



Covenants without Swords: Idealist Liberalism and the Spirit of Empire

Jeanne Morefield



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Covenants without Swords examines an enduring tension within liberal theory: that between many liberals' professed commitment to universal equality on the one hand, and their historic support for the politics of hierarchy and empire on the other. It does so by examining the work of two extremely influential British liberals and internationalists, Gilbert Murray and Alfred Zimmern. Jeanne Morefield mounts a forceful challenge to disciplinary boundaries by arguing that this tension, on both the domestic and international levels, is best understood as frequently arising from the same, liberal reformist political aim--namely, the aim of fashioning a socially conscious liberalism that ultimately reifies putatively natural, preliberal notions of paternalistic order.

Morefield also questions conventional analyses of interwar thought by resurrecting the work of Murray and Zimmern, and by linking their approaches to liberal internationalism with the ossified notion of sovereignty that continues to trouble international politics to this day. Ultimately, Morefield argues, these two thinkers' drift toward conservative and imperialist understandings of international order was the result of a more general difficulty still faced by liberals today: how to adequately define community in liberal terms without sacrificing these terms themselves. Moreover, *Covenants without Swords* suggests that Murray and Zimmern's work offers a cautionary historical example for the cadre of post-September 11th "new imperialists" who believe it possible to combine a liberal commitment to equality with an American Empire.



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