'inevitable conflict' against the Communists; and massacred the Jews. This pre-conceived development seems to fully substantiate Thompson's position, at the expense of Taylor's vision of a war by improvisation and accident. So on the orthodox side we have Hitler as the 'deranged fanatic of the Swastika', leading Europe 'step by step into the abyss', cunningly overcoming all the resistance by way of a preconceived plan. On Taylor's side we see Hitler as a detached dreamer with little knowledge of foreign policy, guided by intu-

ition, responding opportunistically to events, and exploiting the openings provided by bewildered statesmen 'who did not know what to do with him' before the already deep-seated economic and diplomatic crisis of the international system (which is not Hitler's fault). Far from irreconcilable, Overy links the two frameworks without compromising either by arguing that the 'broad ideological and geopolitical aspirations acted as permanent reference points in the day-to-day conduct of affairs […] Hitler acted like any other politician in responding opportunistically to events […] Improvisatory and reactive tactics in diplomacy are no more inconsistent with a broad strategic vision than they are on the battlefield' (1999: 103). As such, each perspective rather than acting as a one-sided framework, interplays and interweaves with the other to produce a less prejudiced and more balanced view. In the end, Taylor's claim that 'in terms of foreign policy Hitler was no more unscrupulous than other statesmen, in wickedness he outdid them all' is, therefore, adequate when placed in the context of the orthodox view as encapsulated by Overy's assertions. It is therefore not unreasonable to locate Taylor's assertion that '[Hitler] didn't plan the Great War' (Taylor, 1962: xvi) within the above framework. Overy holds that presently 'not all historians agree that Hitler did not want total war' (1999: 103), but that most acknowledge that Hitler wished to avoid a confrontation with Britain (he therefore wished to avoid a conflict with the West). According to Overy, Goering stated during the Nuremberg trial that much to his own irritation, Hitler held too firmly to this principle. Again, this proposition was extremely controversial at the time of the publication of 'Origins', as was the suggestion that the bellicose threats over Danzig were designed to 'score another Munich' rather than ignite total conflict. Hitler's intention to score another Munich is feasible and compatible with the above framework in this sense: why not enjoy the fruits of total war without spending the resources required? This does not, however, detract from the fact that before resistance the generals would do what they are supposed to: Taylor's apparently contrasting approach once more adds realism and complexity to the orthodox perspective. The next section will examine the issue of Danzig in more detail.

Causes of the Outbreak: Appeasement

As previously outlined, the status of Hitler's intentions directly impact on the validity of revisionist versus orthodox perspectives: on the one hand, if Hitler's goals were limited to retribution of Versailles, then appeasement was more reasonable, but if conversely *Mein Kampf* was a blueprint of Hitler's

aims, then, as the orthodox perspective would have it, he should have been stopped at the earliest opportunity. However what adds complexity in the case of this paper is that Taylor sites on both sides. Taylor's assertion that 'Hitler got as far as he did due to the stupidity of others' (1962: xxi) is representative of his own *personal* position regarding the escalation of the conflict and his vehement opposition to appeasement. However, this contrasts to 'Taylor the Historian', who believes that 'historians do a bad day's work when they describe the appeasers as stupid or cowards. They were men confronted with real problems, doing their best in the circumstances of the time' (Taylor, 1962: xxii). The disparity between Taylor's views is perplexing given that they are stated in the same section of 'Second Thoughts', though this is partly attributable to complexity of this issue: Taylor's stance on Hitler's ambitions, as located within the confines of revisionism, heavily impact on the status of appeasement and what he believes triggered the great conflict. Despite his dismissal of Nazi ideology, Taylor sees the restoration of Germany as a dominant power within Europe as inevitable. Most Germans of course regarded Versailles as an artificial arrangement preventing the consolidation of their 'natural greatness' in Europe, this coupled with the fact that Germany's ethnic minorities had been 'artificially' displaced was sure to resurface, either by diplomatic means or via war. In the end it was via the latter that Hitler achieved retribution for that which was considered by most Germans and many British as a 'morally wrong' settlement. Thus, according to his revisionist perspective, Taylor assumes that the demands made at Danzig would have been Hitler's last. As such, it did not make sense to withdraw all the diplomatic 'manoeuvres and bargaining which had marked the Czechoslovakian crisis' (Taylor, 1963: 85) in order to engage with a war over what were 'justified German's grievances' and to fight for 'the part of the [Versailles] settlement which they had long regarded as least defensible' (Taylor, 1963: 87). The corollary of this framework is that Taylor lays much of the blame for the outcome of the Danzig crisis on Polish unwillingness to cooperate under British diplomatic pressure, even though this would not compromise their national sovereignty. Failing to do so was disastrous for Poland: 'in 1938 Czechoslovakia was betrayed, in 1939 Poland was saved. Less than one hundred thousand Czechs died during the war. Six and a half million Poles were killed - which was best, to be a betrayed Czech or a saved Pole?' (Taylor, 1962: xxiii).

Taylor's considerable talent to draw ironies and paradoxes regarding the eve of the outbreak and its consequences is a descriptive *tour de force*; however, the

significance attributed to Danzig is based on the wrong premises: for the British were no longer concerned with Danzig itself, but with 'the wider ambitions of Hitler, their implications for the future of Poland and the distribution of power in Europe' (Greenwood, 1999: 225). By the time of the dispute at Danzig, early in 1939, the British government had received a number of disquieting reports predicting 'German moves against Memel, Poland, Czechoslovakia, or the Ukraine, and in the West, against the Netherlands and possibly Switzerland' (Bell, 1997: 278). Chamberlain was aware of Hitler's speeches denouncing 'Chamberlain's interfering diplomacy and proclaiming the Munich settlement a victory for brute force' (cited in Kennedy and Imlay, 1999: 122), British foreign policy was therefore in the process of change from February 1939 onwards: 'it was now believed that another German move against another state would signify that their aim was the domination of Europe' (Bell, 1997: 279). The conflict over Danzig in the eyes of the British no longer reflected their concern to end Hitler's 'revisionist' demands, but instead reflected the beginning of a clear understanding of what his future goals actually were. Greenwood also agrees that the guarantees given to Poland by the British were now supported by fears 'over a general attack on Europe, not merely a Nazi coup on Danzig' (Greenwood, 1999: 225). Hence it is misconceived of Taylor to assume such a 'contingentivist' approach on the cause of the conflict; an approach which was essentially a set of diplomatic blunders culminating with 'Hitler's launching of a diplomatic manoeuvres, putting off until 29th August a move which he should have made on the 28th' (Taylor, 1963: 278). As Kennedy and Imlay rightly observes it seems that for Taylor 'only in this sense it is Hitler's war' (1999: 240). Unsurprisingly, Bell claims that this assertion has had little support, concluding in accord with Kennedy and Imlay, and Greenwood, that France and Britain 'were impelled into war for reasons which combined power politics with ideology: German expansion and Nazi domination both had to be resisted' (1997: 122).

In light of our knowledge of the substance of Hitler's long-term plans, and the horrors that unfolded as a consequence of their materialisation, it would be morally contentious to dispute that Hitler should indeed have been stopped, sooner rather than later. As Taylor 'the individual' (the alter ego to Taylor the historian) it was reasonable for him to condemn the concessions made over Czechoslovakia and the misplaced diplomatic emphasis on Poland instead of Germany vis-à-vis Danzig, but Taylor the historian is also correct to point out that the 'British were doing their best': Chamberlain genuinely

believed that Hitler's goals were limited to revisionism (see Thompsom 1966, but also Bell, 1997; Martel, 1999). However, by the time Chamberlain began to doubt Hitler's intentions, he did not feel the time was yet right to intervene. Chamberlain's assertion that 'we must not precipitate into a conflict - we will be smashed' (cited in Bell, 1997: 264) clearly suggests that more time was necessary for Britain to prepare. Taylor was also right to point out that Britain mistrusted Russia (rightly so as their suspicions were later vindicated), and that the prospect of a counterbalancing force against communism was attractive. This is echoed by Bell: 'Hitler's Germany, until it became an obvious danger to the British public possessed a considerable attraction of being a powerful enemy against Bolshevist Russia' (1997: 124).

Despite Taylor's manifold views on the appeasement, Kennedy and Imlay still believe that many have 'stood the test of time' (1999: 116); perhaps such wide and even contradictory perspectives are what has made Taylor's approach useful for historians positing often very different arguments. Whether Germany was motivated by revisionism, ideology or both, it seems that the orthodox view that a major conflict could have been stopped during the occupation of Rhineland, as suggested by Thompson, is too simplistic a supposition. Taylor's thought is that removing Hitler would be a rather contentious task for the allies, for unfortunately the vast majority of the Germans wanted him there as he 'was a sounding board for the whole nation': Hitler had gained power in a constitutional manner, thus 'only the Germans could turn him out' (Taylor, 1962: xxiv). So even if the allies had intervened during the occupation of the Rhineland, this would have either deferred the problem or even made it worse given Germany's unanimous perception of their shorn off 'natural' greatness, stripped away by Versailles and the 'hate inspired antagonists'. This, however, again contradicts Taylor's own bewilderment as to 'why Britain and France did not resist Germany's reversion to a great power status' (cited in Marks, 1999: 16). In any case, Taylor's ambivalence on the subject might well be justified, for the answer as to whether a major second conflict could have been prevented will remain a counter-factual pursuit.

Conclusion

In 'The Revisionist as Moralist', Martel states that 'Taylor's book will remain in print long after his successors' have ceased publication' (1999: 2). If Martel is correct, this success must rest on something more than the felicity

of Taylor's interpretations on the central issues of the Great War, for it was misconceived of Taylor to deny the high status and specificity of Nazism as an end in itself. Additionally, he was mistaken to ascribe a higher status to the 'well meaning diplomatic blunders' as the cause of the war, over and above the threat posed by Hitler to Western powers. It might therefore seem paradoxical to witness in this essay such high praise of Taylor whilst contrasting it to ample evidence rendering some of his central interpretations substantially flawed, nonetheless, the significance of his project is believed to overcome the shortcomings of his historical interpretation; apart from his captivating talent of highlighting paradoxes and ironies, there are two central points that work in Taylor's favour: the first is that he was unique in propounding an alternative framework to the Orthodox perspective, by way of his rejection of the Nuremberg trial as a reliable source of historical data, and thus establishing a conjuncture of combined responsibility. Despite the controversial extreme forms of argument already highlighted, this additional framework can now be added to the orthodox perspective in order to produce a more balanced account. Since Taylor's publication of 'Origins', the work has become polarised; his challenge to orthodoxy and complacency has highlighted a complex of interrelated factors, and historians now have the options of building these into a new perspective, borrowing from both (orthodox/ Taylor's) and overall has achieved a greater balance in the exercise: Taylor's extreme pulls the orthodox extreme with equal force and somewhere in the middle historians such as Overy are gifted with a clearer picture of Hitler, Germany and the causes and trajectory of the war. Yet, as the leader in introducing this 'counter intuitive' framework, Taylor has created only the means for an end: the end itself, and the second point in his favour, is rooted in Taylor's use of this means for a moral endeavour (contradicting his officially a-moralistic stance). Allardyce claims that 'few Germans after the war would confess having given any loyalty to the Nazi movement. This was not a lie in the soul of the German nation; it was part of the collective delusion that all the fascist movements brought upon their followings […] when the movement disappeared in the holocaust, everything that had given them life and spirit were carried away with them' (1971: 3). It seems that most of the participants in such a 'historical bubble' looked back in disbelief, wondering how it happened. One consequently wonders what is more relevant; the symbolic content of the ideas that constituted it, or the complacency that permitted its consolidation. It is argued here that such complacency, whether conscious or not, is what Taylor is fighting. This might partly explain his undermining of the status of Nazi ideology, situating it in the

shadow of such complacency, which is initially and finally responsible for providing ideology with substance.

Given that Taylor himself retrospectively conceded that 'Origins' was in large part 'an academic exercise' (thus the rejection of documents that contradicted his 'project') (Kennedy and Imlay, 1999: 242), it is not unreasonable to assume a certain level of 'artistic licence' in his work. This is to say that in the higher pursuit of challenging the 'truths' of an epoch, Taylor was not afraid to compromise historical fact; his method rests on a systematic intellectual stir by which one learns that 'few things are as they appear to be to the naked eye; honourable intentions lead to tragic conclusions, wicked designs are facilitated by the well-intentioned', his work, states Martel, 'will endure, if only because he rescued this vital part of the human story from the vapid simplicities of good versus evil and returned it to its proper place of complexity and paradox' (Martel, 1999: 11). However, like every moral stance which is based on a value judgement, and given the historical implications of what actually occurred, the result is contentious.

Nuno Gol Pires (anthroponuno@hotmail.com) is currently completing a Masters in Social & Political Thought at the University of Sussex and is about to begin a New Route DPhil in International Relations. His research will involve a critical investigation of diplomatic crisis. He would like to extend special thanks to J.R, K.M, and T.J.

Endnotes

1. From the minutes of the conference in the Reich Chancellery, November 5, 1037, Documents on German Foreign Policy, Series D, Vol. I, pp. 29-39.

2. From the report of the meeting with Goering, July 28, 1937, in the Christine papers, 18/1 5.

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