

The background is a textured teal color. Scattered across the surface are numerous small, rectangular pieces of paper with torn edges, in various colors including yellow, orange, red, pink, light blue, green, and dark blue. These scraps are arranged in a somewhat random pattern, with some appearing in rows and others isolated.

# Realism and World Politics

Edited by Ken Booth

# REALISM AND WORLD POLITICS

This book contributes to the rethinking of realism through multiple analyses of the key works of Kenneth Waltz, arguing that a sophisticated appreciation of realism is needed to truly understand World Politics and International Relations.

Bringing together a theoretically varied group of leading scholars from both sides of the Atlantic, this book is an outstanding appreciation of the work of realism's most important theorist since the Second World War, and the persistent themes thrown up by his work over a half-century. The contributors do not engage with Waltz's work as slavish disciples, but rather as positive critics, recognising its decisive significance in International Relations, while using the process of critical engagement to search for new or renewed understandings of unfolding global situations and new insights into long-standing problems of theory-building.

The book will be of great interest to students of IR, foreign policy, security studies and politics.

**Ken Booth** is Senior Research Associate in the Department of International Politics, Aberystwyth University, where he was formerly E.H Carr Professor and Head. He is editor of the journal *International Relations* and author/editor of over 20 books on International Relations and Security Studies. He is a Fellow of the British Academy and Academician of the Academy of Social Sciences.

'In this fine volume, Ken Booth has brought together leading theorists of international politics to assess the work of Kenneth Waltz. These excellent essays clearly demonstrate how profound and enduring Waltz's influence has been on the study of international politics. I learned much from reading these essays, and I know others will also.'

*Prof. Robert J. Art, Brandeis University, USA*

'The end of the Cold War, we were told, dealt a death blow to Realism in International Relations. Recent work on Carr and Morgenthau – and now this outstanding volume on Waltz brought to us by one of the major figures in the field – proves otherwise. An indispensable work on the single most important post-war figure in the field of International Relations. Essential reading.'

*Prof. Michael Cox, London School of Economics, UK*

'If you want to understand realism you must read Kenneth Waltz. If you want to understand realism and Kenneth Waltz, you must read this book. Its star-studded cast-list ensures that no angle of the subject is left uncovered.'

*Prof. Christopher Hill, University of Cambridge, UK*

'*Realism and World Politics* is a critical but appreciative analysis of Waltz's thinking from *Man, the State, and War* through *Theory of International Politics* and beyond. No thinker since 1979 has so captured the imagination and critical thinking of the field of IR as Waltz. With the advantage of hindsight, the contributors show that there is still much to learn from Waltz, much to build on, and much to ponder. Followers and critics alike will want to read this book.'

*Prof. John A. Vasquez, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA*

# REALISM AND WORLD POLITICS

*Edited by Ken Booth*

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**This book is dedicated to**

**KENNETH N. WALTZ**

**Our indispensable\* theorist**

★ indispensable *adj.* 1. Incapable of being dispensed with; essential; required.  
2. Incapable of being set aside or escaped; inevitable . . . – *n.* An indispensable person or thing . . . *Indispensable* even more specifically . . . [than *essential* or *vital*] denotes that which cannot be sacrificed.

*The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*



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# FOREWORD

*Kenneth N. Waltz*

Since the Treaty of Westphalia, states have been the bedrock on which the international political system is built. More, and more often, the bedrock is thought to have softened and eroded. When A-bombs fell on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the nation-state appeared to be doomed. That world government was the only alternative to world war was quickly concluded by Robert Maynard Hutchins and Bertrand Russell, and somewhat later by Herman Kahn. Yet, nuclear weapons in the hands of some states have made it impossible for those states to fight major wars and so, paradoxically, these very weapons have thereby become the safeguard of states. Globalization was expected to render national borders so porous as to lead to the demise of states. Instead, globalization has placed a premium on the abilities of states to cope with fast-changing economic and technological conditions. After September 11, 2001, terrorists, it was feared, would be able to deploy forces on a scale that few states could cope with, but terrorists are not able to mount sustained attacks, to rend the fabric of societies, and to occupy state territories. They can frighten and annoy states without the slightest ability to undermine them. Some have thought that non-governmental organizations might transcend states and ultimately replace them. But NGOs, far from threatening states, have served as their hand-maidens. The financing of NGOs depends heavily on states; the health and work, and the very existence of NGOs requires the support and tolerance of states. The essays in this book, written by a band of outstanding scholars with different takes on how to theorize international politics, demonstrate the pertinence, the resilience, and, I must add, at times the limits and weaknesses of realist theory. I am pleased that books of mine published in distant years have stimulated so many thoughtful, insightful, and constructively critical essays. They attest to the importance and contribute to the power of the agenda of realism.





# PREFACE

*Ken Booth*

This volume is one outcome of a project to celebrate two notable milestones in the academic study of International Politics. The year 2009 marked the anniversary of the publication of two of the discipline's small number of classical texts: it was the 50th anniversary of the publication of Kenneth Waltz's *Man, the State and War*, and the 30th anniversary of his *Theory of International Politics*.

The contributors to the present volume have joined in celebrating these anniversaries, recognising Professor Waltz's unique stature in the field in doing so: but they have done so not as slavish disciples. They pay him an even higher scholarly compliment. While mindful of the remarkable centrality and authority of Waltz's work, the contributors engage with it critically in the chapters below, offering alternative understandings of some of the most basic conceptual and theoretical issues in the discipline, and more complex accounts of unfolding global dynamics. All are united with Professor Waltz, however, in sharing an abiding concern with the ways in which power at the international level pulls and pushes the lives of real people in real places, and of the unique potential of our discipline to ask the biggest questions in the biggest political arena of all.

*Realism and World Politics* should be of interest to all students of politics across borders: its issues are of lasting significance to those who want to understand how the world works. The book's particular audience includes upper level undergraduates, Masters and PhD students, as well as teachers of International Relations/World Politics. Addressed by a group of scholars from varied theoretical and geographical locations, the chapters below cover the political ideas and context of Waltzian realism, structural realism's basic concepts, the conundrum of human nature in world affairs, the causes of war and modalities of security, and the Rubik cube of interconnections between politics and power at different levels.

Earlier stages of this project included a conference and special issues of a journal, and multiple thanks are due on my part to those who made these so successful and enjoyable. Particular credit is due to the contributors to this volume; without their enthusiastic support the project would not have been viable. For helping to fund the conference I want to thank the Department of International Politics at

Aberystwyth University, and especially successive Heads of Department, Colin McInnes and Michael Foley. Financial support was also given by Sage, the publishers of *International Relations* (in which the conference proceedings were first published), and by the Aberystwyth University Conference Fund. The conference administrative work was overseen as efficiently as ever by Elaine Lowe, while an early informal sub-committee hammered out its intellectual themes (my thanks go to Toni Erskine, Michael Foley, Andrew Linklater, Nicholas Wheeler and Michael Williams). Various helpers at the time of the conference ensured it was fun, as well as smoothly run: Ali Bilgic, Lisa Denney, Vincent Keating, Laura Lima, Rachel Owen, Jennifer Pedersen, Kamila Stullerova and Iain Wilson. Alastair Finlan organised the vidcasting of the proceedings, and the presentations can be accessed at [www.aber.ac.uk/interpol](http://www.aber.ac.uk/interpol) (link to 'The King of Thought' conference). The vidcast includes an introductory roundtable, entitled 'The indispensable books in our field'; hearty thanks are due to Tim Dunne, Chris Hill, Caroline Kennedy-Pipe, Nicholas Rengger and Ken Waltz himself for making this such a lively and interesting event.

Alongside me on this project from the start has been Frazer Egerton, to whom I owe a special debt. He acted as the conference's willing and innovative 'gofer', oversaw the special issues of *International Relations* as his final job in the post of Editorial Assistant, and subsequently has been an ever-reliable and morale-boosting Research Assistant for this volume; he also prepared the Index. At the last minute, Jan Ruzicka commented very helpfully on my chapters.

Earlier versions of most of the chapters in the volume were published in a two-part special issue of *International Relations* (Vol. 23, nos. 2 and 3, 2009). Special thanks are due to David Mainwaring at Sage who not only secured some funding for the conference, but subsequently smoothed the project's transition to Routledge and the present volume. At Routledge, Andrew Humphrys and Rebecca Brennan proved to be as helpful as any group of academics could wish.

Finally, at the heart of this project, has been Ken Waltz himself. He not only supported the project from the start (in the full knowledge that he would not be entering a den of slavish disciples), but he also attended the conference when the saddest of personal circumstances gave him every reason not to make the arduous journey from remote Maine to west Wales. He participated in the conference proceedings, contributed to one of the special issues, and wrote the Foreword to this volume. Throughout the conference he engaged with humour, tolerance, vigour, deep insight, and quick wit to the constant questioning of his life's work. It has become a commonplace (after Robert Gilpin<sup>1</sup>) to quip that no one loves a realist. It may be true in general: among those who know him, it is not so in the case of Ken Waltz.

## Note

1 Robert Gilpin, 'No one loves a political realist', *Security Studies*, 5 (3), 1996, pp. 3–26.

# 1

## REALISM REDUX

### Contexts, concepts, contests

*Ken Booth*

Three interconnected themes run through this book, though the individual contributors have different takes on them: first, an appreciation of Kenneth N. Waltz as one of the few truly indispensable theorists in the study of international politics; second, an understanding that the theory with which he is associated, structural realism, offers a powerful picture of the international system with which, or against which, any serious student of the subject must engage; and finally a belief that we need to know a good deal more than realism in its various configurations in order to make sense of world politics.

#### **The Waltzian legacy**

The term ‘realism redux’ in the title of this chapter refers to the revival of interest in realist theory following a period in which, apparently, no one loved realists and nobody loved realism.<sup>1</sup> By the start of this century, realism was threatened with becoming a real wasm.<sup>2</sup> Today, realism has not achieved anything like its former disciplinary ascendancy, but its respectability has almost been restored, with particular interest having been shown in the work of some of its great thinkers. This book contributes to such rethinking, in relation to specific aspects of structural realist theory, and realism’s general standing in the discipline.

Realism redux, so far, has largely taken place within the realist family, fine-tuning their differences. For the most part, however, the present book is not the work of such family members. With several notable exceptions, *Realism and World Politics* has been written by scholars better known as critics of some or all aspects of realism, but who believe that engaging with realism is essential if one is to speak with any persuasiveness about politics across borders. Given the book’s generally critical orientation, readers might ask why we are pursuing a project that aims not to bury the work of Kenneth Waltz, realism’s most prominent contemporary theorist, but

## 2 Realism redux

to celebrate it. The apparent paradox is simple to explain. First, a basic task from a critical perspective is to hold up a mirror to contemporary realities, attempting to reveal the ideas that have dominated our history and which continue to sustain the powerful structures that shape the present and at least immediate future. Engaging with realism, for students of International Politics, is central to such a task. Second, nobody should minimise the significance and power of Waltzian theorising simply because they find its arguments uncongenial, in part or in whole. Instead, by recognising both the remarkable centrality and authority of Waltz's work, and the need for knowledgeable critical engagement, I believe the writers of the chapters below are able to develop better understandings of some of the discipline's most basic conceptual and theoretical issues, and more robust explanations of the complexities of unfolding global dynamics. In the pursuit of these goals, the book seeks to make four distinct contributions:

One: by pursuing a critical-yet-engaged approach, the book offers a rich mix of understandings of the powerful structural realist agenda. Readers will find engagement with this agenda from the perspectives, among others, of constructivism, critical theory, the English school, gender, and World History.

Two: the book shows that some of the most basic issues remain unsettled within realism, never mind International Politics as a whole. Central concepts such as 'structure', 'theory', 'human nature', and so on will be exposed as wide open to contestation. This is also the case with certain policy-related issues, notably (in Waltz's world) the role of nuclear weapons. Contested concepts and disputed policy prescriptions ensure that International Politics/IR/World Politics will remain a vibrant discipline.<sup>3</sup>

Three: the book underlines the desirability of moving on from the *schoolism* of the past twenty years – the pigeon-holing, feuding, and flag-waving of distinctive ontological, epistemological, and methodological theoretical positions. The book shows not only how porous the boundaries are between the different schools, but also reveals the flaws in the labelling of individual theorists, as if to label is to explain, and to explain is to understand. Schoolism served its disciplinary purpose for a decade or so, but we now need to move on. This means focusing the best ideas on the most urgent international issues; and in this regard realist ideas must be accorded respect, even if one believes they are flawed.

Four: it is hoped that *Realism and World Politics* will reinforce the claim that this discipline has a unique and potentially overarching role in the Humanities and Social Sciences. Not only is this branch of learning, in its very origins and nature, a quintessentially interdisciplinary discipline,<sup>4</sup> but it asks the biggest questions in Politics in the biggest arena of politics.

These four contributions emerge through the discussion of the three themes highlighted in this chapter's opening paragraph: (1) Kenneth Waltz is an indispensable theorist in the study of International Politics; (2) Structural realism offers a powerful picture of the international system; (3) We need to know a good deal more than realism to make sense of world politics. These are discussed in turn below.

### ***Kenneth Waltz is an indispensable theorist***

In the final decades of the last century, and creeping into the present, the zeitgeist in the study of all branches of the Social Sciences and Humanities moved against honouring ‘great thinkers’. The so-called ‘canon’ attracted particular disdain in postmodern and postcolonial writing, being seen as synonymous with discredited ‘Western’ ways of thinking. This was a fashion I did not like at the time, and still do not, for the canon comprises classic texts and iconic scholars; above all, it is the repository of *the ideas that made us*. To understand the canon is therefore an important part of trying to know ourselves. In their disdain for the IR canon of – admittedly – mostly dead white men, the foot soldiers of opposition not only distanced themselves from key issues, but they also seemed blind to the identity of their own generals. The (feminist) philosopher Mary Daly spied the double standard, and tried to take the wind out of (female) academics working on postmodern theory, by pointing out that they were themselves ‘puppets of dead white males like Michel Foucault’.<sup>5</sup>

Today’s renewed interest in the great realist thinkers and theorists<sup>6</sup> (notably Hans J. Morgenthau) is to be welcomed. There are many justifications for adopting – once in a while – a ‘great-thinkers’ approach to engaging with the fundamental issues in any branch of learning. Studying classic works in depth is one way of learning how to write and to think. ‘Classics’ are invariably better written than the workaday textbooks and articles that presently weigh down our desks, while attempting to comprehend great minds grappling with great issues is among the most taxing intellectual work there is. More specifically, focusing on a distinguished career or on a classic book is a potentially fruitful way of trying to understand the development of a body of thought, or a whole discipline. In International Politics, with its multiple schools and periodic great debates, much can be gained by trying to understand the work of scholars who have attempted to provide an organised framework of answers for our universe of questions. Even when one considers a particular theory to be wrong, the way its exponents have developed it invariably stimulates ideas, warnings, and methods to help one’s own work.

For these general reasons, as well as the contingency of the double anniversaries of his two classic books, the time is ripe for another reconsideration of major aspects of the work of Kenneth Waltz. I will outline the claim that he is one of our truly indispensable theorists under three headings: *scholar*, *theory* and *theorist*.

First, as a *scholar*, Waltz has an outstanding reputation in our field, attested to by leading figures. Note the following: ‘All students of international politics are familiar with Kenneth Waltz’s famous books’ (Robert Jervis); ‘Kenneth N. Waltz is the pre-eminent theorist of his generation’ (Robert O. Keohane); ‘Kenneth Waltz is the most important international relations theorist of the past half century’ (John J. Mearsheimer); ‘Kenneth Waltz is the pre-eminent international relations theorist of the post-World War II era’ (Stephen M. Walt).<sup>7</sup> The chapters below will help readers appraise whether such acclaim is justified.

While his reputation is the highest, Waltz has not been a prolific author by the standards of our times. His books are relatively few in number, and none is the size

#### 4 Realism redux

of a telephone directory. The chapters below concentrate on his two major works, *Man, the State and War* (1959) and *Theory of International Politics* (1979). Hidemi Suganami's chapter discusses some of the links between them; nonetheless, Waltz's other writing is not entirely ignored. Nor should it be, for it has often been controversial and controversialist, as well as addressing major issues. In particular, in what follows, there is some discussion of his work on democracy and foreign policy (see the chapters by Michael Foley and Michael Williams), and on the significance of nuclear weapons (see the chapters by Daniel Deudney and Nicholas Wheeler). It is his classic books, however, which receive and deserve most detailed attention (see Suganami for example on *Man, the State and War* and Ole Wæver on *Theory of International Politics*).

To have written one classic in one's chosen field – let alone two as Waltz has – merits the accolade of 'pre-eminent' thinker by any standards. But how are classics to be read? There is a persistent argument that all works should be understood strictly in context (as is explained in the chapter by Chris Brown). At one level there can be no quibbling with the spirit of such an approach, for context can deliver insight: but there are some books for which a contextualist reading can never be enough. A classic might indeed be defined as a work that transcends context, enabling lucky readers to have what the philosopher W.B Gallie used to call 'a time-transcending dialogue' with the great mind behind it. Whether it is a dialogue about 'human nature' (see the chapters by Neta Crawford and Jean Bethke Elshtain), or the meanings of 'theory' (see the chapter by Wæver), or causation (see Suganami's chapter), Waltz's books give us the opportunity to engage in a dialogue with an indispensable theorist of the international. All the chapters show that there remains a great deal left to discuss in Waltz's books – another test of their being classics.

Waltz is known for his rigour as a social scientist, but what is often overlooked by his friends as well as his detractors, is that he is also a gifted writer. There is a richness in his work (not always evident in that of all his followers) which has been missed by those who have focused narrowly on the most abstract and rationalistic aspects of Waltzian theory, especially in the wake of his 1979 book. This has led to the common image of the 'poverty of neorealism'.<sup>8</sup> Proof, to the contrary, of the richness of Waltz's writing is evident in his ability to encapsulate a complex argument in a beguilingly simple formulation ('Human nature may in some sense have been the cause of war in 1914, but by the same token it was the cause of peace in 1910');<sup>9</sup> in the way his books offer more provocative examination questions for students, page for page, than any others in the field (for example, 'If everyone's strategy depends upon everyone else's, then the Hitlers determine in part the action, or better, reaction, of those whose ends are worthy and whose means are fastidious.'<sup>10</sup> Discuss!); and in his facility to offer a quip that sometimes recalls Bierce's *Devil's Dictionary* (as with 'Interdependence, one might think, is a euphemism used to obscure the dependence of most countries').<sup>11</sup> To ask readers to recognise the richness of Waltz's work must be accompanied by a request – too often ignored in today's fast-food approach to learning and teaching – that there is no substitute for chewing Waltz, slowly, in the original.

This leads, secondly, to Waltzian *theory*. Structural realism undoubtedly reshaped the whole field after its first elaboration. Structural realism/neorealism – the terms are used interchangeably<sup>12</sup> – became the magnetic north by which students of relations between states navigated their different journeys to explanation and understanding. All theories of international politics had to have a theory *about* structural realism, if not *of* it.

It will be helpful here, in this introductory chapter, to give the briefest synopsis of the theory's chief elements, before they are unpacked and examined in detail in subsequent chapters – from the inside (for example by John Mearsheimer), from the outside (for example by Andrew Linklater), and from inside/outside (for example by Georg Sørensen). In brief, the theory of structural realism explains the international system in relation to a dominant structure (anarchy) defined by the interplay between its component units (states seeking survival) which are characterised by particular distributions of power (the capabilities of the units). Crucially, for Waltz, his is a ('systemic') theory of international politics, not a ('reductive') theory of the units. The theory therefore explains the 'causal weight' of the system, not the differing political cultures and other factors that shape the foreign policies and other interactions of the units. Waltz set out to produce a 'parsimonious' theory. In this regard – and against those wanting the theory to deliver much more than it could – Waltz has said with great clarity that his theory sought to explain as opposed to accurately reflect reality ('A theory, though related to the world about which explanations are wanted, always remains distinct from that world').<sup>13</sup> He has also consistently insisted that his theory does not explain everything in international let alone world politics (in his words: 'Not everything need go into one book and not everything can go into one theory').<sup>14</sup>

The agenda set by structural realism, however parsimonious the theory, raises rich questions. These include: debates over key concepts such as 'structure' (see Nicholas Onuf's chapter); methodological debates over theory (see Wæver's discussion of theory's theory) and gender (see Elshain's discussion of where and whether it comes in); political/theoretical puzzles over power transitions (see the chapter by Richard Ned Lebow and Benjamin Valentino), power balancing (see the chapter by Conny Beyer); the implications of changes in statehood (see the chapter by Sørensen), the tensions between anarchy and hierarchy (see the chapter by Ian Clark), and different approaches to understanding continuity and change (note the Process Sociology perspective in the chapter by Linklater, and the World History perspective advanced by Barry Buzan and Richard Little). These are just a start. One could add debates on 'relative' versus 'absolute' gains, 'defensive' versus 'offensive' realism, the meanings of the 'stag hunt', and so on; and, of course, lurking in all these discussions, are issues relating to the ostensible idealist–materialist binary (note the chapters by Onuf and Beyer). As a result of contributing to this huge agenda, it is difficult to imagine today's academic International Politics in the absence of the work of Waltz: if he had never existed, we would have to have invented him.

Third, what of Waltz as a *theorist*? Without doubt, Waltz set new standards of rigour in his attempt to theorise the state system (on his place in realism's



development, see the chapters by Deudney and Brown). His work has sought to bring the discipline more self-consciously into the developing social sciences as understood in the United States (the chapters by Foley and Williams give contemporary context). Again, even if one disagrees with Waltz's own understandings of theory, of social science, and of how to do theory, one cannot say much about the international in world or global politics without engaging with his ideas.

In trying to comprehend Waltz's still ongoing career as a whole, one can see changes and developments – contradictions even. It would be a surprise if it were otherwise in a career of six decades plus. But Waltz's responses to changes in the world and to developments in the discipline serve as a warning against dogmatic schoolism. One response to schoolism's obsessive labelling is to categorise ideas rather than people as far as possible; particular sets of ideas can have a coherence which few scholars can match through long careers.<sup>15</sup> Waltz is always labelled a 'realist', and accepts the label – though not with the tribal intensity of some. But to accept the label of realist these days raises almost as many questions as it settles, and Waltz has had an influential role in this. One consequence of Waltzian theory's intervention in realism's tree-of-life was to stimulate the growth of new branches. Now it is difficult to know what, if anything, constitutes authentic realism. But disciplinary evolution could have been so different. Onuf suggests in his chapter that if Waltz had situated his intervention – as was possible – in the ideas of 'updated constructivism', the field would look 'very different today'. So, who today are the real realists? Where, indeed, does Waltz himself fit in? The discipline's pre-eminent (modern) theorist has been variously described not only as a realist, but also (in alphabetical order) as an instrumentalist, a normative theorist, an optimist, a Popperian, a positivist, a pragmatist, a proto-constructivist, a scientific realist, a structural realist, and an unreflective philosophical realist. What exactly, these days, is a Waltzian?

### ***Structural realism offers a powerful picture***

Whatever one's ultimate take on Waltzian theorising, all serious students of 'international politics' or 'world politics' (the distinction is discussed later) need to understand structural realism's powerful picture of how the international system works. Before elaborating this, it is critical in reading anything about Waltzian structural realism to keep a particular mental footnote in mind: Waltz is not a structural determinist. He could not have been clearer on the matter: in *Theory of International Politics* he told readers: 'Structure . . . does not by any means explain everything. I say this again because the charge of structural determinism is easy to make.'<sup>16</sup> He has continued to defend himself against the charge, writing later: 'Structures never tell us all that we want to know. Instead they tell us a small number of big and important things.'<sup>17</sup> His is not a theory of everything about 'international' let alone 'world' politics.

The reasons for engaging with structural realism's account of 'a small number of big and important things' are multiple: the theory was discipline-changing when it

was first elaborated; it remains a theory with real vigour, with its adherents still keen to improve it; it throws up big questions and offers important explanations; all students continue to work in its shadow, whether they appreciate it or not; conceptually, it draws attention to the power of structures (which in turn raises issues about continuity at the international level); and its agenda items always play a role whenever the curtain goes up on the international.

Though structural realism was field-changing after *Theory of International Politics* appeared in 1979, in recent years the other main branch of realist theory ('classical realism') has attracted more attention. Classical realism, a somewhat imprecise term, is best understood not so much as a self-consciously unified tradition or school of international political thought across 2500 years, but rather in relation to the ideas of a self-defined, largely US-based, and IR-centric group whose main work was done over a thirty-year period from the mid-1930s to the mid-1960s. This group of *IR classical realists* sometimes drew on the supposedly timeless wisdom of statecraft outlined by political theory giants of the distant past – Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Rousseau, and the rest – but it would be stretching things to herd all of them into one self-conscious school across space and time. The most famous theorists of IR classical realism were Hans J. Morgenthau, Reinhold Neibuhr, George F. Kennan, John H. Herz, and Arnold Wolfers.<sup>18</sup> There were several non-US affiliates, notably E.H. Carr in the UK. For most of them – and again Carr was an exception – the primary causal factor in international politics is what is loosely called 'human nature' (see Crawford's chapter). Humans acting in the political world are seen as driven by the vicissitudes of the human condition, the condition of original sin, the sin of *animus dominandi*, and the demands of 'homo homini lupus'. Belief in the causality of such drives led classical realists to a picture of 'politics among nations' (the title of Morgenthau's most famous book) in which 'evil' lurked and 'tragedy' was invariably around history's next corner.

For this group, *Weltschmerz* was the drumbeat of their lives and times. In adulthood they witnessed the collapse of the old liberal order in the Great War and Great Depression, two world wars within a generation, the rise of totalitarianism, Auschwitz's defiance of Enlightenment, and nuclear weapons strategising that overturned Clausewitzian rationality about war. What is more, their witness to all this followed childhoods shaped by liberal optimism and the largely war-free nineteenth century. Not surprisingly, experiencing at first hand an era of converging technological and ideological revolutions, these theorists were drawn to the darker sides of human behaviour: they had seen the temptations and sometimes catastrophic consequences of political and technological power. They had also learned about the limitations of power, and also of ethics. In these decades, IR classical realists emerged, at their simplest, as exponents of an international political theory of pessimism, legitimated by individual lives and turbulent times: at their most radical, as will be seen, some of them sought to change what the rest believed to be unchangeable.

Confronted by the world crisis of the mid-twentieth century, several of the giants of classical realist thought offered radical visions of world politics that were

fundamentally at odds with the prevailing narrow state-centric ('billiard ball') conceptions of realism that dominated Western IR thinking during the Cold War. At the forefront of this radical 'utopian realism'<sup>19</sup> were: E.H. Carr, who concluded that the nation-state was dead, and looked forward to the expansion of community, economic planning, and the spread of functional coordination through international organisations; Hans J. Morgenthau, who also thought the nation-state was obsolete, developed ideas about the growth of world community as the basis for world government, and who promoted nuclear disarmament, functionalism and human rights; and John H. Herz, who not only analysed the obsolescence of the territorial state under modern conditions and looked towards universalist solutions, but who also warned of new global threats – future environmental and demographic changes – which demanded that humanity urgently engage in 'survival research'. This group of radical realists, together with a handful of others, practised what they preached, and attempted to rethink international politics. Yet, for many years, their realist readers took from their work only those ideas that confirmed statist dogma about the timeless practices of statecraft.

In the period since the world crises of the mid-twentieth century, differences within realism developed not only between its thinkers and its theorists, its radicals and its dogmatists, and its human nature or structural advocates; there have also been splits over 'practice', the activity on which realists *through their very name* have always prided themselves. It is expecting too much to think that political theories can deliver neat recipe books for political action, but surely we have the right to expect more from self-professed *realists* than any other group? While there have been areas of consensus (hostility to liberal interventionism for example) there have also been areas of significant difference. There have been differences within structural realism (note Mearsheimer's 'offensive' realist critique below of Waltz's general position on war – though they were united in opposing the US-led invasion of Iraq) as well as differences between structural and classical realists. Among the latter, the gulf between Waltz and Morgenthau on nuclear weapons could hardly have been wider. Morgenthau advocated nuclear disarmament, despite defining 'interest as power', whereas Waltz explored the peace-enhancing properties of nuclear proliferation, despite the implication that technology trumped anarchy (see the chapters by Deudney and Wheeler). Even as a guide to action, therefore, realism has not been dogmatic – or at least some of its leading proponents have not been.

Various factors explain why classical realism has attracted more attention in recent years than the 'structural' approach spearheaded by Waltz: perhaps there has been a sense that structural realism had held centre stage for two decades and that its contestations were exhausted; certainly, the hot peace after the end of the Cold War (Rwanda, Iraq, the Congo, Afghanistan, nuclear proliferation, and so on) quickly destroyed hopes for a new world order, with the reappearance of 'tragedy' demanding new respect for the theorists of tragedy; and the prioritising of agents rather than structures fitted the mood of the discipline's constructivist turn.

But we should be wary about overdrawing the differences between the classical and structural branches of realism (Brown's chapter warns against it, for example).

Classical realists are not averse to structuralist arguments, while structural realists depend for their theory on certain assumptions about so-called ‘human nature’ (Crawford discusses this). Differences between the two main branches of realism have sometimes been overdrawn as a result of the stereotyping of the key figures in each – who have been boxed and labelled to suit the convenience of textbook writers. As a result, how often has one heard ‘Morgenthau’ (a mythic creature, not the actual work of the actual scholar) summarily dismissed as a world thinker by students with no life experience beyond attending school, and no knowledge of *Politics among Nations* beyond Chapter 28 (if that)?<sup>20</sup>

Clearly, such illustrations suggest that realism is a body of ideas with some family resemblances rather than a coherent research project. And the more complex the story of realism becomes, the less clear it is that Waltz’s work marked a decisive break. But if the break was not as much as the neologism ‘neorealism’ implies, the differences are significant. Compare, for example, Waltz’s ‘defensive realist’ prescriptions, infused by some optimism, with the ‘utopian realist’ visions of the likes of Carr, Morgenthau and Herz, infused by some *Weltschmerz*, about remaking a world they believed to be both dangerous and obsolete. The world crisis was so serious in the minds of these leading realist *thinkers* that they thought realism’s unthinkables – world community, world government and universal perspectives. In contrast, the leading realist *theorist*, Waltz, has proved more loyal to the tradition in terms of his prescriptions; he elaborated a theory of realism accompanied by realist practices (self-help, and order based on fear) for a state system he believes can be rescued.

To argue that structural realism offers a powerful picture of international politics, and that all serious students must engage with it, is certainly not the same as endorsing it; it is, rather, to argue that we must know why its ideas are powerful, take its agenda seriously, and assess its ‘explanatory and predictive’ usefulness in relation to our time.<sup>21</sup> We must, in other words, pay our dues to the constitutive and constraining power of structural realism: ‘In the history of international relations . . .’ Waltz writes, ‘results achieved seldom correspond to the intentions of actors.’<sup>22</sup> By better understanding this, we will appreciate why the utopian realist projects advocated by leading IR classical realists were so premature – never mind the prescriptions of the discipline’s so-called ‘idealists’. According to the leading IR classical realists in the mid-twentieth century, realism practised by statist and nationalist means would be a recipe for global disaster; for Waltz such post-realist solutions were beyond the mental horizons of the actually existing agents of the self-help state system. Waltzian realism throws up a similar warning to those of us who offer post-realist, utopian realist, and emancipatory realist responses to the developing world-historical crisis of the present century.

### ***We need to know a good deal more than realism***

From its beginnings, academic interest in international relations has always been more than a scholarly exercise. When David Davies, a Member of Parliament and

former officer in the Great War, invented the university discipline of International Politics in 1919, he did so as a memorial to the students of the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, who had fought and died in the war of 1914–18. Through a broad education in world politics,<sup>23</sup> he hoped to promote international institutions, law and peace. Present at the discipline's creation, therefore, was a particular (practice-oriented) relationship to reality.

The challenges (to understanding and explaining the world, and contributing to better policy-making) are no less profound today than they were in 1919. In fact, they are more complex and unpredictable, if not so likely to produce another world war. Following the surprisingly non-violent endings of the Cold War, symbolised by the dismantling of the Berlin Wall, the much-trumpeted 'New World Order' proved to be hollow propaganda; instead, it was followed by the 'low and dishonest decade' of the 1990s.<sup>24</sup> This wasted opportunity, potentially, presages much worse.

This century's challenge for the discipline is a world-historical crisis I call 'The Great Reckoning'.<sup>25</sup> Human society globally is increasingly having to come face-to-face with the costs of the ideas that made us. World politics, world economics and world sociology are today the outcome of the interplay through history of the ideas and structures of patriarchy, proselytising religions, the triumph of capitalism, statism and nationalism, racism, and consumer democracy. These dominant ideas and their structures today threaten humankind with a concatenation of dangerous crises: unless living globally is radically reinvented, decades of disorder and violence will follow. Already we are in a 'New Twenty Years' Crisis'<sup>26</sup> – a time of danger and opportunity. Human society globally can learn to deal collectively with the challenges of climate chaos, energy supply, regional security dilemmas, nuclear proliferation, food and water shortages, population pressures, the continuing destruction of the natural environment, and the rest, or we can allow the threatening momentum of these risks to increase and interact, and become supercharged at some point by feelings of 'Blood and Belonging'.<sup>27</sup> An era of multi-level world conflict will ensue, testing the age of statism and nationalism as surely as the Thirty Years War tested the age of religion.

The challenge to human society as a whole is to change our collective consciousness about living globally, as the first big step towards reordering human institutions and behaviour. The challenge for students of a practice-oriented discipline like International Politics under the shadow of The Great Reckoning is to contribute to that consciousness-changing by understanding the ideas that made us, and their usefulness (if any) while thinking beyond the limits of those ideas. For sure, structural realism purports to tell us some 'big and important things', but are they useful, and if they are, do they tell us enough? Several chapters below answer in the negative, arguing for example that Waltzian realism does not tell us enough about where we are in world history (see especially the chapters by Linklater, and Buzan and Little), or that it does not give enough space to the 'social logic' of anarchy (see especially the chapter by Clark). But criticism of Waltz's work has not been confined to those outside the family. Some structural realists, for example, have argued that Waltz took parsimony too far, and offered various revisions: these

included a 'fine grain realism', bringing in unit-level factors, and an 'elaborated structural realism', adding elements of system-structure hoping to produce a better systemic account of micro-macro linkages.<sup>28</sup> Others in the wider realist family developed an approach that Gideon Rose called 'neo-classical realism'.<sup>29</sup> This new neo- attempted to construct a bridge between systemic dynamics (survival, distributions of power, military considerations) and unit-level variables (the perceptions of relevant decision-makers and opinion-formers within states). Like other post-*Theory of International Politics* realist revisionisms, neo-classical realism sprinkled additives into the Waltzian mix, hoping to strengthen it by making it more realistic: but they missed the point. For Waltz the purpose of his theory was not to replicate reality, but to explain it.<sup>30</sup> Paradoxically, those given to mixing additives to structural realism in the hope of making it more realistic had the effect of diluting its theoretical power. 'Art', Picasso said, 'is a lie to bring us nearer to the truth.' Theory, for Waltz, is a similar conceit.

Waltz always knew that his realism does not tell us all we want to know about world politics. In addition to eschewing structural determinism, he accepts that there are different sorts of theories with different uses, though his own preferences have always been made obvious. In this regard it is fascinating to recall Robert Cox's well-known distinction between 'critical theory' and 'problem-solving theory' – a distinction that has shaped the work of many students of International Politics for a quarter of a century.<sup>31</sup> Discussing the matter in the mid-1980s, Waltz expressed no fundamental problem with Cox's categorisation.<sup>32</sup> He called it a 'nice distinction', adding: 'I have no quarrel with Cox's concern with counter and latent structures, with historical inquiry, and with speculation about possible futures.' But he underlined that this is not what he himself did, and left nobody in any doubt about the type of theory he thought most theoretically sound and most relevant for living globally. Critical theorists, he said, 'would transcend the world as it is; meanwhile we have to live in it'.

Every chapter below pays some due to the continuing relevance of realism's agendas to living in the world 'as it is', but to a greater or lesser extent they depart from the idea that the world *as it is* is as realism in its various guises pictures it.<sup>33</sup> What is also questioned is the usefulness of the prescriptions that supposedly derive from realism. Various chapters, for example, discuss different elements in realism as part of the problem: Sørensen argues that statehood produces critically 'unlike units' with different security dilemmas; Lebow and Valentino emphasise that psychological factors (misperception and miscalculation) can have more traction in explaining behaviour than those posited by power transition theory; Beyer points to the inadequacy of any analysis from a structural realist perspective that ignores the insights from constructivism about change; and Clark emphasises the need for a more complex view of power (namely one harnessed to 'legitimate social purpose') rather than structural realism's habitual concern with material capabilities. As the book proceeds, a 'world' perspective on the 'international' becomes more explicit, and this is seen at its fullest in the chapters by Linklater, and by Buzan and Little; here, the international becomes one structure – albeit a very powerful one – among

many structures constructing the world *as it is*. Or rather, what theories tell us it *seems* to be.

In such discussions, the word ‘world’ – like ‘international’ and ‘global’ – trip off the tongue, usually without a second thought. This should not be so, and Waltz himself generally uses the terms with care. In the label ‘International Politics’, the word ‘International’ conventionally describes relations between governments across state borders (the word was apparently invented by Jeremy Bentham at the end of the eighteenth century, long after the modern ‘international’ system had passed its Westphalian milestone). The phrase ‘World Politics’ refers to those issues focusing on politics (‘security’, governance, and so on) that are of a general character across the earth, but whose significance is unevenly distributed. In this sense, World Politics is the field for exploring ‘who gets what, when [and] how’ across the earth.<sup>34</sup> ‘Global’ issues or challenges refer to those specific dynamics (such as climate change) which affect all parts of the earth. It was with these distinctions in mind that I chose the title of this book as I did.

These are not merely semantic matters: it is the tensions between the accelerating dynamics of contemporary *world* politics in face of the problem-maintaining structures and identities of *international* politics which I see as central to the discipline’s next great debate. The World Politics perspective problematises the international level, as well as the ‘problem-solving’ theories that seek to explain it. This broader referent – World Politics – is increasingly salient as space shrinks, time quickens, and multiple globalisations densify. Ultimately the world and the international cannot be kept apart. The Great Reckoning will not allow it. Reason demands meta-problem-solving in the biggest arena, even if it cannot be achieved.

To summarise: from the discipline’s beginning, students of International/World Politics have been interested in explaining the world *as it is* and some have sought to speculate about better possible futures – this being a practice-oriented academic project. Structural realism developed as one of the most powerful theories seeking to explain the international system, with its key theorist, Kenneth Waltz, claiming that it explains ‘a few big and important things’ – but certainly not everything. To the extent that its explanatory power accounts for the dynamics of the international system, those who hope to make a better world had better understand it. This is especially so as human society comes face-to-face, this century, with the costs of its traditional ways of doing things. It is essential that fundamental change comes about in the way we (especially the powerful) live globally, if widespread conflict and disorder is to be avoided. In this regard, the relevance of Waltzian theorising, above all, is that his ideas provide a critical tool for what Elshtain in her chapter calls the weeding out of ‘all sorts of nonsense’ about bringing better possible futures into reality. In the final chapter I will argue that ‘We Have Worlds Inside Us’:<sup>35</sup> but before reaching for the best we must first level with the international in Waltz’s world.

## Notes

- 1 See note 1 in the Preface.
- 2 According to John J. Mearsheimer, it had already become so in the UK: see his 'E.H. Carr versus Idealism: the battle rages on', *International Relations*, Vol.19 (2), 2005, pp. 139–52.
- 3 I will use the terms 'international politics' and 'International Relations' (IR) interchangeably, though the latter can be understood as somewhat wider. The label 'world politics' is more comprehensive still, and the difference will be outlined later. In each case, the terms will be capitalised when referring to the relevant academic discipline, but in lower case when referring to political practice. I will call these overlapping enterprises a 'discipline', in the sense of their being 'a distinct branch of learning' as broadly understood in Europe since the Late Middle Ages. The contemporary social science use of the term is too dogmatically disciplining.
- 4 When International Politics was established as a university discipline, in 1919, the man who has claim to be its inventor, David Davies, advocated that its syllabus should include the study of law, politics, ethics, economics, other civilisations, and international organisations. See Ken Booth, '75 years on: rewriting the subject's past – reinventing its future', pp. 328–39 in Steve Smith, Ken Booth and Marysia Zalewski (eds), *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
- 5 Julie Bindel, 'Mary Daly: obituary', *Guardian*, 27 January 2010.
- 6 Waltz made a distinction between them, identifying 'realist thought' as a tradition imbued with normative concerns, while 'realist theory' was (supposedly) free of such concerns. See Kenneth N. Waltz, 'Realist Thought and Neorealist Theory, 1990' in Kenneth N. Waltz, *Realism and International Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2008). For convenience, I will refer to this invaluable collection of Waltz's key articles/chapters rather than the originals; the date in the titles of these reprints signifies the year of their first publication.
- 7 See the back cover of Waltz, *Realism and International Politics*.
- 8 The key reference is Richard Ashley, 'The poverty of Neorealism', *International Organization*, Vol. 38, 1984, pp. 225–86.
- 9 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State and War* (Columbia University Press, 1959), p. 28.
- 10 Waltz, *Man, the State and War*, p. 238.
- 11 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: Random House, 1979), p. 154.
- 12 Readers will notice that some contributors prefer the term 'structural realism', while others prefer 'neorealism'. Occasionally the terms are used interchangeably. My own preference is for *structural realism*, as it gets to the descriptive heart of the theory, rather than its supposed genealogy.
- 13 Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 6.
- 14 Waltz, 'Reflections on *Theory of International Politics*: a response to my critics, 1986' in Waltz, *Realism and International Politics*, p. 51.
- 15 This is the approach in Ken Booth and Nicholas J. Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation and Trust in World Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008), pp. 10–11.
- 16 Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 174.
- 17 Waltz, 'Reflections', p. 43.
- 18 A sense of this group can be gained from Kenneth W. Thompson, *Masters of International Thought: Major Twentieth-Century Theorists and the World Crisis* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), and Michael Joseph Smith, *Realist Thought from Weber to Kissinger* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986).
- 19 I started using this term in the mid-1980s and adopted it for E.H. Carr in 'Security in anarchy: Utopian Realism in theory and practice', *International Affairs*, Vol.67 (3), pp. 527–45. For similarly motivated readings of radical realists, see my 'Morgenthau's realisms and transatlantic truths' pp. 99–128 in Christian Hacke, Gottfried-Karl Kindermann and Kai M. Schellhorn (eds), *The Heritage, Challenge, and Future of Realism* (Göttingen: Bonn University Press, 2005); and 'Navigating the "Absolute Novum": John H. Herz's 'Political Realism and Political Idealism', *International Relations*, Vol. 22 (4), 2008, pp. 510–26.



## 14 Realism redux

- 20 Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: the Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965, Third edition). From Chapter 28 onwards it begins to deal with 'The World State' and 'The World Community' – peace through 'transformation' and then through 'accommodation'. Already, in this edition, Morgenthau was complaining (in the Preface) that he was being criticised for ideas he never held.
- 21 Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, pp. 8–9.
- 22 Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 65.
- 23 See note 4.
- 24 The phrase was originally W.H. Auden's, describing the 1930s: see Ken Booth, 'The Kosovo tragedy: epilogue to another "low and dishonest decade"', *Politikon*, Vol. 27(1), 2000, pp. 5–18.
- 25 The general argument below is taken from Ken Booth, *Theory of World Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) pp. 21–27, 395–426, 427–70.
- 26 *Ibid.*, pp. 395–426.
- 27 This was the title of the book by Michael Ignatieff, in which he recounted his discovery of the continuing power of tribe and history as drivers in human society: *Blood and Belonging: Journeys into the New Nationalism* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1995).
- 28 The term 'fine grain realism' is Stephen Van Evera's: see his *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999) pp. 1–13. On 'elaborated structural realism', see various references by the contributors in Annette Freyberg-Inan, Ewan Harrison, and Patrick James (eds) *Rethinking Realism in International Relations: Between Tradition and Innovation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), esp. pp. 4–8, 223–30, 255–57.
- 29 Gideon Rose, 'Neoclassical Realism and theories of foreign policy', *World Politics*, Vol. 51 (1), 1998, pp. 144–72.
- 30 Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, pp. 8–9.
- 31 Robert W. Cox, 'Social forces, states and world orders: beyond International Relations theory', *Millennium*, Vol.10 (2), 1981, pp. 126–55.
- 32 Waltz, 'Reflections', p. 50.
- 33 On the temptations and perils of the word 'is' in the study of human affairs, see Philip Allott, 'Theory and Istopia' in *The Health of Nations: Society and Law beyond the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 3–8.
- 34 This is an extrapolation of Harold Lasswell's once well-known conception of politics: *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How* (New York: Peter Smith, 1950).
- 35 This line was the title of a poem which became the title of a painting: see Booth, *Theory of World Security*, pp. 427–70.

## **PART I**

# Political ideas in Waltzian realism



# 2

## ANARCHY AND VIOLENCE INTERDEPENDENCE

*Daniel Deudney*

### **The reign of neorealism**

Across a half-century, Kenneth Waltz has refined and extended the ‘thought’ of earlier writers, most notably Hobbes and Rousseau, into the ‘theory’ of neorealism.<sup>1</sup> His lucidly formulated arguments about how anarchy shapes the politics of international systems have dominated Realist international theorizing, and made Waltz the clear successor to Hans Morgenthau as the leading American realist in the last third of the twentieth century. Waltz’s reformulation of earlier insights has been extremely intellectually productive, by framing and stimulating a large body of insightful neorealist ‘routine science’ on topics such as polarity, balancing, alliances, the security dilemma, relative and absolute gains, and grand strategy. It also has evoked a wide array of attacks from virtually every quarter, with neoliberal institutionalists, constructivists, Marxists, and other realists all generating elaborate criticisms, alternatives, and amendments.<sup>2</sup> Contemporary international theory is vastly more diverse than ever before, but a conceptual mapping of much of it would look something like a hub with spokes, with neorealism sitting at the centre and various rivals and critics significantly defining themselves in relation to neorealism.

Waltz says a great many insightful things about a great many important topics, but it is clear that anarchy is at the centre of his theory. Reflecting the centrality of arguments about anarchy, both in Waltz and recent realist theory more generally, this cluster of his argument has come to be known as the anarchy problématique. It is anarchy which is the distinctive and determining attribute of the system level that comprises the third image. For states in anarchy, security and the preservation of the plural political order of the anarchic state-system depend on a favourable distribution or balance of power, and the ability of states to maintain it.

Another great virtue of Waltz’s work (unlike most behavioural revolution system theorizing) is that he explicitly builds on core concepts of early modern international

political theory, particularly Hobbes and Rousseau. Indeed Waltz's main contribution is the refinement and extension of ideas about anarchy, unearthed in *Man, the State and War* and advanced as a social scientific system structural theory in *Theory of International Politics*.<sup>3</sup> Waltz's reading of some of these classic realist texts is not only productive conceptually, but it also is part of the ongoing realist claim to be, not simply a set of substantive claims of great intellectual power, but also a tradition of thought in which ideas have been handed down across millennia and progressively developed and improved. This tradition is presented as a towering herd of kindred intellectual giants, most notably Thucydides, Niccolò Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Waltz stands tall in part because he claims to be standing on the shoulders of these giants. This realist claim of a tradition adds power to contemporary realist argument and advice because it allows realists to present themselves as the contemporary embodiment of a set of arguments long vindicated and hallowed by time. This rhetoric of tradition, while not directly shaping which arguments fit best with the evidence, does alter the presumptive burden of proof placed upon critics and opponents of realist claims and advice. Against this intimidating assemblage, challengers appear new and untried, and possibly just another variation of the utopian illusions that realists have been combating since time out of mind.

### **From the anarchy-interdependence problématique to the anarchy problématique**

Unfortunately, the theoretical reach of Waltz's system structural theory is profoundly limited by what he leaves out from his chosen illustrious predecessors. There is a core set of ideas about violence interdependence that were central to the early modern international theory from which Waltz draws, but which Waltz's reading and his subsequent model-building largely excludes or significantly narrows. The fact that Waltz drops or narrows these important lines of argument profoundly shapes and limits his argument and accounts for some of the puzzling and troubling features of his theories, noted by many observers and critics, with regard to change and nuclear weapons. In making this critical characterization, my claim is not that the king, despite his impressive retinue and public acclaim, rides naked on his horse. Rather, my claim is that he is, indeed, wearing some impressive garments, but he is half naked in ways that can be remedied from the same clothing line from which he is so dazzlingly attired. I proceed by first briefly summarizing my two main claims and then, in the subsequent two parts of the paper, making these claims and drawing their implications.

My main claim is that Waltz's 'anarchy problématique' is a truncated formulation of what can be termed the 'anarchy-interdependence problématique' that sits at the centre of Western theorizing about anarchy, violence, and political order. Interdependence for Waltz is economic interdependence (which does not greatly matter for Great Powers). But 'violence interdependence' (the capacity of actors to wreak damage upon one another, holding distribution constant) sits at the centre of

early modern theorizing about the ‘state of nature’. The reason that the state of nature anarchy (where life is ‘nasty, brutish’ and – most importantly – ‘short’) is intolerably insecure and necessitates authoritative government is because of the presence of intense violence interdependence among actors (whether groups or individuals). Conversely, the reason that the interstate ‘state of war’ among sovereigns (while anarchical, and often ‘nasty and brutish’) is not routinely existentially precarious, and does not necessitate government, is because violence interdependence among actors is weak or strong, but not intense. Thus Waltz, often castigated for excessive ‘materialism’, actually drops the most important material contextual variable, violence interdependence, and retains only the secondary material variable of distribution or balance. This omission can be traced by looking at the role that violence interdependence played in the arguments of Hobbes and Rousseau (and their contemporaries, most notably Montesquieu), in many realist theories of the industrial period stretching to 1945, and in the arguments of leading realists, most notably John Herz and Hans Morgenthau, in the first decades of the nuclear era. Within this succession of theorizing about violence interdependence, Waltz’s treatment clearly marks a narrowing, the key move in the ‘anarchy interdependence problématique’ becoming the ‘anarchy problématique’.

Waltz’s omission of violence interdependence from its traditional central position in structural-materialist security theorizing helps account for Waltz’s troublingly static concept of the international system, while at the same time suggesting a robust line of contextual materialist argumentation about change that other realists (most notably Carr, Morgenthau, and Herz) develop at length. This omission also sheds light on Waltz’s argument about nuclear weapons, which, whatever its substantive appeal, seems to have little to do with the main conceptual apparatus of his system structural model.

In making the case for this argument I proceed in five steps, first looking at the features of state-of-nature arguments in general, then looking in greater detail at the role of violence interdependence in the arguments of Hobbes, of Rousseau (and their Enlightenment contemporary Montesquieu), of subsequent theorists in the industrial era of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and finally in the early nuclear era. Having established the centrality of violence interdependence in the early modern theorists from whom Waltz draws his main anarchy ideas, I then demonstrate its absence in Waltz and note some of the implications of this absence for his system structural theory.

### **State-of-nature arguments**

In drawing from Hobbes and Rousseau, Waltz looks to two of the most important political theorists of early modern Europe who wrote about anarchy and security. Arguments about anarchy long pre-date Hobbes and Rousseau, appearing in a variety of idioms and formats, beginning with ancient discussions of the origins of civilization, and then continuing in early modern European state-of-nature and contract theories.<sup>4</sup> State-of-nature arguments are particularly ripe for realist

theorizing because their fundamental concern is security-from-violence. There are many complex and important differences among state-of-nature theorists regarding many secondary issues, but there is an overwhelming consensus that anarchical situations combined with actors who are in a situation of intense violence interdependence are intrinsically perilous for security. It is this key insight which Waltz has dropped in his appropriation of the anarchy problématique from the anarchy-interdependence problématique.

The claims of Hobbes and Rousseau about anarchy are cast as part of a state-of-nature argument. The conceptual device of the state-of-nature is used to make claims about anarchy and political order in a form largely alien to modern social science. The typical state-of-nature argument is a mixture of three different but overlapping types of claims: (1) historical anthropologies of the genesis of civilization; (2) conceptual devices for explicating recurrent and fundamental logics of all human association; and (3) arguments about how different security-providing institutions are formed to compensate for specific configurations of 'natural', mainly geographic, material realities.<sup>5</sup> The first of these have been superseded by more systematic archaeological and anthropological investigations and are thus mainly of interest to intellectual historians. The second continues vigorously among contemporary political theorists and is the forerunner of formal 'rational choice' analysis. The third strand is essentially 'geopolitical' (in the old narrow sense of the term) and entails a reading of politically significant variations in non-human physical nature as it presents itself as constraints and opportunities for human agents. The arguments about anarchy that Waltz draws from state-of-nature arguments are almost entirely from the second essentialist strand, and he drops key insights from the third.

The third strand, although clearly a substantial part of many state-of-nature arguments, has been largely neglected in recent treatments of the state-of-nature and its early theorists. These arguments are 'naturalist' not in the essentialist sense of 'the nature of' but rather in the sense of non-human physical nature as material context interacting with physical human nature and human social arrangements that together partially shape all aspects of human social, economic, and political arrangements. This type of theorizing is now associated with Marxian (and other, including 'liberal') 'historical materialisms', but this type of theorizing was a major part of ancient and early modern political science. The three generally recognized founders of political science (as opposed to political ethics and philosophy) are Aristotle, Machiavelli and Montesquieu, and two of them (Aristotle and Montesquieu) deploy arguments about a bewilderingly wide array of natural material contextual factors as explanations for a wide range of outcomes. These factors, which today are referred to as geographic, climatic, topographic, and ecological, include violence interdependence.

At first glance, state-of-nature arguments of the second essentialist type seem to aim to purge themselves of the variables at play in the third 'geopolitical' type. They seem to aspire to leave behind the mere contingency of 'nature' (in the sense of material context) in order to ascertain a universal logic of human association. In actuality, however, nature as material context still plays a pivotal but sometimes

nearly invisible role. Indeed, when it comes to the core questions of security-from-violence and its relationship to anarchy, nature as material context, far from not mattering, powerfully shapes the entire essentialist state-of-nature argument. In Hobbes' state-of-nature, for example, the natural fact that men must sleep, and therefore are vulnerable no matter what their strength, is advanced as the proximate reason for departing from the state-of-nature and entry into civil society. Deductive contract theorists rarely provide an explicit or systemic justification for which particular facts of nature are injected into their models, and the actual role of these facts in the argument is typically far more extensive than the effort made to justify them. And such theorists take nature as a static given and do not seem to seriously entertain that it might change over time.

These essentialist state-of-nature arguments, despite their ambition to discern universal logics of human association purged of natural material 'contingent' influences, may thus be read as abstract and somewhat cryptic structural-materialist analyses in which the 'state' is formed to solve predicaments posed by 'nature'. The formation of the civil state is a compensation for naturally existent threats and vulnerabilities, and the political order formed to escape from the state-of-nature is shaped by those features of the state-of-nature from which escape is sought. Thus, the natural facts a theorist uses to define the state-of-nature determine, in a compensatory fashion, the particular structures of the civil state: vary the natural contextual material facts employed (whether explicitly or implicitly) in the model and the outcomes change.

## Hobbes' two anarchies and violence interdependence

Building on Thucydides' horrific portrayal of the civil war in Corcyra, Hobbes formulated one of the most influential state-of-nature argument, and one that Waltz significantly draws upon. Hobbes' premise is that corporeal security is a primary human need, and his 'great aim is to show men the way to security'.<sup>6</sup> Only a handful of passages in Hobbes' work address these issues, and they are embedded in a grand political philosophical system that is very complex, as well as odd and archaic. Despite obstacles of interpretation, realist theorists before and after Waltz cite and evoke Hobbes' ideas, as do many political theorists.<sup>7</sup>

Hobbes deploys a simple model that distinguishes between three fundamentally different arrangements: (1) a pre-governmental state-of-nature anarchy, (2) an authoritative government, or sovereign, that is the antithesis of anarchy, and (3) an intergovernmental state-of-war anarchy. Life in the state-of-nature is 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short'.<sup>8</sup> In the state-of-nature man is his own master, but life is insecure because even the strongest man can be easily killed by another when asleep.<sup>9</sup> This vulnerability induces individuals to trade their absolute freedom for a minimum of security, provided by the 'sovereign'. In contrast, the state-of-war (not to be confused with actual war)<sup>10</sup> exists between separate sovereigns.<sup>11</sup> Both the state-of-nature and the state-of-war are anarchies and both are characterized as 'nasty and brutish'. But their implications for security and political order are vastly, almost



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diametrically, different. Unlike individuals (or small groups) in the state-of-nature, sovereigns in the state-of-war are not subject to sudden death at each other's hands: they are in a state of anarchy together, but are not so vulnerable. With their survival more assured than the individual (or small group) in the state-of-nature, the sovereigns in the state-of-war are not compelled by basic security imperatives to submit themselves to an even greater sovereign. Government is necessary but government over sovereign states is not.

There are thus two anarchies and the relationship between these two anarchies and acute insecurity – and thus the imperative need for government – is vastly different. Government is needed in one, but not the other. It is a fundamental security imperative to leave the first anarchy of the state-of-nature and find protection in government. In contrast, replacing the second anarchy of the interstate state-of-war anarchy with government might yield many security benefits, but is not a fundamental security imperative. From these arguments arises the starkly Janus-faced posture of realist theorists toward anarchy: internal government is vital to security, but 'international' government is utopian, unprecedented, and not vital for security.

The presence of these two radically different anarchies thus poses a fundamental question: Why is one anarchy so insecure while another anarchy, while at times perilous, is not generally so acutely insecure as to require government? The simple answer to this question is the material-contextual variable of *violence interdependence*, the capacity of actors to do violent harm to one another. This variable is arguably the most important in the whole state-of-nature conceptual edifice of Hobbes and subsequent structural materialist security theory. When Waltz omits this variable, the anarchy-interdependence problématique becomes the anarchy problématique.

A situation of violence interdependence occurs when two actors can inflict violence upon one another, and the levels of violence they can wreak upon each other vary in ways that matter profoundly. The level of violence interdependence is pivotal because it defines whether anarchy is compatible with security. The presence of violence interdependence inherently poses the issue of restraining violence for security as a primordial and fundamental problem. Once some violence interdependence is present, the way in which this reality is dealt with becomes inescapably a political issue. The reason violence interdependence is so pivotal for thinking clearly about the basic issues of security from violence and political order is that it sets the fundamental parameters of the spatial scope of the actors whose activities matter for the security of other actors. The levels of violence interdependence shape the number of actors whose coordination is necessary for achieving security and thus the extent of the collective action problem that must be overcome to achieve security. It also thus defines which identity or other differences must be mediated (or reduced) in order to coordinate to achieve security. Of course, violence interdependence does not determine everything, but does powerfully shape the outcomes of concern in state-of-nature arguments as guides to security.

## Rousseau on European anarchy and violence interdependence

The second major early modern state-of-nature source for Waltz's neorealist thinking about anarchy is three short unfinished and unpublished essays by Jean-Jacques Rousseau.<sup>12</sup> These are but small pieces of Rousseau's complex and sprawling corpus, which has been subject to very diverse interpretation. It is in Rousseau more than Hobbes that Waltz finds not just the famous 'Stag Hunt' image of the difficulties of cooperation in anarchy, but the key ideas about anarchy itself as a factor shaping outcomes, and arguments about why the anarchic interstate state-of-war is simultaneously undesirable, difficult to overcome, and an independent cause of conflict among states.<sup>13</sup> Waltz's interpretation, however, neglects the powerful role played by the variable of violence interdependence in Rousseau's argument. This variable was implicitly a major driver of Hobbes' main argument, but a variant of it – topographical fragmentation – appears much more explicitly in Rousseau. It plays a pivotal role in Rousseau's argument about why Europe is an anarchy composed of multiple sovereigns rather than one 'universal monarchy'. In part Rousseau's greater specificity results from the fact that he, unlike Hobbes, was analysing a specific historical state-system – the modern European Westphalian – as well as making general arguments about the anarchic state-of-war. Rousseau thus provides an argument about violence interdependence to explain why this state-system exists in the first place, as well as why this state-system has political characteristics rooted in its anarchical structure. The first Waltz omits and the second he makes the basis for his theory.

Rousseau's analysis of European political arrangements incorporates many diverse variables (culture, religion, commerce, domestic regime type, and geography). In important ways Europe is a 'society' owing to its common history, religion, culture, and commerce. Its parts are independent and diverse, but its extensive network of navigable rivers and maritime access provides for extensive inter-unit flows of ideas, people, and goods. The structure of this society is anarchical, lacking common general authority, and thus Europe is in a state-of-war where uneasy peace alternates with war.

This disorderly order, which Rousseau refers to as Europe's 'general constitution', exists and persists for three reasons: (1) topographical divisions, (2) rough equality among several of the major units, and (3) balance-of-power practices. In a characteristically compressed passage, Rousseau observes that 'the location of the mountains, the seas, the rivers, which serve as borders to the nations that inhabit Europe, seems to have determined their *numbers* and *size*'. As a result, 'the political order in this part of the world is, in certain respects, the work of nature'.<sup>14</sup> In pointing to Europe's fragmented topography to explain the number of European states, Rousseau holds that Europe, despite its cultural and social unity, is a plural political order because its material context is divided. This view, straight out of Montesquieu (like much of Rousseau's material contextualist argumentation) was widely held by Enlightenment contemporaries, and has been widely endorsed by historians of European political order ever since.

Second, Rousseau points to material context as the basic cause of the relatively equal size of the major states, and thus attributes the balance of power (in the sense of a rough equality in size) to the material context. Rousseau emphasizes that the number of states and their rough balance make it practically impossible for an ‘ambitious prince’ to subdue the whole of Europe. Material context explains why Europe is a plural order with parts in rough equality. Here too, Rousseau is not breaking new ground, but merely repeating the conventional wisdom of Enlightenment political science as expounded by Montesquieu’s *Spirit of the Laws*, and echoed by numerous other writers.<sup>15</sup> Third, and last in importance, Europe remains plural and anarchic because of the prevalence of balancing practices: states are vigilant about the capacities and intentions of other states; they are prepared to enter into countervailing alliances; and they are similar in military ‘discipline’.<sup>16</sup> Of Rousseau’s three arguments, it is this set of balancing practices (or behaviours) that is most fully incorporated in Waltz’s theory. The role of societal processes such as emulation and socialization is acknowledged by Waltz, but his treatment of them is, as many critics have pointed out, a bit thin and at odds with what has come to be called his ‘rationalist’ and ‘individualist’ ‘ontological assumptions’. Waltz is also seen as having an excessively materialist ontology of conceptual primitives, but compared to Rousseau what is notable is the incomplete and attenuated character of his materialism.

### **Violence interdependence in realist theory in the industrial era**

The next step in seeing the previous centrality of the variable of violence interdependence that Waltz leaves behind in narrowing the anarchy-interdependence problématique into the anarchy problématique is an examination of its role in the arguments of theorists of the period when the industrial revolution was making itself felt in world politics. The argument about violence and interdependence and anarchy found in Hobbes, Rousseau, and Montesquieu did not stop with them, but rather flourished in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as theorists grappled with the seismic shifts in violence interdependence brought about by the industrial revolution and its radical transformation of the material context as a factor in human affairs, particularly world politics and the interstate system. Writing before the industrial revolution, Hobbes and Rousseau did not incorporate technology as a dynamic variable in their understanding the material context. By the late nineteenth century, however, the combined impact of the industrial technologies of the railroad, the steamship, telegraphy, and chemical high-explosives was widely viewed as creating a new material environment with far-reaching implications not only for the balance or distribution of power among states, but also for the viability and scope of anarchic state-systems.

The most extensive body of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century international theory was the highly materialistic arguments of figures, spanning the political spectrum, most notably Friedrich Ratzel, John Seeley, Alfred Thayer

Mahan, Halford Mackinder, H.G.Wells, Karl Haushofer, and John Dewey.<sup>17</sup> These figures disagreed about much, but they all assumed that the dynamics of security politics would henceforth be played out on a global scale by actors such as the United States and Russia which dwarfed the older European great powers, and that the European state-system would be consolidated.<sup>18</sup>

These theorists, while not totally forgotten, are certainly outside the mainstream of what contemporary realism thinks of as its predecessors and they are almost completely ignored by Waltz. These writers are commonly lumped together as 'geopoliticians'. Closely associated with the horrific excesses of Nazi Germany, 'geopolitics' became something that American realists (many of them émigrés and refugees from Germany) widely shunned in the period when the realist-dominated 'American social science' of international relations was developed in the years surrounding (and particularly after) the Second World War. Unfortunately, a lot of baby was thrown out with this bathwater. With this body of work banished to the margins, the realist tradition rather oddly jumps from the late Enlightenment to the late interwar period more than a century later. Of course, the events of this period have been the central topic of international theorizing, which makes it even odder that the theorists from this period have been so neglected.

When these theorists are recognized as one group, as the industrial globalists, we see a sprawling and uneven body of work animated by a common set of general assumptions and approaches, and grappling with a common set of problems, all stemming from the spread of industrial revolution as it produced unprecedented levels of interaction and interdependence on a global scale. At the centre of their theorizing is the variable of violence interdependence. The common goal of the industrial globalists was to understand the impact on world order of the material capabilities of transportation, communication, and destruction produced by the industrial revolution (most notably railroads, steamships, telegraphy, chemical high-explosives, and aeroplanes) interacting with the largest-scale geographic features of the earth. In approaching these questions, the industrial globalists exhibited great diversity and many disagreements. These writers commonly emphasize, often breathlessly, the novel and revolutionary aspects of the emerging world and the technological forces propelling it, but in their theoretical conceptualizations they are more evolutionary than revolutionary, and they largely employ pre-industrial structural materialist concepts and arguments, particularly about violence interdependence. They essentially take Montesquieu's (and thus Rousseau's) argument about topographic variations in violence interdependence and apply it to the global scale. Thus if Rousseau (and Montesquieu) are 'Hobbes set to nature', the industrial globalists are 'Hobbes set to history'.

The debates among the industrial globalists were highly charged and addressed very basic political issues. Although the various dynamics of anarchy as a force were part of the mix, their main focus was on something arguably more elemental and certainly more new. While disagreeing about many secondary issues, they all emphasized that the global arrangement of loosely coupled or quasi-isolated regional state (or imperial) systems had come to an end, replaced by a global state-system

marked by levels of violence interdependence previously only experienced at smaller regional scales. This shift in the level of violence interdependence put the old European regional system into a very novel situation. Where previously Europe had been a second state-of-war anarchy, in which the major actors could survive without exiting anarchy, the volumes and velocities of violence capabilities afforded by the industrial revolution meant that Europe had become a first state-of-nature anarchy marked by levels of violence interdependence sufficiently intense so as to necessitate exit from anarchy. In the absence of such an exit, ruinous ‘total’ wars would bring home the realities of the new situation. Beyond this basic line of agreement about Europe, there was a fundamental and politically vital question of whether this exit from anarchy would or should take the form of hierarchical empire-building sought by Germany, or whether it would or should take the more confederal form of the European Union, as foretold by Wells and pursued after the cataclysm of the Second World War.

### E.H. Carr on violence interdependence and European order

This argument about violence interdependence also appears forcefully in the work of E.H. Carr, a widely hailed father of modern realism.<sup>19</sup> As a proponent of appeasing Hitler and an admirer of Soviet Russia, the Carr that has canonical status in American realism has been quite selective. Beyond these political indiscretions, however, a major part of Carr’s realist theory of world politics has been almost completely ignored. Carr’s *Twenty Years’ Crisis* (purged of its appeasement punchline) remains widely used as a textbook in teaching international theory, but his other works, most notably *Conditions of Peace* and *Nationalism and After*, are long out of print and almost never cited. Carr has ‘at least two different theories’, one famous about hegemony, and one largely ignored about violence interdependence.<sup>20</sup>

The well-known main argument of *The Twenty Year’s Crisis* is that the disarray culminating in the Second World War was caused by the idealist harmony-of-interests doctrine and the inability of Britain’s power resources to sustain her role as international hegemon.<sup>21</sup> In *Nationalism and After*, however, and to a lesser degree *Conditions of Peace*, the crisis is attributed to the disjuncture between ‘technological interdependence and political parochialism’. The first theory sees a crisis in the reigning ideology and in the relative power positions of leading states in the system; the second posits a much more fundamental crisis of the national state and state-system caused by a shift in the level of violence interdependence.

The central claim of Carr’s second theory is the obsolescence of the European nation-state and state-system as an arrangement for providing military security and organizing production.<sup>22</sup> Carr argues that ‘modern technological developments’ are making the nation-state ‘obsolescent as the unit of military and economic organization’.<sup>23</sup> He sees the emergence of a ‘few great multinational units’ and militarily characterized by ‘strategic integration’, essentially the same view widely held by the global geopoliticians.<sup>24</sup> Carr sees the emergence of multinational units in both the United States and the Soviet Union, and observes about the Second

World War that ‘none of the main forces that have gone to make the victory is nationalist in the older sense’.<sup>25</sup> The emergent global order composed of ‘a small number of large multi-national units exercising effective control over vast territories’ promises to replicate the patterns of the eclipsed European system, with ‘competition and conflict’ and a ‘new imperialism’ which would be ‘simply the old nationalism writ large’ and likely to produce ‘more titanic and devastating wars’.<sup>26</sup> His limited hopes for peace rest on the decoupling of national sovereignty from military security, great power self-restraint, and international functional agencies.<sup>27</sup>

### **Herz and Morgenthau on violence interdependence and the nuclear revolution**

The development of nuclear weapons forced realist thinkers to reassess the relationship between violence interdependence and the security implications of anarchy on a global rather than merely regional scale. For at least the first decade of the nuclear era the most prevalent realist view of the implications of nuclear weapons for interstate politics was essentially an extension of the arguments of Carr and other industrial globalists on the impact of the mature industrial revolution on the European state-system: nuclear weapons had produced a situation of worldwide vulnerability for even the greatest of states, comparable to the perilous state-of-nature, and the emergence of a world state was therefore necessary for security. This simple ‘nuclear one worldist’ argument posits the global emergence of levels of violence interdependence previously experienced on a national and then regional scale. This argument was advanced in many variations by many realists,<sup>28</sup> as well as world federalists who differed with one another about secondary issues of timing, transition, and the character of a security-appropriate world state. The two most carefully formulated realist versions of the argument about the effects of nuclear weapons on violence interdependence and thus on the security implications of anarchy were advanced by John Herz, pioneering theorist of the security dilemma, and Hans Morgenthau, who played a central role in establishing realism in American international theory.

Herz argued that the most basic function of states is to provide security through military control of territory, which requires territorial ‘impermeability’.<sup>29</sup> It is not enough for a state apparatus to aspire to, claim, or even be recognized as having statehood. The state apparatus must be capable of making good its claim, and states are driven to consolidate as the technological bases of military viability shows increasing scale effects. With the advent of nuclear weapons, states cannot maintain a protective ‘shell’ and have become ‘permeable’, and therefore another consolidation is required.<sup>30</sup> When ‘not even half the globe remains defensible against the all-out onslaught of the new weapons’, the ‘power of protection, on which political authority was based in the past, seems to be in jeopardy for any imaginable entity’. Humans inhabit a ‘planet of limited size’, but ‘the effect of the means of destruction has become absolute’.<sup>31</sup> Nuclear explosives have produced ‘the most radical change in the nature of power and the characteristics of power units since

the beginning of the modern state system', or perhaps 'since the beginnings of mankind'. This development 'presages the end of the territorial protective function of state power and territorial sovereignty' and the 'chief external function of the modern state therefore seems to have vanished'.<sup>32</sup>

Hans Morgenthau also came, after much tortured reflection and evolution in this thinking, to a view of the situation very similar to Herz's.<sup>33</sup> In the 1960s he advanced the argument that nuclear weapons had produced such high levels of violence interdependence on a global scale as to make the nation-state militarily obsolete and a world state necessary.<sup>34</sup> Although well-known for his role in synthesizing and propagating realism in the United States, Morgenthau's nuclear violence interdependence argument has been largely abandoned by his many followers. He speaks in terms quite similar to Herz's: 'The feasibility of all-out atomic war has completely destroyed this protective function of the nation-state. No nation-state is capable of protecting its citizens and its civilization against all-out atomic attack'.<sup>35</sup> He also agreed with the world federalist view that only a world state with a monopoly of violence could solve the problem of insecurity created by nuclear weapons. In *Politics Among Nations* he observed: 'There can be no permanent international peace without a state coextensive with the confines of the political world'.<sup>36</sup> The observation that only a world state can bring permanent peace has been acknowledged by many realists, but Morgenthau went a decisive step beyond this view to argue that the state-system and modes of consciousness it has generated need to be radically changed because of the change in the level of violence interdependence. 'Instead of trying in vain to assimilate nuclear power to the purposes and instrumentalities of the nation-state', there was a need 'to adapt these purposes and instrumentalities to the potentialities of nuclear power'. Doing this, however, 'requires a radical transformation – psychologically painful and politically risky – of traditional moral values, modes of thought, and habits of action'. Without such a transformation 'there will be no escape from the paradoxes of nuclear strategy and the dangers attending them'.<sup>37</sup> Morgenthau, however, doubted that a world state could be created soon, because world community was weak and national communities were strong. The resulting tragic impasse stems from the disjunction between inherited political arrangements and emergent material realities, rather than from timeless flaws in human nature.<sup>38</sup>

The realist argument about the evolution of violence interdependence as it appears in the analyses of Herz and Morgenthau is essentially 'Hobbes set to nuclear history'. The industrial and nuclear revolutions altered the scale at which a state-of-nature situation of mutual vulnerability existed. Coupled together, these historical contextual-materialist realist arguments suggest a simple pattern of change. Before the industrial revolution, security was consistent with a state-of-war anarchy on the regional scale of Europe. But the mature industrial revolution produced a state-of-nature anarchy at the regional scale, at the same time that it produced a second state-of-war anarchy on a global scale, marked by the end of the loosely coupled and quasi-isolated multi-system world order of the pre-industrial era. The nuclear revolution, as first interpreted by realists, replicated this process, changing a second

state-of-war anarchy into a first state-of-nature anarchy on a global scale. Because there was no longer any geographical periphery providing space for the replication of a state-of-war anarchy on a larger scale, however, this transformation would entail only consolidation and not expansion of the state-system, and world government would not find itself with the need to navigate the perils of a yet larger interstate system.

## Waltz on violence interdependence

Having established the central role of violence interdependence in realist and proto-realist thought before Waltz, we are now prepared to examine what Waltz says about violence interdependence, focusing on three bodies of theoretical argument: (1) his 'three images' schema in *Man, the State and War*; (2) his neorealist argument in *Theory of International Politics*; and (3) his writings on nuclear weapons. The simple story is that violence interdependence largely disappears and material context more generally becomes attenuated to only 'balance of power' phenomena.

Waltz's three-image schema of human nature (first image), domestic structure (second image), and system structure (third image) omits violence interdependence.<sup>39</sup> Waltz takes states as given and advances claims about the effects of anarchy itself on outcomes, and does not in any way register that the implications of anarchy are plausibly vastly different with different levels of violence interdependence. Although his third image theory is derived from Rousseau and Hobbes, he makes no mention of the important role Rousseau assigned to topographical fragmentation in determining that Europe was a plural and thus potentially anarchic system.<sup>40</sup> It is this move to refine earlier arguments about anarchy and balance, but not division and violence interdependence, that the anarchy-interdependence problématique narrows into the anarchy problématique.<sup>41</sup>

Waltz's formulation of neorealism then develops into a social scientific theory the ideas on anarchy unearthed in the exegesis and sorting accomplished in *Man, the State, and War*. In the three-tiered conceptual apparatus of his neorealism (ordering principle, extent of functional differentiation, and distribution), material factors register only as distribution. Waltz's claims about interdependence address economic interdependence, which he holds has been exaggerated and which he holds states should and will seek to minimize.<sup>42</sup> Violence interdependence vanishes in Waltz's claim that there has only been one significant system-level shift in the modern state-system, the shift from the multi-polarity of the classical European state-system to the bipolarity emerging from the world wars of the middle twentieth century. In doing so he does not seem interested in registering the arguably even more momentous shift from a global system configuration of loosely coupled regional systems to one in which there was a state-system of global scope marked by levels of interaction and violence interdependence previously found only within regional subsystems such as Europe.

Waltz's treatment of violence interdependence is indicative of a great narrowing of material variables generally. He largely disregards geography, saying nothing



generally about it. And he also explicitly downplays the importance of technology, arguing that the 'perennial forces of politics are more important than new military technology'.<sup>43</sup> This is then registered in his treatment of nuclear weapons in *Theory of International Politics*, where he observes that 'nuclear weapons do not equalize the power of nations because they do not change the economic bases of a nation's power', and because they neither caused nor changed the bipolarity of the post-Second World War system.<sup>44</sup> The material context has been narrowed to the balance and since nuclear weapons do not or did not shape the fundamentals of the balance or distribution of capabilities in a bipolar pattern, they do not matter as a first order event for the international system as understood by his system theory.

The consequence of this dropping of violence interdependence from the main conceptual apparatus of neorealism is to narrow neorealism to being a systemic rather than a system theory. This is to acknowledge that so long as international politics is a second, state-of-war anarchy, then neorealism (particularly as augmented and filled in by his colleagues and students) offers powerful explanatory insight.<sup>45</sup> Its limitations arise when levels of violence interdependence shift and push actors from a second to a first anarchy.<sup>46</sup> Such shifts are vastly less frequent than the routine interactions that have marked the second anarchy of the early modern European and the industrial global state-systems. Waltz looks at the last five hundred years of world politics, and sees only one significant change, from multipolarity to bipolarity, not registering as a system change the change that occurred when the system went from being very loosely global, to one in which the main great power actors were continental sized (or viewed becoming so as a life or death matter) and as interactive at global scales as the nation-states had been in Europe.<sup>47</sup>

The narrowing of the anarchy-interdependence problématique to the anarchy problematic also occurs in Waltz's nuclear arguments, his attempt to grapple with a situation in which the level of violence interdependence in the system shifted suddenly and significantly.

In essays after *Theory*, Waltz sketched a very different view of nuclear weapons. In his famous 'More may be better' essay Waltz adopts an extreme version of the argument, largely dominant among realist theorists, about the central role of deterrence in a state-system with nuclear weapons. Here he argues that nuclear weapons seem to negate or severely circumscribe the perennial political force of anarchy. For Waltz anarchy with nuclear weapons is radically unlike anarchy without nuclear weapons. Added to anarchy, nuclear weapons produce a peace far more robust than was previously achieved by the balance and balancing. The prospect of war, which previously shadowed the pursuit of security by state actors in anarchy, seems, in Waltz's assessment of the nuclear era state-system, to be far closer to the perpetual peace visions of Kant and others that Realists had for so long dismissed as pipe dreams than to the uncertain and precarious situation of interstate anarchy.<sup>48</sup>

Waltz thus provides an image in which technology has vastly influential, even transformative, influences on the pursuit of security in anarchy. But whatever their substantive merit, Waltz's nuclear claims sit very awkwardly in the conceptual

frameworks of his neorealism.<sup>49</sup> Nuclear weapons are clearly a material variable and the effects of nuclear weapons are explicitly held to be unrelated to distribution, the only material variable in the neorealist model. Indeed, Waltz goes out of his way to debunk fears about the nuclear balance widely held by many other nuclear-age realists.<sup>50</sup> The recognition that nuclear technology matters so much, and matters so much in ways largely unrelated to the nuclear balance, is not accompanied by any reflection about technology more generally, or an analysis of pre-nuclear technological environments for the presence of smaller-scale versions of the effects which nuclear weapons produce. Waltz's nuclear argument, whatever its substantive merits, is thus essentially ad hoc. It is not so much an advance of system theorizing about nuclear weapons (let alone technology more generally) as it is a set of astutely formulated thoughts about nuclear weapons that benefit from Waltz's reputation as a system theorist without much connection to his system theory.

Whatever their substantive merits, or relation to neorealism's variables, deterrence theories (most of which are less extreme than Waltz's) are clearly dominant in realist thought after the decline of Herz–Morgenthau nuclear one-worldism. Indeed, most realists do not even consider, let alone support, the nuclear one-world view, making complete the victory of the deterrence position. But, whatever the substantive merits of this position, it is theoretically revolutionary, and is a radical break from the previously main line of theorizing about material context that was centred around violence interdependence. Before the nuclear revolution, intense violence interdependence meant acute insecurity and/or consolidation, while after the nuclear revolution intense violence interdependence makes anarchy peaceful and muffles and chokes off the dynamics that previously gave interstate politics its distinctively precarious character. The fact and extent of this break, unacknowledged by realists, is kept conveniently out of sight by collapsing the anarchy-interdependence problématique into the anarchy problématique. But for theorists suspicious of radical theoretical innovations, and less optimistic in temper, the overwhelming victory of deterrence theory is not so compelling. Given the great pre-nuclear importance of violence interdependence, it would be premature to dismiss its nuclear-era application in nuclear one-worldism, and its expectations of either disaster or some sort of authoritative exit from anarchy. Whether deterrence is at best a temporary holding action (as Morgenthau thought) or an extremely stable (and stabilizing) force (as Waltz believes), remains to be seen.

## Notes

- 1 Kenneth N. Waltz, 'Realist thought and neorealist theory', in *The Evolution of Theory in International Relations*, ed. Robert L. Rothstein (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), pp. 21–38.
- 2 For the range of this debate, see Robert O. Keohane, ed., *Neorealism and its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); Kenneth A. Oye, ed., *Cooperation Under Anarchy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); Alexander Wendt, 'Anarchy is what states make of it', *International Organization* 46 (2), 1992; Barry Buzan, Charles Jones, and Richard Little, *The Logic of Anarchy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993);

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- Robert Powell, 'Anarchy in International Relations theory: the neorealist–neoliberal debate', *International Organization* 48 (2) 1994, pp. 313–44; and Hayward Alker, 'The presumption of anarchy in World Politics', in *Rediscoveries and Reformulations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
- 3 As Robert O. Keohane has observed, the significance of Waltz's *Theory of International Politics* lies less in Waltz's 'initiation of a new line of theoretical inquiry or speculation than in his attempt to systematize realism into a rigorous deductive' theory. Robert O. Keohane, ed., *Neorealism and Its Critics*, p. 15.
  - 4 Richard Tuck claims that Hobbes first employed the expression 'state-of-nature' but observes the frequent presence of the basic concept in ancient theorists. *The Rights of War and Peace: Political Thought and the International Order from Grotius to Kant* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).
  - 5 For recent analyses, see Richard Tuck, *Natural Rights Theories: Their Origin and Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Anthony Pagden, ed., *The Languages of Political Theory in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); and Asher Horowitz, *Rousseau, Nature and History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).
  - 6 David Gauthier, 'Hobbes and International Relations', appendix to *The Logic of Leviathan*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 207.
  - 7 Donald W. Hanson, 'Hobbes's highway to peace,' *International Organization*, 32(2), 1984; Mark Heller, 'The use and abuse of Hobbes: the state of nature in International Relations', *Polity*, 13 (4), 1980, pp. 21–32; Michael C. Williams, 'Hobbes and International Relations: a reconsideration,' *International Organization*, 50 (2), 1996, pp. 213–36; David Armitage, 'Hobbes and the foundations of modern international thought', in Annabel Brett and James Tully, eds, *Rethinking the Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
  - 8 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, part I, ch. 13, ed. Michael Oakeshott (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1960), p. 82.
  - 9 'Nature hath made men so equal, in the faculties of body and mind, the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest.' Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 80.
  - 10 'The nature of warre, consisteth, not in actual fighting; but in the known disposition thereto, during all the time there is no assurance to the contrary.' Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 13, p. 82.
  - 11 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 83.
  - 12 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 'The state of war,' 'Summary of Saint-Pierre's project for perpetual peace,' 'Critique of Saint-Pierre's project for perpetual peace,' in Grace Roosevelt, *Reading Rousseau in the Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), pp. 185–229.
  - 13 For other readings of Rousseau's theory of international politics, see Stanley Hoffmann, 'Rousseau on war and peace,' in Stanley Hoffmann and David Fidler, eds, *Rousseau on International Relations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); Michael Doyle, 'Constitutionalism: Rousseau,' ch. 4, *Ways of War and Peace* (New York: Norton, 1997), pp. 137–60; and Michael C. Williams, 'Rousseau, Realism and Realpolitik,' *Millennium*, 18 (2), 1989, pp. 185–203.
  - 14 Rousseau, 'Summary,' in Roosevelt, *Reading Rousseau*, p. 205, my emphasis.
  - 15 Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws* [1748], ed. Cohler, Miller, and Stone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) book 18, ch. 6, pp. 278–79.
  - 16 Rousseau, 'Summary,' in Roosevelt, *Reading Rousseau*, p. 205.
  - 17 For overviews, see Geoffrey Parker, *Western Geopolitical Thought in the Twentieth Century* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1985); and James E. Dougherty and Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, Jr., ch. 2, 'Environmental theories', *Contending Theories of International Relations* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), pp. 54–84. For the inclusion of liberal industrial globalists in this grouping, see Daniel H. Deudney, ch. 8 'Federalist global geopolitics,' *Bounding Power: Republican Security Theory from the Polis to the Global Village* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

- 18 For perhaps the most starkly realist version of this argument, see James Burnham, *The Managerial Revolution* (New York: John Day, 1941).
- 19 For Carr's influence, see William T.R. Fox, *The American Study of International Relations*, (Institute of International Studies, University of South Carolina, 1968); and William T.R. Fox, 'E.H. Carr and Political Realism: vision and revision', *Review of International Studies*, 11 (4), 1985, pp. 1–16.
- 20 Whittle Johnston, 'E.H. Carr's theory of International Relations: a critique', *Journal of Politics*, 24 (4), 1967, p. 861.
- 21 The other main branch of neorealism, Gilpin's theory of hegemonic instability, is explicitly an elaboration of Carr's first argument, also rooted in Thucydides. Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).
- 22 Carr's materialist argument is most indebted to Marx's production-centred materialism, but he assigns military technology a role not explicitly or readily reducible to productive forces and relationships. Carr, *Conditions of Peace*, p. 57. See also Mick Cox's introduction in Carr, E.H. *The Twenty Years' Crisis: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001) and Charles Jones, *E.H. Carr and International Relations: A Duty to Lie* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- 23 Carr, *Conditions of Peace*, p. 39.
- 24 Carr, *Conditions of Peace*, p. 54; Andreas Dorpalan, ed., *The World of General Haushofer: Geopolitics in Action* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1942); and Johannes Mattern, *Geopolitik: Doctrine of National Self Sufficiency and Empire* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science, 1942).
- 25 Carr, *Conditions of Peace*, p. 37.
- 26 Carr, *Conditions of Peace*, p. 55. Here Carr's reaction to the German geopoliticians and Burnham's image of a handful of world powers locked in struggle is similar to George Orwell's.
- 27 Carr, *Conditions of Peace*, p. 60.
- 28 For the most starkly realist version of nuclear one-worldism, see James Burnham, *The Struggle for the World* (New York: John Day, 1947).
- 29 John Herz, *International Politics in the Atomic Age* (New York: Columbia University, 1960). The first half of Herz's book summarizes the understanding of the impact of the mature industrial revolution held by Carr and others, and the second half treats the development of nuclear weapons as a continuation of this same process.
- 30 Herz's nuclear one-world argument is an extension of the concept of the 'security dilemma'. John Herz, *Political Realism and Political Idealism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951). For synoptic recent treatment, see Ken Booth and Nicholas J. Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation and Trust in World Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).
- 31 Herz, *International Politics in the Atomic Age*, p. 13. For Herz's nuclear argument, see Nicholas J. Wheeler, 'To put oneself into the other fellow's place: John Herz, the security dilemma and the nuclear age', *International Relations*, 22 (4), 2008, pp. 493–509.
- 32 Herz, *International Politics in the Atomic Age*, p. 22.
- 33 For the evolution of Morgenthau's thinking about nuclear weapons, see Campbell Craig, *Glimmer of a New Leviathan: Total War in the Realism of Niebuhr, Morgenthau, and Waltz* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).
- 34 For discussion of Morgenthau's nuclear one-worldism, see James Speer, 'Hans Morgenthau and the World state,' *World Politics*, 20 (2), 1968; Richard Rosecrance, 'The One World of Hans Morgenthau', *Social Research*, 48 (4), 1981; and Campbell Craig, 'Hans Morgenthau and the world state revisited', in Michael Williams, ed., *Realism Reconsidered: The Legacy of Hans J. Morgenthau* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
- 35 Hans Morgenthau, *The Purpose of American Politics* (New York: Knopf, 1960), p. 170.
- 36 Hans Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations* (New York: Knopf, 1947), p. 491.
- 37 Hans J. Morgenthau, 'The four paradoxes of nuclear strategy', *American Political Science Review*, 68 (2), 1964, p. 35.

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- 38 Morgenthau's argument thus diverges from Neibuhr's claim that human frailties precluded a world state. Reinhold Neibuhr, 'The illusion of world government,' *Foreign Affairs*, 27 (2), April 1949.
- 39 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War*, pp. 171–85.
- 40 Using Hobbesian categories, Waltz observes that 'states in the world are like individuals in the state of nature', but does not conclude from this fact that states must combine because 'individuals, to survive, must combine; states, by their very constitution, are not subject to a similar necessity'. He thus builds into his definition of a state the security viability which is, in fact, historically variable. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War*, pp. 163 and 162.
- 41 This narrowing of material context is in part the product of the narrow scope of his main question (What are the causes of war?) which largely assumes the existence of states in systemic anarchy.
- 42 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, pp. 129–160.
- 43 Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 173.
- 44 Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 175.
- 45 In John J. Mearsheimer's version of offensive realism, the topographic fragmentation (in the form of the 'stopping power of water') makes a surprise appearance and plays a major role in shaping world political outcomes. *Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton, 2001).
- 46 Although Barry Buzan, Charles Jones, and Richard Little usefully move to expand Waltz's truncated structural theory by (re)introducing violence interaction capacity, they confine their deployment of this variable to situations moving from absent to low to medium grades of such interaction (adding valuable insight into the formation of international systems), and they fail to explore the more basic and recurring situation in which such violence interdependence among actors rises to intense levels that logically necessitate an exit from anarchy. *The Logic of Anarchy: Neorealism to Structural Realism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); and at length in Barry Buzan and Richard Little, *International Systems in World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Stephen van Evera also reintroduces a variant of violence interdependence in his offense-defense theory, but treats this as a fine-grained modification of the systemic argument of Waltz's neorealism. *The Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).
- 47 Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, pp. 180–82.
- 48 Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: More May be Better* (London: International Institute for Security Studies, 1981); and Kenneth N. Waltz, 'Nuclear myths and political realities', *American Political Science Review* 84 (3), September 1990.
- 49 For major substantive criticisms of Waltz's nuclear argument, see Sagan chapters in Scott D. Sagan and Kenneth Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate* (New York: Norton, 1995). For more extended analysis of the disjuncture between Waltz's neorealist and nuclear arguments, see Daniel Deudney, 'Dividing realism,' *Security Studies* 2 (3 & 4), 1993, pp. 7–37.
- 50 'Within very wide ranges, a nuclear balance is insensitive to variation in numbers and size of warheads.' Waltz, 'Nuclear myths and political realities', p. 740.

# 3

## BRINGING REALISM TO AMERICAN LIBERALISM

### Waltz and the process of a Cold War adjustment

*Michael Foley*

#### Introduction

The reputation of Kenneth Waltz's *Man, the State, and War*<sup>1</sup> is rightly attributed to its achievement in locating international theory – and the behaviour on which it is founded – within an explicit context of its own: namely the autonomy of 'the international'. Nevertheless, in seeking to demarcate the clear parameters of a purportedly bounded realm of analytical, theoretical and organizational value, the Waltzian conception of international politics can often preclude notable influences not merely at different levels of analysis, but within different dimensions of Waltz's own personal and social context. The intention of this chapter is to examine the latter categories and, in particular, the political and intellectual milieu of American liberalism during the Cold War. It was during this period that liberalism in the United States acquired a conspicuous identity as a celebrated and assertive conception of an achieved social order that combined unity with modernity. It was also a time when this self-conscious emphasis upon a predominant liberalism coincided closely with a series of international developments that witnessed the emergence of the US as a global superpower at the very time that its sense of national security and social purpose came under increasing scrutiny. This is the context within which *Man, the State, and War* was conceived and formulated. While it may be contended that Waltz's theoretical exegesis imparted a timeless property upon its subject field, the contention is that it is legitimate to look more closely at the contemporary landscape of social attitudes and political ideas in order to assess their influence upon both the provenance and logic of Waltz's position. By the same token, a review of this kind will also allow for some estimation of the implications that can be drawn from Waltz's analysis upon the political debates surrounding one of the most problematic aspects of American liberalism – namely its periodic fluctuations between transformative international engagement and an equally principled impulse towards withdrawal and dissociation from the international sphere.

## Liberal ascendancy as cohesion and settlement

The 1950s was a period that witnessed a marked rise in the United States' perception of itself as a quintessentially settled social order which had experienced the transformational epochs of the 1930s and the 1940s to emerge as the paramount embodiment of progress and modernity. This sense of a resolved state of advanced development found its rationale in what was widely regarded as a dominant American paradigm of liberal supremacy. In the Cold War intensity of ideational mobilization and social integration, the United States' traditional attachments to liberal principles were fused with the notion of a contemporary liberal settlement on the contours of post-Second World War politics. The aggregate result was widely described as tantamount to an 'end of ideology'. This theme received various expressions. To some, it represented the contemporary dominance of centre-ground politics in which the liberal reforms of the 1930s and 1940s were assimilated into a national framework. For many, this was taken to represent an affirmation that the United States had acquired the position of an assured centrist alternative to the extremes of both the left and the right in the international realm. Others saw the emergence of American supremacy as a social model and a global superpower more as a continuation of a deeper set of historical and social processes.<sup>2</sup>

Irrespective of the interpretive nuances, the dominant narrative of the American condition during this era was almost invariably conceived in terms of a transcendent liberalism. Within this construct, the problems of industrialization and modernization had been effectively resolved. The only disputes that remained were those that could be negotiated to a satisfactory solution through the use of technical adjustments. In 1951, Lionel Trilling had reached the conclusion that liberalism was so dominant that it had become essentially 'the sole intellectual tradition'<sup>3</sup> within the United States. Ten years later, J.K. Galbraith was equally confident that the mainstream had remained firmly in the liberal sector: 'These, without doubt, are the years of the liberal. Almost everyone now so describes himself.'<sup>4</sup> Conservatism was widely seen to be a reactive impulse confined to the margins of American political debate.

The deeper significance of the assertion that liberalism possessed a ubiquitous presence in the United States was largely defined by the exponents of consensus history. They claimed that the circumstances of American development had bestowed upon the country a unified experience which was characterized by the indigenous presence of a particular value structure. The avowed unity and continuity of American history meant that values in the United States were accepted as being in 'some way or other automatically defined: given by certain facts of geography or history peculiar to us'.<sup>5</sup> By far the most influential of these consensus historians was Louis Hartz. *The Liberal Tradition in America*<sup>6</sup> not only became one of the most cited books on US political culture but was seen in its own right as a reflection of Cold War precepts about the challenges confronting the US and in particular the need for the country to comprehend its own past and its current identity.

In what John P. Diggins described as a 'brilliant analysis of the relationship between social structure and ideology',<sup>7</sup> Hartz rationalized American history and its

political development within the exclusive confines of liberal values and in particular by reference to what he termed 'democratic capitalism'. Hartz's seminal work reformulated American history and society into a culturally attractive depiction of a continuity of American experience centred upon an organizing agency of liberalism and capitalism. In Hartz's work, all social conflict was necessarily reduced to that arising from mere differences of emphasis or technique. Because of an idiosyncratic collection of positional properties, the United States had become the beneficiary of an all-embracing historical legacy that generated a static and timeless world of capitalist harmonies, self-regulating balances and consensus politics. Hartz's sweeping study of American society and its usage of political ideas led him to advance the proposition of an exceptional society in which there was only one estate governed by a single and integrated set of core liberal values. The notion of an inherently liberal moral consensus was not only presented as the only plausible conception of the United States' social evolution, but was regarded as instrumental in consolidating the social cohesion and ideological mobilization necessary to engage in the cold war.

*The Liberal Tradition in America* is often taken to be the archetypal Cold War expression of American cultural integration. Its central thesis is that the initial absence of a feudal order and an *ancien régime* in American society had permitted liberalism to acquire an uncontested monopoly status in the public philosophy and individual mindsets of an uninhibited bourgeois culture. Americans simply gravitated to Lockean liberalism because there was nothing else to stop it. This allowed the United States to avoid the intractable extremes of Europe's left and right ideologies and in doing so to emerge from its own idiosyncratic historical processes as a thoroughly liberal entity with a self-evident attachment to freedom, individualism, capitalism, democracy, egalitarianism, rights, and the rule of law.

In terms of explanation and normative affirmation, *The Liberal Tradition in America* effectively conveyed the notion of a liberal society with a strong national identity and an instinctive – and even compulsive – set of core beliefs that supported a resilient framework of pluralist politics. For Hartz, this ubiquitous liberalism was grounded less in the consequences of rational inquiry and analytical preference than in the outcome of a visceral and reflexive traditionalism that in effect fused the principles and spirits of both John Locke and Edmund Burke. The settlement of deep moral questions on the basis of a 'submerged and absolute liberal faith'<sup>8</sup> had marked the end of speculation upon them. For Hartz it is 'only when you take ethics for granted that all problems emerge as problems of technique'.<sup>9</sup> The all-embracing nature of liberalism in the United States, therefore, possessed a deterministic property that proffered a social consensus with no serious means of, or instinct for, challenge. Any attempt to use traditionalism to contest liberalism would be doomed to self-contradiction. This is because 'a society which begins with Locke, and . . . stays with Locke . . . has within it, as it were, a self-completing mechanism which ensures the universality of the liberal idea'.<sup>10</sup>

In many respects Hartz's combination of historiography and political theory amounted to a celebration of America's sense of difference as a social and interpretive



phenomenon. The Hartzian thesis is often cited as an exposition offering descriptive and prescriptive support to America's Cold War posture. Both the study and its popular reception were no doubt influenced by the ideological cohesion of the Cold War and by the need to root American solidarity within a durable historical continuity.

This is not to deny the existence of alternative and dissenting voices which subsequently sought to contest the prevalence of this liberal construction. Over the years, Hartz's proposition of a socially and ideationally rooted liberal consensus has been subjected to an array of retrospective critiques. In many ways, it was the acquired orthodoxy surrounding the Hartzian thesis in the 1950s which prompted the critical reassessments that emerged after the initial intensity of the Cold War had passed. Revisionist outlooks suggested that the analytical and interpretive categories used by Hartz were narrow, misrepresentative and guided by a purposeful drive to impose a harmonious superstructure upon American development. Many of these claims possess more than a minimal element of validity. The same phenomena that Hartz observed as signifying the presence of a fixed and final unity can also be construed as presenting a quite different picture of American social and political processes. In place of consensus and continuity, it is possible to perceive American liberalism as being not only riven with problematic properties but also noted for elements and episodes of palpably illiberal behaviour. It is even possible to speculate on whether America's attachment to liberalism has been, and remains, in reality provisional and incomplete in nature.<sup>11</sup>

It is certainly the case that liberalism in the US has been noted for its internal tensions and variable priorities – even at times when it has been publicly portrayed as a permanent and exclusive paradigm. Strains have occurred and continue to persist over the rightful reach of liberalism; over its precepts and applications; and over the relationships between its principles and purposes. Notwithstanding the various claims of contestation or the evidence of disputed legacies, Hartz's exposition on liberalism as the originating source and defining account of the United States remains highly significant as a quintessential depiction of American identity during an exceptional period of adjustment. Hartz, along with other consensus analysts, typified a contemporary impulse to minimize internal conceptual strains and to foreclose social divisions against a backdrop of a compulsive and unifying attachment to liberalism. This view is noteworthy not merely because of the way that the US could be plausibly conceived in this era as an extraordinary embodiment of liberal values, but because liberalism appeared to be the only vehicle capable of evoking a central core of cultural attachment and communal conformity. And yet in spite of the significance attached to this ubiquitous liberal presence and despite the emphasis given to what was asserted to be the extraordinarily assimilative nature of this narrative, it was notable for one equally conspicuous and self-professed exception. When it came to the international sphere, and more specifically the position of the United States within it, American liberalism suffered from a notorious ambivalence.

## Liberal ascendancy and the challenge of the international

In the area of international relations, the liberal impulse was seen as being far from a constant condition. More precisely, it was recognized as being highly unstable when the perspective shifted to the field of foreign policy. This amounted to something of an anomaly because in many respects liberalism could be construed as a historically sanctioned characteristic of America's approach to the outside world. From the notions of an 'empire of liberty' and the 'Enlightenment applied' to the claims of being an international vanguard of liberal modernity and technological progress, the United States had the reputation of being an applicable model for others to emulate.<sup>12</sup> America stood as the self-conscious exemplar of a form of liberalism that by virtue of its own historical and social experience possessed the potential to extend across different regions and cultures. The Cold War deepened the implied logic of this national liberalism that could be projected into international arrangements of social, economic and regulatory benefit. It was understood by mainstream consensus historians and analysts that American leadership was based upon its liberal credentials and, thereby, on the legitimacy of its proposition that liberalism was the basis of a strong, unified and stable social order.

An integral element of this outlook, and a fundamental source of the traction required for its propagation, was the need for the United States to have a settled view of its position and role in the world. In many respects, this appeared to be the case with the emergence of the US as a global superpower that had assumed a profusion of post-Second World War responsibilities in the fields of recovery, security, trade and economic management. It had not only been instrumental in devising a range of architectures related to international governance, but had demonstrated its attachment to the need for American leadership in the new order. Nevertheless, American adjustment to a new international role continued to be severely limited. Despite an apparently consistent posture that seemed to bear witness to an acceptance of the principles of liberal internationalism – based firmly upon its own indigenous convictions – the United States remained curiously afflicted by a state of deep unsettlement over the extent to which liberalism could or should guide its actions in relation to the international realm.

It was the doyen of consensus scholars, Louis Hartz himself, who drew attention to what he regarded as a conspicuous and discordant anomaly in the otherwise unperturbed unity of America's liberal order. Notwithstanding the organizing principle of his exposition, Hartz took it upon himself to highlight a notable disjunction in the ramifications of American liberalism. Far from being the occasion or the location of a seamless symmetry of liberal attitudes, the arena of international politics exerted such enormous strains upon outlooks in the US that it could be regarded as a major structural weakness in its professed purpose as the leader of the free world. In this most critical of areas in which the US had positioned itself as the key actor in a litmus test of liberalism, it was evident to Hartz that the country was having to operate under a self-imposed disadvantage that threatened its entire Cold War rationale. What was characterized as a grave weakness came from the very

properties that in every other respect were described as an extraordinary strength: namely America's solidity as a social order embedded in liberalism.

When it came to the United States' relationship with the world outside its own new world experience, Hartz declared that the depiction of liberal exceptionalism could cut both ways. The final chapter of *The Liberal Tradition in America* provided a sting in the tail. It offered a powerful critique of the United States' position towards the international sphere. Far from confirming its position as a mature world power, the Hartzian view was that the Cold War had merely thrown the fundamental ambivalence of this most liberal of cultures into high relief. The thrust of the argument was that America had developed a liberal absolutism that was not only unaware of its conformity but was quite incapable of comprehending a world which had not undergone the formative conditions of the United States. The tenets of liberalism may have been universal in theory but in the American context they were conjoined to a compulsive and largely ingrown set of attachments.

The net effect was that the United States had a highly volatile view of the world that fluctuated between the bipolar positions of withdrawal and engagement. In essence, the US still proceeded to determine its relationship with the world on the basis of a choice undertaken as an autonomous agency. The impulse towards withdrawal and retreat was based upon the republic's escapist past from European decadence and its subsequent suspicion of that which lay beyond the sanctuary of its own liberal terms of reference. This 'liberal absolutism' was described as having a strong tendency towards 'identifying the alien with the unintelligible' and towards turning upon perceived incursions with a liberal hysteria that is born out of 'our own antiradical fetishism'.<sup>13</sup> American engagement abroad was similarly rooted in a narrowly conceived liberal impulse that justified engagement only through the unsustainable rationale of international transformation. Hartz concluded that the continual shifting between these two poles was the uncomfortable consequence of America's rootedness in liberal fundamentalism.

In the portraiture of an avowed liberal consensus, this difficulty with the rest of the world amounted to a significantly problematic disjunction. It might have been constructed as an expression of liberal choice on the part of an autonomous agency. But Hartz chose not to take this course. He conveyed it as something akin to a deep division – not in any material sense that may have been construed as a form of class-based or material dispute. Instead, he presented it more in psychic terms. It was the sheer orthodoxy of American liberalism that rendered the US susceptible to dramatic swings in outlook and posture towards the world and therefore towards international relations.

This could not simply be attributed to a simple crisis of adjustment occasioned by the onrush of a Cold War. It indicated a much more deep-set and systemic problem that amounted not merely to a state of disequilibrium but to a volatile and arguably dysfunctional condition. 'An absolute national morality' Hartz recorded 'is transpired either to withdraw from "alien" things or to transform them: it cannot live in comfort constantly by their side'.<sup>14</sup> This is the outlook that is derived from the 'absolute perspective' of America's liberal community and the 'peculiar link that

... [it] forges between the world and domestic pictures'.<sup>15</sup> Within this perspective, an internal pluralism appeared to be a natural condition. But an external pluralism was deeply problematic both in conceptual and political terms. For a historian of American liberalism, Hartz remained significantly sceptical over whether the American liberal mind could ever transcend its own limited horizons – that is, whether it could 'ever understand peoples elsewhere' and even whether it could 'ever understand itself'.<sup>16</sup>

### Hartz, Waltz and the cautionary tale of Woodrow Wilson

These selfsame issues of liberalism – its principles, outlooks and organizing logics – feature strongly in *Man, the State and War*. It is true that Waltz's approach is different in so far as he approaches them in the main from the perspective of international relations theory. Nevertheless, he undertakes a close critical examination of various liberal ideas and how they have developed from an initial position of constraining the state towards a set of more expansive claims over the responsibility to ensure that key freedoms are secured and protected through state activity. In his review of the limitations of the second image, taken either in isolation or in combination with the first image, Waltz surveys the international aspirations and assumptions of liberal thinkers who have seen it as their responsibility not merely to reaffirm liberal values by virtue of extending their applicability to the international realm, but to authenticate the possibility of a future world order of peaceful harmony through the imprimatur of liberal principles. His analysis is largely set against a nineteenth-century backdrop of liberal themes relating to optimistic notions of social development and historical progress based upon decentralization, freedom of contract, individual rights, free trade, representative government, transcendent harmonies of interest and the transformative energies of emancipation.

In tracing the various iterations of liberalism in this era and their different approaches to the issue of security and the international order, Waltz settles upon much the same duality that Hartz uses to portray the strains within contemporary liberalism – namely those that are prompted by, and exhibited in, the issue of a liberal construction of international relations. This is not to claim that Waltz was taking his cue directly from Hartz. But it is noteworthy that both have very similar reservations over the record and prospectus of American liberalism when its focus becomes directed to the international sphere. Within both their respective expositions, Waltz and Hartz showcase the figure of Woodrow Wilson to depict the deep fault lines within liberalism in respect to the place of war in the processes of international politics.

Hartz discusses the advent of Wilsonianism as a twentieth-century liberal hybrid that was at one and the same time both innovative and traditional in composition as well as being both visceral and abstract in spirit. Wilson had attempted to draw on American experience and liberal principles to forge a new international concert of interests and supranational institutionalism, whilst depending upon nineteenth-century axioms of national self-determination, contractual agreements and free trade.

The inner contradictions of Wilson's liberal mindset had been duly exposed and, in being so, were revealed as a generic weakness in American liberalism – that is, its inability to relate effectively to the world because of America's predisposition towards perceiving the alien outside through the image of its own indigenous liberal experiences. Wilsonian liberalism sought to overcome these constraints in a concerted form of transformative international action. But in the end this preferred mode of interplay, merely exposed the 'peculiar American blind spots of Wilson'<sup>17</sup> and had the 'effect of projecting the limitations of the American liberal perspective onto the world scene'.<sup>18</sup>

*Man, the State and War* reveals that Waltz had very similar reservations over the liberal excesses of Wilsonianism. Waltz divided liberals into two camps. 'Noninterventionist liberals' depended more on historical forces, notions of progress and the educative effect of model liberal democracies to create an evolutionary process towards a peaceful world order. Working on the premise that regressive and hostile states can and will change for the better, noninterventionists looked towards promoting internal liberalization at a distance (e.g. free trade, arms reduction, decolonization). 'Messianic interventionists' on the other hand were liberals who disputed the mechanisms of international change. In place of what they regarded as self-abnegating gradualism, liberal interventionists placed their trust in the transformative exertion of power in order to shift the environment in a progressive direction.

Woodrow Wilson could at times appear to be driven by the demands of national security. But in the main, his reputation was that of a messianic interventionist who broke new ground by extending the prospectus of engagement to the point of promoting the creation of an international organization designed to perform governmental functions. The objective was to move beyond the customary processes based upon the narrow calculation of state interests and the normal dynamics of a balance of power system. Whereas liberals had previously rejected international organizations as unnecessary and regressive, Wilson's advocacy of such a scheme 'mark[ed] a turning point'.<sup>19</sup> It disclosed an impulse in liberalism that was both hubristic and dangerous. Waltz does not merely reiterate the common conclusion relating to Wilson. He applies the critique to all forms of interventionist liberalism that occasion a moral obligation to provide final solutions to war.

Interventionist liberals are . . . not content with a realism that may prolong the era of war forever. Their realism lies in rejecting the assumption of automatic progress in history and in the consequent assertion that men must eliminate the causes of war if they are to enjoy peace. Their realism involves them in utopian assumptions that are frightening in their implications. The state that would act on the interventionist theory must set itself up as both judge and executor in the affairs of nations.<sup>20</sup>

To Waltz, such liberals would aim to 'make a leap into the future and take all of us with them'.<sup>21</sup> The reckoning was that even with the most virtuous of motives such

interventions would lead to extravagant wars and to an unsettled peace relying upon international organizations without the necessary machinery of effective governance. Waltz summed up the liberal theory of intervention as being hopelessly imprecise and logically flawed. It amounted to a thoroughly dangerous prospectus because it was based upon a fundamental misunderstanding of international politics. In seeking to supersede the politics of a balance of power by resorting to a set of transcendent moral standards more commonly associated with a first image conception of appropriate behaviour, Wilson and the other advocates of messianic interventionism were overlooking the dynamics and conditioning effects of what was a functioning system of states.

### **Liberals and the Cold War predicament**

Situated in an era of entrenched Cold War confrontation during the late 1940s and 1950s, it can be supposed that Kenneth Waltz would not have been unaware of the contemporary danger of nuclear conflict and of the contemporary debates surrounding the ways of avoiding it, or at least of containing the possibilities of war. As a political theorist and political analyst, his outlook in *Man, the State and War* was conspicuously informed by the perceived limitations of liberal conventions and prescriptions – and by extension to all those perspectives exclusively confined to the first and second images. In the conditions of the Cold War, Waltz's critique of Marxist and socialist conceptions of international peace might be considered to be unremarkable. More noteworthy in this context was the inclusion of liberal internationalism in his indictment of universalist notions of human nature and state typologies.

For Waltz, no special status could be claimed on behalf of liberalism in the quest for a peaceful world. It was merely one form of associational life with the same predilections towards its own interests as the other forms. In the realm of international anarchy, liberal states were no different to other states in an aggregated system in which each state's sovereignty coexisted with that of every other state. As far as Waltz was concerned, there was no bias against liberal states. Equally, there was no discrimination in their favour: 'Our criticisms of the liberals apply to all theories that would rely on the generalization of one pattern of state and society to bring peace to the world'.<sup>22</sup> Waltz was intent upon incorporating into international theory the 'conditioning effects of the state system'<sup>23</sup> – that is, the way that the international environment operated as an explanatory dimension in its own right – as a medium of exchange and thus as a 'permissive cause'<sup>24</sup> of war.

Waltz would have been conscious that his analysis was germane to the state of liberal anxieties that were current at the time. American liberalism had emerged from the Second World War with a renewed affirmation of confidence in the grandeur and virtue of the liberal ethos. But this was qualified by an unnerving disquiet over the implications of mass politics and in particular over the dangers of unmediated forms of political engagement. Liberal reason had recognized how social intolerance and political extremism could be elicited from the interior impulses of

individuals by autocratic regimes like Germany, Italy, Japan and the USSR. Now elements of American liberalism in the 1950s were increasingly concerned that these dynamics could well be replicated within the confines of liberal democracy. This concern over the prospect of unstable structures of mass opinion was reflected in the work of such contemporary intellectual figures as Richard Hofstadter, Walter Lippmann, Lionel Trilling, Daniel Bell, Hannah Arendt, Dwight Macdonald and Reinhold Niebuhr. The destruction, cruelty and slaughter of the Second World War gave pause for sceptical thought. As Alan Brinkley notes, liberal triumph coincided conspicuously with liberal dismay:

Like the fear of the state, with which it was closely associated, it reinforced a sense of caution and restraint in liberal thinking; a suspicion of ideology, a commitment to pragmatism, a wariness about moving too quickly to encourage or embrace spontaneous popular movements; indeed, a conviction that one of the purposes of politics was to defend the state against popular movements and their potentially dangerous effects.<sup>25</sup>

The concurrence of confidence and critique generated an ambiguous mix that could see liberals both disavowing the grand pretensions of a global prospectus whilst supporting a moral imperative to confront communism as an illegitimate world power – at the same time as they supported the notion of the United States as an international model and reference point of modernity while critiquing its social and economic structures as worthy candidates for progressive reform.

In terms of foreign policy and its domestic significance, American liberals were continually under strain from the need to respond to two primary sources of tension. First, was the need to defend themselves against the charge of being ‘soft on communism’ mainly because of their various associations with left-wing causes and organizations before and during the war. Their agenda of social and economic reform was strongly grounded in systemic critiques that required a response of governmental activism in the advance of a positive state, whilst retaining a sensitivity towards civil liberties at the same time. The second source of tension was derived from liberals’ long-term discomfort over the energies and purposes of American populism. The insurgent properties of populist politics could induce volatile movements of opinion that could attach themselves in unpredictable and damaging ways to an eclectic range of public issues. Because these accelerated surges of mass protest were fuelled by notions of exclusion and cultural disinheritance, they tended to operate outside the normal channels of political mediation.<sup>26</sup> To that extent, they could be seen as raw, unrefined and confrontational – with a disposition towards sentiments of anti-politics, to simplistic analyses and agendas, and usually to negative and often intolerant positions. In the 1950s, liberals often felt compelled to meet the moral energy and objections of populists by an uneasy set of accommodations.

Both sources of tension, for example, were dramatically combined in the phenomenon of McCarthyism. The febrile atmosphere had led many liberals to switch into a markedly more hostile attitude towards the communist threat and into a more

sceptical outlook upon the dynamics of world politics. The onset of atomic weapons and with it the spectre of thermonuclear destruction appeared to preclude the future possibility of limited warfare at the same time that it raised the stakes in the emergent formation of two great power blocs. As a consequence, American liberalism evolved into a Cold War position that sought to establish an identity which could be differentiated from the hawks of nationalist conservatism and from the remnants of the socialist-popular front axis of the 1930s. Liberal anxiety over being politically outflanked and over its forms of governance being disrupted by outbursts of populist insurgency led to the renowned hybrid of Cold War liberalism; namely an intense and sustained posture geared to ideational and strategic confrontation coexisting alongside a domestic agenda of measured internal critique and domestic reform. Some elements of US liberalism believed that this stance was conspicuously inconsistent with its domestic agenda, and represented a form of political over-compensation in order to pre-empt charges of liberal elitism and covert complicity in anti-Americanism. But in the main, the liberal persuasion became strongly associated with a concerted anti-communism and with a willingness to compete against the international reach of communism. Liberalism became noted for its hostility to those forces that were deemed to threaten the United States' national interests, its global position and its central role in organizing the international system.

To many, this represented an agreeable and even vital centrist position that suggested a mature response to contemporary circumstances. Hartz remained unconvinced by the relationship between on the one hand an indigenous liberalism that professed the existence of universal properties and, on the other, the equally vibrant notion of national exceptionalism based upon the very same indigenous liberalism. It is noteworthy that Hartz's critique was as much directed towards Cold War liberals as it was towards their tormentors on the right and the left. Beneath the veneer of liberal optimism in the United States, Hartz detected a note of pessimism because of America's almost congenital inability to adjust itself to a global position. As a consequence, it remained at the mercy of an inherent instability due to the problematic nature of its ingrown liberal ethos when it had to confront the outside world. In effect, it could not be assumed that American liberalism had arrived at a full reconciliation with the notion that engagement in international politics was a binding fact of global life rather than a choice motivated by moral conviction.

## Meeting the world halfway

The extent to which *Man, the State and War* was designed with this liberal predicament in mind is a matter that is open to debate. It might be argued that Waltz's metier lay with the properties of high theory rather than with the cross-currents of contemporary American liberalism. However, a proposition of equal or greater weight might plausibly assert that he was not only conscious of the relevance of his position in relation to the more nuanced disputes between himself and other post-war realists like Reinhold Niebuhr and Hans Morgenthau over the United States' strategic posture in the world, but recognized the significance of these debates



in the wider social realm of political contestation.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, it is also noteworthy that Waltz himself was integrated into an increasingly advanced culture of social science professionalization that entailed both contact with current issues of policy relevance and also an integral place in the developing structural infrastructure of the American political economy. Oliver Zunz describes the 1950s as a transformative period in US capitalism that was marked by the highly productive synergies generated in a singularly American matrix of institutions based upon business, science, engineering, management and social science sectors that found their outlet in universities, research foundations, marketing and polling organizations, advertising agencies, government bodies and policy centres.<sup>28</sup> This conflation of cross-sector collaboration boosted interest in the roles, methods and purposes of the social sciences. At the same time, it increasingly connected their professional organizations with a hinterland of political engagement.

In spite of its evident distinction as an intellectual exegesis, Waltz's work on structural realism cannot simply be consigned to a bounded sphere of international relations theory specialists. His theoretical treatise possessed a resonance with the contemporary processes of America's accommodation to an inextricable global position as well as with the deep political insecurities generated by the emergence of an apparently unstable and dangerous international order. Part of the appeal of *Man, the State and War* was the way it tapped into these wider misgivings over the Cold War's emergent dynamics. This is not to claim that Waltz set out to provide anything in the way of a prospectus. Quite the reverse. His insights into the remit of international politics were not intended to address any normative issues; neither were they designed to offer guidance to foreign policy-makers over how to achieve a peaceful world order. In this vein, it is noteworthy that some contemporary reviews of his book reflected a marked reluctance to give an unequivocal welcome to its conclusions.<sup>29</sup> This was due in no small measure to the tensions and high stakes of the nuclear age. It should be recalled that the period was marked by an increased awareness of an international system that was deemed to be oppressive and from which most participants would have preferred some means of escape. It was also a period in which the United States' often fractious ambiguity over its relationship with the rest of the world could well have threatened to exacerbate the dangers inherent in a deteriorating situation.

The posited existence of a morally neutral and immutable system of international politics that Waltz advanced cannot be said to have resolved the manifold issues attached to America's liberal perspectives in this field. Nevertheless, it can be proposed that the study contributed towards defusing the central issue at stake. In this respect, it may be concluded that Waltz succeeded in turning the Hartzian position on its head. In contrast to Hartz, Waltz found reasonable grounds for optimism within an otherwise generally pessimistic context of international power politics. His claim on behalf of an inherent structural realism offered a way out of the Hartzian duality of the liberal mind. The third image amounted to a differentiated repository of multiple agencies. It had properties and dynamics of its own, derived from the interplay of state interests and the actions taken in pursuit of them.

This world was not something to be imbued with moral or immoral constructions – let alone grand aspirations of purpose. It was simply a set of contextual relations to which foreign policy-makers had to adjust in the terms in which it presented itself – that is, in the manner of ‘a reasoned response to the world about us’.<sup>30</sup>

While it may well be possible to locate Waltz in a broader historiography of liberal concepts and ideas,<sup>31</sup> there is a closer claim to relevance for contemporary American liberals. His study offered an organizing rationale to a world that appeared increasingly unsettled, dangerous and liable to evoke extreme responses in the light of unprecedented threats and the possibility of nuclear annihilation. In a political context that was noted for the intensity of debate over the position of the US in an emergent Cold War, Waltz offered a persuasive account of a long-established continuity of relationships between states as operating in accordance with their own interests and with their own calculations for survival in a condition of anarchy. Given the absence of a functioning supranational polity – and the improbability of one ever coming into existence – Waltz’s realism pointed to what was in effect a closely argued realization that the international had a constant operational and political logic of its own that was resistant to the incursion of singular and sweeping changes from individual agencies.

This notion of an international structure of autonomous processes built upon the participatory imperatives of its constituent units was suggestive of a need to recognize the steady-state nature of the realm. It was this depiction that offered close parallels to the position being worked through by many of America’s Cold War liberals. Waltz’s kind of realism carried a positive core that implicitly addressed the issue of American engagement in the international system. Waltz illustrated the way that it was possible for American liberalism, and thereby the United States, to achieve a stable and sustainable form of international involvement without falling prey to the volatile swings between the Hartzian extremes of transformative change and reactive dissociation. In effect, the dynamics of international bipolarity had in fact enhanced the possibility of diminishing the chronic nature of liberalism’s own bipolarity. Waltz underlined the reassuring existence of a differentiated framework of world politics with which the United States could engage as a settled political player within an ongoing and open-ended process. As such, the country could participate without recourse to its traditionally episodic and often morally driven dislocations exemplified in its self-conscious exertions of vivid engagement and principled disavowal. For American liberals, it offered an altogether more congenial prospect in relation to the international sphere. In point of fact, structural realism may be said to have placed American liberalism in a predicament that liberals were far more accustomed to in another and altogether more familiar context: namely their domestic ability to work within and through the ambiguities of a predominant system; the impulse to question an existing order whilst remaining firmly in its mainstream; and the capacity to press for incremental changes whilst reaffirming the foundational principles of an embedded structure of political relationships. To American liberals, international realism had had the reputation of being a dark and pessimistic doctrine that merely served to reaffirm an image of the outside world as

an alien and morally redundant entity. Waltz's structural realism by contrast offered a far more neutral explanatory device and one that could facilitate an altogether more measured liberal adjustment to the international sphere.

## Notes

- 1 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).
- 2 See Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), ch. 13; Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Genius of American Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953); Seymour M. Lipset, *Political Man* (London: Heinemann, 1960), pp. 403–17; Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom* (Cambridge, MA: Riverside, 1961).
- 3 Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p. 9.
- 4 Quoted in John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge, 'For Conservatives, mission accomplished', *Sooner Thought*, 18 May 2004, <http://www.soonerthought.com/archives/000672.html> (accessed 31 October 2007).
- 5 Boorstin, *The Genius of American Politics*, p. 9.
- 6 Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1955).
- 7 John P. Diggins, *The American Left in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), p. 147. See also John P. Diggins, 'Knowledge and sorrow: Louis Hartz's quarrel with American history', *Political Theory*, 16, no. 3 (August 1988), pp. 355–76.
- 8 Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America*, p. 10.
- 9 Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America*, p. 10.
- 10 Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America*, p. 6.
- 11 See Rogers M. Smith, 'Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal, and Hartz: the multiple traditions in America', *The American Political Science Review*, 87 (3), September 1993, pp. 549–66; Rogers M. Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in US History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997); Louisa B. Green, 'The liberal tradition in American politics: a slow boat to democracy', in David F. Ericson and Louisa B. Green (eds), *The Liberal Tradition in American Politics: Reassessing the Legacy of American Liberalism* (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 43–66; Desmond King, *Making Americans: Immigration, Race, and the Origins of the Diverse Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).
- 12 See Henry S. Commager, *The Empire of Reason: How Europe Imagined and America Realized the Enlightenment* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1978); Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation, Volume II – The Science of Freedom* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1970), pp. 555–67.
- 13 Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America*, p. 306.
- 14 Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America*, p. 286.
- 15 Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America*, p. 285.
- 16 Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America*, p. 309.
- 17 Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America*, p. 294.
- 18 Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America*, p. 293.
- 19 Waltz, *Man, the State and War*, p. 117.
- 20 Waltz, *Man, the State and War*, p. 113.
- 21 Waltz, *Man, the State and War*, p. 110.
- 22 Waltz, *Man, the State and War*, p. 122.
- 23 Waltz, *Man, the State and War*, p. 231.
- 24 Waltz, *Man, the State and War*, p. 233.

- 25 Alan Brinkley, 'Legacies of World War II', in Alan Brinkley, *Liberalism and its Discontents* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 106.
- 26 See Paul Starr, 'Liberalism versus Populism', available from Paul Starr, *Freedom's Power* website, <http://www.freedomspower.com/2007/04/liberalism-versus-populism.html> (accessed 20 September 2007).
- 27 See Campbell Craig, *Glimmer of a New Leviathan: Total War in the Realism of Niebuhr, Morgenthau, and Waltz* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), especially pp. 117–36.
- 28 Olivier Zunz, *Why the American Century?* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2000).
- 29 Most notably in Richard W. Taylor, Review of Waltz, *Man, the State and War: A Theoretical Analysis*, published in *Midwest Journal of Political Science*, 4 (2) May 1960, pp. 194–97; J. David Singer, Review of Waltz, *Man, the State and War: A Theoretical Analysis*, published in *World Politics*, 12 (3), April 1960, pp. 453–61.
- 30 Waltz, *Man, the State and War*, p. 238.
- 31 For example, see Deborah Boucoyannis, 'The international wanderings of a Liberal idea, or why Liberals can learn to stop worrying and love the balance of power', *Perspectives on Politics*, 5 (4), December 2007, pp. 703–28.

# 4

## THE POLITICS OF THEORY

### Waltz, realism, and democracy

*Michael C. Williams*

Intellectual historians are fond of stressing the need for context in understanding a particular text or thinker. By looking at context, they suggest, we can gain a clearer sense of the issues that a particular thinker was trying to confront, and the otherwise sometimes hidden debates in which they may have been engaged. In the case of Kenneth Waltz and International Relations (IR) such a contextual dimension has not been totally absent. Though the lion's share of commentary, debate, and criticism surrounding Waltz's theory has focused on questions of conceptual cogency and analytic rigour, these methodological debates have often explicitly located themselves within traditions of social theory and developments in the social sciences that provide important background for Waltz's thinking. Whether formulated in terms of the influence of 'positivist' understandings of science in the evolution of the field of IR, or 'rationalist' or structural-functionalist forms of social theory in the social sciences as a whole, Waltz's thinking has often been implicitly or explicitly contextualized as part of wider debates over the relationship between theory and practice, or the political implications of adopting particular theoretical or methodological stances.<sup>1</sup>

There are, of course, many good reasons for this focus, not least the powerful status of Waltz's methodological contributions to the study of world politics, and his own tendency to formulate and defend his claims in terms of his own methodological position; and there is equally little doubt that the most intelligent, incisive, and productive debates surrounding Waltz's thinking have taken place in these terms. In this chapter, however, I would like to suggest the value of taking a rather different path. Instead of focusing primarily on *Theory of International Politics* and locating Waltz against the background of disputes over the nature of social science, it may be revealing to shift the interpretive context to a much earlier time and an apparently very different set of concerns and controversies. This context lies in debates within American realism in the 1950s, their connections to broader political

controversies of the time concerning the cultural malaise of modern society, and the connections of both of these debates to the pressing practical question of whether democracies in general, and the United States in particular, were capable of developing and carrying through effective foreign policies in the dangerous world of the Cold War. These were not debates over methodology or theory in its narrower sense. They were highly charged political controversies over the fate of modern societies, the future of Western civilization, and the survival of liberal democracy in the United States and beyond.

Viewing Waltz's thinking in the context of the 1950s may strike some as foolish enough; viewing it through the lens of foreign policy-making and democracy will no doubt strike them as even more outlandish, and perhaps worse. Waltz, after all, is famous amongst both his supporters and critics for his rigorous refusal to address such issues, arguing that there is an important difference between a theory of international politics and a theory of foreign policy. Nonetheless, I would like to venture that by following this unfamiliar route it is possible to bring to light previously ignored aspects of Waltz's thinking, and to show connections in his work that put that thinking in quite a new light. In particular, I suggest it does three things. First, it helps clarify further Waltz's relationship to (and departure from) specific strands of 'classical' realism, including those of Hans Morgenthau and Reinhold Niebuhr. Second, it brings to light a little recognized dimension of Waltz's career, one with potentially wider consequences for appreciating his thinking as a whole. For while Waltz is often criticized as having little concern with domestic politics, I will try to show that by taking account of the broad sweep of his body of work – including his oft-ignored 1967 book, *Foreign Policy and Democratic Politics* – this charge cannot in any simple form be sustained. Not only does he in this book provide a widely researched study of the impact of domestic factors on foreign policy; much more importantly, on closer reading his analysis reveals an agenda motivated directly by the highly politicized question of the capacity of democratic states to act effectively in foreign policy, and a desire to confront the claims by realists and others that the US was in the midst of a political crisis in which its democratic structures were a hindrance rather than a help in meeting the foreign policy challenges that it faced. For Waltz, a different (structural) realist theory of international politics has concrete political, as well as intellectual, appeal. It could counter the dire – and in Waltz's view, mistaken – warnings of classical realists and others about the weakness of liberal democracy in an anarchic international system.

Seeing this context leads to my third claim: that there is a subtle and important set of domestic political interventions embedded in Waltz's entire theoretical edifice. The three images set out in *Man, the State and War*, the historical analysis in *Foreign Policy and Democratic Politics*, and the systemic theory developed in *Theory of International Politics* are not just analytic devices. Nor are they politically neutral. On the contrary, they are in fact shot through with political implications. In fact, I will argue, Waltz's international theorizing contains a direct if largely unrecognized connection and commitment to democratic decision-making. An unrecognized objective and effect of Waltz's theory of international relations is to *exclude* from

consideration precisely the questions of political modernity that classical realists (and many others) insisted were crucial in understanding contemporary politics at both the domestic and international level. In doing so, Waltz's thinking made a key contribution to the still-developing field of International Relations, providing a basis for the field's development as an apparently neutral social science by setting it apart from the highly controversial and deeply politicized debates concerning liberalism, democracy, and the future of Western civilization that preoccupied its realist predecessors. This move certainly had implications for subsequent debates over theory construction in IR, but it also points to a more subtle and yet deeply political dimension of Waltz's apparently abstract theorizing.

### **Man, the state, and modernity: the pessimism of classical realism**

In textbook treatments, post-war realism's concerns with 'Man' and 'the State' have often been reduced to rather crude visions of the intrinsic 'evil' of human nature or the insatiable power hunger of states. The reality, of course, bears little resemblance to this caricature. In fact, the classical realism of the 1950s and early 1960s exhibited a remarkably wide range of philosophic, sociological, and political concerns, concerns that were by no means restricted to questions of international relations. Indeed, at the heart of many of the most sophisticated forms of realism in this period was a concern with the 'crisis' of liberal modernity and its implications for politics, both within and between states.

The precise contours of the debates that swirled around the fate of Cold War liberalism defy any brief exposition.<sup>2</sup> In broad outline, however, they revolved around the question of whether the social and ideological structures of modern society had eroded the capacity of those societies to produce citizens and societies with the individual and collective virtue and principled cohesion necessary to maintain democratic institutions at home and to defend them abroad. Liberal democracy, it was argued, had fallen prey to (or even transmogrified into) fascism in Weimar. It had barely survived the war. And it was now challenged by an adversary perhaps even more formidable. Were democratic societies capable of formulating foreign policies capable of responding effectively to these challenges abroad while maintaining liberty at home and avoiding global thermonuclear destruction? For many of those in the emerging school of post-war realism, this was the key question underlying foreign policy, and they tended to answer it with scepticism, pessimism, and foreboding.

Underpinning these analyses lay a clear set of connections between man, the state, and the dilemmas of democratic foreign policy. At the risk of significantly oversimplifying their views, a thumbnail sketch of the positions of some of the era's most prominent realists serves to illustrate the point. For Hans Morgenthau, for example, the problem lay in the relationship between the ascendance of 'scientific man' and decadent liberal individualism.<sup>3</sup> Reduced to either a denuded rationalism, or a facile relativism and subjectivism, increasingly dominant conceptions of the liberal modern

individual provided an inadequate foundation for individual identity and political community, and led towards an anomic democratic politics that at its extremes yielded either the weakness of Weimar or the nationalistic crusading that was its alter-ego.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, in Reinhold Niebuhr's view, modern individuals had lost spiritual depth and political wisdom: unable to cope with a politics of evil, the Children of Light increasingly risked falling into a pacifist quiescence in the face of the Children of Darkness – or to the righteous crusading that was its equally disturbing foil.<sup>5</sup> To George Kennan, the erosion of the Protestant ethos and civic virtue in the face of urbanization and capitalist modernization meant that societies in general – and the United States in particular – were bereft of direction and commitment, and left Kennan himself pensive, melancholy, and often with abiding intimations of decline and decay.<sup>6</sup>

For our purposes here, one of the most challenging and important voices in this chorus was the widely influential journalist Walter Lippmann.<sup>7</sup> For Lippmann, the challenges confronting liberal democracy were daunting. In one vein, he argued that modern mass media had rendered democracy evermore ephemeral. Since action was based upon mental 'representations', and the experience of politics and wider social reality was increasingly dominated by distanced media and images, modern politics were increasingly a realm of mass manipulation in which the democratic ideal of a deliberative public was evermore divorced from reality. The irrational tendencies of this 'phantom public' in turn heightened even further the shortcomings of democratic foreign policy-making that had been the grist of critics since at least de Tocqueville.<sup>8</sup> In an argument that in many ways paralleled Morgenthau's diagnosis in *Scientific Man versus Power Politics*, Lippmann also worried that modern societies had lost the individual and collective virtues necessary for the successful functioning and defence of democracy. The Executive, he argued, needed to regain its power of decision and decisive action against the increasingly self-interested pluralism of the legislative branch and the democratic electorate. At the same time, the American public needed to recover its ability to believe in objective natural laws that Lippmann saw as the foundation of the Republic. 'The people', he argued, 'have acquired power which they are incapable of exercising and the governments they elect have lost powers which they must recover if they are to govern'. Where mass opinion rules, 'enfeeblement, verging on paralysis, of the capacity to govern' and a 'morbid derangement' of government follows. 'This breakdown in the constitutional order', he direly concludes, 'is the cause of the precipitate and catastrophic decline of Western society. It may, if it cannot be arrested and reversed, bring about the fall of the West'.<sup>9</sup>

As much as the analyses of figures such as Lippmann, Niebuhr, and Morgenthau differed in diagnosis, detail, or direction, and particularly in their responses, these thinkers shared a deep ambivalence about modern subjectivity and modern politics – about the relationship between man and the state, and about the implications of that increasingly fraught relationship for foreign policy and relations between states. In their diverse ways, they were all particularly concerned about the implications of this situation for the ability of democracies to conduct effective foreign



policies, worries that were heightened by the dangers posed by the Cold War and the development of nuclear weapons. Their responses to this situation varied, of course. Hans Morgenthau, for instance, attempted to combine calls for renewed presidential leadership with exhortations toward a revived republicanism – a position that not infrequently intersected with Niebuhr's. Almost all of these realists, however, displayed a certain nostalgia for an era of aristocratic or elite control over foreign policy, and more stable and limited balance of power politics with which they associated it.

In sum, post-war realists were not just pessimistic as a matter of personal idiosyncrasy or dire geopolitical circumstances. Their pessimism derived in no small part from their visions of the connections between the 'nature' of individual human beings and the modern state. And one of the main consequences of their views was a deep scepticism about the future of liberal democracy, and particularly about the aptitude of democracies in the area of foreign policy. These were not isolated concerns. Although the formulations of the crisis differed widely and importantly, they reflected widespread views amongst scholars and political commentators that liberal democracies were simply incapable of conducting foreign policy effectively, and that in such dangerous conditions democratic procedures might well have to be curtailed if these states were to survive.

Waltz was well aware of these arguments.<sup>10</sup> In fact, they form the revealing backdrop to one of his most intriguing (though least acknowledged) works, *Foreign Policy and Democratic Politics*.<sup>11</sup> In this, the longest of his three books, Waltz notes that while the criticism of democracies' inability to conduct foreign policy effectively is an old theme of conservative thinkers, going back at least to de Tocqueville, it has recently taken on a more widespread appeal and urgency of tone. Here, tellingly, his discussion turns directly to Lippmann's *The Public Philosophy*, and he takes up a key theme that is worth quoting at length. 'In his criticism of democratic foreign policy', Waltz argues, Lippmann

joins hands with an enduring aristocratic distrust of mass electorates. One wonders however, whether he has correctly described the workings of democracy. And even if he were right, could anything be done about it? In a happier world, a world in which the democracies were not so sorely tried, Mr. Lippmann's critique of democracy would still have point and purpose. Others have shortened their philosophic reach to concentrate more closely upon problems of the moment. Engaged in mortal combat with a monster, one must become a monster himself. Thinking of the disadvantages of democracy as merely temporary has suddenly, in the space of two decades for America and perhaps twice as long a time for the democracies of Western Europe, ceased to give comfort, for the fear has grown that disadvantages even of short duration might be fatal. America's potential opponents . . . are garrison states, tightly organized and closely controlled. If this does give them a clear advantage, then democracies are encouraged to adopt similar methods. Competitors, by the force of their struggle, are made to become alike; the

one less well equipped for the contest must imitate the other or fall by the wayside.<sup>12</sup>

As Waltz shows, this conclusion was drawn by a wide range of thinkers at the time. For 'while Lippmann's harsh indictment is rejected by most students of politics, many would assent to a milder charge'<sup>13</sup> – and amongst the many he lists such figures as Gabriel Almond, V.O. Key, W.W. Rostow, and Henry Kissinger. Equally importantly, he notes, the theme had substantial appeal amongst policy elites. As Waltz phrases it:

Haunted by the memory of the democracies' failures in the 1930s and dismayed by America's inability to adjust force to political purpose in and immediately after World War II, critics of democratic institutions found ample sustenance for a far-reaching pessimism. Although somewhat allayed by the rapidity and breadth of response to Soviet challenges in the period that began in 1947 and reached into the 1950s, pessimism reappeared in the Eisenhower years. Lippmann's critique, Emmet Hughes's description of the nation's plight in the title of his book *America the Vincible*, the officially sponsored investigation by the Gaither Committee, and the unofficial but highly authoritative studies of the Rockefeller Brothers' Fund, all reflected the fear that the 1950's like the 1930's were years of the locusts.<sup>14</sup>

Seen against the background Waltz sketches in *Foreign Policy and Democratic Politics*, the issues at stake are momentous and go well beyond social scientific claims about the logic of anarchy. For if the claims of Lippmann and many realists in the academic and policy worlds were true, they would mean that democratic control over foreign policy-making needed at the very least to be curtailed (and perhaps removed) as liberal democracies were forced by the 'systemic' logic of anarchy to become like their 'garrison state' competitors. Indeed, the idea that states will be forced 'to become alike' inevitably calls to mind the 'third image' conclusions of *Man, the State and War*, and might seem to presage the analysis in *Theory of International Politics*, whereby states are seen as forced by systemic pressures to become 'like units'. In short, in both Lippmann's jeremiad against the decline of Western civilization, and in the wider political position that portrayed liberal democracies as operating at a potentially fatal disadvantage to their Cold War competitors, nothing less than the future of liberal democracy might well be at stake. A key and generally unexamined concern for Waltz is whether this widely shared (often realist) scepticism toward democracy is in fact true.

Although Waltz is clearly aware of the depth of the concerns of those who favour curtailing democracy in order to safeguard the state, and although he is more aware than most of the pressures created by the international system, he disagrees fundamentally with the conclusions drawn by so many prominent figures on the relationship between democratic decision-making and foreign policy, and thus on the implications of this question for the future of liberal democracy as a whole.<sup>15</sup> To

respond to the critics of liberal democracy, and to rebut the implicit (and sometimes explicit) conclusion that countries such as the United States must effectively cease being liberal democracies – or at the very least significantly curtail their democratic processes – if they are to survive the geopolitical struggle, Waltz needs to argue the case for democracy in general and for American democracy in particular, while at the same time retaining the realist acknowledgement of the systemic pressures provided by international anarchy. This concern with democracy is one of the hidden themes of Waltz's thinking about international politics, and when viewed in this light his three major works – and the relationship between them – take on quite a different significance. In the rest of this chapter, I would like to suggest how this might be so by looking briefly at each.

The obvious place to begin this exploration is by teasing out some of the political consequences of the abstract philosophical analysis that Waltz develops in his first major theoretical statement, *Man, the State and War*. As we have seen, at this time many realists saw the shortcomings of liberal democracy arising directly from the relationship between man and the state: it was the narrowed horizon of 'scientific man', or the dynamics of the 'phantom public' that made democratic control of foreign policy dangerous and its restriction necessary. The crisis in foreign policy and international affairs arose from the nature of human beings and the inadequacy of liberal democracy to deal effectively with its implications. As I showed earlier, it is important to recognize that this claim was not based upon the simplistic charge that human nature was in some straightforward sense 'evil'.<sup>16</sup> It was a much more complex claim where, in Lippmann's words, the 'acids of modernity' have gradually dissolved the belief in principles of the public interest and the ability of the Executive to carry it out, leaving in its place an increasingly irrational and destructive populism. The relationship between modern subjectivity (Man) and government (the State) had become increasingly 'deranged'.<sup>17</sup>

But these political conclusions depended on the validity of the analysis: they *would* be concerns *if* foreign policy was driven predominantly by the relationship between Man and the State that Lippmann and other prophets of decline suggested. One of the consequences of Waltz's argument in *Man, the State and War*, however, is that it allows him to reject this connection and the conclusions that follow from it. Waltz does not, of course, deny the importance of first and second image causes.<sup>18</sup> But what he does deny is that they are the sole determinants of foreign policy. The contribution of the third image – the causal role of international anarchy in the production of state action – is that it provides an opening for an account of foreign policy-making beyond individual and domestic levels of analysis. In short, the critique of first- and second-image explanations of the nature of international politics that Waltz develops allows him to oppose at the most fundamental theoretical level those who criticize democratic foreign policy-making. Whether classical realists and others are correct in their diagnoses of human nature and the condition of the polity is not an argument that Waltz takes up. Instead, he seeks to render such questions less relevant for IR, and to prevent their concerns and conclusions from dominating sensible discussions of foreign policy. If the primary source of state action is found

in international anarchy, then this provides an explanation of why all states – including democratic ones – conform to its demands. Since the sources of foreign policy are not wholly ‘internally’ determined, the actions of democratic states are not determined solely by the dynamics pointed to (correctly or incorrectly) by critics such as Lippmann. Third-image theory provides a *causal* account of why democratic states may be more adept in foreign policy than their second image critics allow. *Man, the State and War* is thus not simply a philosophic text or a conceptual preface to a more full-blown structural theory: in this context it has direct political implications too – one of which is to defend democratic decision-making by disarming some of its most trenchant critics.

A second articulation of this theme emerges in *Foreign Policy and Democratic Politics*, where Waltz develops an empirical and historical defence of democratic foreign policy-making. Through an analysis of British and American foreign policy, he seeks in this study to demonstrate that liberal democracies have not in fact proven to be any less effective actors in international politics than other types of governments. Given the common charge that Waltz ignores domestic politics, one of the intriguing aspects of his account is the quite subtle analysis of how domestic factors impact foreign policy. Contrasting British and American policies in the post-war era, for example, he argues that while both countries have adapted quite successfully to the new condition of bipolarity, the ‘national styles’ of each remain influential. In Britain’s case, although its international position has eroded, ‘a hard residuum of national habits and of deep-set attitudes toward international affairs remains’.<sup>19</sup> And it was, he remarks later, this mannered national style that contributed to Britain’s relatively ‘graceful’ and largely ‘benign’ retreat from empire: ‘British governmental arrangements and national temperament coincide and reinforce one another’ and, he remarks in words that might seem to warm the hearts of either liberal or constructivist IR theorists today, ‘External manner parallels internal procedure’.<sup>20</sup>

More important, however, is Waltz’s conclusion that in explicit contradiction to the claims of many realist sceptics, the history of both countries demonstrates their effectiveness in foreign policy. Arguing explicitly against the charge by Lippmann, Kissinger, Rostow, and others, that the politics of ‘mass opinion’ mean that the public is fickle, vacillating, or overly vehement,<sup>21</sup> Waltz argues that a closer examination of democratic foreign policy reveals that while leadership (particularly presidential) is necessary, responsible leadership will usually generate public support, whereas irresponsible leadership will not. Two quite happy conclusions follow from this. The first concerns the nature of the American public, which in general turns out to be remarkably good at judging good leadership and the broad dynamics of international politics, as well as being flexible learners. It would seem, Waltz concludes, ‘that the mass of the American people have learned to live with danger, to tolerate ambiguity, to accept setbacks, and to understand that victory is sometimes impossible, or that it can be gained only at a price the wise should restrain from paying’.<sup>22</sup>

Even more strikingly, he goes on to directly contradict the dire claims of those who see democracies as dangerously weak in foreign affairs. Not only, he argues, is

democracy a better system for conducting foreign policy than totalitarianism, but American presidential democracy is the best form of all:

It was long believed that America's democratic institutions would prevent her from behaving effectively and responsibly in the world. The judgment should be reversed. American institutions facilitate rather than discourage the quick identification of problems, the pragmatic quest for solutions, the ready confrontation of dangers, the willing expenditure of energies, and the open criticism of policies.<sup>23</sup>

Far from being a danger to themselves as many realists believed, democracies are well equipped to produce effective foreign policy: 'Coherent policy, executed with a nice combination of caution and verve, is difficult to achieve in any political system' he concludes, 'but no more so for democratic states than for others'.<sup>24</sup>

### **The third image: democracy and *Theory of International Politics***

Thus far, I have argued that Waltz's critique of post-war realist scepticism toward democracy rests on two pillars: the critique of first- and second-image theorizing first developed in *Man, the State and War*, and a positive historical assessment of the foreign-policy performance of the two most powerful modern democracies expounded in *Foreign Policy and Democratic Politics*. This leaves an obvious third question: What explains this performance? Since his appreciation of the impact of domestic factors on actual policy formation has denied Waltz access to a second-image explanation, the answer is of course obvious: the performance of democracies is the result of a combination of their own characteristics and the more fundamental determinations of the structure of the international system. Articulating this argument is a goal of *Theory of International Politics*: the system sifts out dysfunctional behaviours, and so long as states are willing to reflexively monitor their actions and avoid fatal errors, they will conform to its pressures. As Waltz puts it, 'competition spurs the actors to accommodate their ways to the socially most acceptable and successful practices. Socialization and competition are two aspects of a process by which the variety of actors are reduced'.<sup>25</sup>

As Goddard and Nexon have astutely pointed out, Waltz's thinking here bears the marks of yet another context, his engagement with structural-functionalism.<sup>26</sup> In the context of the argument I am pursuing here, however, what is interesting is not the question of whether Waltz has an adequate theory of socialization, but rather the way in which his structural theory once again forecloses classical realism's scepticism toward democracy. Structural theory provides an explanation of why democratic states are effective in foreign policy terms. Since state action is not determined solely by type, all state forms can in principle be effective if they successfully adapt to and adopt the self-help logic of the system. By treating states as units within a systemic theory, the question of democracy's inadequacies or the

dilemmas of liberal modernity is not determinative. Contrary to the claims of those who saw foreign policy competition as requiring domestic transformations, Waltz's systemic theory seeks to provide an explanation of why such claims are mistaken. The combination of objective structural pressures and flexible, responsive democratic policy structures means that internal dynamics do not wholly determine state policy. Nor, crucially, is there any need to curtail (or radically restructure) liberal democracy in the face of international pressures.

*Theory of International Politics* thus has a productive as well as an analytic agenda.<sup>27</sup> Rational self-preservation, not the dark metaphysics of man or grandiose theories of the state, is what states ought to pursue – and in Waltz's view there is considerable evidence in both logic and history that they in fact do so. First- and second-image theories on their own (or in combination) are misguided and dangerous: they can lead to the construction of radical dilemmas and crises, and to equally radical solutions that are not only suspect in foreign-policy terms, but that potentially endanger liberal democracy itself. If states will simply seek their own self-preservation, the system will ensure relative stability. The only difficulty is if they refuse to do so – if they place some value above survival, which is precisely what metaphysical theories of man and the state tempt them to do. In such a condition, the system will not work. *Theory of International Politics* is an explanation of why democracies do not need to bow to classical realism's fears, and a guide to how they (and others) should conduct themselves in order to ensure that these fears do not become reality. Seen in this light, *Theory of International Politics* is in its effect, if not its intention, a third plank in Waltz's defence of democracy.<sup>28</sup>

## Conclusion

Many views of Waltz's theory of international politics stress his strict division between the domestic and the international, and between positive and normative theory. The account I have suggested here cuts across these categories. As I have tried to show, Waltz's critique of much of post-war American realism is not only methodological: it has a clear political edge, one that in part reflects the tendency of many of these realists to be sceptical or even hostile toward democratic government and its ability to cope with foreign affairs, a hostility that Waltz feels is deeply misguided. Seen in this light, Waltz's methodological arguments and their political entailments are intertwined. His three major books – *Man, the State and War*, *Foreign Policy and Democratic Politics*, and *Theory of International Politics* can even be seen as a triptych, each contributing in a different way (critique, evidence, reconstruction) to a defence of democratic foreign policy-making. It would be foolish to claim that this is the only, or even the main, agenda in Waltz's thinking. Yet at the very least, the symmetry and power of the argument is food for thought about both the lineages and the political entailments of his arguments.

A second conclusion follows directly: despite continual claims to the contrary, Waltz does not ignore domestic politics.<sup>29</sup> At the very least, putting *Foreign Policy and Democratic Politics* alongside *Theory of International Politics* in assessments of his

work (and in reading lists) would go a long way toward correcting numerous misinterpretations of his thinking. More subtly, as I have suggested above, Waltz's thinking about the place of domestic politics may go beyond the need to integrate unit-level foreign-policy analysis and structural theory into any analysis of concrete situations. One of the clearest ways of seeing this, I have argued, is to locate Waltz's thinking against the background of 1950s classical realism, its concerns with culture, modernity, democracy and foreign policy, and its widespread though by no means universal claim that the pressures of international relations required a restriction of democratic processes when it came to international affairs. Waltz was deeply concerned that claims about the anarchic nature of international politics (which he shares with other realists) should not be transformed into the claim that democracy must be curtailed in the face of the exigencies of foreign policy. Critics have often pointed to Waltz's unwillingness to look at domestic politics as not only an analytic weakness, but also as a political one – a move that denies the possibility of positive agential change. This may well be the case. But it is perhaps also important to recognize the other side of the equation: by bracketing the questions of political life that so preoccupied many classical realists, Waltz's structural theory also represents a subtle attempt to insulate democratic structures from some of their most powerful realist critics. Waltz's 'pessimism' about the ability to alter the structure of the international system is actually optimism about the prospects for democracy within that system and a defence of democratic policy-making. Whether or not one finds these arguments convincing, they deserve serious consideration.

More speculatively, exploring these political aspects of Waltz's international theory may also shed light on some of the reasons for its remarkable popularity. As noted earlier, this popularity is often traced to neorealism's affinities with rationalist method and the emergence of IR as a distinctive (American) social science. Waltz's influence here was clearly crucial, not only in the overtly methodological claims of *Theory of International Politics*, but also for the ways that *Man, the State and War* seemed to free the emerging field of IR from the suzerainty of both history and political theory. However the sources of its attraction go even deeper than this, for Waltz's theory provided a way of thinking about realist power politics that did not require the thoroughgoing critique of domestic liberal politics that classical realists had demanded. By providing a framework through which a relatively comfortable domestic liberalism could coexist with an international realism, Waltz provided a form of realism acceptable to liberal political cultures in a way that classical realism never could.<sup>30</sup> The difficult dilemmas concerning the relationship between liberalism and democracy, the challenges of modernity and profound changes in social structure that were the hallmarks of the realism of Morgenthau, Niebuhr, and Lippmann could be met with agnosticism, or simply ignored – cordoned off as irrelevant to the field analytically. Waltz's neorealism thus seemed to provide a realism that did not demand challenging the (often comfortable) liberal democratic political preferences of scholars and publics alike.<sup>31</sup> Whether one finds this convincing or not, the political implications of the theory, and the important if rarely explicit issues with which it grapples, are key dimensions of Waltz's thinking and his legacy for IR.

Finally, it helps show that in contrast to the pessimism that is often seen as a hallmark of realism, Waltz is in many ways an optimist.<sup>32</sup> International anarchy and the pressures of foreign policy do not undermine the prospects for democracy. In fact, if we take seriously his claim that democracies are at least as apt (and perhaps even better) at discerning and responding to changes in the international system as other forms of state, and combine it with his argument that structural pressures socialize states into adopting the most effective competitive forms, it may not be wholly outlandish to suggest that Waltz's theory could even envision a progressive spread of democracies. This does not, of course, mean that Waltz believed in the overcoming of anarchy through a 'democratic peace' – that is surely a step too far. However, the logic of a spread of democratic structures is not inimical to his theoretical vision as a whole. And if this structural dynamic could be combined with cultural traits or traditions that, as in his assessment of the case of Britain, allowed for transitions within a relatively stable and yet fluid balance of power and international order, then the pessimism of the Cold War realists would be almost entirely reversed. This may be taking the logic of Waltz's argument further than it will go, but it may also point to the ways that re-engaging Waltz's thinking can yield surprising and intriguing lineages and possibilities. Waltz: realist, democrat, optimist?

## Notes

- 1 A point noted by Chris Brown in his contribution to the conference on which this collection is based. Important contributions to this area of inquiry include Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) and Colin Wight, *Agents, Structures and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
- 2 For a variety of treatments in IR, see Duncan Bell, ed., *Political Thought and International Relations: Variations on a Realist Theme* (Oxford University Press, 2008); Richard Ned Lebow, *The Tragic Vision of Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2003); Vibeke Schou Tjalve, *Realist Strategies of Republican Peace* (Palgrave, 2008); Michael C. Williams, *The Realist Tradition and the Limits of International Relations* (Cambridge University Press 2005); in an enormous wider literature, see also the challenging interpretation in Ira Katznelson, *Enlightenment and Desolation* (Columbia University Press, 2003).
- 3 Recent treatments of Morgenthau include William E. Scheuerman, *Hans J. Morgenthau: Realism and Beyond* (Oxford: Polity Press, 2009) and Michael C. Williams, ed., *Realism Reconsidered: The Legacy of Hans Morgenthau in International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
- 4 See particularly, *Scientific Man Versus Power Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946) and 'Nationalism' in *Politics in the Twentieth Century, Volume 1: The Decline of Democratic Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), pp. 181–95.
- 5 Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness* (New York: Scribner, 1944). Significantly for the argument I will make later, it is often forgotten that the subtitle of this book was 'A vindication of democracy and a critique of its traditional defense'. For a revealing study, see Tjalve, *Realist Strategies of Republican Peace*.
- 6 George F. Kennan, *Memoirs: 1925–50*, and *Memoirs 1950–63* (New York: Pantheon, 1983). A revealing study of Kennan's view of European and American cultures in this context is John Lamberton Harper, *American Visions of Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 135–233.



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- 7 The standard study of Lippmann is Ronald Steele, *Walter Lippmann and the American Century* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1999).
- 8 Walter Lippmann, *The Phantom Public* ([1925] Brunswick: Transaction, 1993) and *Public Opinion* ([1922] New York: Free Press, 1965); a survey of the period that includes incisive analyses of Niebuhr and Lippmann, is John Patrick Diggins, *The Promise of Pragmatism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 280–359.
- 9 Walter Lippmann, *The Public Philosophy* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1955), pp. 14–15. There are a number of interesting links in this book to Leo Strauss, and a lineage connected to contemporary neoconservatism that is worthy of exploration. The place of communication in Lippmann's thinking is briefly but interestingly developed in Alan Chong, 'Lessons in International Communication: Carr, Angell, and Lippmann on human nature, public opinion, and leadership', *Review of International Studies*, 33, 2007: 615–35.
- 10 Waltz served as the rapporteur for a conference organized by Kenneth Thompson and supported by the Rockefeller Foundation, that brought together figures including Morgenthau, Niebuhr, and Kennan, and that sought to provide a counter to the emerging behavioural movement in American political science; see the very revealing study by Nicolas Guilhot, 'The realist gambit: postwar American Political Science and the birth of IR theory', *International Political Sociology*, 2(4), 2008: pp. 281–304.
- 11 For an exception to this general disregard see the insightful analysis in Deborah Boucoyannis, 'The international wanderings of a liberal idea, or why liberals can learn to stop worrying and love the balance of power', *Perspectives on Politics*, 5(4), December 2007, p. 705, fn.37.
- 12 *Foreign Policy and Democratic Politics: The American and British Experience* (New York: Longman, 1967), p. 13. Later in the book, Waltz confronts a similar question when examining the popular suspicion that the American public is incapable of fighting the limited wars that are now necessary since thermonuclear weapons have rendered total war suicidal – a position that, he notes, is shared by figures as diverse as Douglas MacArthur, Herman Kahn, and (significantly, given his later role in neoconservatism) Irving Kristol. Revealingly, one of his choices of adversary again renders the issue in philosophical-political terms: 'Paul Ramsey has recently written that 'perhaps because of the Calvinism gone to seed in the atmosphere, and the lack of any doctrine of the Two Realms in which a human destiny is played out, the American people are ill prepared for the self-discipline necessary for the limitation of war'. Waltz's response is somewhat cryptic, but it is also revealing. Ramsey's conclusion, he writes, 'may once have been true, though not necessarily for the reasons he suggests'. *Foreign Policy and Democratic Politics*, p. 295, emphasis added. The quote is from Ramsey's *War and the Christian Conscience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1961), p. 151.
- 13 *Foreign Policy and Democratic Politics*, p. 268.
- 14 *Foreign Policy and Democratic Politics*, p. 269.
- 15 Many realists, it should be noted, turned to the revitalization of democracy as an at least partial alternative – a perspective developed by Lippmann in *The Public Philosophy*, and perhaps most strikingly by Morgenthau in *The Purpose of American Politics* (New York: Knopf, 1960).
- 16 Whether this crisis referred to specifically modern individuals or not is a bigger question than I can address here, though there is little doubt that for Morgenthau and Lippmann the question was not one of a straightforwardly fixed human nature – its sociological dimensions were also vital.
- 17 Lippmann, *The Public Philosophy*, pp. 47–49; there are clear echoes of this analysis in contemporary neoconservative views of American foreign policy.
- 18 See especially *Man, the State and War*, pp. 224–38.
- 19 *Foreign Policy and Democratic Politics*, p. 7.
- 20 *Foreign Policy and Democratic Politics*, pp. 306 and 307. One might also thus suggest that the claim of many critics (and supporters, for that matter) that Waltz totally excludes domestic factors can only be sustained by focusing solely upon *Theory of International Politics* and ignoring Waltz's own major study of the issue.

- 21 *Foreign Policy and Democratic Politics*, p. 269.
- 22 *Foreign Policy and Democratic Politics*, p. 297.
- 23 *Foreign Policy and Democratic Politics*, p. 307–08.
- 24 *Foreign Policy and Democratic Politics*, p. 311.
- 25 *Theory of International Politics*, p. 77.
- 26 Stacie E. Goddard and Daniel H. Nexon, 'Paradigm Lost?: Reassessing *Theory of International Politics*', *European Journal of International Relations*, 11 (1), 2005: 9–61.
- 27 A point early and often stressed by Richard Ashley. See also the discussion in Keith Shimko, 'Realism, neorealism, and American liberalism' *Review of Politics*, 54 (2), 1992: 281–301.
- 28 My thanks to Nicholas Rengger and Colin Wight for a very useful conversation on this point.
- 29 A useful corrective is once again Goddard and Nexon, 'Paradigm Lost'.
- 30 See also the discussion in Shimko, 'Realism, neorealism, and American liberalism', 281–301.
- 31 If this is the case, then reopening the question of domestic politics, as urged by many 'neoclassical' realists may well mean taking on much wider political questions and realms of social analysis than has yet been the case within this trajectory.
- 32 A theme pointed to in a different vein, by Randall Schweller, 'Neorealism's status-quo bias: What security dilemma?' *Security Studies* 5:3 (Spring 1996), pp. 90–121.



## **PART II**

# Challenges to structural realist theory



# 5

## WALTZ'S THEORY OF THEORY

### The pictorial challenge to mainstream IR

*Ole Wæver*

I emphasized that much in the present seems to contradict the predictions I make. But then, I did not write as a positivist or an empiricist.

Waltz<sup>1</sup>

In wondering how to develop a theory of international politics, I spent a lot of time reading the philosophy of science. I started to read on the subject because I noticed great variation in the way the word 'theory' is used.

Waltz<sup>2</sup>

Most discussions of Waltz's work open with reference to *Man, the State and War*<sup>3</sup> or *Theory of International Politics*.<sup>4</sup> In contrast, I would like to start with some of Waltz's later writings.<sup>5</sup> Kenneth Waltz's answers to critics increasingly come in terms of 'what is theory?' The poor critic is rarely lectured anymore on having misunderstood factual features of world politics, nor on having got specifics of Waltz's theory wrong, but on missing the nature and purpose of theory as such. The first post-*Theory of International Politics* phase of 'reply to critics' – notably the reply in *Neorealism and its Critics*<sup>6</sup> – was phrased mostly at the level of the book, defending the specific decisions in it, such as being state-centric and not including this or that in the structure. A second kind of defence focused on people misunderstanding or misrepresenting neorealism. But in later replies and interviews, emphasis moves towards what theory is.

Waltz says ultra-clearly in *Theory of International Politics (TIP)* and in later articles and interviews, that the major move enabling *TIP* was to think deeply about the 'What is theory?' question. 'Neorealism's response [to the confusions in classical realism] is that, while difficulties abound, some that seem most daunting lie in misapprehensions about theory.'<sup>7</sup> And: 'In wondering how to develop a theory of international politics, I spent a lot of time reading the philosophy of science. I started

to read on the subject because I noticed great variation in the way the word 'theory' is used.<sup>8</sup> Yet the debates on *TIP* never focused on the 'What is theory?' issue, or on the implications of Waltz's particular – and peculiar – stance on it. Debates unfolded first at the level of 'reality' – does 'international relations' out there look in general more like one kind of theory or the other (a continuation of the 1970s-style inter-paradigm debate);<sup>9</sup> and, second, in terms of social theory: how did Waltz conceptualise structure, agency, system, process and so forth. But not 'theory'.

Current debates on neorealism are even more puzzling. Mostly Waltz is now debated *among* realists, who commonly see Waltz's theory as too sparse and under-specified and hence in need of elaboration. Therefore, arguments rage over either pinning down in more detail the mechanics of the core theory (offensive versus defensive realism) or adding unit-level variables to make it a theory of foreign policy (neoclassical realism). Yet even these writers somehow manage to never really spell out *what* the theory is. Debates are conducted *as if the theory is a set of statements constituting a proposition*, an assertion which is in principle true or false. But nobody seems to be really clear what the proposition is. No wonder, because that is not the format of the theory. In this situation, I will draw attention to the importance of *the structure of theory* (not theory of structure this time, but structure of theory). In particular, I want to emphasise Waltz's definition of theory as 'a picture, mentally formed'.

The main part of this chapter (part 2) spells out *what Waltz's kind of theory is*, partly through simply going back to his own account, partly by introducing a philosophical literature on the 'Structure of Scientific Theory'<sup>10</sup> discussing the 'syntactic' versus the 'semantic' view, 'non-statement views of theory' and the role of models in theory.

Once this has been elucidated, additional insights appear of a more 'history of science' and 'sociology of science' nature (part 3). Placing *TIP* in the history of the discipline, explaining its effects, suggests that the battle-lines within IR might be about to shift away from the 'fourth debate' (rationalism v reflectivism or the *neoneos* v the *pomos* with constructivism as the middle ground).<sup>11</sup> Recapturing the radical anti-empiricism of Waltz's seminal work could be the starting point for recasting the main battle-line between empiricism and theory,<sup>12</sup> even with a case to be made – with Waltz as exhibit A – for the *political* necessity of theory.

I will not study possible changes over time in Waltz's understanding of theory, but assume consistency from at least *TIP* onwards. Although I obviously have an agenda of my own – revealed mostly in part 3 – I aim in parts 1 and 2 to clarify Waltz's view. A few criticisms emerge at the end of section 2.3, but the main agenda is to excavate a subversive Waltz beneath the canonised one. My focus is on what his kind of theory *is*, and not primarily how, why or when he produced it; but *how* theory is in general created turns out to be an element in understanding what it is.

I do not imply that theory is or should be the same for all times, projects and purposes. Nevertheless a discussion of the most influential theorist of the last half-century – and the paradoxes of his influence and non-influence on the discipline's

understanding of theory – helps to clarify more general issues about what ‘theory’ in ‘IR theory’ could mean. The philosophical literatures on ‘theory’ drawn upon in this article hopefully assist in this more general task. *TIP* is undoubtedly the most important book produced in the discipline within the last sixty years, possibly ever (if referring to the discipline in its modern form), so getting the concept of theory in this book right matters in its own right. But I try to foster general reflection in the discipline about the role of different kinds of theory.

## 1. Philosophy of science

Discussions of *TIP* have come in numerous forms – on specific aspects or following established lines of debate along IR theory fronts, that is, liberalism–realism. Debates at the level of IR theory as such have increasingly become intra-realist (offensive/defensive realism; neoclassical realism; post-classical realism). Among meta-theoretical debates on Waltz, the liveliest have been in terms of *social theory*: starting as structure–agency and evolving into general discussions of how to study society, atomism/holism, materialism/idealism and the nature of social order. These became the core of general discussions around constructivism and economics-based versus sociology-based theories of politics, epitomised by Wendt's *Social Theory of International Politics*.<sup>13</sup>

In contrast, the philosophy of science has been ignored, except for a particular discussion around Lakatos's meta-methodology of research programmes<sup>14</sup> – important but only exploring one rather idiosyncratic approach, even one saying little about what a theory is and limited by a statement view of theory (see part 2 below).<sup>15</sup>

In terms of his general philosophy of science position, Waltz has been labelled a positivist, a Popperian, a pragmatist, an instrumentalist, and a scientific realist.<sup>16</sup> ‘Positivist’ is by far the most common, and also by far the most mistaken.<sup>17</sup> The main ‘enemy’ in the meta-theory chapter of *TIP* is the ‘inductivist illusion’, and Waltz is critical of attempts to build theory by cumulating correlations and critical of any kind of simple testing of theories as if theories were at the behavioural level, not at a distinct theoretical level. Thus, the way ‘positivist’ is mostly used in the discipline, it is quite misleading to label Waltz a positivist – not to mention his own declarations, such as ‘I did not write as a positivist or an empiricist.’<sup>18</sup> Better cases can be made for Popperian,<sup>19</sup> instrumentalist,<sup>20</sup> pragmatist,<sup>21</sup> or even scientific realist.<sup>22</sup> The last label actually fits surprisingly well. Waltz searches for mechanisms of a non-observable nature. Characterising Waltz as a scientific realist is rare, probably for the good reason that his *terminology* is clearly not realist: he insists on key elements such as structure as analytical categories, not ‘real’ ones. He distinguishes what is real from what is a model, where a realist would phrase it in terms of different levels of reality. As shown below, this difference is for many purposes inconsequential and Waltz's practice is in some respects compatible with scientific realism.<sup>23</sup>

None of the main positions in the philosophy of science fits Waltz's in *TIP* terribly well. Waltz is not a *school man* in these terms. When he underlined the crucial



importance of the philosophy of science for *TIP*, this was not in terms of finding a guru or a church to sign up with. He rather talks of a diverse collection of lessons from various scholars, seen by others as belonging in contradictory camps. The route of Waltz's argument does not run through answering *the* general and ultimate and universal question in the philosophy of science about the basis and nature of scientific knowledge (and from that deducing the nature of theory), but through focusing on the question of *theory*. In Waltz's words: 'Instead of the logically prior question, what is a theory?, most of the philosophy-of-science literature deals with the testing and not the meaning and making of theory.'<sup>24</sup>

## 2. The structure of theory

WALTZ: I've spent a lot of time reading the philosophy of science, because it's a very difficult question: What is a theory? What can it do? What can it not do? How do you test its validity or seeming validity? It's a profound and difficult subject in its own right. It also is a field in which there is great literature, and it was a pleasure for me to read in the philosophy of science, and not to have to read a lot more political science.

INTERVIEWER (HARRY KREISLER): Are you allowed to say that as a former president of the American Political Science Association?

WALTZ: Well, I do!<sup>25</sup>

### 2.1 Waltz's 'theory'

In *Theory of International Politics*, Waltz is emphatic about the importance of theory. It is the first word in the title and in the preface; the book's three stated aims are to examine existing theories of international politics, construct a better one, and examine some applications of it; and Waltz makes the strong claim that really there is only one theory of international politics.<sup>26</sup> The book's grand success owed much to being widely accepted as setting a new standard for 'theory' in the discipline. Given this, it is surprising how little attention has been paid to what Waltz says about the nature of theory. Much has been written about the specifics of the theory he proposed. But Chapter 1 is often skipped when teaching *TIP* and is certainly not the most cited part. A majority of the American IR mainstream manages to act *as if* they were following Waltz's lead towards more scientific IR theory – thus borrowing legitimacy – while actually violating with increasing consistency his warnings against inductivism and empiricism, despite his usual clarity in the relevant pages. (By 'mainstream', I mean the kinds of work that regularly find their way to the leading journals, are included in general IR courses at the top universities, are widely cited by colleagues as 'interesting', and land PhD students jobs in top departments. In the US this happens to stretch from neorealism to soft constructivism and not least includes methods-driven work from rational choice and increasingly from large-n research.)<sup>27</sup> Today's neorealists are de facto upholding

scientific standards more along the lines of King, Keohane and Verba, the text that Waltz increasingly designates as a contrast to his own position.<sup>28</sup>

Waltz asserts that the word 'theory' should not be used synonymously with 'law', not even for collections or sets of laws. 'Theory' should be reserved for something that explains – explains laws, and explains in general. Such theory cannot be arrived at by collecting hypotheses, even if these are carefully verified and interconnected. The argument is directed primarily against the inductivist illusion.

'Rather than being mere collections of laws, theories are statements that explain them.'<sup>29</sup> (Throughout this chapter, I mostly 'go with' Waltz's position, only trying to push its implications, but at this specific point, I must contest Waltz's own formulation: the word 'statements' is problematic here. Much more on this later. For now, the main argument is that theories are qualitatively different from laws, and that theories explain laws.)<sup>30</sup>

Theories contain theoretical notions – and these can only be invented, not discovered. Theoretical notions, like the theories they help to construct, usually need to move away from 'the real world' to produce bolder and better explanations.<sup>31</sup>

Theoretical notions – concepts or assumptions – are not to be assessed in terms of accuracy (true/false), but in terms of the success of the theories that employ them. As Waltz puts it: 'Of purported laws, we ask: "Are they true?" Of theories, we ask: "How great is their explanatory power?"'<sup>32</sup> And again, 'A theory . . . always remains distinct from [the] world. "Reality" will be congruent neither with a theory nor with a model that may represent it.'<sup>33</sup>

The role of models is not to mirror reality – then the best model would be identical to reality, 1:1, quite useless and hard to find a place for. This 'model aeroplane' kind of depiction, possibly at a different scale, does not help to explain. The interesting kinds of models *represent theories*. Waltz says, 'In modelling a theory, one looks for suggestive ways of depicting the theory, and not the reality it deals with. The model then presents the theory, with its theoretical notions necessarily omitted, whether through organismic, mechanical, mathematical, or other expressions.'<sup>34</sup>

What then *is* a theory? Waltz repeats a very specific formulation in writings and interviews: 'A theory is a picture, mentally formed, of a bounded realm or domain of activity. A theory is a depiction of the organization of a domain and the connections among its parts.'<sup>35</sup>

The quote contains (at least) three important and controversial elements. First is the idea of a 'bounded realm or domain of activity', which raises discussions about international politics in relation to international political economy and culture: issues well addressed by Buzan and Little, by Goddard and Nexon, and others.<sup>36</sup>

Second, the active element: theory is (a picture) *mentally formed*. This relates to Waltz's insistence that theories are made 'creatively', citing John Rader Platt that theories are 'also artistic creations, shaped by the taste and style of a single hand'.<sup>37</sup> This argument contains at least three components: (a) a critique of naive realism: theories are not reality; they construct a depiction, always temporary, potentially to

be overthrown by new theories. This is in practice supported by most positions. (b) There is no way of getting from empirical data to theory – neither by some kind of cumulative empiricism, nor by systematic trial and error, but by ‘a brilliant intuition’, a ‘creative idea’. (c) The exact form of a theory will vary with the person inventing it.

Third, there is the interesting word ‘picture’. Waltz later said he ‘can point to no single source for this definition of theory’.<sup>38</sup> But actually, the reference in *TIP* to Ludwig Boltzmann (see note 35 below) is fitting. Boltzmann wrote in 1890: ‘I am of the opinion that the task of theory consists in constructing a picture of the external world that exists purely internally and must be our guiding star in all thought and experiment.’<sup>39</sup>

Still, there is limited usefulness in exploring Boltzmann’s arguments made in the specific context of dilemmas relating to the ontological status of atoms.<sup>40</sup> Closer attention to both Boltzmann’s predecessors in articulating a *Bildtheorie*, and his influence on later thinkers, including Wittgenstein, does not immediately open new doors. A more recent literature helps better.

## 2.2 Theories about theory structure – the role of models

There is actually a contemporary philosophy of science literature on the role of models, pictures and language in theory. Commonsensically, most people start out assuming that theories are best conceived of as a set of theoretical postulates (plus correspondence rules): what Frederick Suppe calls ‘the received view’,<sup>41</sup> and others call ‘the syntactic view’ or the ‘statement view’. Against this was first formed the ‘semantic view’,<sup>42</sup> the ‘non-statement view’ and increasingly a ‘model-theoretic approach’, all allowing theories to be extra-linguistic entities.

The syntactic view is this. Until around 1970, it was largely taken for granted that:

for *philosophical* purposes, scientific theories are to be thought of as interpreted, formal, axiomatic systems. The axioms of a theory, on this account, are statements which, in principle, are either true or false. The theoretical terms were identified with empirical ones by correspondence rules. In addition, at least some of the axioms were typically taken to have the form of laws, understood as universal generalizations. On this account, then, scientific theories have the structure of an axiomatic, deductive system.<sup>43</sup>

Among several problems with this concept of theory was that correspondence rules could often not be specified fully and the observational-theoretical distinction was untenable. The newer semantic view, in contrast, sees theory as a collection of models or a specification of a class of models. Instead of seeing theory as a set of statements with clearly defined relations between all terms and the empirical world, the core of theory is a model (or set of models) where theoretical concepts are defined internal to the model, and principles should be understood in relation to

the model. Application of theory then takes the form of assessing the fit between the model and things in the world. The semantic conception can cover quite a spectrum of philosophies of science.<sup>44</sup> Even within a traditional understanding of explanatory, causal natural science, a strong case was made for changing the understanding of theory towards the semantic conception.

With this move came a strengthened role for visual elements like pictures. The received/syntactic view saw science as carried by *linguistic* representation:

In the framework of Logical Empiricism, then, there can be no fundamental role in science for non-linguistic entities like picture or diagrams. Such things might, of course, play some part in how scientists actually learn or think about particular theories, but unless their content is reduced to linguistic form, they cannot appear in a *philosophical* analysis of the content or legitimacy of any scientific claims to knowledge.<sup>45</sup>

In the semantic view, in contrast,

the primary representational relationship is not the truth of a statement relative to the facts, or even the applicability of a predicate to an object, but the similarity of a prototype to putative instances. This is not a relationship between a linguistic and a nonlinguistic entity, but between two nonlinguistic entities.<sup>46</sup>

Models have no empirical content. Theories as such make no empirical claims; they define predicates such as 'is a pendulum', 'is a game of bluff' or 'is an instance of securitisation'. They are used to make empirical claims about reality. Truth value can only be attached to theoretical hypotheses applying the theory to an empirical situation, basically taking the form 'The Cuban missile crisis is similar to a game of bluff'.<sup>47</sup>

Where discussions in the philosophy of social science often gets polarised over naturalism – whether to model social science on natural science or emphasise the contrast – this updating of our picture of how natural science actually works promises to get us beyond the dominant dichotomy in IR: Americans/mainstream scholars take theory to be ultimately causal laws that explain, while Europeans (notably including rather mainstream Europeans<sup>48</sup>) and some dissident Americans take theory to be roughly 'interconnected sets of concepts that make sense out of something' – one excessively narrow, the other extremely wide. The model-theoretic approach could get us beyond this (without everybody having to sign up to demanding philosophical dogma with, for instance, critical/scientific realists, the currently strongest 'third way'). Processing theories of theories will clarify that diverging IR approaches all contain explanations, but non-mainstream ones should (robbed of the excuse of not being positivists) tighten conceptual sets, and mainstream work would have to spell out their theories (no longer hide behind laws and hypothesis testing).

Particularly the *usages* of theory need to be re-conceptualised. Usually, mainstream scholars in IR lean on natural science ideals and critics insist on a radical contrast. Typically both groups assume – because of famous equations vaguely remembered from school – that the great natural science theories are empirical generalisations summed up with mathematical precision. However, ' $F = ma$ ' is not a generalisation, both universal and true. If seen so, it is either vacuously true or false.<sup>49</sup> Newton's second law is rather a principle (closer to a definition). Theories of this deep nature are vehicles for making empirical claims, but the key terms cannot be directly applied. Actual usage always applies a more specified model. Instead of  $F = ma$ , it can be the law for the harmonic oscillator or a two-body gravitational system, both dependent on  $F = ma$ . These, however, cannot be constructed from the basic law alone, but only by adding specifics – and creativity. Contrary to the dominant 'vending machine' view of theory, you cannot feed a theory input and get a model of new phenomena. Most actual work of theorists in the natural sciences consists of developing models, a creative, complicated job combining several theories with information of other kinds.<sup>50</sup>

Some see models as intermediary with a relative autonomy to both theory articulation and experimenting,<sup>51</sup> others talk of 'testing' actually being a relationship between model and model: the situationally specified model of the theory (representational model) and a model of data<sup>52</sup>. In any case, 'even' in the natural sciences, the most celebrated theories are much further from the regularity/correlation format than mainstream social scientists assume. Theories are abstract and only connectable to 'reality' through several quite contingent and creative steps implying similarity questions, rather than formalised necessity.

### 2.3 What then is Waltz's theory?

Given copious discussions on Waltz's theory, as well as the countless alleged applications of it, there is a puzzling absence of a clear statement of the theory. This is strange indeed, given that in Waltz's own list of the seven steps for testing theory, number 1 is 'State the theory being tested'.<sup>53</sup>

Of course, some of the crucial moves in setting up the theory are clear and famous: clear separation of unit level and systemic/structural level, arguments why a true theory of international politics needs to have explanatory force located at the systemic level in terms of international structure, why the structure has to exclude unit features and therefore has to be defined in positional terms (the arrangement of the units).

Much of Waltzian controversy has focused on arguments about structuralism, determinism, atomism, socialisation and competition. Here, we do not discuss *how* the structure works, but what exactly it *is* and especially how it is a theoretical category – and thus what structure the theory gets.

WALTZ: You have to have an idea. If you don't have an idea, how can you develop a theory? That's why many theorists in the natural sciences say, 'I was

taking a shower, and that's when I suddenly saw it. I have been trying, working at it, working at it, working at it, BUT . . . that's when I saw it. I saw a theoretical coherence'.

INTERVIEWER (WÆVER): Did you have the same experience?

WALTZ: I will not say it came while I was taking a shower, but I had been saying to my wife 'I can almost see it, but I can't see it quite clearly enough that I can write it down'.

INTERVIEWER (WÆVER): So when you say theory is a 'picture' mentally formed, 'picture' is to be taken relatively literally. There is something graphic to it?

WALTZ: Yes, it is a picture, but of course 'mentally formed' – that is important too!<sup>54</sup>

Such ideas 'will be about the organization of the subject matter. They will convey a sense of the unobservable relations of things. They will be about connections and causes by which sense is made of things observed.'<sup>55</sup> Domestic political structure consists of first the principle, hierarchy, then second the specification of functions and authorities for different political actors, and third the relative capabilities (power).<sup>56</sup> It is clear in *TIP*,<sup>57</sup> but expounded by John Ruggie in his famous review essay, that these elements of the structure are to be thought of as 'successive causal depth levels'.<sup>58</sup> They are not separate 'variables' – not weighed against each other or taking turns in shaping outcomes. The first is the most basic, the second moulds *how* it unfolds, and this in turn is further specified by the third.<sup>59</sup>

Similarly with international structure, when the second component drops out (because states are like units), the ordering principle is anarchy, and the distribution of capabilities sums up as polarity. This structure has two components, and the second specifies the first. In Richard Little's elegant and exact expression: 'Anarchy is what polarity makes of it'.<sup>60</sup>

The core of the theory is this idea, this image of the structure. The last chapters of *TIP* and Waltz's post-Cold War writings on the international system<sup>61</sup> show that to *use* neorealism means to draw from the basic idea of anarchy and a characterisation of current polarity general expectations about dynamics in a given situation – particularly such expectations that are not widely held – and compare expectations with empirical patterns.

Others might say the theory is balance-of-power theory. Terminology can be confusing in these pages. Balance of power is placed in between the theory as such and the 'law-like regularities' that the theory should help to explain. *Realpolitik* or 'balance-of-power theory' is treated in *TIP* as an inherited tradition, the best existing literature and therefore a raw material to be refashioned in a more theoretical format now, when the structural theory provides it with a deeper basis. Structure explains *why* these particular methods are repeatedly used – balance-of-power theory has tried to explain the results that *follow from* these methods. By being restated as part

of Waltz's theory, balance of power becomes explanatory in a deeper sense than it usually is – not unlike the status of models in the 'mediating' school presented above. It is important to notice how abstract the theory is, and consequently how contingent and mediated the situational expectations are.

Compare Mearsheimer who presents his theory in terms of 'assumptions'. First, the international system is anarchic; second, great powers inherently possess some offensive military capability; third, states can never be certain about other states' intentions; fourth, survival is the primary goal of great powers; fifth, great powers are rational actors.<sup>62</sup>

Waltz, in contrast, insists that his

definition of structure includes only what is required to show how the units of the system are positioned or arranged. Everything else is omitted.<sup>63</sup>

These are different *structures of theory*. Waltz states *one* assumption (and defends the principles behind simplifying assumptions) – that states seek to ensure their survival.<sup>64</sup> This, however, is not an additional assumption, exterior to the basic picture – it is a necessary assumption in order for the structure to be possible, an element in the concept of anarchy. 'A theory contains at least one theoretical assumption.'<sup>65</sup> 'Balance-of-power politics prevails wherever two, and only two, requirements are met: that the order be anarchic and that it be populated by units wishing to survive.'<sup>66</sup>

Fundamentally different is to list assumptions that are not part of one integrated conception, but separately meant to be 'reasonably accurate'. This leads to a computational logic of factors that interact. This approaches the if-then format of propositions dominant in IR. The pictorial approach, in contrast, organises around one core idea.<sup>67</sup>

Discussions of Waltz's theory have continuously been conducted *as if* the theory was of the propositional form. It is almost as if everybody was ashamed to admit they could not find the 'theory' (in the sense they expected it to exist), and therefore just discussed it as if we all knew. Or, more likely, we are so used in political science to sloppy 'theories', that we could discuss a theory at this great length without specifying what the theory was. Thus it was overlooked that, in this case, the theory *was* there – only in a different shape than expected.

This has at least a specific and a general implication. The specific one has to do with neorealism, its validity and limitations. The general one is about the criteria for theories: Allegedly, Waltz/*TIP* has been the measure of 'theory' for thirty years. How the 'highest' theory is understood shapes the judgment of other contributions to the field. Part 3 reveals this dimension by placing *TIP* within the history of the discipline. Section 2.4 underlines the impact of my re-reading by showing how today's neorealists mishandle their Waltzian heritage. But first, the present section should be rounded off by three critical observations on Waltz's presentation of his theory.

(1) *TIP* contains strikingly few diagrams.<sup>68</sup> If the theory is basically a picture of an arrangement, one should expect to see it – depicted. It should be possible to read

from the text unambiguously what is part of the core model. Very likely, it consists of both graphic and linguistic elements. Some such set-ups can be interpreted from reading *TIP*, but there is no clear statement about what exactly is intended to have what status.

(2) Not emphasised enough in *TIP* is the universal modesty that follows from this conception of theory. In many respects, Waltz's theory appears very ambitious or even pretentious. On the other hand, he has famously said that structures 'tell us a small number of big and important things'.<sup>69</sup> However, this is often taken in an almost quantitative sense as a question of how much is 'ruled' by international structure relative to other factors. There is a structural modesty of a different kind built into the theory: because of the kind of theory it is, the 'distance' from theory to reality will always be huge, and the way theory links up to reality is much 'softer' than assumed in most mainstream IR discussions of theory.

(3) Closely related is the sense in which this conception of theory allows for deriving hypotheses and testing them. When philosophers like van Fraassen, Giere and Cartwright push an approach very similar to Waltz's to its logical conclusion, the basic theory only forms a basis for specific models which actual events under very specific conditions come to resemble. Waltz is misleading or at least ambiguous, when he – after criticising previous tests of realism – claims that tests are easy to think up when finally you have a real theory<sup>70</sup> – although he adds: difficult to carry through; and generally by emphasising in the book and its statement of purpose 'testing'. On the one hand, he wants us to 'infer hypotheses'; on the other hand he much more modestly says: 'compare features of the observed domain with the picture the theory has limned'.<sup>71</sup> These features are highly aggregate, like balancing and emulation of successful policies. His terminology about hypotheses, however, was too close to mainstream positivism and allowed easy assimilation into the dominant understanding. His actual practice is more consistent with his 'theory of theory' than the statements about testing are. Waltz could and should have taken the logical step: There is no such thing as testing a theory – but it is possible to assess the applicability of it to a given domain.

## 2.4 Waltzianism without Waltz

Current debates on neorealism – mostly conducted within the family – follow recurrent patterns. Critics call for further 'specification' of the theory. It is found to be too sparse, too elegant, too minimalistic. Almost any case study easily shows that the theory tells us less than we want to know, and the author of the case study therefore calls for the theory to be elaborated further. Or, more trivially, it is found that something 'important' is not included in the theory, whereas the case study shows its importance. Waltz's reply to the latter version is familiar: it goes against the basic idea of *theory* to include everything in it until it becomes a 1:1 map of reality. Less noticed is his answer on 'specification'. Here Waltz – much like the philosophers presented above – stresses the importance of *usage* of the theory, of applications:



The matters omitted are not neglected when a theory is used. Theories are sparse in formulation and beautifully simple. Reality is complex and often ugly. Predictions are not made, nor explanations contrived, by looking at a theory and inferring something about particular behaviours and outcomes from it. How could that be done when the empirical matter that must be considered in making predictions or fashioning explanations can not be included in a theory? A theory is an instrument used to explain 'the real world' and perhaps to make some predictions about it. In using the instrument, all sorts of information, along with a lot of good judgment, is needed. Theories don't predict, people do.<sup>72</sup>

Ironically, a major implication of Waltz's prioritising of 'serious theory' is to give application and usage a much higher status. Far from being mindless 'processing', an application demands lots of *theoretical work*, constructing a specific model for the occasion and specifying concepts. This kind of work is not part of the theory.

Another favourite criticism is 'the theory is underspecified', but that is a characteristic of theories – Einstein's theory is underspecified, Newton's was. The specification comes when you test the theory, when you apply it, that's when you have to specify it. That's what, say, physicists spend most of their time doing; they don't spend most of their time inventing new theories.<sup>73</sup>

Even the 'big' debate on offensive v defensive realism (where typically Waltz is seen as one of the defensive realists) is refused as an inappropriate attempt at specification. The *theory* as such should only say that states act to survive, and whether they go for more or less power is dependent on the situation, not something the theory should pronounce on in general. Waltz therefore refuses the identification of himself as 'defensive realist', and tries to have his own theory placed prior to this divide – a divide that he sees as strictly running not between two theories, but between different applications of one theory.<sup>74</sup>

In discussions, these counter-arguments are reduced to a Waltzian willingness to pay a high price for parsimony, as if it is just about a range where Waltz's idiosyncratic preference is to one extreme. Trivially it is set up as a trade-off: Include less in the theory and get elegance and clarity – include more and be able to explain more. Discussion can go on forever – and misses the more forceful argument from Waltz: that you actually explain *less* by including more, because if the theory is no longer 'coherent and effective',<sup>75</sup> it is actually not a theory and not able to explain. It becomes purely contingent generalisations. If you want something else to do your explaining, you have to come up with a new theory (or show carefully how your idea can be inserted into his without making it less coherent and effective). 'Changing the concepts of a theory, however, makes an old theory into a new one that has to be evaluated in its own right.'<sup>76</sup>

The revisionists' image of explanation is one of *variables*, not exactly Waltz's kind of theory. This pattern repeats itself in relation to the two main debates within

realism – offensive/defensive<sup>77</sup> and neoclassical realism<sup>78</sup> – as well as in Waltz's discussion with Keohane.<sup>79</sup>

Take the characteristic case of a relatively loyal 'improver', Randall Schweller's *Unanswered Threats*. Schweller places the book 'squarely within the new wave of neoclassical realist research, which . . . posits that systemic pressures are filtered through intervening domestic variables to produce foreign policy behaviors'.<sup>80</sup> Under-balancing is explained through a domestic level 'theory' with four variables: elite consensus, elite cohesion, social cohesion and regime/government vulnerability. Yet clearly a concept like 'under'-balancing is only meaningful in relation to a measure of appropriate behaviour, which is therefore presented in Chapter 1. This ideal follows from a system-level theory, because it is only from understanding the international dynamics that it is possible to say anything about threats and balances. Thus the book operates with theory at two levels: a system-level theory and a unit-level theory. This is very much in line with the research programme of 'neoclassical realism'. Schweller talks about theory in relation to both levels, but clearly the profundity and status of the two theories are so radically different that it becomes misleading to use the same word for both. The form of the theories varies too. The systemic one is not spelled out, but ultimately grounded in Waltz's theory (although Schweller prefers an 'offensive realism' clothing to it) and thus explored above. The domestic level one is a much more traditional *variables kind of theory* – actually close to the form of theory that Waltz criticises. The aggregation Schweller sees as a general approach – neoclassical realism – but de facto it consists of two poorly integrated theories of different kinds.

I do not want to make a lot of the familiar issue (cf. the Elman/Waltz debate) whether it is possible or advisable to build a foreign policy theory on the basis of neorealism. Rather, I would like to emphasise tension between the different philosophies of science.

De facto, the systemic theory is treated almost according to scientific realism, as underlying mechanisms that are always part of the explanation whenever the unit-level theory is used too. These mechanisms are inherent in the international system, and taken for granted as the basis for both generating the puzzle motivating the book – it is because states do not do what the theory predicts, that Schweller's own theory is necessary – and part of the explanation, because it is when the two theories combine that we fully understand. But only the new part of the theory is tested, not the underlying mechanisms, and nor is the combined theory. The mechanisms are taken for granted and are all-pervasive; the question is how states respond to them. When in the opening part it is noted that states 'misbehave' (under-balance) more often than not, this is not taken as the starting point for an examination of neorealism (an anomaly, a possible falsification), although it is only with reference to this theory that behaviour is necessarily anomalous. In contrast, it is assumed that the general laws of realism basically operate at some subterranean level – only they do not emerge into actuality the way we would expect, and therefore more factors must be at play.<sup>81</sup> Implicitly, it is assumed here that the systemic theory should not be held to a simple correlation standard, and the challenge is to better understand the

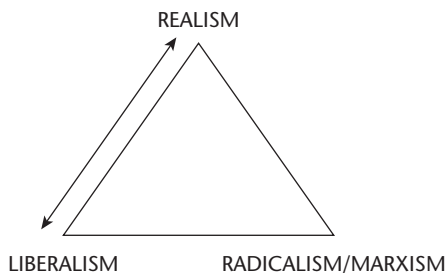
factors that condition how these mechanisms translate into actual outcomes. This is laudable from a Waltzian perspective, but totally unexplained.

Schweller's own theory, in contrast, is a very ad hoc type of theory for a specific kind of question.<sup>82</sup> This new theory (of foreign policy) is then tested in a correlation-like manner, holding independent and dependent variables against each other: does the distribution of the explanatory variables correspond to the outcomes?

This seems the general pattern: Waltz's academic grandchildren build theory according to a positivist manual very far from Chapter 1 of *TIP*. Not only do they violate his injunctions against add-ons to the theory, their new theories are not built in his style but adopt understandings of theory that he explicitly warned against.<sup>83</sup> Waltz's theory of theory plays no role among Waltzians.

### 3. The sociology of TIP's place in (American) IR history

Can we explain the puzzling selectivity, with parts of Waltz's theory super-influential and other ignored? I have previously told this chapter of the history of the discipline in terms of some drawings (Figures 5.1 and 5.2).<sup>84</sup> The 1970s spelled crisis for realism, with Keohane and Nye's *Power and Interdependence* gaining ground on *Politics Among Nations* as the core text. The second debate left a vague yearning for 'science' but – especially among realists – a scepticism against method-driven forms. Debates left the discipline hanging in the pluralistic, unsettled 'inter-paradigm' situation. At this point, Waltz recast the whole landscape with *TIP*. Realism came back to the fore, and the terms were set for all other approaches, especially due to the high threshold set by Waltz for what counts as 'theory'. Liberalism reacted by accommodating Waltz in two respects: accepting the alleged core assumptions of neorealism (anarchy and egotism) and trying to devise a similarly minimalistic theory (institutions matter; a market-failure theory shows how information is a key variable in the rational creation of institutions). Neorealism and neoliberalism shed much of the broader philosophical and ethical baggage, and became more 'scientific'. This development decreased their distance and both became 'microeconomics emulating' rationalist theories. The main line of debate therefore shifted to the diagonal one of rationalism–reflectivism. Thus Waltz gave rise within IR to both rationalism and poststructuralism (the latter repaying the favour by bestowing the school name of 'neorealism'<sup>85</sup> which, as often happens with academic naming, furthered the career of Waltz's theory).



**Figure 5.1** The 1970s 'interparadigm debate'

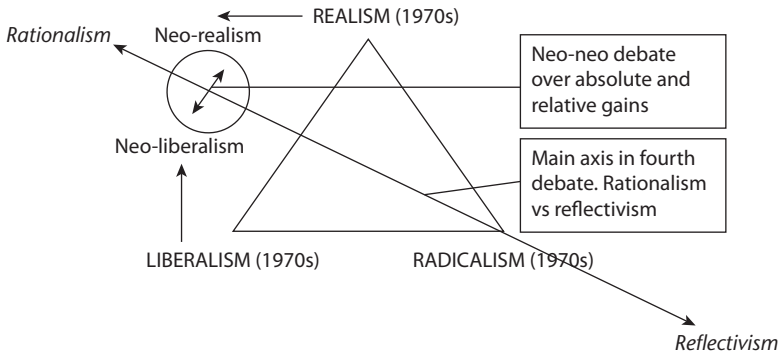


Figure 5.2 1980s: the fourth debate

This ultra-short version places neorealism in discipline-wide patterns. Given other contenders, available allies and possible transformations in a given situation, the meaning of a text is constituted in the interaction.<sup>86</sup> As with system-structural effects on units in the international system, the strategic moves of a theorist will be shaped by the constellation and dynamics of the discipline. What becomes important is determined not by an individual, but relationally by what clicks with other things said and not said, what is a meaningful move in the situation, and what can generate social energy in relation to other scholars.<sup>87</sup> Waltz's own insights about international relations tragically applied to himself: systemic effects insert themselves between intention and outcome; only in this case the system was the discipline of IR.

During the 'fourth debate' throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, effects followed the key axis constituted by the microeconomic element in *TIP*, because this could fuse with similar inspiration among neoliberal institutionalists and not least with the wave of rational choice methodology. This was an ideal platform for reflectivist critics to build their position on; and ritualised debates resulted.

*TIP* was successful, especially among security scholars, in getting realism back to the centre of the discipline; after being the theory of the past, it became the theory of the future. However, this was – as shown above – far from the only or even the main aim of the author. Successfully he rode a general aspiration of the discipline to become more *scientific* – reaping slowly maturing fruits of the second debate – and got *scientific* interpreted as meaning structural, microeconomic and with stronger *theory*. Furthermore, some specific arguments in the theory were widely accepted, notably the causal power of polarity and the advantages of bipolarity over multipolarity. Three failures were notable: deducing a policy warning against unnecessary (wasteful) and counter-productive (escalatory) practices regarding armaments and interventions; composure regarding the spread of nuclear weapons; and his understanding of the nature of theory. Roughly, he succeeds at the level of 'paradigms' and science, but fails at the levels of theory-of-theory and policy.

The failure to consolidate a specific understanding of theory, which I believe this chapter has demonstrated, is probably due to 'the positivist tradition that permeates

American political science' (to quote Waltz).<sup>88</sup> When the end result is a discipline worshipping correlations after the strong impact of a book based on strident anti-empiricism, this clearly demonstrates an incredible pull in American IR towards correlations style empiricism.<sup>89</sup>

On a more speculative note, one might contemplate a connection between the failures. Is it because of the failure to establish reality-distanced ambitious theory that more provocative and unwelcome political arguments fail? Low-theory empiricism by definition is closer to 'common sense', that is, the politically viable in a given political situation. That would make a case for the political importance of *TIP*'s seemingly least political chapter – Chapter 1.

Let me end by continuing this historical narrative into the near future. Is it time to redraw the map of IR – beyond the fourth debate – with a 'front-line' of empiricism v theory? At the level of analysis and understanding, I agree with Waltz that we should emphasise specific theories, not vague paradigms or schools. Much is lost by teaching, testing and debating loose aggregates rather than precise theories. However, I also appreciate the sociological reality of the larger labels (despite the current fashion of seeing the great debates as sheer myths and harmful). The discipline evolves as social system through major works getting defined – constituted and given meaning – due to the energy they produce in a given constellation, as *TIP* did. Maps matter. Each period shares some sense of main theories/schools, fronts and debates,<sup>90</sup> and this shapes what projects are more important than others. For a decade we have now been in the slipstream of the fourth debate – no longer lively and actively conducted, but still the most relevant general map. A polarised rationalism/reflectivism debate mutated into an *axis* with more and more people located towards the middle, but still defining themselves in relation to this axis. What next? Could the diagonal line in my second figure begin to curl up and reveal a new split along the line of correlation-type empiricism v Theory?

Waltz's placement at the mainstream extreme in the typical fourth-debate image is contingent on the defining role of rationalism/reflectivism (economics v sociology, rational choice v culture). But increasingly, the main challenge might be the recurrent relapse of American mainstream IR into neo-neo-neo-...-positivism.<sup>91</sup> This chapter demonstrates how radical Waltz's anti-empiricism is. During the fourth debate reflectivists often flirted with classical realists and tried to enlist their historical status as support against neorealists and other rationalists. It is time for a new pincer movement: Waltz's insistence on the distance between theory and reality and the crucial importance of theory actually clicks with much reflectivism, if only the nature of theory is brought into play as a separate issue – not part of a religious division into positivists and post-positivists. It is time to make Waltz unsafe for the mainstream.

That the positivism/post-positivism debate has become sterile is often well argued by critical realists (and other scientific realists), but their solution is to put up a new meta-theory creating both 'beware of gurus!' reactions and a flight towards philosophy, not towards IR theory. It is probably better to dissolve a lot of these issues by being agnostic about realism/instrumentalism along the route of Boltzmann

and Waltz. Rationalism/reflectivism are far from irrelevant; but they could be treated usefully as questions of social theory and pragmatic methodology choices.<sup>92</sup>

Beyond this somewhat personal strategic reflection, this chapter hopefully shows the importance for the discipline of getting a much clearer idea of the different kinds and levels of theory at play.

The extreme case of Waltz being so victorious in the discipline, and yet being consistently misinterpreted on the question of theory, shows the power of a dominant philosophy of science in US IR, and thus the challenge facing ambitious theorising. It might be time to rethink the restraint in various other camps against theory in order to get a new creativity in this, probably the most difficult part of the discipline.

'From theory all else follows.'<sup>93</sup>

## Acknowledgements

I appreciate many helpful comments and suggestions from participants at the Aberystwyth 'Waltzfest' in September 2008 as well as the IR research seminar in the Copenhagen department, in particular the detailed written comments from Ken Booth, Olaf Corry, Jonathan Joseph, Karen Lund Petersen, Trine Villumsen and Anders Wivel. Thanks to Anne Kathrine Mikkelsen Nyborg, Anna Christina Riisager and Cecilie Fenger for valuable research assistance. A longer version of this chapter will be made available at [www.cast.ku.dk](http://www.cast.ku.dk).

## Notes

- 1 Elizabeth Pond and Kenneth N. Waltz, 'Correspondence: international politics, viewed from the ground', *International Security*, 19 (1), 1994, pp. 195–99, citing from p. 198.
- 2 Kenneth N. Waltz, 'Kenneth N. Waltz' (a presentation of the ten works that shaped Waltz's intellectual development – henceforth referred to as 'Ten Works'), *Politik*, 7 (4), December 2004, pp. 93–105, citing from p. 103. This special issue '10×10', with ten leading social scientists presenting each the ten works influencing their thinking, has been republished as Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, Ole Dahl Rasmussen and Ole Wæver (eds), *10×10* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007).
- 3 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959).
- 4 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: Random House, 1979).
- 5 Kenneth N. Waltz, 'The validation of international-political theory', *Security Studies*, 6(1), 1996, pp. 54–57; Kenneth N. Waltz, 'Evaluating Theories', *American Political Science Review*, 91(4), 1997, pp. 913–17; Kenneth N. Waltz, 'Thoughts about assaying theories', in Colin Elman and Miriam Fendus Elman (eds), *Progress in International Relations Theory: Appraising the Field* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), pp. vii–xii; Kenneth N. Waltz, 'Neorealism: confusions and criticisms', *Journal of Politics and Society*, XV, 2004, pp. 2–6.
- 6 Kenneth N. Waltz, 'Reflections on *Theory of International Politics*: a response to my critics', in Robert O. Keohane (ed.), *Neorealism and its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 322–45.
- 7 Kenneth N. Waltz, 'Realist thought and neorealist theory', *Journal of International Affairs*, 44 (1), 1990, pp. 21–37; quoting from p. 26.
- 8 Kenneth N. Waltz, 'Ten Works', p. 103.

- 9 Ole Wæver, 'The rise and fall of the inter-paradigm debate', in Steve Smith, Ken Booth and Marysia Zalewski (eds), *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 149–85.
- 10 To borrow the title of the key book edited by Frederick Suppe, *The Structure of Scientific Theories*, Second edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977).
- 11 Wæver, 'Rise and fall'; James Fearon and Alexander Wendt, 'Rationalism vs. constructivism? A sceptical view', in Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse, and Beth A. Simmons (eds), *Handbook of International Relations* (London: Sage, 2001), pp. 52–72.
- 12 Note the launching in March 2009 of the new journal *International Theory*.
- 13 Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
- 14 See especially Elman and Elman, *Progress in International Relations Theory*.
- 15 Some might see philosophy of science covered through the general 'fourth debate' struggle between rationalism and reflectivism, where the word 'positivist' has been bandied about habitually (and often in connection with Waltz). Yes, reflectivists often fell into the mainstream trap of debating at the level of epistemology. However, the interesting part of the fourth debate was in terms of ontology, social theory and philosophical-political-ethical questions. When conducted as an epistemological debate between 'positivists' and 'constructivists', it has usually been unbearably trivial.
- 16 A detailed discussion of these five interpretations was in the original version of this chapter presented at the Aberystwyth conference and will reappear in extended form on the internet.
- 17 Of course, the term 'positivism' is used in numerous ways. In some usages of the term it covers Waltz (and in some it covers almost everybody).
- 18 Pond and Waltz, 'Correspondence', pp. 195–99.
- 19 Hans Mouritzen, 'Kenneth Waltz: a critical rationalist between international politics and foreign policy', in Iver B. Neumann and Ole Wæver (eds), *The Future of International Relations: Masters in the Making* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 66–89.
- 20 Fred Chernoff, 'scientific realism as a meta-theory of international politics', *International Studies Quarterly*, 46 (2), 2002, pp. 189–207; Colin Wight, *Agents, Structures and International Relations: Politics as Ontology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2006), pp. 75, 94, 97.
- 21 Charles A. Jones, 'III. Rethinking the methodology of realism', in Barry Buzan, Charles A. Jones and Richard Little, *The Logic of Anarchy: Neorealism to Structural Realism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).
- 22 Wendt wrote in 'The agent-structure problem in International Relations theory', *International Organization*, 41 (3), note 35: 'Neorealists might be seen as scientific realists to the extent that they believe that state interests or utilities are real but unobservable mechanisms which generate state behaviour.' This is a rather odd place in the theory to identify scientific realist features, when the obvious focus would be the *structure* that Waltz endows with power to 'shape and shove'. Most scientific realists have disowned Waltz, Fred Chernoff ('Scientific Realism') seeing him as 'thoroughgoing anti-SR'.
- 23 The scientific realists will – and should – insist that their difference with Waltz is fundamental. The scientific realist says that only by explicitly taking the starting point that science is the uncovering of causal laws, rooted in the generative mechanisms of things, will productive research ensue. However, this demands yet another case of placing basic starting assumptions in the realm of logic, intuition or other forms of a-priori assumptions, that is, independently of the actual scientific practice. Communicatively, the discipline gains from a more inclusive formulation over a route that demands a quasi-religious conversion to a particular denomination.
- 24 Waltz, 'Ten Works', p. 103.
- 25 Harry Kreisler, *Theory and International Politics: Conversation with Waltz*, 10 February 2003, available at: <http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/people3/Waltz/> (webcast, podcast and text versions) (accessed 19 March 2009).

- 26 Waltz characterises neorealism as 'the basic theory of international relations' ('Structural realism after the Cold War', p. 41). In an exchange with Keohane, Waltz remarks on the two most prominent alternative theories, liberal institutionalism and constructivism, that one is really a branch of his theory, and that the other is not a theory at all.
- 27 For these four criteria – which roughly lead to similar results – see respectively Ole Wæver, 'Still a discipline after all these debates?' in Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki and Steve Smith (eds) *IR Theories: Discipline and Diversity?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 288–308; Thomas J. Biersteker, 'The parochialism of hegemony: challenges for "American" International Relations', in Arlene B. Tickner and Ole Wæver (eds), *International Relations Scholarship around the World* (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 307–26; Richard Jordan, Daniel Maliniak, Amy Oakes and Susan Peterson, 'One discipline or many? 2008 TRIP survey of International Relations faculty in ten countries', Reves Center for Arts and Sciences, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA, February 2009; and for the fourth criterion there is so far no solid documentation, mostly rumours and general tribal knowledge. Among the mainstream, some rational choice modellers are those least guilty of de-Waltzification.
- 28 Gary King, Robert O. Keohane and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).
- 29 Kenneth N. Waltz, *TIP*, p. 5.
- 30 Post-positivists and scientific realists will object that Waltz's understanding of 'laws' is problematic or even positivist. (In the typical critiques of Waltz that ignore his arguments about theory, his notion of laws is emphasised to depict him as more positivist than reasonably the case.) True: Waltz presents laws in a traditional Humean sense as regularity in relations between variables: if a, then b. But this has much less importance than one should think. His main line is to downgrade the trust in laws, and upgrade the importance of theory. The link between theory and law is loosened, and his main project is radically anti-inductivist. Thus the formulations about laws are partly polemical to sharpen their contrast to theory. A serious understanding of Waltz's *theory* has to focus on his understanding of – theory!
- 31 Here scientific realists will object that Waltz unfortunately uses positivist language, even when his intention is to construct an anti-empiricist and anti-inductivist understanding of theory. The theoretical notions move away from 'sense experience'. To a realist they move closer to something at least as real: the actual forces and tendencies that drive events and form the basis of experiences. However, in relation to the advice for scientific practice, the difference in terminology matters less than scientific realists expect.
- 32 Waltz, *TIP*, p. 6.
- 33 Waltz, *TIP*, pp. 6ff.
- 34 Waltz, *TIP*, p. 7.
- 35 Waltz, *TIP*, p. 8; cf. Waltz, 'Evaluating Theories', p. 913, and the interviews with Kreisler, 'Theory', and Ole Wæver and Ingvar Sejr Hansen, 'Teori, Praksis og fredelige Atomvåben' ('Theory, Praxis, and Peaceful Nukes'), *Universitetsavisen*, 11 June 2005, available at: <http://universitetsavisen.ku.dk/dokument9/nyhedsarkiv/2005/2005-06/050611h/>. In *TIP*, this sentence ends with a reference '(cf. Boltzman 1905)'. It should be Boltzmann (see references in notes 39 and 40 below).
- 36 Barry Buzan and Richard Little, *International Systems in World History: Remaking the Study of International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Stacie E. Goddard and Daniel H. Nexon, 'Paradigm lost? Reassessing theory of International Politics', *European Journal of International Relations*, 11 (1), 2005, pp. 9–61.
- 37 Waltz, *TIP*, p. 9.
- 38 Waltz, 'Ten Works', p. 103.
- 39 Ludwig Boltzmann, 'On the significance of theories' (1890), in L. Boltzmann *Theoretical Physics and Philosophical Problems: Selected Writings* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1974), pp. 33–6, quotation from p. 33.
- 40 Henk W. de Regt, 'Ludwig Boltzmann's *Bildtheorie* and scientific understanding', *Synthese*, 119 (1–2), 1999, pp. 113–34 (and other articles in this special issue of *Synthese*).



- See also Carlo Cercignani, *Ludwig Boltzmann: The Man who Trusted Atoms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
- 41 Frederick Suppe, 'The search for philosophical understanding of scientific theories', in Suppe, *The Structure of Scientific Theories*, pp. 1–241, and 'Afterword – 1977' in Second edition, pp. 615–730.
  - 42 Patrick Suppes, 'A comparison of the meaning and uses of models in Mathematics and the empirical sciences', *Synthese* 12, 1960, pp. 287–301; Frederick Suppe, *The Semantic Conception of Theories and Scientific Realism* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1989); Bas C. van Fraassen, *The Scientific Image* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1980).
  - 43 Ronald N. Giere, *Science without Laws* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 97.
  - 44 Cf. Suppe, *The Structure*, p. 522.
  - 45 Giere, *Science*, p. 119.
  - 46 Giere, *Science*, p. 123.
  - 47 Paul Diesing, *How Does Social Science Work? Reflections on Practice* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991), pp. 69ff, 306ff, 330–35; Ronald N. Giere, *Scientific Perspectivism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), pp. 89–92; Giere, *Science*, throughout.
  - 48 While such definitions are usually – especially from those who use the wide conception of theory – implied but not spelled out, laudably clear presentations can be found in Barry Buzan, *From International to World Society? English School Theory and the Social Structure of Globalisation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 24–26; and Gunther Hellmann, Klaus Dieter Wolf and Michael Zürn (eds), *Die neuen Internationalen Beziehungen: Forschungsstand und Perspektiven in Deutschland* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2003).
  - 49 Giere, *Scientific Perspectivism*, p. 61; Giere, *Science*, pp. 84–96; Nancy Cartwright, *The Dappled World: A Study of the Boundaries of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 43–59.
  - 50 Cartwright, *The Dappled World*.
  - 51 Mary S. Morgan and Margaret Morrison (eds), *Models as Mediators: Perspectives on Natural and Social Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
  - 52 Giere, *Scientific Perspectivism*, pp. 48–9, 59–72.
  - 53 Waltz, *TIP*, p. 13.
  - 54 Wæver and Hansen, 'Teori, Praksis og fredelige Atomvåben'. The present quote is taken directly from the recording of the interview (00:37:44–00:39:00).
  - 55 Waltz, *TIP*, p. 9.
  - 56 Systematic effects of variation in domestic political structure is demonstrated in Kenneth N. Waltz, *Foreign Policy and Democratic Politics: The American and British Experience* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967) – although not using much of the structuralist terminology of the later 1979 book.
  - 57 Waltz, *TIP*, pp. 81–84.
  - 58 John Ruggie, 'Continuity and transformation in the world polity: toward a neorealist synthesis', *World Politics*, 35 (2), 1983, p. 266.
  - 59 Ruggie therefore denotes the first 'deep structure', and Buzan *et al.* proceed to subdivide the 'structural level' into 'deep structure' and 'distributional structure' and talk about 'tiers' of structure (*Logic*, Fig 4.2 on p. 79).
  - 60 Richard Little, *The Balance of Power in International Relations: Metaphors, Myths and Models* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 190.
  - 61 Kenneth N. Waltz, 'The Emerging Structure of International Politics', *International Security*, 18 (2), 1993, pp. 44–79; 'Structural realism after the Cold War' *International Security*, 25 (1), Summer, pp. 5–41.
  - 62 John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton, 2001), pp. 30–31.
  - 63 Waltz, *TIP*, p. 82.
  - 64 Waltz, *TIP*, pp. 91, 118.
  - 65 Waltz, *TIP*, pp. 117, cf. p. 10.
  - 66 Waltz, *TIP*, p. 121.

- 67 Mearsheimer's chapter in this volume ('Reckless States and Realism') illustrates this contrast very accurately.
- 68 The extended version of this chapter discusses *TIP*'s two diagrams as well as a graphic depiction of Waltz's structure that I have previously developed – and why none of these answer the demand.
- 69 Waltz, 'Reflections', p. 329.
- 70 Waltz, *TIP*, pp. 7–8, 13–17, 123–8.
- 71 Waltz, *TIP*, p. 123.
- 72 Waltz, 'Neorealism', p. 3. Except for the first sentence, the same passage is found on p. 56 in 'International politics is not foreign policy', *Security Studies*, 6 (1996), pp. 54–57.
- 73 Interview by Wæver and Hansen, 'Teori, Praksis' (recording 00:29:10–00:30:23); cf. also 'International politics is not foreign policy', p. 56.
- 74 Waltz, 'Neorealism', p. 6.
- 75 Waltz, 'Neorealism', p. 2; 'International politics is not foreign policy', p. 57.
- 76 Waltz, 'Evaluating Theories', p. 916.
- 77 Cf. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy*.
- 78 Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 1–216; Gideon Rose, 'Neoclassical realism and theories of foreign policy', *World Politics*, 51 (1), 1998, pp. 144–72; Brian Rathbun, 'A rose by any other name: neoclassical realism as the logical and necessary extension of structural realism', *Security Studies*, 17 (2), 2008, pp. 294–321; Colin Elman, 'Horses for courses: why not neorealist theories of foreign policy', *Security Studies*, 6 (1), 1996, pp. 7–53.
- 79 Keohane, *Neorealism and its Critics*.
- 80 Randall L. Schweller, *Unanswered Threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 6.
- 81 In Lakatosian terms, this is obviously a case of avoiding 'naïve falsificationism' and instead using seeming anomalies for further theory development. However, despite having written about the relationship between Lakatos and neoclassical realism (Randall L. Schweller, 'The progressiveness of neoclassical realism', in Elman and Elman, *Progress*, pp. 31–48), in *Unanswered Threats*, Schweller does not even consider the possibility that structural realism as such could be under pressure.
- 82 These days mainstream IR seems to be moving towards middle-range theory, developing ad hoc explanatory models for specific purposes (and calling them a theory). Only it happens in slightly different ways for (late-)neorealists and others. Non-neorealists generally make specific theories for an isolated question, implicitly assuming that the background system is 'passive'. The descendants of Waltz, in contrast, retain an understanding of an 'active' system, and get an unsettled dualism of systemic and unit-level theory.
- 83 For example, Stephen van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1997), especially pp. 7–9.
- 84 Ole Wæver, 'Figures of international thought: introducing persons instead of paradigms', in Neumann and Wæver, *Masters in the Making*, pp. 1–38; Wæver, 'Rise and fall'; Wæver, 'Still a discipline'.
- 85 Richard K. Ashley, 'The poverty of neorealism', in Keohane, *Neorealism and its Critics*, pp. 255–300.
- 86 Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics, 1: Regarding Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
- 87 Randall Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1998).
- 88 Waltz, 'Evaluating theories', p. 913. Cf. Ole Wæver, 'The speech act of realism: the move that made IR', in Nicolas Guilhot (ed.), *The Rise of International Relations Theory, 1945–1955* (Columbia University Press, 2011).
- 89 Cf. Dorothy Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Ole Wæver, 'The sociology of a not so international discipline', *International Organization*, 52 (4), 1998, pp. 687–727.

**88** Waltz's theory of theory

- 90 Ole Wæver, 'Measuring debateness and mapping frontiers – great debates in IR, 1947–2009', paper for ISA, February 2010.
- 91 In the 1980s–90s the dominant mainstream used neither Waltz's kind of theory, nor explicit correlation logic, but rational choice modelling – and could thereby partly accommodate and simultaneously stay more positivist than Waltz. Even this is now increasingly replaced (again) by large-n data studies and middle-range theory, a further decline of theory. The position of theorists of all stripes is weakened in mainstream journals and departments.
- 92 Fearon and Wendt, 'Rationalism vs. constructivism'.
- 93 Kenneth N. Waltz, 'Introduction' in *Realism and International Politics* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. vii–xiv; quoting from p. vii.

# 6

## STRUCTURE? WHAT STRUCTURE?<sup>1</sup>

*Nicholas Onuf*

Kenneth Waltz's name is irrevocably associated with the term *structure*. Waltz's theory of international politics, as expounded in the 1970s, is a systemic theory and, for that reason, a structural theory.<sup>2</sup> His systemic perspective quickly came to be known as *structural realism*, and Waltz has himself adopted this label.<sup>3</sup> In an act of sublime flattery, one of Waltz's most strident critics, Alexander Wendt, went so far as to describe constructivism in the field of International Relations (IR) 'as a kind of "structural idealism"'.<sup>4</sup> In this chapter, I suggest that Waltz's theory also bears describing as a kind of structural idealism, though hardly the kind that Wendt has espoused. Appropriately developed, Waltz's conception of structure suits, even supports, a strong version of constructivist social theory.

More precisely, I take Waltz's theory to be grounded in a philosophical position closer to Immanuel Kant's than to the philosophical realism that Wendt has promoted. *Philosophical realism* and its variants *scientific realism* and *critical realism* (not be confused with *political realism*) start with the claim that 'the world is independent of the mind and language of individual observers'.<sup>5</sup> According to Michael Devitt (a realist himself), modern philosophical constructivism draws on two ideas that are from Kant and one that is not.

*Constructivism* The only independent reality is beyond the reach of our knowledge and language. A known world is partly constructed by the imposition of concepts. These concepts differ from (linguistic, social, scientific, etc.) group to group, and hence the worlds of groups differ. Each such world differs only relative to an imposition of concepts.<sup>6</sup>

Constructivism is typically if unhelpfully described as philosophically idealist. The updated, post-Kantian constructivism defended in these pages, and with it the constructivist social theory that I prefer, draws on Aristotle to avoid the

idealist–materialist binary suggested in Wendt’s characterization of constructivism.

In developing a structural theory, Waltz devoted almost no attention to philosophical matters. He simply declared that testing a theory should meet ‘philosophy-of-science standards’ and assumed that positivist philosophy does the job.<sup>7</sup> Indeed his stringently expressed positivism and tidy theory encouraged a later generation of scholars, confronted with Continental social theory and philosophy, to pose post-positivist philosophical challenges that Waltz found bewildering.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, his treatment of structure brings a central philosophical issue to the fore: Are structures *real* – really ‘out there’ in the world – even if they cannot be observed? Philosophical realists set themselves against strong positivists *and* post-Kantian constructivists on this question. Realists alone will answer yes.

For all the importance of Waltz’s conception of structure, it is not, in my opinion, well understood. Scholars have subjected it to intermittent, sometimes acute commentary, but they have never made its most consequential features the centre of attention. After Waltz presented his structural theory in the 1970s, he has not given his critics a concerted response to their interpretations. Nor has he systematically restated his position. I attempt to do so, however presumptuously, because I believe Waltz’s philosophical stance is sounder than most of his critics claim, most recently, from a realist point of view.

Philosophical realism is now in fashion among IR theorists.<sup>9</sup> That Waltz’s stringently expressed positivism and a post-Kantian constructivism turn out to be philosophical allies against philosophical realism many scholars will find an odd and uncongenial claim. Waltz may find it so. As we shall see, there are many places where he seems to undercut his declared position on theory by imputing objective properties to system structure. In some instances he may simply have been careless. Cumulatively, they raise the possibility that he is an unreflective philosophical realist after all.

In substantiating these several claims, I divide this essay into six sections. The first section traces Waltz’s view of political structure in his early work. The next section recapitulates Waltz’s conceptualization of structure and its philosophical grounding. The third section addresses the question of his (or any) theory’s relation to ‘reality’. Waltz has drawn a line between theory and reality, only to subvert it in a way that any philosophical realist would applaud. The fourth section further illustrates Waltz’s difficulty with structural theory and institutional reality. The fifth section summons the ghost of Milton Friedman to confront two of Waltz’s critics.

The final section considers the vexing question of any theory’s fit to a world already talked into existence. It shows how close Waltz has been to a stance, grounded in post-Kantian constructivism, that solves his problem with theory’s relation to reality and specifies the conditions under which any social theory can make sense or use of the term *structure*. The chapter concludes on a speculative note. Had Waltz come to appreciate philosophical differences among positivists, realists and constructivists, he might better have guarded against the realist tendency to find causal structures in the world. Had he seen the value in situating his structural theory of international politics in an updated constructivism, our field might look very different today.

## Political structure

Waltz's first book, *Man, The State and War* (1959), makes occasional use of the term *structure* in discussing the three 'images' or coherent sets of ideas commonly invoked to explain the incidence of war. Thus the chapter spelling out the second image is subtitled 'International conflict and the internal structure of states'.<sup>10</sup> We soon learn, however, that, 'the internal organization of states is the key to understanding war and peace'. *Structure* and *organization* are synonyms.

Waltz described the third image as an absence of 'social structure' – 'institutionalized restraints and institutionalized methods of altering and adjusting interests' – and, as such, a condition that is conducive to war. While states have 'political structure' and 'military organization', the absence of institutional arrangements among states is itself 'a general structure that permits them to exist and wreak their disasters'. We see here an early version of Waltz's famous claim that 'international anarchy' has structure even if it has no discernible institutional features giving it a social character.<sup>11</sup> How we would know what this structure is, in the absence of institutional clues, he did not yet say.

A few years later, Waltz offered a clue in an essay entitled 'International structure, national force, and the balance of world power' (1967). Here defined as 'the pattern according to which power is distributed', structure reveals itself in the 'global balance of power'.<sup>12</sup> Treated by states' leaders as a 'game' with its own rules, the balance of power would seem to qualify as an institution, though an institution (unlike those constituting the internal structure of states) conducive to at least limited war.<sup>13</sup> Had Waltz construed the balance of power as an institution, he would have found congenial company.<sup>14</sup> That he did not spared him the need to consider other patterned features of international politics in institutional terms: international law, diplomacy, great power concert and war itself.<sup>15</sup> Instead he distanced himself from states' relations, where social content expresses itself with kaleidoscopic complexity, and took the balance of power to be a 'model' – whether his own model stipulating the presence of at least two states, or the 'old' model based on three or more states.<sup>16</sup>

Appearing in the same year (1967), Waltz's second book, *Foreign Policy and Democratic Politics* is a straightforward consideration of the question: 'Do the institutions and processes of democracy make excellence in foreign policy difficult to achieve?'<sup>17</sup> To answer this question, with its second image resonances, Waltz compared 'various characteristics of the British and American political systems' to see how 'political structures differ and, in their differences, affect the processes and policies of governments'.<sup>18</sup> Systems have structure; political systems, or states, have political structures, political arrangements, governmental structures or, more simply, governments. Waltz used these terms more or less interchangeably to characterize institutions of a familiar kind.<sup>19</sup> They do not signal a theoretical stance about the way Waltz's three images might be related, and they carry no conceptual freight beyond the standard concerns of political science at the time Waltz wrote the book.

When Waltz turned directly to theory-building in the following decade, we see a continuing interest in 'political structure'. Waltz's definitive exposition of his

structural theory, *Theory of International Politics* (1979), contains a comparative discussion of ‘political institutions’ (also called ‘governmental systems’) in Britain and the United States that could have been taken directly from *Foreign Policy and Democratic Politics*.<sup>20</sup> Preceding this discussion, however, is a newly developed conceptualization of structure.

A domestic political structure is thus defined, first, according to the principle by which it is ordered; second, by specification of the functions of formally differentiated units; and third, by the distribution of capabilities across those units . . . The three-part definition of structure includes only what is needed to show how the units are positioned or arranged. Everything else is omitted.<sup>21</sup>

Thanks to a readily identified ordering principle, ‘Structure is not a collection of political institutions but rather the arrangement of them’. For the political structure of the state, this principle is hierarchy. ‘The units – institutions and agencies – stand vis-à-vis each other in relations of super- and subordination’. Thus organized, ‘governmental institutions and offices’ engage in functionally specified activities as the ‘concrete counterparts’ of functionally differentiated structures.<sup>22</sup>

By contrast, international politics constitute a system consisting of functionally undifferentiated units, or states, over which there is no political structure or, concretely, subordinating institutions. Anarchy is the organizing principle, not hierarchy.<sup>23</sup> In ‘Theory of International Relations’ (the version of Waltz’s structural theory appearing in 1975), he was more concise. ‘Domestic systems are centralized and hierarchic. International systems are decentralized and anarchic’.<sup>24</sup>

## Models, theories, science

In his 1967 essay, Waltz made passing reference to the balance of power as a model. In the 1970s, he specified his conception of *model* to anchor his definition of *theory* and illustrate a theory’s relation to *reality*. Although Waltz’s views on theory are well known, I want to emphasize – as few other scholars have – the importance Waltz attached to models in linking theories to ‘the real world’.<sup>25</sup>

A theory, while related to the world about which explanations are wanted, always remains distinct from that world. Theories are not descriptions of the real world; they are instruments that we design in order to apprehend some part of it. ‘Reality’ will therefore be congruent neither with a theory nor with a model that may represent it.<sup>26</sup>

The referent for the pronoun ‘it’ concluding this passage is not reality but theory. Waltz held that the term *model* has two senses: ‘a model represents a theory’ or ‘a model pictures reality while simplifying it, say, through omission or reduction in scale’.<sup>27</sup> Precisely what Waltz meant by the term *represent* in this context is not at all clear. I suggest that every theory *is*, or must take the form of, a model, that theories

represent one kind of model (theoretical models), and that all models are simplifications, as indeed are all representations. Thus a model aeroplane represents reality ('A model airplane should look like a real airplane'), but this kind of model cannot, by itself, explain how aeroplanes manage to stay airborne. By contrast, a theoretical model might explain why aeroplanes fly but would not look like an airplane. 'Explanatory power is gained by moving away from "reality"'.<sup>28</sup>

Waltz was not saying that models are not real in themselves.<sup>29</sup> Maps are models too. They provisionally substitute one reality for another, in the process becoming an integral feature of the world they are said to represent. A theoretical model is a map representing/simplifying 'some part' of the world – 'a picture, mentally formed, of a bounded realm or domain of activity'<sup>30</sup> – on which the theorist has marked a sequence of events that will necessarily take place. Necessity arises not from the world as such, but from the choices the theorist has made in representing the world. A model aeroplane may fly if the plans for it (map) provide for all the right components – motor, wings, controls, etc. – connected in the right order.

Drawing maps, making choices on what events to connect, putting things in the right order are imaginative acts, involving guesswork but harnessed to experience. Does the theorist's model work – does it seem to explain events in the real world that it purports to? Can it be made to work better? These questions follow from the familiar model of modern science, itself institutionalized through general acceptance of the procedural rules (the scientific method) for checking theoretical models (models stipulating necessary relations) against evidence taken to represent some feature of 'the real world' and refining those models accordingly.

Thirty years ago, Waltz endorsed this model of science. I see no reason to think he would repudiate it now. He acknowledged the importance it assigns to imagination (in his words, creativity and intuition): 'To form a theory requires envisioning a pattern where none is visible to the naked eye' – or, for that matter, to any of the senses, no matter how much instrumental assistance we give them.<sup>31</sup> By implication, there are many patterns visible as such, if not to all observers, then to those observers with some idea where to look.

For most observers, rules, institutions, and agents variously constitute visible patterns (*constitute* in both passive and active senses). The invisible patterns that models propose are structures, and structures are theoretically relevant if they function either as causes or as limits on causal processes.<sup>32</sup> Different models assign causal significance to different structures and direct observers to look for visible patterns (including especially frequent if not constant conjunctions). Rather contentiously, Waltz's theory invokes a restrictive conception of structure – so restrictive it eliminates most visible patterns from consideration.<sup>33</sup>

Waltz's restrictive conception of structure discounts the visible presence of institutions plausibly enabling Waltz's structure of international politics to function as the model requires. Other scholars propose models defining structure less restrictively and, like Waltz, ask how they comport with some part of the world.<sup>34</sup> In the pursuit of reliable knowledge about the world, scholars oriented to science tack between their theoretical models and the best evidence they can muster. Doing



so reconciles the rationalist and empiricist strands in Western philosophy and eventuates in demonstrable progress in explaining and predicting the course of events. Lack of progress means weak theory, bad science, an absence of cumulative findings and an incentive to devise better (logically sound, empirically testable) theories.<sup>35</sup>

Behind Waltz's affirmative view of science is the Humean presumption that we can never conclusively know the causes of the world's many apparent regularities.<sup>36</sup> Where Hume's constant conjunctions remain constant, we can construe them as *laws*. 'Each descriptive term in a law is directly tied to observational or laboratory procedures, and laws are established only if they pass observational or experimental tests'. Concepts such as 'force, and absolute space and time' Waltz called 'theoretical notions'; his conception of a law in science is another such theoretical notion.<sup>37</sup> Waltz's conviction that the world consists of observable phenomena and theoretical notions, neither reducing to the other, makes him a strong positivist.

'Of purported laws', Waltz would have us ask, 'are they true?'<sup>38</sup> But this is not quite right. We ask instead, can we trust them? Insofar as any given theory seems to explain the constancy of an empirical generalization, that theory increases our confidence in the generalization it explains, just as factual constancy increases confidence in a given theory. Yet this virtuous circle never produces truth beyond the causal links stipulated to be true by a given theory's very terms. If a theory is true, it is true only of, or to, itself, and not true of the world to which it claims to refer.

## Formal causes, institutional effects

As Waltz has said, to form a theory, we must sense a pattern. It is possible that Waltz has always subscribed to a Platonic doctrine of forms. Behind the many patterns that our senses make real to us, and their sole cause, is a truly real world, consisting entirely of perfect forms only dimly available to the senses. Early modern natural law thinkers advanced a similar metaphysical doctrine. By exercise of reason, we can find the underlying order of the world in what we see. Even now, quite a few scientists reflexively hold this view. Constant conjunctions are no accident, laws capture truths, theories order laws, science finds the larger truth informing laws we know to be true.

On the evidence presented in the preceding section, I doubt that Waltz is, or has ever been, a Platonist or, in Kant's terms, a dogmatic philosopher. Waltz would seem to be closer to Aristotle than to Plato or the dogmatic rationalists. Aristotle rejected Plato's doctrine of forms: 'things cannot come from the Form in any of the usual senses of "from"'.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, forms matter, but not as matter. Consider the second of Aristotle's four senses of the term *cause* – material, formal, efficient and final. A *formal cause* is the 'form [*eidōs*] or pattern [*paradeigma*], that is, the formula [*logos*] of the essence [*ti estī*, what is, rendered by medieval Platonists as *essentia*, is-ness]'.<sup>40</sup>

Aristotle used the production of a bronze sphere to illustrate formal causality. We see spheres in the world consisting of various materials (for example, water droplets,

soap bubbles), just as we see disks (the sun, moon). Any given sphere is made 'by art [*technê*] or by nature [*phusis*, the whole to which all causes ultimately lead] or by some capacity [*dunamis*, developmental potential, where form is an emergent property]'.<sup>41</sup> Forms have many sources in a world already laden with forms. Forms must be realized materially; they give the formless stuff of the world recognizable properties. Mindless empiricism and pure materialism are no more plausible than Platonic idealism.

Aristotle's use of the term *poieô* (to make or produce) does favour art over nature in telling us where forms 'come from'.<sup>42</sup> 'But that there is a *bronze sphere*, this we make. For we make it out of the bronze and the sphere; we bring the form into this particular matter, and the result is a bronze sphere'.<sup>43</sup> Given this example (Aristotle's only one), it would seem that form – in this case a spherical form – is a property that an artisan gives to a formless medium such as bronze (which is then a *material cause*). In such a case, the artisan must have this form in mind, as a goal, and use it as a model or pattern (thereby serving as the *efficient cause*).

Aristotle's conception of formal cause is ambiguous. It does seem to imply the prior existence of a model (map, formula). If not a Platonic essence, then the model must 'come from' a human mind and be given to the stuff of the world. Produced as an imaginative act, the model generalizes and idealizes the human experience with relevant forms. What then does anyone using the model produce? It can only be a model: a sphere that happens to be made of bronze, or an object unlike any other that testifies to the imaginative power of the mind responsible for it, or an aeroplane that, as a working model or prototype, invites the production of any number of aeroplanes of the same model.

Every model assigns formal properties to its contents. If the model stipulates a formal causal relation between some set of elements making it up, then *that* relation is internal to the model. As a theorist, Waltz has formed a model of international politics in which a formally specified structure functions as a formal cause. That cause has effects that are no less formal – they are entailed by the model, as a closed system of relations, and they can only take place within the model.

'A systems approach is successful only if structural effects are clearly defined and displayed'.<sup>44</sup> Given Waltz's Aristotelian model of models, this demanding standard must be honoured. He issued it in a critique of Morton Kaplan's several models of international systems. In turn, Kaplan criticized Waltz for denying that Kaplan's models properly specified structural causes.<sup>45</sup> In my opinion, *Theory of International Politics* warrants criticism because it fails to meet Waltz's own standard for specifying structural effects.

Two chapter titles reveal as much: 'Structural causes and economic effects' and 'Structural causes and military effects' (Chapters 7 and 8). Few of these effects are 'structural' in the formal sense that Waltz's model requires. Thus Waltz opened the second of these chapters with a brief discussion of stability as a structural effect in balance of power systems. Indeed, states of (in)stability or (dis)equilibrium are standard concerns in systemic theorizing, and they are typically treated in functional terms. Passing over these concerns, Waltz's discussion quickly turned to the institutional dynamics of alliance formation and interaction.

Most observers would call these dynamics *real effects*, to be found in the world, not the model. I would call them *institutional effects*. When agents 'see' a world of patterns and act on them, in the first instance by telling each other what they see, they have begun a process of transforming patterns into institutions (models whose formal properties are more or less fixed and publicly available as an ensembles of rules). Both chapters detail what governments do: agents' choices take effect in and through institutions. In this process, agents have an effect on those institutions through their choices, if only to reinforce institutional rules.

Waltz has never denied the causal significance of agents and institutions (recall the first and second images). Indeed he has acknowledged that structures do no more than 'condition behaviors and outcomes'. If agents are moved by unseen forces, their choices foreclosed by conditions they are not even aware of, then there is little point in calling them agents at all. If agents do make choices with consequences, then we need to ask, how do agents *know* which structures constrain them in what ways? To suggest that agents must have a relevant structural model in mind, or that institutional rules must somehow accord with such a model, calls for theories about structural effects as causes of institutional effects.

### 'Structures select'

Speaking metaphorically (metaphors are simple models), Waltz drew a clear line between theory and reality in *Theory of International Politics*, and proceeded to blur it. The most striking example of this tendency arises in his well-known defence of his structural theory of international anarchy 'through analogy with microeconomic theory'. Waltz advocated 'reasoning by analogy' when 'different domains are structurally similar'.<sup>46</sup> In this context, the term *domain* is ambiguous insofar as it suggests a resemblance between different 'parts' of the real world – in this case, firms and states, well-formed markets and international anarchy. Even if Waltz's discussion puts theory first, the analogy seems to operate on both sides of the theory/reality divide.

'Microeconomic theory describes how an order is spontaneously formed from the self-interested acts and interactions of individual units – in this case, persons and firms'. Key to this formulation is the phrase *spontaneously formed*. Markets are 'individualist in origin, spontaneously generated, and unintended'. Not designed or produced on any model, a 'market is not an institution or an agent in any palpable sense'. And yet 'The market is a cause interposed between the economic actors and the results they produce'.<sup>47</sup>

Waltz appears to have it both ways. Markets do not really exist, but they operate causally in producing real results. Appearances are deceiving. Either markets are institutions, which seem to be causally implicated in market behaviour, or markets are structural causes producing structural effects, as stipulated in a theoretical model.

It is easy enough to show – devise a model showing – that markets are always institutions ('hedged about', as Waltz said himself), even if some markets form spontaneously.<sup>48</sup> It is almost as easy to show that people respond to institutions as

models or by reference to other models already available to them. 'Seeing' markets in action reinforces market behaviour in turn validating markets as a model and reinforcing them as institutions.

As I have just remarked, additional theories offer a fuller picture. They also cast doubt on the notion that the spontaneous emergence of markets means that they need not really exist to have real effects. From the time of David Hume and Adam Ferguson, observers have grasped the institutional effects of agents' self-interested choices, even if agents do not.<sup>49</sup> As with markets, so with anarchy. Following John Ruggie's review of *Theory of International Politics*, few scholars would venture to say that the Western state system emerged spontaneously, whole cloth out of whole cloth.<sup>50</sup> There is a mountain of recent scholarship explicating the system's institutional moorings, as if any student of international law, at least since Emmerich de Vattel, could have doubted the extent and significance of the system's institutional features. And there is a sizeable literature on the social construction of sovereignty.<sup>51</sup>

On Waltz's account, anarchy is a model of the international system. A theoretically enhanced account would construe anarchy as a model and, at the same time, an institution that system observers and states' agents have made together. States' agents are themselves system observers; models mediate whatever all observers (and not just states' agents) think they 'see'; agents acting on what they see give rise to institutions; observers take these institutions into account in forming models and acting on their conclusions (whether reporting on them as observers or doing something about them as agents). In the process, models (structural models, constitutive models) and institutions 'structured' by models (anarchy, sovereignty), lend each other credibility.<sup>52</sup>

Waltz seems to have been deeply, even hopelessly confused in explicating the analogy between microeconomic theory and his structural theory. Yet his concluding remarks redeem him.<sup>53</sup> 'To say that "the structure selects" means simply that those who conform to accepted and successful practices more often rise to the top and are likelier to stay there'. To say that structure selects is to summarize the model's terms with a crisp metaphor made familiar by well-known evolutionary models. What Waltz called 'selection according to behavior' is behaviour that accords with the model but responds, in the first instance, to the institutional possibilities that agents 'see' for themselves. Insofar as relevant models tell them what to see, their behaviour may *also* respond to the constraints stipulated in those models.

### Friedman's ghost

Waltz's careless tendency to move from the formal causes stipulated in his theoretical model to institutional effects has troubled his critics less than has his careful segregation of structural models and institutional reality. '[H]ow can something which does not really exist . . . "shape and shove" anything?'<sup>54</sup> If one believes that structures really do exist even if they cannot be directly observed, then one never needs to ask this question, much less engage in conceptual contortions to answer it. And this is exactly what philosophical realists believe.

Wendt has reduced scientific realism (a prominent species of philosophical realism) to three propositions:

- 1 the world is independent of the mind and language of individual observers;
- 2 mature scientific theories typically refer to this world,
- 3 even when it is not directly observable.<sup>55</sup>

Practically speaking, most of us are empirical realists most of the time; proposition 1 summarizes what we think as we get along in the world.<sup>56</sup> Positivists routinely accept 2 along with proposition 1. They resist proposition 3 on methodological grounds, although they (have little choice but to) tolerate proposed nonobservables if they have consistently observable implications.<sup>57</sup> They would not criticize Waltz, as I have, for moving from structural causes to institutional effects, if he drew out observable implications with appropriate care. Yet they would join philosophical realists in rejecting Waltz's enterprise insofar as it does not comport with proposition 2.

Compare these remarks, one from a positivist willing to countenance unobservables with observable effects (Robert Keohane) and the other more recently from a philosophical realist (Milja Kurki). Keohane wrote:

Although Waltz is content to make theoretical assumptions about units that deviate sharply from their known patterns of behavior, this is not, *pace* Milton Friedman (1953), a universally accepted practice in the natural or social sciences.<sup>58</sup>

Kurki wrote:

While trying to avoid seeing the international system as logically 'necessitating' effects in the 'when A, then B' manner, Waltz finds it hard to resist deducing logical effects from the system. Arguably, this is because the microeconomic model his theory is based on works on the basis of a 'closed system' view of the social world.<sup>59</sup>

Both comments direct attention to Waltz's reliance on microeconomic theory in developing his structural theory of international politics, and more especially to these claims of Waltz's:

Economic units and economic markets are concepts, not descriptive realities or concrete entities. This must be emphasized since the early eighteenth century to the present, from the sociologist Auguste Comte to the psychologist George Katona, economic theory has been faulted because its assumptions fail to correspond to realities. Unrealistically, economic theorists conceive of an economy operating in isolation from its society and polity. Unrealistically, economists assume the economic world is the whole of the world.<sup>60</sup>

Some microeconomists may regard the ‘economic world’ a model of the whole world – Gary Becker comes to mind<sup>61</sup> – but most are ‘content to make theoretical assumptions’ (Keohane’s words) that are based on, or result in, a more limited model. Waltz was clearly not troubled by microeconomic theory’s unrealistic assumptions, or by his own analogous assumptions. For Keohane, erecting a model based on unrealistic assumptions runs against ‘accepted practice’. For Waltz, doing so is an accepted practice – one, he might have said, that Milton Friedman (whose ghost Keohane, no doubt insincerely, sought to pacify) authoritatively sanctioned.

Friedman’s position hardly seems inflammatory. He wrote:

More generally a hypothesis or theory consists of an assertion that certain forces are, and by implication others are not, important for a particular class of phenomena and a specification of the manner of action of the forces it asserts to be important. We can regard the hypothesis as consisting of two parts: first a conceptual world or abstract model simpler than the ‘real world’ and containing only the forces that the hypothesis asserts to be important; second a set of rules defining a class of phenomena for which ‘the model’ can be taken to be an adequate representation of the ‘real world’ and specifying the correspondence between the variables or entities in the model and observable phenomena.<sup>62</sup>

As I suggested earlier, Friedman was a strong positivist; only ‘observable phenomena’ count for empirical purposes. He acknowledged the competing tendencies of rationalism and empiricism in Western philosophy by discriminating clearly between conceptual worlds and the real world. He implied that anyone schooled in science would be concerned about the correspondence between the model’s elements and that part of the world to which it presumably refers. The only trouble then would seem to be the dissonance between Wendt’s proposition 2 – theories should refer to a real world available to the senses – and Friedman’s view that ‘a theory cannot possibly be thoroughly “realistic” in the immediate descriptive sense so often assigned to this term’.<sup>63</sup>

Indeed the trouble here is not the unreality of Friedman’s and Waltz’s models. The source of trouble is the notion of *correspondence* between the model and the world. At least for Friedman and Waltz, correspondence is a loose criterion for deciding on theoretical assumptions and building models. Furthermore, it does not tell you how to negotiate between theory and reality, such as it is. Waltz turned to figurative language in explaining this process. ‘You take the theory’, he remarked in an interview, ‘and then you have to hook it up to the real world’.<sup>64</sup> While his implicit model of the process would seem to require a great deal more than sensory experience, his language suggests that he has not fully considered what this might be.

By contrast, Keohane as an empirical realist and Kurki as a philosophical realist have assumed that we all have some kind of access to an independently real world. As informed observers, theorists know what is real because what they know reflects

the consensus of many other informed observers. Waltz himself has adopted this position: ‘some part of the scientific community has to decide whether enough of an empirical warrant exists to give a theory credibility’.<sup>65</sup> Once again Waltz has got into trouble – being realistic doesn’t matter, and yet it does.

## Post-Kantian constructivism

If some community of observers decides that a given theory is empirically credible, then, at least for them, the theory is realistic. Waltz’s realism by default raises awkward questions. ‘What is the criterion’, Friedman asked, ‘by which to judge whether a particular departure from realism is or is not acceptable?’<sup>66</sup> How can Waltz, or any realist, say the world even has parts? How does a realist know that Aristotle’s *ti esti* – what is – is real? For Aristotle, at least, *what it is* is but the first, and presumably the most important, in a list of ten kinds of predication (*genēōn katēgoriōn*), or universal categories for talking about the world.<sup>67</sup>

It is easy enough to read Aristotle as an empirical realist: the world out there is more or less as we sense it. Generalizing from what I said earlier about formal causes, we can also read him as a proto-constructivist: the world is what we say it is. In such a view, any realist’s models of the world dovetails with other widely accepted models. Yet all such models are made up, just as Friedman and Waltz insisted. When we talk, we make our models (maps, formulae) available for others to use in making their own models. In this process (as modelled), there is no reality beyond what our models collectively say it is.

Insofar as we make models by imposing form (patterns, structure) on what we think we see, the mind’s ‘eye’ does most of the work, and not the senses. I take this point of view to be Kant’s, as propounded in *The Critique of Pure Reason*. What Kant called an *appearance* (‘the undetermined object of an empirical intuition’) has two components. That which corresponds to sensation (appears as the stuff of the world) Kant termed *matter*. That which ‘so determines the manifold of appearance that it allows of being ordered in certain relations’ (appears as a pattern), Kant termed ‘the *form* of appearance’. For Kant, this ‘pure form of sensibility’, which gives ‘extension and figure’ to the world of appearances, ‘must be found in the mind *a priori*’.<sup>68</sup>

In Kant’s view, the sensing mind imposes order on the manifold of appearances. It does so, in the first instance, by situating appearances in space and time and then by putting them together (Kant called this operation *synthesis*). And it does so with the help of ‘pure concepts of synthesis’ that the mind ‘contains within itself *a priori*’. Kant identified twelve such concepts. Following Aristotle, he called them categories but claimed, against Aristotle, that his twelve categories constitute an ‘exhaustive inventory’. Among the twelve are three categories of relation: ‘inherence and subsistence’, ‘causality and dependence’, and ‘community (reciprocity between agent and patient)’.<sup>69</sup>

Once the synthetic operations of the mind have conceptually reordered the manifold of appearances, we have in our minds a ‘manifold of representations’. Thanks to the faculty of apperception, these representations are in turn subject to a

final, unifying synthesis filling space and time with ‘the continuous and uniform production’ of ‘things in themselves (thinghood, reality)’. Without this final operation of the sensing, synthesizing mind, consciousness – of things in themselves, of one’s self, of the whole world as a thing in itself – would not be possible.<sup>70</sup> Kant’s philosophical stance is radically constructivist. In giving form to the world, the mind makes the world real – *in our heads*. And yet the world *appears* to exist, more or less as we sense it, outside the mind.

Kant’s constructivism is also radically incomplete. In Kant’s model, we are solitary souls imprisoned in cells of our own construction. Indeed, there is no *we*. To escape our solitary confinement, *we* need an additional model – one that grants intersubjectivity, or sociality, to the Kantian subject. Our faculty for language would appear to do the job.

No longer is the question of fit between model (as something you and I ‘see’ in our respective mind’s eye) and world (as something independent of us both), but between your words (formulating a model in a public, standardized symbolic format) and my words (formulating a similar model in much the same format). Whether we *really* have escaped our solitary cells is impossible to say conclusively. As Nietzsche remarked, language is a prison-house. Reality resolves into a constant proliferation, and no less an infinite regression, of models seen and heard. Such is the world we have talked into existence. Some models converge, some conflict, some are superseded and some forgotten, some are only distantly related, some we all seem to be able to count on. Every proposition we utter performs an operation on some kind of model and thereby affects the world as we know it.

Jonathan Joseph has called this model of mine ‘models all the way down’ to point up the relevance of enduring disputes between idealists and materialists and to indicate the difference between my model and Waltz’s ‘phenomenalist’ model, which (in Joseph’s model) uses sensory evidence alone to explain what happens in the world.<sup>71</sup> What happens, in my model, is that agents make models with institutional effects by resorting to models with institutional effects. I fail to see why Waltz would not come to the same conclusion once he conceded the constructivist underpinning of his structural model. Waltz’s model of models is surely not materialist in the usual sense attributed to political realists (only an empiricist deserves this charge), or even ‘rump materialist’ in the sense that Wendt advocates.<sup>72</sup> Instead Waltz’s strong positivism ends up making him a structural idealist in a deeper, more consistent sense than Wendt is.

As positivists, Friedman and Waltz resisted the claim that theoretical notions such as form, cause, structure and agent, not to mention space and time, have a reality independent of the observer. Post-Kantian constructivism offers an alternative. Qualified along the lines I have just suggested, constructivism escapes the solipsism implicit in Kant’s stance. Observers can get into each other’s minds, as agents, by using models to invent and exchange models; intersubjectivity ensues.

Friedman’s defence of *as if* formulations – ‘firms can be treated *as if* they are perfect competitors’ – is distinctly Kantian.<sup>73</sup> Kant himself defended empirical realism for most practical purposes: our world is more or less as we experience it.<sup>74</sup>



Indeed, Waltz called himself ‘a Kantian, not a positivist’, although the context is Kant’s *Perpetual Peace*, not the *Critique of Pure Reason*.<sup>75</sup> If Waltz had ever considered fully the philosophical implications of his Kantian affinities, he might indeed have acknowledged how close he is to an updated constructivism. Given Waltz’s stature, we might wonder what his impact on the field would have been.

As it is, we take sides early on in our careers. We do so naively and unequivocally, more or less as an act of faith. On one side are scholars with largely unexamined realist commitments, positivist training and, in some cases, an irrational zeal for rational choice theory, on the other scholars who dabble, too often indiscriminately, in post-positivist philosophy and Continental social theory. Had Waltz gone philosophical, the chasm would not have disappeared. On the contrary, the distance between the two sides might have widened as scholars made a sustained effort to defend their philosophical predilections.

If indeed the world is what we make it, post-Kantian constructivists are necessarily relativists (recall Devitt’s characterization, quoted above). So are post-positivists in general. Realists always invoke the correspondence theory of truth in order to combat relativism with what they take to be common sense. ‘The theoretical statements of a science are true or false’, as Rom Harré has put it, ‘by virtue of the way the world is’.<sup>76</sup> Most positivists simply accept the common sense view without further ado. Yet they need not repudiate relativism if they see truth in Humean terms: at any given moment, systematically supported, provisionally reliable inferences convey the truth as we know it.

Perhaps positivists would have ended up choosing sides. Perhaps the more thoroughgoing among them could have mediated between realists and constructivists in the pursuit of knowledge, not truth. Perhaps both sides would have tempered their contempt for the other. Perhaps not.

If Waltz had declared himself a thoroughgoing constructivist, other scholars might have followed suit. There would have ensued a substantial, necessarily inconclusive debate between realists and constructivists on the issues I have raised in this chapter. Vacuous discussions of idealism and materialism might never have arisen. A post-Wall generation of liberal internationalists might not be calling themselves constructivists. Positivists and constructivists might have accepted their differences on philosophical issues and come together to develop and elaborate structural models of international politics, theories about institutions, agents and motives and, not least, theoretical frameworks linking theoretical models of structure and agency in larger social processes. Just perhaps.

## Notes

- 1 I am grateful to Ken Booth, Harry Gould, Patrick Jackson, Patrick James, Jonathan Joseph and Milja Kurki for their very helpful written comments and to the many members of the audience in Aberystwyth for questions and comments. I am also grateful to Ken Booth for suggesting a title better suiting this essay than anything I had in mind.
- 2 Kenneth N. Waltz, ‘Theory of International Relations’, in Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby (eds), *Handbook of Political Science, Vol. 8, International Politics* (Reading, MA:

- Addison-Wesley, 1975), pp. 1–85 (hereinafter noted as *Handbook*); *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979; hereinafter noted as *TIP*). A system is then defined as a set of interacting units. At one level, a system consists of a structure, and the structure is the systems level component that makes it possible to think of the units as forming a set, as distinct from a mere collection. At another level, the system consists of interacting units. *Handbook*, p. 45; *TIP*, p. 40.
- 3 Kenneth N. Waltz, 'Structural realism after the Cold War', *International Security*, 25 (1), 2000, pp. 5–41.
  - 4 Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 1; also see p. xiii. The very title of Wendt's book is an homage to *TIP*.
  - 5 Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, p. 51. See below for Wendt's full definition.
  - 6 Michel Devitt, *Realism and Truth*, Second edition. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 235. See, generally, ch. 13.
  - 7 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Handbook*, p. 2; *TIP*, p. 1. For a checklist of these standards, see *Handbook*, p. 12; *TIP*, p. 13. Waltz could plausibly assume that his readers would be familiar with the *deductive-nomological* or *covering law* model of scientific explanation favoured by positivist philosophers. See Carl G. Hempel, *Aspects of Scientific Explanation* (New York: Free Press, 1965).
  - 8 See, for example, Richard K. Ashley, 'The poverty of neorealism', in Robert O. Keohane (ed.), *Neorealism and its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 255–300; Ashley, 'Living on borderlines: man, poststructuralism, and war', in James Der Derian and Michael J. Shapiro (eds), *International/Intertextual Relations: Postmodern Readings of World Politics* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1989), pp. 259–321. On Waltz's bewilderment, see 'A response to my critics', in Keohane, *Neorealism and its Critics*, p. 337.
  - 9 See Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, ch. 2; Heikki Patomäki, *After International Relations: Critical Realism and the (Re)Construction of World Politics* (London: Routledge, 2002); Colin Wight, *Agents, Structures and International Relations: Politics as Ontology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Milja Kurki, *Causation in International Relations: Reclaiming Causal Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), chs 5–6.
  - 10 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), p. 80.
  - 11 Waltz, *Man, the State and War*, pp. 81, 231, 124, 184–5, 159 (chapter subtitle).
  - 12 Kenneth N. Waltz, 'International structure, national force, and the balance of world power', *Journal of International Affairs*, 21 (2), 1967, pp. 229 n18, 228.
  - 13 Waltz, 'International structure, national force, and the balance of world power', p. 218.
  - 14 The Treaty of Utrecht gave the balance of power formal notice in 1713. 'Thenceforward, for two hundred years, the balance of power was generally spoken of as if it were the constituent principle of international society, and legal writers described it as an indispensable condition of international law'. Martin Wight, 'The balance of power', in Herbert Butterfield and Wight (eds), *Diplomatic Investigations: Essays in the Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 153, footnote deleted.
  - 15 Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), p. 74.
  - 16 Waltz, 'International structure, national force, and the balance of world power', p. 218. 'Within the structure of world politics, the relations of states will be as variable and complex as the movements and patterns of bits of glass within a kaleidoscope' (p. 229).
  - 17 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Foreign Policy and Democratic Politics: The American and British Experience* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967), p. 8.
  - 18 Waltz, *Foreign Policy and Democratic Politics*, p. 17.
  - 19 Waltz, *Foreign Policy and Democratic Politics*, p. 36.
  - 20 Waltz, *TIP*, pp. 82–88.

- 21 Waltz, *TIP*, p. 82. In *Handbook*, pp. 46–47, Waltz had put forward a ‘two-part definition of structure’, effectively combining the second and third parts of the later definition.
- 22 Waltz, *TIP*, pp. 82, 88.
- 23 Waltz, *TIP*, pp. 93–97.
- 24 Waltz, *Handbook*, p. 46.
- 25 This omission is particularly telling in Stacie E. Goddard and Daniel H. Nexon, ‘Paradigm lost? Reassessing *Theory of International Politics*’, *European Journal of International Relations*, 11(1), 2005, pp. 9–61. Rather than taking advantage of Waltz’s discussion of models, they introduced the concept of analytical systems. Such systems ‘are not *real* in an ontological sense – for the most part there is no real distinction between personalities, culture and social systems, and in reality all will affect action and order’ (p. 17, their emphasis). As I hope to make clear, analytical systems are models, and conversely all models are analytical in this sense. Yet Waltz quite properly reserved the term *analysis* and its cognates for the procedure of ‘reducing the entity to its discrete parts and examining their properties and connections’ (*Handbook*, p. 44; *TIP*, p. 39). Systemic models are *not* reductive, or analytical, in Waltz’s sense.
- 26 Waltz, *Handbook*, p. 8; *TIP*, pp. 6–7, omits the second sentence in this passage and slightly alters the first sentence in the remainder.
- 27 Waltz, *Handbook*, pp. 8–9; *TIP*, p. 7.
- 28 Waltz, *Handbook*, p. 9; *TIP*, p. 7.
- 29 ‘Theories do construct a reality, but no one can say it ever is *the* reality’. *TIP*, p. 9.
- 30 Waltz, *TIP*, p. 10.
- 31 Waltz, *TIP*, p. 10. It should be clear that, for Waltz, the familiar expression ‘naked eye’ is not to be taken literally, as if we do *not* subject perceptions to cognitive processing when we *are* not specifically forming a theory. As will become clear below, Waltz’s position is quite the converse: we are envisioning patterns whatever we do.
- 32 Waltz, *TIP*, p. 73, where Waltz considered ‘structures as causes’.
- 33 Waltz, *TIP*, pp. 99–101; Morton A. Kaplan, *Toward Professionalism in International Theory: Macrosystem Analysis* (New York: Free Press, 1979), pp. 36–48.
- 34 See Patrick James, *International Relations and Scientific Progress: Structural Realism Reconsidered* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002), pp. 44–49, for a good summary.
- 35 See James, *International Relations and Scientific Progress*, pp. 66–116.
- 36 For a critical treatment of the Humean view of causality and its influence on IR, see Milja Kurki, *Causation in International Relations*.
- 37 Waltz, *Handbook*, p. 3; *TIP*, p. 5.
- 38 Waltz, *Handbook*, p. 4; *TIP*, p. 6.
- 39 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, I, trans. W. D. Ross, 987a29–992a23, quoting 991a20–1, in Jonathan Barnes (ed.), *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), II, pp. 1561–8, at 1566. The Greek text is available online at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0051>.
- 40 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, V, 1013a26, in Barnes, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, II, p. 1600; ‘the form or the archetype, i.e. the definition of the essence, and its genera, are called causes’. Aristotle, *Physics*, II, trans. R. P. Hardie and R. K. Gaye, 194b27–8, in Barnes, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, I, p. 332.
- 41 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, VII, 1033b8, in Barnes, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, II, p. 1632.
- 42 Aristotle’s discussion of ‘why some things are produced spontaneously as well as by art’ is tautological: in some instances matter ‘can move itself’ while in other instances it ‘is incapable of this’; form drops out of the discussion. *Metaphysics*, VII, 1034a9–21, in Barnes, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, II, pp. 1632–33.
- 43 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, VII, 1033b8–10, in Barnes, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, II, p. 1632; emphasis in translation.
- 44 Waltz, *TIP*, p. 58.
- 45 Waltz’s, *Handbook*, pp. 56–64; *TIP*, 50–59; Kaplan, *Toward Professionalism in International Theory*, pp. 42–48.

- 46 Waltz, *TIP*, pp. 89–93, quoting p. 89. On Waltz and analogy, see Charles Jones, ‘Rethinking the methodology of realism’, in Barry Buzan, Charles A. Jones and Richard Little, *The Logic of Anarchy: Neorealism to Structural Realism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 178–99.
- 47 Waltz, *TIP*, pp. 89, 90.
- 48 Waltz, *TIP*, p. 91. Also see Jones, ‘Rethinking the methodology of realism’, p. 195.
- 49 See further Nicholas Onuf, ‘Institutions, intentions and International Relations’, *Review of International Studies*, 28 (2), 2002, pp. 211–28.
- 50 John Gerard Ruggie, ‘Continuity and transformation in the world polity: toward a neorealist synthesis’, reprinted in Keohane, *Neorealism and Its Critics*, pp. 131–57.
- 51 See especially Thomas J. Biersteker and Cynthia Weber (eds), *State Sovereignty as a Social Construct* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
- 52 I should be clear that I am endorsing the way Waltz’s model can be enhanced, and not Waltz’s model, whether enhanced or not. See *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), part II, for the structural model I prefer.
- 53 Waltz, *TIP*, p. 92.
- 54 Wight, *Agents, Structures and International Relations*, p. 97, quoting Waltz, ‘Reflections on Theory of International Politics’, p. 343.
- 55 Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, p. 51. See generally ch. 2.
- 56 Milja Kurki has suggested that positivists, being ‘at their core empiricists’ (or phenomenologists, see below), believe that ‘reality consists literally of our observations’ and therefore do not accept proposition 1 (personal communication). I would say instead that positivists, even Humean sceptics, are empirical realists: our observations represent reality insofar as they work for us.
- 57 See, for example, Gary King, Robert O. Keohane and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 109–10.
- 58 Robert O. Keohane, ‘Realism, neorealism and the study of world politics’, in Keohane, *Neorealism and its Critics*, p. 12; two references deleted.
- 59 Kurki, *Causation in International Relations*, p. 112.
- 60 Waltz, *TIP*, p. 89; two references deleted. Waltz probably meant nineteenth century.
- 61 Gary S. Becker, *The Economic Approach to Human Behavior* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).
- 62 Milton Friedman, *Essays in Positive Economics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 23.
- 63 Friedman, *Essays in Positive Economics*, p. 32.
- 64 Fred Halliday and Justin Rosenberg, ‘Interview with Ken Waltz’, *Review of International Studies*, 24(3), 1998, p. 380.
- 65 ‘Reflections on Theory of International Politics’, p. 336.
- 66 Friedman, *Essays in Positive Economics*, p. 32.
- 67 Aristotle, *Topics* I, trans. W. A. Pickard-Cambridge, 103b20–23. In *Categories*, trans. J. L. Ackrill, 1b25, Aristotle used the term *substance* (*ousia*, not be confused with matter, *hylē*) to lead off the list. See Barnes, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, I, p. 172, 4.
- 68 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St Martin’s, 1965), pp. 65–66.
- 69 On space and time, see Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. 67–91; on the pure concepts of synthesis, or categories, see pp. 111–19.
- 70 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. 133–38, 180–87, quoting 134, 184.
- 71 Joseph coined this formula, and characterized Waltz’s model as phenomenalist, in discussion of my presentation at Aberystwyth (I offered ‘models all the way back’ as an alternative formula). I have also relied on a personal communication from him.
- 72 Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, pp. 109–13, 130–35.
- 73 Friedman, *Essays in Positive Economics*, pp. 37–38, his emphasis; also see p. 40, and see further my *Republican Legacy in International Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University

Press, 1998), pp. 95–98. Kurki, *Causation in International Relations*, pp. 193 n6, 248, attributed ‘as if’ thinking to Waltz, although the cited pages in *TIP* do not actually use this formula.

74 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 347.

75 Halliday and Rosenberg, ‘Interview with Ken Waltz’, p. 379. In this context, I cannot say what Waltz may have had in mind in using the term *positivist*.

76 Rom Harré, *Varieties of Realism: A Rationale for the Natural Sciences* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 38. On the ‘common-sense’ of realism, see Devitt, *Realism and Truth*, ch. 5.

# 7

## 'BIG AND IMPORTANT THINGS' IN IR

### Structural realism and the neglect of changes in statehood

*Georg Sørensen*

#### Introduction

Where is the world headed?<sup>1</sup> Considerable confusion has surrounded this question since the end of the Cold War. There is a war on terror going on, but there is also a 'liberal moment', elements of a 'clash of civilizations', in some ways a 'coming anarchy', maybe a replacement of 'the end of history' by 'the return of history', perhaps combined with a 'new world order'; recently, a serious financial crisis has demanded our attention.<sup>2</sup> Wide-ranging political and economic change invites all kinds of speculations; exotic theories, not always substantially connected to the real world, compete for our attention. There appears to be no end to the novelties and transformations that we have overlooked. 'New, new, change, change'; academic reflections about IR 'are beginning to sound more and more like American political campaigns' one observer quipped already in 1994.<sup>3</sup>

Some would argue that this happens because major existing theories, including realism and structural realism (sometimes referred to as neorealism), have too little to offer when it comes to analyse and understand the most important aspects of current world politics. In particular, structural realism in the version of Kenneth Waltz may well be set on explaining 'a few big and important things'<sup>4</sup> but for all its focus on systemic balance of power and relative capabilities it is often charged with having failed to notice crucial developments. Is Waltzian structural realism a reliable guide to understanding current world politics? My answer will be a resounding 'Yes and No'. 'Yes' in the sense that structural realism has important insights to offer regarding the current balance of power and its effects on world politics. 'No' in the sense that changes in statehood have taken place with profound consequences for international affairs; these changes are not addressed by structural realism because, regardless of its preoccupation with sovereign states, structural realism does not have a developed theory of the sovereign state and can thus only address changes in

statehood with great difficulty. But let us begin with the strong side of structural realism, balance of power analysis.<sup>5</sup>

## Unipolarity and the balance of power

It is sometimes forgotten that structural realism is not a theory about everything, a point explicitly emphasised by Waltz.<sup>6</sup> It does not primarily aim to explain the demise of the Soviet Union, the emergence of international terrorism, or even the foreign policy of a certain state. Structural realism is a systemic theory about the way in which the systemic pressures expressed through the balance of power constrain the behaviour of states. Whatever change there may have been, structural realism emphasises basic continuity as regards the international system: it remains a system of independent political units with no central authority above them; therefore, the system is anarchic. States want to survive and take measures to defend themselves. But in a self-help system, 'many of the means by which a state tries to increase its security decrease the security of others'<sup>7</sup>. This is the security dilemma; states face it through instrumentally rational behaviour; they 'think strategically about how to survive in the international system'.<sup>8</sup>

Two basic options are available to states seeking security: preparing for self-defence and/or seeking security-enhancing alliances with others. Since most states face limitations in providing for self-defence, appropriate alliance strategies become crucially important. In this game, states are constrained by the distribution of power in the international system and the existing place of a given state within that distribution. That is because differences of power – the relative distribution of capabilities – is the most decisive determinant of state behaviour:

In a self-help system, states are differently placed by their power. States are self-regarding units. State behaviour varies more with differences of power than with differences in ideology, in internal structure of property relations, or in governmental form. In self-help systems, the pressures of competition weigh more heavily than ideological preferences or internal political pressures.<sup>9</sup>

According to structural realism, then, the pressures of competition depend on the distribution of power. In a bipolar system, with two leading states significantly more powerful than any of their competitors, these two states are compelled to be rivals. Lesser states will seek the alliance that offers maximum security and freedom of action. Systemic constraints on states are at their strongest when state survival and autonomy are at stake:

Realism can offer its most precise explanations when states have few options because they are narrowly constrained by the international distribution of power. Britain was bound to balance against Germany in both the First and Second World Wars because Germany was the one state that had the potential

to dominate the continent and thereby pose a threat to the physical security of the British Isles. After the Second World War, Western Europe was compelled to ally itself with the United States because of the size and geographical propinquity of the Soviet Union.<sup>10</sup>

There has not been great variation over time in the general pattern of power distribution in the international system. The sovereign state system was multi-polar – always with five or more great powers – until 1945. It was bipolar during the Cold War. With the demise of the Soviet Union, most structural realists tend to see the system as unipolar – with the United States as the single preponderant power.<sup>11</sup> Unipolarity is a difficult situation for structural realism, especially as regards the leading power. That is because the United States is sufficiently powerful so as to be unconstrained by the international system: the ‘pressures of competition’ are absent; no other state, or combination of states, can mount a serious threat against the survival and autonomy of the United States. In other words, the master explanatory variable of systemic competition explains very little in a situation of unipolarity.

What structural realism does suggest is that a unipolar state may be tempted to do either too much or too little. On the one hand, it can embark on ambitious expansionist policies, making its influence felt everywhere; on the other hand, it may become introvert and isolationist, preoccupied with its own domestic agenda. Any combination of those extremes is of course also possible. But whatever the unipolar power chooses to do, structural realism cannot offer an explanation for it:

in the absence of systemic constraints, states may follow a wide range of policies. The most likely explanation for the policies followed by a particular state would be the values embodied in the domestic political order, although other interpretations, such as the interests of particular bureaucracies or the unconscious psychological drive of specific leaders, might be equally compelling.<sup>12</sup>

Structural realism helps us understand why all these factors become relevant in the absence of serious systemic constraint; but the theory offers little help in understanding concrete policy choices: it is not a theory of foreign policy.

The twists and turns of a unipolar foreign posture was amply demonstrated by the administration of George W. Bush. The 9/11 attacks led to a global war on terrorism which was defined as the ‘Long War’ and was explicitly compared to the Cold War as ‘a similar sort of zero-sum, global-scale generational struggle against anti-liberal ideological extremists who want to rule the world’<sup>13</sup>. Most structural realists remain sceptical about the war on terror, because they consider the terrorist threat ‘pretty small beer’.<sup>14</sup> As it turned out, the invasion of Iraq could not be justified by Saddam Hussein’s possession of weapons of mass destruction; nor was it possible to demonstrate a connection between Saddam and international terrorism. Many structural realists think of the invasion as an ‘Unnecessary War’;<sup>15</sup> supporters of the administration, of course, claimed that it was doing exactly the right thing.<sup>16</sup>



In other words, neoconservatives had captured the foreign agenda. The foreign initiatives of a unipolar state can go in all kinds of directions in the absence of systemic constraints; 'I distrust hegemonic power, whoever may wield it', Waltz said, 'because it is so easily misused'.<sup>17</sup>

At the same time, according to Waltz and other structural realists, unipolarity will not last long, because rising great powers will be compelled to balance against the United States. Structural realist logic dictates that other states will balance against the US because offsetting US power is a means of guaranteeing one's own security: such balancing will eventually lead to the emergence of new great powers in a multipolar system. 'Realist theory predicts that balance disrupted will one day be restored . . . In our perspective, the new balance is emerging slowly; in historical perspective, it will come in the blink of an eye'.<sup>18</sup> The logic also dictates that NATO will not last and that there will be increased nuclear proliferation; intensified power competition will also emerge between European great powers. Leading structural realists (Waltz, Mearsheimer, Layne) share these predictions.<sup>19</sup> In sum, now that the common enemy has disappeared, the post-Cold War world order would be characterized by much intensified balance-of-power competition between 'old friends' both across the Atlantic and inside (Western) Europe – as anticipated by structural realist theory.

But this has not happened. Power balancing against the US has not taken place in a major way since the end of the Cold War. As a result, there have been various attempts to repair the structural realist balance-of-power argument in order to account for the new situation.<sup>20</sup> Some simply claim that 'international competition between great powers has returned with United States, Russia, China, Europe, Japan, India, Iran and others vying for regional predominance'.<sup>21</sup>

In sum, structural realism provides some direction as to where the world is headed. It helps us understand the uncertainties connected with unconstrained unipolar dominance and it rightly indicates that aggressive power balancing can still be found in the international system. But there is so much that is squeezed out of the picture because the theoretical straitjacket compels us to look at little else but the power competition between states; Waltz justifies this move in the name of parsimony, but this is probably taking the quest for parsimony too far. Structural realism is at its finest when the pressures of competition are narrowly constraining and compel states to particular modes of balancing behaviour. It is a much weaker theory when the pressures of competition are less constraining so that states are *not* compelled to certain forms of behaviour. This is not merely a problem connected to the above considerations on a unipolar power whose comprehensive dominance will probably soon be over. There is a large group of weak states that were never constrained by the system in the ways posited by structural realism; and there is a large group of liberal states that have gone beyond self-help in ways not considered by structural realism. These are dramatic transformations that have to do with changes in statehood. They are most certainly 'big and important things' in terms of grasping prospects for war and peace, for patterns of conflict and cooperation.

Structural realism has little to say about this because it lacks a developed theory of sovereign states and consequently a theory of changes in statehood; it is wedded to a view of sovereign states as ontological givens; states are by definition 'the constitutive components of the international system. Sovereignty is an order based on territorial control. The international system is anarchical. It is a self-help system'.<sup>22</sup> But states are not by definition constitutive components of the international system; they emerged to current dominance through a long process of historical development and change; they could eventually become irrelevant again.<sup>23</sup> Sovereignty is not necessarily based on actual territorial control; sovereignty is an institution that has changed and developed over time. The international system is not by definition characterized by self-help anarchy; there are softer varieties of anarchy where states are not compelled to self-help in the ways depicted by structural realism.<sup>24</sup> The following sections develop these claims, first in theoretical and then in empirical terms.

### **States are not 'like units' and anarchy does not always mean self-help**

There is an element of state theory in Waltz's structural realism. It proposes that states are compelled to become 'like units' according to the following logic: given that states as a minimum seek to survive, they are driven, under conditions of anarchy, to emulate the more successful states in the system. 'The theory says simply that if some do relatively well, others will emulate them or fall by the wayside'.<sup>25</sup> Socialization and competition are the two principal ways in which the anarchic structure affects states. Waltz draws an analogy between states in anarchy and firms in the marketplace: 'Those who survive share certain characteristics. Those who go bankrupt lack them. Competition spurs the actors to accommodate their ways to the socially most acceptable and successful practice. Socialization and competition are two aspects of a process by which the variety of behaviours and outcomes is reduced'.<sup>26</sup>

The problem is that socialization and competition do not work in the way stipulated by Waltz. For example, a pure Darwinian logic of selection cannot explain important aspects of European state formation. There is great variation in unit size; no convergence on an 'optimum' size has taken place.<sup>27</sup> As noted by Buzan *et al.*,<sup>28</sup> the balance of power can be constructed in such a way that it allows some weak states to persist. That means we would have to investigate the interests and preferences of great powers in any historical period to make inferences about the survival of states in the system. Such reasoning leads away from the structural realist view of an international system mechanically created by survival of the fittest and towards the notion of an international society of states containing members that are 'unlike units'.<sup>29</sup>

Furthermore, if competition and socialization are non-mechanical and instead take place through actors in social processes, it is necessary to make room for the possibility that some actors learn and adapt better than others.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, it must

also be expected that different domestic conditions, including different historical trajectories and varying political conditions, affect the process. The homogenizing effects of competition and socialization are limited in other ways. First, one approach to competing is to innovate, to develop new institutional and other solutions that are superior to existing solutions.<sup>31</sup> The special form of cooperation in the European Union, for example, can be seen as such an innovation which is neither a new regional state, nor a mere case of interstate collaboration. When such collaboration – including its modifications of the institution of sovereignty – is pushed as a European answer to international competition, this process has led to heterogeneity rather than homogeneity.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, the concept of socialization is not very clear. The scope and depth of socialization is not discussed by Waltz; who or what gets socialized to which extent (depth) and in which areas (scope)? States in the same system can be socialized to different roles ('trading states' or 'warrior states'); in short, competition and socialization may lead towards heterogeneity rather than homogeneity.<sup>33</sup> Marxist scholars (Amin, Trotsky) argue in favour of a logic of heterogeneity based on the notion of uneven capitalist development; English School scholars (Jackson) note that self-help can be circumscribed by international norms so that a struggle for survival is not on the agenda. If international norms delegitimize conquest by war and the change of borders without the consent of the parties involved, and if such norms are effective, then the argument about competitive struggle for survival carries little weight.<sup>34</sup>

If the international-political system is not always one of self-help struggle for survival, the argument that system structure is about power and nothing else drops out.<sup>35</sup> We should hold on to the structural realist idea that international forces help shape domestic environments and that domestic processes help shape systemic conditions, but we need a richer concept of international (and domestic) structure in order to better analyse the interplay between international and domestic and vice versa. This is a hazardous undertaking for sure; it risks conflict with the Durkheimian roots of Waltz's concepts;<sup>36</sup> more seriously, it risks creation of theoretical frameworks that are less parsimonious and therefore closer to rich description. But it is needed in order to understand where the world is headed.

I propose three elements of international structure: economic power, political-military power, and international norms. *Economic power* is possessed by those able to produce wealth in a world dominated by capitalism. Many structural realists will want to subsume economic power under other forms of material power; the two are linked, of course, but they are also analytically and institutionally separate. There is an economic logic of the market which is different from the political-military logic of the state. *Political-military power* is the 'realist' element in the international structure, that is, power embodied in control over political institutions and the means of violence. Finally, there are norms, rules, and ideas – in short *international norms*. As emphasized in recent constructivist analysis (and for quite some time by the English School), 'collective expectations about proper behaviour for a given identity' shape 'the national security interests or (directly) the security policies of states'.<sup>37</sup>

The distinction between these three elements is analytical. International norms, for example, affect and shape the exercise of political and economic power and are themselves affected by these forces. The three elements are considered equally important, that is, their relative influence must be identified in concrete, historical analysis. This view is, of course, different from structural realism, which will subject economics and norms to the logic of political and military power, and from constructivism, which will attach extraordinary importance to norms and ideas. It is also different from Marxist analysis, which will tend to subject political-military power as well as norms to the logic of economic power.

The aim is now to identify the ways in which the international structure affects the domestic structures of states and, in turn, to trace the effects of these domestic structures on the international system. Where Waltz and others argue that socialization and competition leads to 'like units' compelled to behave in certain ways, I argue that the international structure leads to *unlike* units, compelled to behave in certain ways.

### 'Unlike units' in the international system

The notion of 'unlike units' suggests major differentiation among states in the international system.<sup>38</sup> This needs to be captured without descending into pure description where every state is unique. Weberian ideal types are a way forward. I want to suggest three major modalities of state in the current international system; they are the *postmodern*<sup>39</sup> states in the OECD world, which have developed due to the changes that modern statehood has undergone since the end of the Second World War; the *weak postcolonial states*, most of them in Sub-Saharan Africa, which have emerged in context of decolonization; and the *modernizing states*, mainly in Asia, Latin America, and parts of Eastern Europe (e.g. Russia). Modernizing states combine features of modern, postmodern, and weak statehood in different mixtures.

The international forces identified above have helped create these states in combination with local conditions. Take the weak states. The normative framework concerning colonies changed dramatically in the post-Second World War period. Before the war, the possession of colonies was considered legitimate and even necessary, given the backward condition of the colonized areas. After the war, colonialism came to be considered fundamentally wrong, even 'a crime'.<sup>40</sup> The political-military power element of the international structure probably also played a role in decolonization; there was a new distribution of power in the world, where the major colonial motherlands no longer controlled the agenda concerning the Third World. Finally, economic processes in the capitalist world system were unfavourable to weak states. Jackson believes that normative change was the decisive element ('colonialism ultimately proved defenceless at the level of ideas in a world that was fundamentally different not materially, but normatively')<sup>41</sup> but it was not the only element.

Postmodern states emerged from the combined processes of economic globalization and political integration among the advanced states. According to Robert

Cooper, the world of postmodern states was in no small measure ‘invented’ by America.<sup>42</sup> It is certainly true that the United States took the lead in setting up the institutional framework of a liberal world order after the Second World War.<sup>43</sup> In Europe, the US pushed for cooperation between her West European allies. This in turn set a framework for dense economic interdependence in Western Europe and across the Atlantic. Stronger economic networks have then created an increased demand for more intense political cooperation.<sup>44</sup> These processes paved the way for the advanced states’ transformation from modern to postmodern statehood. Again, all three elements of international structure played a part in these developments: they were pushed by American power, but economic forces in context of globalization played a part too, and the normative frameworks of cooperation supported by international institutions have become increasingly important.

Table 7.1 portrays three ideal types of state plus a fourth (modernizing state), which is a combination of the three. Four major aspects of statehood are in focus: the political level (government); the level of national community (nationhood); the economic basis (economy) and the institution of sovereignty. The modern state ideal type is the conceptual basis for structural realist theory. Modern states are entities with clear boundaries in every respect: a national polity within a defined territory, a national economy unwilling to become dependent on others (‘nations pull apart as each of them tries to take care of itself and to avoid becoming dependent on others’).<sup>45</sup> In context of modern states, sovereign autonomy and self-determination is a core value: ‘Specifically, states seek to maintain their territorial integrity and the autonomy of their domestic political order’.<sup>46</sup> It is certainly true that effective states pursue a number of basic social values, including security, freedom, order, justice, and welfare.<sup>47</sup> But in the pursuit of these values they have often chosen to cooperate to an extent that has created a very high level of integration among them: economic integration, political integration and social integration. Postmodern liberal states have become so densely integrated that both territorial integrity and the autonomy of their domestic political orders are no longer upheld. In that specific sense, state survival is not the primary goal.

Intense cooperation has gone farthest among EU members, but the transformation towards postmodern statehood is relevant for other consolidated liberal democracies as well, even for the United States. At the political level, the US surely participates in the development of governance networks across borders. A recent analysis argues that the US ‘government networks’ are proliferating transnationally, ‘addressing the issues and resolving the problems that result from citizens going global’; this amounts to ‘a system of global governance that institutionalizes cooperation’.<sup>48</sup> Multilateral institution building is strong across the Atlantic; this can be seen as a case of liberal co-binding ‘locking each other into institutions that mutually constrain one another’.<sup>49</sup>

As regards the economy, the United States is intensely involved in the process of economic globalization. A substantial amount of trans-Atlantic trade is intra-firm, testifying to the integration of transnational production chains instead of traditional ‘shallow integration’ of arms-length trade between independent entities. The US

**TABLE 7.1** Four types of states

| <i>State dimensions</i> | <i>Modern state</i>  | <i>Postmodern state</i>   | <i>Weak postcolonial state</i>   | <i>Modernizing state</i>   |
|-------------------------|--|---|--|--|
| <i>Government</i>       | A centralized system of democratic rule, based on a set of administrative, policing and military organizations, sanctioned by a legal order, claiming a monopoly of the legitimate use of force, all within a defined territory.                                 | Multilevel governance in several interlocked arenas overlapping each other. Governance in context of supranational, international, transgovernmental and transnational relations. | Inefficient and corrupt administrative and institutional structures. Rule based on coercion rather than the rule of law. Monopoly on the legitimate use of violence not established. | The modernizing states combine features of the modern, the postmodern and the weak postcolonial state. |
| <i>Nationhood</i>       | A people within a territory making up a community of citizens (with political, social and economic rights) and a community of sentiment based on cultural and historical bonds. Nationhood involves a high level of cohesion, binding nation and state together. | Identities less exclusively national. Collective identities 'above' and 'below' the nation reinforced. Transformation of citizenship. Less coherent 'community of citizens'.      | Predominance of local/ethnic community. Weak bonds of loyalty to state and low level of state legitimacy. Local community more important than national community.                    | Brazil, China, India, and Russia are major examples of modernizing states.                             |

**TABLE 7.1** Continued

| <i>State dimensions</i> | <i>Modern state</i>  | <i>Postmodern state</i>  | <i>Weak postcolonial state</i>  | <i>Modemizing state</i>  |
|-------------------------|--|--|---|--|
| <i>Economy</i>          | A segregated national economy, self-sustained in the sense that it comprises the main sectors needed for its reproduction. The major part of economic activity takes place at home.            | National economies much less self-sustained than earlier because of 'deep integration'. Major part of economic activity embedded in cross-border networks. | Heterogeneous combination of traditional agriculture, an informal petty urban sector, and some fragments of modern industry. Strong dependence on the global economy.   | Additional examples include Argentina, Mexico and Venezuela in Latin America, as well as Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand in Asia. |
| <i>Sovereignty</i>      | National authority in the form of constitutional independence. The state has supreme political authority within the territory. Non-intervention: right to decide without outside interference. | From non-intervention towards mutual intervention. Regulation by supranational authority increasingly important.   | Constitutional independence combined with 'negotiated intervention' (donor control of aid, supervision by international society). 'Non-reciprocity' (special treatment of weak states because they cannot reciprocate). | Each of these countries contains a unique mixture of different types of statehood.   |
| <i>Country examples</i> | OECD states circa 1955   | OECD states today  | Most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa  | See above  |

ranks high on the globalization index,<sup>50</sup> holding place 7 in front of such countries as Germany and France. Finally, at the level of community there is a strong sense of common identity (both at the mass and the elite level) across the Atlantic, based on common values of liberal democracy, human rights, constitutional government, and market economies based on private property.<sup>51</sup>

All this matters little to structural realist analysis because they are all changes *in* and not *of* the system. Sovereign autonomy remains in place, so does anarchy, self-help, and the security dilemma. The view taken here, by contrast, is that changes in statehood imply systemic changes and changes in security dilemmas as well. Both the anarchic environment and the related security dilemma have particular features in the case of weak states and in the case of postmodern states. None of this plays a role in structural realist theory but they are a big and important thing for our understanding of where the world is headed.

### **Anarchy and security dilemmas in weak states and in postmodern states**

Weak postcolonial states do not face an international anarchy of self-help and mortal danger; they would be completely unable to survive under such conditions. In context of decolonization, weak states were exempted from that classical security dilemma. They do not face external threats that amount to a matter of life and death for the state. In general, both states and regimes are protected by international norms, backed by the great powers. There is a strong ‘territorial integrity norm’ – that is, ‘the proscription that force should not be used to alter interstate boundaries’,<sup>52</sup> which in a sense is a life insurance for weak states. Recolonization, annexation or any other format by which stronger states could take over weaker ones is out of the question. This does not guarantee that outsiders will refrain from pursuing their interests in weak states, of course; they did so during the Cold War, sometimes through intervention, and have done so later on as well; but never in a game of life or death for the weak state.

Unfortunately, the lack of external threat did not create domestic security for the peoples of weak states. Rather to the contrary: it created a situation where state elites could be self-seeking predators to the extent that domestic chaos and violent conflict could go to any extreme without paying the ultimate price: termination of the state. In most cases, post-independence leaders of weak states were not interested in the creation of strong states; they feared that the latter would represent a potential threat to their grip on state power. But in contrast to the colonial elites, the new rulers were not insulated from society: they were closely connected to it via ties of clan, kinship and ethnic affiliation. The network of clients had great expectations of benefits from the power over the state apparatus. This opened the door to clientelism, patronage, and nepotism.<sup>53</sup>

Basing themselves on patron–client relationships, self-seeking state elites lacked legitimacy from the beginning and faced populations divided along ethnic, religious and social lines. They created ‘captured states’ that benefited the leading strongman



and his select group of clients. The majority of the population was excluded from the system and faced a state that was sooner an enemy and a mortal threat than a source of protection and a champion of development.

The peculiar security dilemma in weak postcolonial states emerges from the paradoxical situation that weak states are relatively free from external threat, while simultaneously the weak state itself poses a serious security threat to major parts of its own population. In a basic sense, anarchy is domesticized: there is an international system of relative order with fairly secure protection of the borders and territories of weak states; and there is a domestic realm with a high degree of insecurity and conflict. The government's primary task ideally should be to provide security for its population, but instead it makes up the greatest potential threat to people within its boundaries.

Violent conflict in the world today is no longer mainly interstate war; it is intrastate conflict in weak states (sometimes with external participation). Since the end of the Cold War there have been a large number of such conflicts, while there have been extremely few interstate wars.<sup>54</sup> The distinctive security dilemma connected to weak statehood does not sit well with structural realist analysis because according to that analysis the state is the 'hard shell' which provides security in a self-help world. For people in weak states the shell is more frequently an insecurity container exposing them to lethal domestic danger. The dynamics of domestic insecurity and state failure in context of an international system which underwrites the continued right to sovereign independence of weak states is not easily analysed with the concepts and assumptions offered by structural realism.<sup>55</sup>

Let me turn to the issues of anarchy and security dilemma in relation to post-modern states. The relations between postmodern states amount to a liberal peace based on dense interdependence in economic and other areas, common institutions and common basic values. The EU community cannot be grasped with a notion of 'anarchy' because the community is densely framed by legitimate international and supranational authority. In such a framework, the use of violence to solve conflicts is no longer an option. The members have become a security community;<sup>56</sup> where states no longer resort to violence as a means of conflict resolution. It was indicated above that there is a transatlantic security community as well; in some areas the transatlantic relationship was cooled down after 9/11. President Bush's notions of 'preventive war' and 'regime change by force' were 'not considered legitimate means of international politics in Europe';<sup>57</sup> and there were other disputes over arms control, international human rights, and the environment.

But the transatlantic security community was not seriously harmed by these disagreements; it remained in place. Should the rift opened by such quarrels begin to grow, the security community may start to deteriorate. Such major deterioration would be indicated by changes on several levels, for example by institutional breakdown or crisis (in NATO and other transatlantic institutions) and by renewed economic competition and rivalry. There is little likelihood of that happening, because the security community is itself a structure that imposes pressures and constraints. It induces multilateralism rather than unilateralism. A continued outspoken

unilateralism will be costly for the US in terms of international legitimacy and loss of 'soft power',<sup>58</sup> even in terms of overall power.<sup>59</sup> This is the external pressure for adjustment; it combines with a strong domestic pressure in American politics, documented by the electoral victory of Barack Obama.<sup>60</sup>

The security community defined by postmodern statehood has thus developed to different degrees among different countries. Relations between North America and Europe are more institutionalized than relations between these areas and Japan; some countries are part of the institutional and economic networks without being fully democratic (e.g. Turkey); some countries are fully democratic without being deeply integrated in the institutional networks (e.g. Switzerland). The inner circle of the security community is EU–Europe, followed by Western Europe and Western Europe/North America, Western Europe/North America/Japan, and the members of the OECD.

But the forces of political economic integration are relevant elsewhere also, and that further reduces the relevance of the classical view of states threatening each other in an anarchic system. Two basic factors are in play; first, a general process of democratization and liberalization. There are now 90 'free' (that is, liberal democratic) countries in the world, up from 43 in 1972; they represent almost half of the world's population; established democracies are open towards cooperation and integration.<sup>61</sup> Second, modernizing states – such as China – know that the road to greatness involves focus on manufacture upgrading and deep involvement in economic globalization; by no means does it involve territorial conquest and militarization. In this sense, China is following the 'trading state' path set by Japan and Germany after the Second World War.<sup>62</sup>

These changes have been accompanied by increasing respect for the 'territorial integrity norm' mentioned earlier. According to Zacher's detailed analysis, that norm emerged in context of the League of Nations after the First World War; it was generally accepted as an element in the UN Charter in 1945, and it has been strengthened since the mid-1970s. From 1976 to the present, 'no major cases of successful territorial aggrandizement have occurred'.<sup>63</sup> One might argue that a future independent Kosovo will be a partial exception here, but still, the general respect for territorial integrity has increased.

My argument is not that the classical security dilemma<sup>64</sup> has been completely eliminated across the board. The argument is rather that: (a) the structural realist view posing the security dilemma as inescapable must be rejected; (b) the liberal view that the security dilemma can be transcended among liberal (postmodern) states is correct; (c) among many other states the security dilemma appears to have receded, although it may yet return; (d) in some regions the security dilemma remains active.

## Conclusion

To repeat: structural realism has important insights to offer regarding the current balance of power and its effects on world politics. In particular, it helps us understand why a unipolar power – in the absence of systemic constraints – may follow a wide

range of more or less unusual policies. But structural realism is less ready to analyse changes in statehood and their implications for international relations, as I have argued in detail in this chapter. States are not 'like units' and anarchy does not always mean self-help. A richer concept of structure which includes economic power, political-military power, and international norms gives us a better take on the ways in which international forces affect domestic structures of states. In particular, they help us detect the weak states in the Third World, and the postmodern states in the OECD world. International forces have helped create these states in combination with local conditions. And changes in statehood have implications for international relations. In weak states the classical security dilemma has been turned on its head: instead of domestic order and international threat there is domestic threat and international order. In postmodern states violent external threat has been dramatically reduced because these states make up a security community.

I support the structural realist idea that 'international' and 'domestic' are intimately connected, but I think that this insight requires a much more comprehensive study of the development and change of sovereign statehood than has been offered by structural realism. The modern state was fundamentally self-sustained. It was expected to supply a series of core values for its citizens. In the pursuit of these values the modern state faced a number of typical problems which have made up the subject matter of IR theory: first and foremost the problem of survival and security in an anarchic world where heavily armed states faced each other. Profound changes in statehood have helped create qualitatively different security dilemmas. New research questions concerning security as well as concerning the larger texture of international relations emerge from these developments. It would appear that purely systemic analysis (or purely domestic analysis) is not well suited for taking on the analysis of such changes. Instead, the international-domestic interplay should be at the centre of inquiry and we should ask questions, both about 'outside-in' and about 'inside-out' relationships.

In that sense, the development of a theory of the state that Kenneth Waltz called for is most probably going to require some larger modifications of structural realist theory. As part of this development, it seems to me, structural realism and the realist tradition from which it springs, will no longer dominate the study of IR. Realist theory helps us address some big questions in IR but is of little help in relation to a number of other big questions. From a theoretical point of view, the study of IR must be pluralist; the complex subject of international relations cannot be sufficiently explored from the viewpoint of one single theory or even one single theoretical tradition.<sup>65</sup>

## Notes

- 1 Thanks to Ken Booth and Barry Buzan for detailed comments on earlier versions of this chapter.
- 2 Major analyses of world order include: Francis Fukuyama, 'The end of history', *The National Interest*, 16, Summer 1989, pp. 3–18; Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Avon Books, 1992); Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of*

- Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996); Robert D. Kaplan, *The Coming Anarchy: Shattering the Dreams of the Post Cold War* (New York: Random House, 2000); Robert Kagan, 'End of dreams, return of history', *Policy Review*, August–September 2007, available at: <http://www.hoover.org/publications/policyreview/8552512.html> (accessed 11 November 2009); Anne-Marie Slaughter, *A New World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).
- 3 Stephen D. Krasner, 'International political economy: abiding discord', *Review of International Political Economy*, 1(1), p. 13.
  - 4 Kenneth N. Waltz, 'Reflections on Theory of International Politics: a response to my critics', in Robert O. Keohane (ed.), *Neorealism and its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 329.
  - 5 I have worked with the issues taken up here in previous writings; they include Georg Sørensen, 'Development as a Hobbesian dilemma', *Third World Quarterly*, 17 (5), 1996, pp. 903–16; *Changes in Statehood: The Transformation of International Relations* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001); *The Transformation of the State: Beyond the Myth of Retreat* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); 'After the security dilemma: the challenges of insecurity in weak states and the dilemma of liberal values', *Security Dialogue*, 38 (3), 2007, pp. 357–78; and 'The case for combining material forces and ideas in the study of IR', *European Journal of International Relations*, 14 (1), 2008, pp. 5–32. Some formulations in what follows draw on these works.
  - 6 Kenneth N. Waltz, 'International politics is not foreign policy', *Security Studies*, 6 (1), 1996, p. 57.
  - 7 Robert Jervis, 'Cooperation under the security dilemma', *World Politics*, 30, January 1978, p. 169.
  - 8 John Mearsheimer, 'The false promise of international institutions', in M.E. Brown, S.M. Lynn-Jones, and S.E. Miller (eds), *The Perils of Anarchy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), p. 337.
  - 9 Waltz, 'Reflections on Theory', p. 329.
  - 10 Stephen D. Krasner, 'Realism, imperialism, and democracy: a response to Gilbert', *Political Theory*, 30 (1), 1992, p. 40.
  - 11 Birthe Hansen and Bertel Heurlin (eds), *The New World Order: Contrasting Theories* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000).
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- 25 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979), p. 18.
- 26 Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 77.
- 27 Spruyt, *The Sovereign State*; Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990–1900* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1990).
- 28 Barry Buzan, Charles Jones and Richard Little, *The Logic of Anarchy: Neorealism to Structural Realism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).
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- 30 Spruyt, *The Sovereign State*.
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- 32 Heterogeneity at the system level, that is. Within the EU, the innovation has led to convergence, and therefore a deeper homogeneity than is found in the international system as a whole.
- 33 Waltz would probably subsume such heterogeneity under differences in power, and maintain that his theory is about great powers, not the small fry of the international system.
- 34 See Sørensen, *Changes in Statehood*.
- 35 Waltz, 'Reflections on Theory', p. 329.
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- 37 Ronald Jepperson, Alexander Wendt, and Peter Katzenstein, 'Norms, identity and culture in national security' in Peter Katzenstein (ed.), *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), pp. 33–75.
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- 40 Robert Jackson, 'The weight of ideas in decolonization', in Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane (eds), *Ideas and Foreign Policy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 111–39.
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- 44 Michael Zürn, *Regieren jenseits de Nationaalstaates: Globalisierung und Denationalisierung als Chance* (Frankfurt Main: Suhrkamp, 1998).
- 45 Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 143.
- 46 John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton, 2001), p. 31.
- 47 Robert Jackson and Georg Sørensen, *Introduction to International Relations: Theories and approaches, Third edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 3–6.
- 48 Slaughter, *A New World Order*, pp. 15–17.
- 49 Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry, 'The nature and sources of liberal international order', *Review of International Studies*, 25 (2), 1999, p. 182; see also Thomas Risse, 'Beyond Iraq: the crisis of the transatlantic security community', *Die Friedens-Warte*, 78, 2003, pp. 173–94.
- 50 See [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story\\_id=3995](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=3995) (accessed 12 November 2009).
- 51 Risse, 'Beyond Iraq'; see also Deudney and Ikenberry, 'The nature and sources'.
- 52 Mark W. Zacher, 'The territorial integrity norm: international boundaries and the use of force', *International Organization*, 55 (2), 2001, p. 215.
- 53 Robert Jackson and Carl Rosberg, 'The political economy of African personal rule', in David Apter and Carl Rosberg (eds), *Political Development and the New Realism in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994), pp. 291–325.
- 54 Lotta Harbom and Peter Wallensteen, 'Armed conflict 1946–2008', *Journal of Peace Research*, 46 (4), 2009, pp. 577–87.
- 55 See Sørensen, 'Development as a Hobbesian dilemma' for a realist take on security in weak states.
- 56 Karl W. Deutsch *et al.*, *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957); Emmanuel Adler and Michael Barnett (eds), *Security Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- 57 Risse, 'Beyond Iraq', p. 175.
- 58 Joseph S. Nye Jr., 'US power and strategy after Iraq', *Foreign Affairs*, 82 (4), pp. 60–73.
- 59 G. John Ikenberry, 'America's imperial ambition', *Foreign Affairs*, 81 (5), September–October 2002, pp. 49–60.
- 60 See also Edward Rhodes, 'American grand strategy: the imperial logic of Bush's liberal agenda', *Policy*, Summer 2003–4, pp. 1–14. Available at: <http://www.cis.org.au/Policy/summer03-04/polsumm0304-5.htm> (accessed 12 November 2008).
- 61 Arch Puddington, 'Freedom in the world 2007', available at: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=130&year=2007> (accessed 12 November 2009).
- 62 Richard Rosecance, *The Rise of the Trading State: Commerce and Conquest in the Modern World* (New York: Basic Books, 1986); *The Rise of the Virtual State* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).
- 63 Zacher, 'The territorial integrity', p. 237.
- 64 For a new in-depth analysis of the security dilemma, see Ken Booth and Nicholas J. Wheeler, *Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation and Trust in World Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).
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# 8

## RECKLESS STATES AND REALISM

*John J. Mearsheimer*<sup>1</sup>

Kenneth Waltz is the most important international relations theorist of the past half-century. He has written a handful of seminal works, a feat that few scholars achieve. He is best known for *Theory of International Politics*, which explains how systemic forces influence the interactions among states. In the preface to that book, he emphasizes that ‘a theory is never completed’, which is another way of saying that his theory – like all others – is not perfect and should therefore be open to criticism and refinement.<sup>2</sup> In keeping with that spirit, I will examine Waltz’s decision to reject the rational actor assumption, and raise some questions about how that move affects his theoretical claims.

It is sometimes said that realists axiomatically assume that states are rational agents. In particular, there are a number of scholars who insist that Waltz employs a rational actor assumption.<sup>3</sup> But these claims are not true. Some realists assume that states behave strategically, but others do not. The choice, of course, has significant implications for one’s theory. Waltz has repeatedly stated that his theory of international politics rejects the rational actor assumption. ‘Since making foreign policy is such a complicated business’, he writes, ‘one cannot expect of political leaders the nicely calculated decisions that the word “rationality” suggests.’ He puts the point even more bluntly when he writes, ‘The theory requires no assumptions of rationality.’ Or, as he said when pressed on the issue at the September 2008 Aberystwyth conference honouring him, ‘I don’t like the word rationality. I’ll admit it.’<sup>4</sup>

Instead, Waltz relies on ‘the process of selection’, which means that ‘those who conform to accepted and successful practices more often rise to the top’, while those who do not ‘fall by the wayside’.<sup>5</sup> In essence, Waltz’s theory is predicated on the assumption that states often ignore balance-of-power logic and act in non-strategic ways; when they do, the system punishes them. On the other hand, states that act rationally are usually rewarded for their smart behaviour.

Waltz's decision to eschew the rational actor assumption is an important matter to which scholars have paid little attention. Although I focus mainly on what that decision means for his theory, I also discuss how his thinking about state rationality is reflected in the works of other prominent defensive realists. Moreover, I consider how Waltz's theory differs from realist theories which are built on a rational actor assumption. However, I make no effort to evaluate those other theories, much less compare their explanatory power with his theory. I am interested in simply assessing Waltz's theory on its own terms.

The chapter begins with a synopsis of Waltz's theory of international politics. I then make the case that his decision to allow for considerable non-strategic behaviour among the great powers creates three problems for his theory. First, it means that he has little choice but to say that his theory is ill-suited to explaining state behaviour, and that its principal virtue is that it can explain 'international outcomes'. However, a theory that cannot account for the behaviour of the most important actors in the system is of limited utility for understanding international relations. Second, Waltz's claim that his theory is well suited to explaining international outcomes is not persuasive. Those outcomes, after all, are determined largely by the actions of the great powers, but if his theory cannot predict their behaviour, it is difficult to see how it can reliably predict the outcomes of their behaviour. Third, Waltz's assumption that states often behave foolishly leads to a more competitive world than pictured in his theory. Finally, I conclude by suggesting that the theory's strong suit is its normative value – its ability to explain how the world should work, not how it actually works, at least not how it has worked up to now.

## The Waltzian baseline

Waltz states clearly that his theory is built on two simple assumptions. First, he assumes that states are the key actors in international politics and they operate in an anarchic system, which is to say that no higher authority sits above them. Second, he assumes that the primary motive of states is to survive, which means that they seek to guard their sovereignty.<sup>6</sup> From these assumptions, Waltz deduces that states will care greatly about their position in the balance of power. Specifically, they will aim to be somewhat more powerful than their potential rivals, because that advantage would maximize, although not guarantee, their prospects for survival.

While Waltz recognizes that states will attempt to gain power at the expense of their rivals, nowhere in his work does he suggest that going to war is a smart way to achieve that goal.<sup>7</sup> In fact, he seems to think that offensive wars are a bad idea. For example, he writes, 'Force is more useful than ever for upholding the status quo, though not for changing it.' Indeed, he maintains that, 'Before 1789, war may have been "good business"; it has seldom paid thereafter.'<sup>8</sup> Not surprisingly, I cannot find evidence of Waltz endorsing the initiation of any past war. Although he admires Bismarck, he praises his behaviour after 1870, when he was committed to maintaining the European balance of power.<sup>9</sup> He says nothing, however, about



Bismarck's behaviour between 1862 and 1870, when he launched three wars that transformed Prussia into Germany and caused a fundamental shift in the European balance of power.

Waltz also stresses that great powers should not attempt to gain hegemony, either in their own region of the world or around the globe.<sup>10</sup> States should not attempt to maximize their share of world power, because the other great powers in the system will join together in a balancing coalition and stop them in their tracks. 'In international politics', he writes, 'success leads to failure. The excessive accumulation of power by one state or coalition of states elicits the opposition of others.' Therefore, 'states can seldom afford to make maximizing power their goal. International politics is too serious a business for that.'<sup>11</sup> Smart states, Waltz maintains, will not be overly ambitious and will seek to gain an 'appropriate amount of power'.<sup>12</sup> He does not discuss the wisdom of Imperial Germany's attempt to dominate Europe in the early twentieth century or the later attempts by Imperial Japan and Nazi Germany to dominate Asia and Europe respectively. There is little doubt, however, that these three aspiring hegemonies acted in ways that contradict how his theory expects rational states to behave.

Although states seek additional increments of power in Waltz's world, they have a much more important goal: to ensure that other states do not gain power at their expense. 'The first concern of states', he emphasizes, 'is not to maximize power, but to maintain their positions in the system.'<sup>13</sup> Balancing is the key strategy that states employ when a rival takes steps to increase its share of world power. Those states that feel threatened can build up their own capabilities – internal balancing – or they can join together and form a balancing coalition – external balancing. Waltz emphasizes that 'balances of power recurrently form', clearly implying that especially aggressive states should expect to be checked by their potential victims.<sup>14</sup> Of course, this is why it is a fool's errand to pursue hegemony, as Germany and Japan learned at great cost in the last century.

Waltz contrasts balancing with bandwagoning, which is an ill-advised strategy. Bandwagoning is where a threatened state joins forces with the threatening state to exploit other states, but allows its dangerous rival to gain a disproportionate share of the spoils that they conquer together. In essence, the bandwagoner permits its new-found 'friend' to improve its position in the balance of power, which is unacceptable in a realist world, because it puts the bandwagoning state's survival at risk. Thus, Waltz concludes, 'Balancing, not bandwagoning, is the behaviour induced by the system.'<sup>15</sup>

In sum, there are few incentives for states to act offensively in Waltz's world, mainly because threatened states are likely to balance effectively against aggressors, especially those bent on dominating the system. Thus, it is hardly surprising that Waltz does not think war has much utility as a strategy for gaining power, and that he believes states seeking hegemony are doomed to fail. The structure of the international system does not simply discourage aggressive behaviour; it pushes states to concentrate on maintaining their position in the balance of power. This is why Waltz is sometimes labelled a 'defensive realist', and why some say – to quote Randall Schweller – that his theory has a 'status-quo bias'.<sup>16</sup>

This rather benign realist world is based on the assumption that states behave rationally. In effect, Waltz is saying that there would be little conflict in the international system if great powers acted strategically almost all of the time.<sup>17</sup> Smart states simply would not cause much trouble. I believe that it is this part of his theory – let us call it the baseline – that leads some scholars to think that Waltz employs a rational actor assumption. But it is not the whole theory. Indeed, it is just a starting point, because Waltz ultimately assumes that states are not rational agents most of the time. In fact, he allows for considerable reckless behaviour by the great powers, which naturally leads to a more competitive and dangerous world, and which ultimately causes problems for his theory.<sup>18</sup>

### The rational actor assumption and state behaviour

What exactly does it mean to say that Waltz rejects the rational actor assumption? And how does that move affect the explanatory scope of his theory of international politics?

To assume that states are rational is to say that they are aware of their external environment and they think intelligently about how to maximize their prospects for survival. In particular, they try to gauge the preferences of other states and how their own behaviour is likely to affect the actions of those other states, as well as how the behaviour of those other states is likely to affect their own strategy. When they look at the different strategies that they have to choose between, they assess the likelihood of success as well as the costs and benefits of each one. Finally, states pay attention not only to the immediate consequences of their actions, but to the long-term effects as well.

Nevertheless, rational states miscalculate from time to time because they invariably make important decisions on the basis of imperfect information. They hardly ever have complete information about any situation they confront, which forces them to make educated guesses. This is due in part to the fact that potential adversaries have incentives to misrepresent their own strength or weakness, and to conceal their true aims. But even if disinformation were not a problem, states are often unsure about the resolve of opposing forces as well as their allies, and it is often hard to know beforehand how one's own military forces, as well as those of adversaries, will perform on the battlefield. Therefore, rational states sometimes guess wrong and end up doing themselves serious harm.

By assuming that states do not act rationally, Waltz is effectively saying that it is clear to him from the sweep of history that the great powers have frequently behaved in ways that make no strategic sense. These are not cases of states miscalculating because of imperfect information. These are cases of states acting foolishly by ignoring relevant information or paying serious attention to largely irrelevant information. 'Historically', he writes, 'dominant powers have behaved badly.'<sup>19</sup> Consequently, they 'lead troubled lives'.<sup>20</sup> Consider, for example, that Napoleonic France, Imperial Germany, Imperial Japan, and Nazi Germany all made a run at achieving regional hegemony, which contradicts his theory. Waltz also believes that

US foreign policy during the Cold War was often misguided.<sup>21</sup> Finally, history is littered with wars involving the great powers; ‘historians know’, he writes, that ‘war is normal’.<sup>22</sup> Yet he maintains that initiating a war to gain power is usually not a smart idea. Given this rich history of foolish state behaviour, Waltz cannot build his theory on the assumption that states are strategic calculators.<sup>23</sup>

States often pursue misguided foreign policies because domestic politics intrude into the policy-making process and trump sound strategic logic. For example, a powerful interest group or an individual with an ill-advised agenda might have undue influence on a country’s foreign policy. When states act in non-strategic ways, according to Waltz, they usually pay a price – sometimes an enormous price – because the international system itself tends to act in predictable ways and it has a way of punishing foolish behaviour. The cost of pursuing misguided policies creates powerful incentives for states to act rationally, and certainly some do, which is why Waltz believes that the system ultimately acts in foreseeable ways. But apparently not enough states act strategically to justify employing a rational actor assumption.

Given that states often behave in ways that contradict how his theory of international politics says that they should act, Waltz has little choice but to argue that it cannot explain state behaviour. For that purpose, he says that we need a separate theory of foreign policy, which focuses mainly on the domestic political factors – or what are sometimes called unit-level variables – that often drive state behaviour. Of course, that theory will also have to pay attention to the systemic imperatives that shape state behaviour, even though they are frequently overwhelmed by domestic political considerations. ‘A theory about foreign policy’, Waltz writes, ‘is a theory at the national level. It leads to expectations about the responses that dissimilar polities will make to external policies.’<sup>24</sup> In essence, it is a theory of domestic politics.<sup>25</sup>

Waltz has not laid out his own theory of foreign policy. In fact, he seems to think that it is not possible to develop a theory of foreign policy. He writes, for example,

If the aims, policies, and actions of states become matters of exclusive attention or even of central concern, then we are forced back to the descriptive level; and from simple descriptions no valid generalizations can logically be drawn . . . If the situation of actors affects their behaviour and influences their interactions, then attempted explanation at the unit level will lead to the infinite proliferation of variables, because at that level no one variable, or set of variables, is sufficient to produce the observed result.<sup>26</sup>

Waltz’s theory of international politics, on the other hand, is a systemic theory that is designed to explain international outcomes, not state behaviour. ‘It can describe the range of likely outcomes of the actions and interactions of states within a given system and show how the range of expectations varies as systems change.’ It can ‘account for similarities of outcome that persist or recur even as actors vary’, such as the formation of balancing coalitions against especially aggressive states. ‘We find states forming balances of power’, he writes, ‘whether or not they wish to.’

Moreover, it can 'indicate some of the conditions that make war more or less likely'. In particular, it can show why bipolar systems are more stable than multipolar ones. 'But it will not predict the outbreak of particular wars', because that requires a theory of foreign policy.<sup>27</sup>

In contrast to Waltz, realists who build their theories on a rational actor assumption do not need separate theories of foreign policy and international politics.<sup>28</sup> For these realists, great powers are expected to act in strategically smart ways most of the time. For sure, there will be occasional cases where great powers behave foolishly, but not like in Waltz's world where they often behave that way. For theorists who assume that states are rational agents, misguided policies are the exception, not the rule. Thus, their theories should do a good job of accounting for state behaviour as well as international outcomes. Unfortunately, it is not possible to come up with precise numbers that show how much suboptimal behaviour we should expect in Waltz's theory or in rival theories that employ a rational actor assumption.

Realists who assume that states act rationally recognize that domestic political considerations almost always influence a state's foreign policy. Unlike Waltz, however, these theorists maintain that unit-level factors usually do not have much effect on foreign policy-making, and when they do, they do so in ways that are consistent with balance-of-power logic. In other words, domestic political calculations are not likely to undermine sound strategic thinking, which often happens in Waltz's world. A case in point is Bismarck's foreign policy between 1862 and 1870. He was motivated in good part by nationalism – a unit-level ideology – to start three wars (1864, 1866, and 1870) that transformed Prussia into Germany. Bismarck's actions, however, made good strategic sense, as the German state that emerged in 1871 was more powerful than the Prussian state it replaced.

Still, there will always be a few instances where domestic pathologies lead states to act in suboptimal ways, thus contradicting any realist theory that is built on a rational actor assumption. No social science theory can account for every case; all theories face anomalies. But that cannot happen often if the theory is to be useful for explaining state behaviour. Colin Elman succinctly makes this point: 'Insofar as the number of inaccurate predictions does not grow too large . . . there is no problem with using neorealist theories to make foreign policy predictions.'<sup>29</sup> It is worth noting that instances where great powers act recklessly do not contradict Waltz's theory, because it does not claim to explain state behaviour.

As emphasized, Waltz's theory has a baseline embedded in it that explains how states would act if they were rational agents. But he ultimately chooses not to assume that states act strategically, because he sees too much evidence of suboptimal behaviour. This decision leads him to argue for a theory of foreign policy that can account for state behaviour and a separate theory of international politics that can explain outcomes. Let us now explore some consequences of this decision for his theory.

### A slender explanatory construct<sup>30</sup>

The first consequence of Waltz's decision to build his theory of international politics without a rational actor assumption follows from the previous discussion. It significantly limits the theory's explanatory power, as it cannot explain state behaviour – to include the outbreak of specific wars like the First and Second World Wars – which is a truly important part of world politics. For that purpose, he needs help from a theory of domestic politics, which is not a realist theory. Thus, to provide a reasonably comprehensive explanation of the workings of the international system, Waltz would need to combine his realist theory of international politics with a theory of domestic politics.

A number of prominent realist scholars – all of whom have been deeply influenced by Waltz – have written important books which combine realist and unit-level variables. Barry Posen, for example, maintains that states act according to the dictates of realist logic when other states seriously threaten them, mainly because their survival is at stake. But when states are operating in a relatively benign threat environment, the organizational pathologies of militaries take over and cause states to pursue suboptimal policies, which get them into trouble. Jack Snyder, on the other hand, maintains that whether or not states behave strategically is largely a function of interest group politics on the home front. Selfish interest groups, he argues, can usually sell their bad ideas in cartelized political systems, but have trouble doing so in democracies, which tend to pursue smart strategies. Finally, Stephen Van Evera argues that great powers often pursue misguided policies when their militaries have inordinate influence in the decision-making process. Professional militaries, he argues, purvey dangerous ideas as a means of protecting their organizational welfare.<sup>31</sup>

There is nothing wrong with advancing theories that include both a realist and a domestic politics component. Indeed, one could argue that such compound theories are better at explaining how the world works than straightforward realist theories. Whether that is true or not is irrelevant here; the key point for the issue at hand is that scholars who employ compound theories are effectively saying that there are serious limits to what realism can tell us about international politics. Realism needs considerable help from other bodies of theories if it hopes to explain state behaviour as well as international outcomes.<sup>32</sup> This point, of course, is at the core of Waltz's work.

There is an interesting paradox here. In *Theory of International Politics*, Waltz devotes considerable space to criticizing various international relations scholars for developing reductionist theories, which 'concentrate causes at the individual or national level', rather than systemic theories, which 'conceive of causes operating at the international level'.<sup>33</sup> His aim, of course, is to develop a systemic theory, and there is no question that his theory of international politics fits that bill. Nevertheless, it can only hope to explain a narrow slice of the story, which means that Waltz has to rely on reductionist theories if he hopes to explain other key parts of the story, such as state behaviour.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, he noted in response to a critic that, 'Any theory

of international politics requires also a theory of domestic politics, since states affect the system's structure even as it affects them.<sup>35</sup> Given all the brickbats Waltz hurls at reductionist theories in *Theory*, it is striking how important he believes they ultimately are for understanding international politics.

### The influence of behaviour on outcomes

Waltz would surely respond to this first criticism by acknowledging his theory's limited explanatory power, while emphasizing that it nevertheless tells us a great deal about an important set of phenomena: international outcomes. He writes, for example, 'Structures never tell us all that we want to know. Instead they tell us a small number of big and important things.'<sup>36</sup> In particular, he maintains that his theory is well suited for explaining when the international system is likely to be more or less prone to war and that when states become especially aggressive, balancing coalitions will form to check them.

There is reason to think, however, that omitting the rational actor assumption limits Waltz's theory's ability to explain even international outcomes. After all, these outcomes are largely the result of the collective behaviour of the world's great powers, and if those states frequently act in strategically foolish ways, how can we be confident that the theory will work as advertised?<sup>37</sup>

For example, why should we expect balancing to work effectively if states time and again do not act rationally? Why should we expect states in Waltz's world to take the necessary measures – either individually or collectively – to deter a potential aggressor and then defeat it if deterrence fails? He correctly points out that 'balancing is hard to do' under any circumstances, because it 'is costly, and the right time to balance is hard to calculate. Moreover, to jump on the bandwagon of an emerging power is tempting.' Waltz also notes that 'In the great-power politics of multipolar worlds, who is a danger to whom, and who can be expected to deal with threats and problems, are matters of uncertainty.' Of course, these considerations explain why balancing sometimes does not work even when all the great powers are acting rationally. But the likelihood of balancing failures is even greater – maybe much greater – in a world where the great powers are prone to behave in misguided ways.<sup>38</sup>

After all, is it not likely in Waltz's world that at least some states will misread the balance of power and either fail to balance or balance slowly against a serious threat? And is it not reasonable to expect some threatened states to bandwagon with an especially formidable adversary, thus undermining the efforts of the other great powers to check that dangerous foe? In short, how can we be confident that an effective balancing coalition will form against an aggressor when we cannot be confident that almost all of the threatened states will recognize the threat and act wisely?<sup>39</sup>

To illustrate the point, consider that the great powers failed to balance effectively against Prussia between 1862 and 1870, which allowed Bismarck to win three wars and markedly shift the European balance of power in Berlin's favour. More

importantly, given the consequences, consider the failure of Britain, France, the Soviet Union, and the United States to balance effectively against Germany during the 1930s, which allowed Hitler to conquer much of Europe. Waltz would surely concede that the balancing process before the Second World War was ineffective, but point out that a balancing coalition eventually formed and Nazi Germany was defeated.<sup>40</sup> That is true, but what if Hitler had not invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941? Germany would have still ended up controlling much of Europe, including France. Furthermore, Hitler came close to knocking the Soviet Union out of the war in the fall of 1941, in which case Germany would have gained hegemony in Europe.

Waltz would probably respond that it was not a near miss; Hitler was doomed from the start, because balance-of-power logic rules out any state becoming a hegemon. There is no question that it is difficult to achieve hegemony, for the reasons Waltz identifies, but it is possible. Stephen Van Evera notes that there are at least three cases where the preponderant actor in the system achieved hegemony because 'effective defending coalitions failed to form'.<sup>41</sup> They include the Roman Empire, the Ch'in dynasty in ancient China, and the United States in the western hemisphere during the nineteenth century. 'Balancing', Van Evera notes, 'can break down if appropriate conditions are absent.' One would think that an appropriate condition for balancing to work is that threatened states must act strategically in the face of reckless aggressors. But that is not always the case in Waltz's world.

It also seems reasonable to expect Waltz's theory to have trouble explaining when the international system is more or less prone to experience major wars, since wars are the result of decisions and actions taken by individual states and his theory cannot explain state behaviour. It could be the case, for example, that the main reason that the system is especially war-prone in a particular period is not because of its structure, but because of the presence of a handful of powerful states that are bent on pursuing reckless and dangerous foreign policies. If those same states were headed by smart strategists, peace would prevail.

To illustrate this point, consider Europe in the first half of the twentieth century, which was consumed by two of the deadliest wars in recorded history – the First and Second World Wars. One might argue that Waltz's theory – which holds that multipolar systems are more war-prone than bipolar systems – can account for this outcome. After all, Europe was multipolar between 1914 and 1945. In contrast, it is hardly surprising that the United States and the Soviet Union did not fight each other during the Cold War, since their competition took place in a bipolar system. Of course, Waltz would also argue that nuclear weapons played a key role in preventing a shooting war between the superpowers.

One problem with this line of argument is that Europe was multipolar between 1815 and 1914, and yet there were only four wars between the European great powers during this hundred-year period, and none was anywhere near as deadly as either of the World Wars. Plus there was no war between the European great powers from 1815 to 1853, and from 1871 to 1914. Those lengthy periods of relative stability, which occurred in multipolar Europe, compare favourably with

the 'long peace' of the Cold War. But this criticism is not important for the discussion at hand.

The more relevant criticism is that according to Waltz's perspective neither of those bloodbaths was the result of the initiating states acting in strategically smart ways. Imperial Germany and later Nazi Germany were both pursuing regional hegemony, which he says is a boneheaded policy that is doomed to fail. Their misguided behaviour must have been the result of poisonous domestic politics or delusional leadership, or both. Presumably, if Bismarck or some other savvy leader had been running German foreign policy in 1914 or 1939, there would have been peace, not the outbreak of cataclysmic wars, and Europe would have been at least as peaceful in the first half of the twentieth century as it was in the second half. Remember, Waltz believes that war hardly ever pays, which effectively means that in a world of rational states there should be no great-power wars in either bipolarity or multipolarity. Given this perspective, it is difficult for Waltz to argue that the multipolar structure of the system was the main reason why the first half of the twentieth century was consumed by two deadly wars. Instead, it appears that domestic politics accounts for this outcome.

In sum, the best way for Waltz to explain international outcomes is with his baseline, where states act like rational calculators to maximize their prospects for survival. His decision to move beyond that baseline and allow for substantial amounts of non-strategic state behaviour raises doubts about whether his theory can account for international outcomes, which is supposed to be its strong suit.

### **Reckless states and defensive realism**

Finally, there is reason to think that omitting the rational actor assumption creates incentives for all the great powers – including the strategic calculators – to act more aggressively than Waltz's theory seems to indicate. As noted, if every major state behaved rationally, which is to say, if every state acted according to the dictates of his defensively oriented baseline, there would be little great-power conflict and there certainly would not be any hegemonic wars in his world. Instead, states would mainly be interested in maintaining their position in the balance of power, which would not be an especially difficult task, given that their rivals would not have much opportunity to gain power at their expense.

Of course, Waltz allows that there will be misguided states that adopt highly aggressive policies; the especially powerful ones might even attempt to gain hegemony. But how does he think the strategic calculators in the system should deal with these reckless states? Although Waltz does not directly answer this question, it seems clear that he would advise the threatened states not to pursue aggressive policies, even if they attempted to do so in intelligent ways. The smart strategy would presumably be to balance against the troublemakers and make sure that they do not become more powerful and thus even more dangerous. In some cases, particularly those involving a potential hegemon, containment probably will not work and the strategic calculators will have to decisively defeat their imprudent foe.



That draconian outcome, however, would be the result of a war initiated by the misguided great power, not the result of a preventive war launched by one or more of the threatened states.

Waltz's views on how the rational agents in the system should act in the face of danger are not persuasive. Specifically, in a world that allows for considerable non-strategic behaviour by the great powers, those states that are rational have strong incentives not just to balance against potential aggressors, but also to take concrete steps to increase their own share of world power for purposes of self-protection. When confronting reckless aggressors, all the power a state can possibly get is 'an appropriate amount of power'. States in such a dangerous situation also have strong incentives to pursue risky – which is not to say foolish – strategies to gain additional increments of power. In fact, aggression may sometimes be the smart strategy for states simply worried about their survival in Waltz's world. Let me explain.

A rational state operating in a system where there might be powerful but misguided adversaries runs the risk that one or more of those reckless adversaries might attack it, possibly with the aim of annihilating it. Even if no rival great power seems to fit that profile at the moment, a state can never be certain that will always be the case, especially since reckless states are commonplace in Waltz's world. A savvy state will therefore be constantly thinking about how best to prepare itself for the possible appearance of a dangerous opponent.

Waltz would surely advise a threatened state to build a balancing coalition in the event that an aggressive adversary appears on the scene. However, there are two major obstacles to designing an effective balancing policy in his world. First, it is more difficult to make deterrence work when dealing with powerful and reckless states rather than strategic calculators. By definition, misguided states will sometimes pursue policies that violate strategic logic. That means that they might initiate a war in circumstances where a rational state would sit tight and not start a fight. This is because domestic political considerations are likely to push them to pursue strategies that are unnecessarily risky. They are also likely to have more than the usual amount of trouble that states face when they assess the balance of power as well as the systemic constraints and incentives facing them. After all, they are not strategic calculators.

Second, a threatened state cannot be confident that its potential balancing partners will be there for them in the crunch. There is always the possibility in Waltz's world that they might behave foolishly, in which case the balancing coalition would not come together in time to deter the dangerous aggressor. Again, one might concede that balancing is not always efficient and that war sometimes results, but argue that a balancing coalition would eventually come together and the threat would be contained or eliminated in the end. That is possible, maybe even likely, but not guaranteed. Moreover, the rational state would still have to fight a war to check the aggressor, and that undertaking would surely involve huge costs, which a prudent state would want to avoid.

Given the difficulties of making containment work effectively in a world where there might be a number of misguided great powers, the optimum way for a rational

state to protect itself is to be especially powerful. Striving to be the preponderant power in the system would appear to be a wise policy, although going so far as to pursue hegemony would be self-defeating according to Waltz's theory. Furthermore, that calculating state should be willing to pursue risky strategies to gain more power or retain the power advantage it has over other states. And there should be opportunities, even in Waltz's world, because he acknowledges that balancing is difficult under any circumstances. In particular, preventive war should be a serious option for a rational state facing a rising power that might one day foolishly aspire to be a hegemon.

The logic here is straightforward. The more powerful a rational state is relative to the other states in the system, the less likely it is that a reckless state would attack it. There is no guarantee that a state prone to foolish behaviour would not start a losing war, but it is less likely if that potential aggressor is badly outgunned. Plus, if deterrence fails and there is a war, the rational state would be well positioned to win it quickly and decisively. Finally, a rational state that is the preponderant power in the system is likely to be able to contain a misguided aggressor by itself and not need a balancing coalition to do the job. This takes the problem of inefficient balancing off the table, as the rational state no longer has to worry about unreliable allies.

To illustrate how this logic applies in the real world, consider the problem of balancing against Imperial Germany and Nazi Germany. According to Waltz, these two powerful states should not have started the two World Wars; but their leaders foolishly thought that they could gain hegemony in Europe. Britain, France, and Russia (later the Soviet Union) were all committed to containing Germany before 1914 and again before 1939. But their efforts to form a tightly knit balancing coalition against Germany failed both times and the result was the two World Wars.

Given the difficulty of containing a misguided Germany and preventing two cataclysmic wars, would it not have been smart for each of those threatened states to search assiduously for clever ways to increase their share of world power? Would they not have been more secure if each had been significantly more powerful than Germany in 1914 and 1939? Would that power advantage not have helped Germany understand that it was likely to lose a war it started with any of them, much less all of them? And would it not have freed each of them up from having to rely on the others to form a balancing coalition against Germany? Finally, would it not have been better for those threatened states if one or more of them had launched a preventive war against Nazi Germany in 1936? This would not have been an ideal outcome, as occupying Germany would have been difficult and costly. But it was certainly better than allowing Hitler to become much more powerful and eventually launch the Second World War.

This same logic applies to an important contemporary case: how the United States should deal with a rising China. According to Waltz, the United States would have little to fear from an increasingly powerful China if Washington could be assured that China would act like a rational calculator that understood that aggression rarely pays and that it definitely makes no sense to pursue hegemony. Unfortunately, there is a good chance – according to his theory – that China will pursue a misguided

foreign policy as it becomes more powerful, much the way Imperial Germany, Imperial Japan, and Nazi Germany did in the first half of the twentieth century. The consequences for the United States, not to mention China's neighbours, would be disastrous if that happened. Therefore, it makes good sense in Waltz's world for the United States to pursue risky policies to maintain its present power advantage over China. The alternative – allowing China to continue growing and relying on a balancing coalition to contain it down the road – might have dire consequences.

There is another reason why the great powers are likely to act more aggressively than Waltz's theory allows. If a savvy state acts more offensively to protect itself from a reckless adversary, there is a good chance that the reckless state will feel more threatened and respond even more aggressively. For sure, a rational state bent on defending itself will try not to needlessly provoke the reckless state. But that is not easy to do, because of the security dilemma, the essence of which is that the measures a state takes to increase its own security usually decrease the security of other states. Nevertheless, rational states will sometimes go on the offensive anyway because they believe that they can gain power at the expense of their reckless foes and thus increase their likelihood of survival.

The bottom line is that Waltz's decision to omit the rational actor assumption creates a more competitive world than he describes in his theory. He certainly allows for the presence of misguided great powers that might pursue reckless foreign policies. But he misses the fact that their presence – or possible presence – will push rational states bent on survival to adopt risky and aggressive foreign policies, which, in turn, will encourage the reckless states to behave even more aggressively. In short, while there is a status quo bias in Waltz's baseline, there is no such bias in his broader theory of international politics.

## Conclusion

Waltz readily admits that his theory does not explain state behaviour, but maintains that it can account for international outcomes. I have attempted to show that behaviour and outcomes are closely linked and that because his theory cannot account for state behaviour, it is not well suited to explaining international outcomes either. Given these limits, one might argue that its greatest value is as a normative theory, not an explanatory one. In other words, Waltz's theory is best suited to serve as a set of prescriptions for how states should behave so as to maximize their prospects for survival. As such, the focus would be on his baseline, which emphasizes that the world would be a much more peaceful place if states acted rationally. After all, savvy leaders would recognize that conquest does not pay, and that states usually pay a steep price when they allow domestic political consideration to overwhelm sound strategic considerations. Thus, there would be little incentive for states to cause trouble if they were sold on Waltz's baseline.

Charles Glaser, another prominent defensive realist, thinks about the theory he has developed in his forthcoming book in just this way. Surveying the historical record, he concludes that 'we have strong grounds for believing that states often do

not act rationally', and if 'states often fail to choose optimal policies, then a rationalist theory will not do well at explaining strategic behaviour'. Simply put, he sees too much suboptimal state behaviour to think that his theory can do a satisfactory job of explaining how the international system has worked up to now. Thus, he has opted to develop 'a normative theory – a theory of what states should do to achieve their goals, given the constraints they face – not a positive or explanatory theory of what states actually do'.<sup>42</sup>

Some might think that normative theories are inferior to explanatory theories and thus my suggestion is a backhanded way of damning Waltz's theory. But that conclusion would be wrong. Normative theories can be valuable tools for understanding the constraints imposed on states by the international system, whether or not states actually heed them, and they can affect how states interact with each other. The potential significance of normative theories is evident in the enormously influential writings of Adam Smith, especially his magnum opus, *The Wealth of Nations*. He made the case for free trade at a time when states around the world were wedded to mercantilist economic policies and showed little interest in pursuing free trade. Smith's theory was obviously not designed to explain how the world worked in his day, but instead was prescribing a smarter way for states to do business with each other, and ultimately make a better world.

One might make a similar case for Waltz's theory.

## Notes

- 1 I greatly appreciate the comments of Ken Booth, Colin Elman, Charles Glaser, Keir Lieber, Ido Oren, Brian Schmidt, Stephen Walt, and Alexander Wendt. I would also like to acknowledge the many smart comments I received at the 'King of Thought' conference at Aberystwyth on 15–17 September 2008 and at an 11 November 2008 workshop sponsored by the University of Chicago's Program on International Security Policy.
- 2 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979).
- 3 For examples of scholars arguing that realists assume states to be rational actors, see Jack Donnelly, *Realism and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 64–65; Robert O. Keohane (ed.), *Neorealism and its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 7, 167; Jeffrey W. Legro and Andrew Moravcsik, 'Is anybody still a realist?' *International Security*, 24 (2), 1999, pp. 6–7, 12–13, 18. For examples of scholars arguing that Waltz assumes that states are rational agents, see Colin Elman, 'Horses for courses: why *not* neorealist theories of foreign policy?' *Security Studies*, 6 (1), 1996, p. 43; Charles L. Glaser, 'Theory of rational international politics', unpublished book manuscript, University of Chicago, 3 April 2008, ch. 5, p. 4; Keohane, *Neorealism and its Critics*, p. 173. On realism's complicated relationship with the rational actor assumption, see Miles Kahler, 'Rationality in International Relations', *International Organization*, 52 (4), 1998, pp. 919–25; Randall L. Schweller and William C. Wohlforth, 'Power test: evaluating realism in response to the end of the Cold War', *Security Studies*, 9 (3), 2000, p. 70.
- 4 Kenneth N. Waltz, 'Reflections on *Theory of International Politics*: a response to my critics', in Keohane, *Neorealism and its Critics*, p. 330; Waltz, *Theory*, p. 118; comment made by Waltz at 'The King of Thought' conference, Aberystwyth, 17 September 2008. It is worth noting that Waltz maintains that, 'deterrence does not depend on rationality. It depends on fear.' Scott D. Sagan and Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate Renewed* (New York: Norton, 2003), p. 154.

- 5 Waltz, 'Reflections', p. 330; Waltz, *Theory*, pp. 92, 118.
- 6 Waltz, *Theory*, p. 121. For Waltz's theory to work, he also needs to assume that states can never be certain about the intentions of other states. See 'Conversations in International Relations – interview with John J. Mearsheimer (Part II)', *International Relations*, 20 (2), 2006, pp. 231, 240–41.
- 7 I cannot find any place in Waltz's work where he explicitly argues that states should seek to gain power at the expense of other states. I do think, however, that it is implicit in his work that states should seek to improve their position in the balance of power, although he makes clear that they should not attempt to gain too much power. The best discussion of his thinking about war is Waltz, 'The origins of war in neorealist theory', in Robert I. Rotberg and Theodore K. Rabb (eds), *The Origins and Prevention of Major Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 39–52. Waltz sometimes argues that wars are the result of uncertainty and miscalculation, which seems to imply that starting wars is a mistake. 'Origins of war', p. 47; Waltz, *Theory*, p. 168.
- 8 Waltz, *Theory*, pp. 190–91.
- 9 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Realism and International Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 54.
- 10 Waltz, *Theory*, p. 126.
- 11 Kenneth N. Waltz, 'Origins of war', p. 49; Waltz, *Theory*, p. 127. Also see Waltz, *Realism and International Politics*, p. 79.
- 12 Waltz, 'Origins of war', p. 40.
- 13 Waltz, *Theory*, p. 126.
- 14 Waltz, *Theory*, pp. 124, 128.
- 15 Waltz, *Theory*, p. 126. On balancing and bandwagoning more generally, see *Theory*, pp. 124–28.
- 16 Randall L. Schweller, 'Neorealism's status-quo bias: what security dilemma?' *Security Studies*, 5 (3), 1996, pp. 90–121. Although Schweller was the first person to describe Waltz's theory as having a 'status-quo bias', he does not argue it is due to balancing behaviour, as I do. Instead, he argues that it is because Waltz focuses exclusively on security-seeking states and ignores revisionist or greedy states. Also see Deborah Boucoyannis, 'The international wanderings of a liberal idea, or why liberals can learn to stop worrying and love the balance of power', *Perspectives on Politics*, 5 (4), 2007, pp. 710–11, 719; Elman, 'Horses for courses'; Keith L. Shimko, 'Realism, neorealism, and American liberalism', *Review of Politics*, 54 (2), 1992, pp. 281–301.
- 17 I disagree with Waltz on this important point. I argue that the international system would be competitive and dangerous even if all the states were rational agents. John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton, 2001). As discussed below, Waltz's world becomes competitive and dangerous once he takes away the rational actor assumption and allows that great powers often act recklessly. Indeed, I maintain that states become even more aggressive than he appears to recognize. I do not explore our difference, however, because the focus here is on examining Waltz's theory on its own terms.
- 18 Recklessness is not simply misguided aggressiveness. A reckless state can also fail to take the necessary steps to defend itself against a dangerous adversary.
- 19 Waltz, *Realism and International Politics*, p. xii.
- 20 Comment made by Waltz at 'The King of Thought' conference.
- 21 Waltz told Fred Halliday and Justin Rosenberg in May 1993, 'I've been a fierce critic of American military policy and spending and strategy, at least since the 1970s.' See 'Interview with Ken Waltz', *Review of International Studies*, 24 (3), 1998, p. 373. He elaborates his criticisms throughout this interview. Also see Waltz, *Realism and International Politics*, ch. 23.
- 22 Waltz, 'Origins of war', p. 44.
- 23 In *Theory*, Waltz emphasizes that socialization and competition are important processes that tend to produce 'sameness' among states. 'Competition', he argues, 'spurs the actors to accommodate their ways to the socially most acceptable and successful practices.'

- Socialization and competition are two aspects of a process by which the variety of behaviours and of outcomes is reduced.' *Theory*, pp. 74–77, 127–28. One might think that socialization and competition lead states to become increasingly rational over time in Waltz's world. But he does not make that argument; there is no evidence from his writings that he believes that states have learned to act more strategically over time. As he remarked at the 'King of Thought' conference, 'state learning is not impressive'. Of course, in a world where reckless states are commonplace, socialization might very well perpetuate the presence of reckless states, and undermine smart learning.
- 24 Waltz, *Theory*, p. 72. Also see pp. 67–73, 121–23.
  - 25 Waltz, 'Reflections', p. 340.
  - 26 Waltz, *Theory*, p. 65.
  - 27 Waltz, *Theory*, pp. 65, 69, 71, 125.
  - 28 Elman, 'Horses for courses', pp. 7–53. Also see Kenneth N. Waltz, 'International politics is not foreign policy', and Colin Elman, 'A response to Kenneth Waltz', in *Security Studies*, 6 (1), 1996, pp. 54–61.
  - 29 Elman, 'Horses for courses', pp. 33, 37, 40.
  - 30 This subheading is based on Waltz's comment that, 'A theory is not a statement about everything that is important in international-political life, but rather a necessarily slender explanatory construct.' Waltz, *Realism and International Politics*, p. 76.
  - 31 Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany Between the World Wars* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984); Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991); Stephen Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999). Neoclassical realists also combine realist and unit-level variables in ways that are consistent with Waltz's thinking. See Brian Rathbun, 'A rose by any other name: neoclassical realism as the logical and necessary extension of structural realism', *Security Studies*, 17 (2), 2008, pp. 294–321.
  - 32 The fact that realists like Posen, Snyder, and Van Evera incorporate domestic political factors into their theories leads Jeffrey Legro and Andrew Moravcsik to question whether they should be categorized as realists. 'Is anybody still a realist?' There is no question that these scholars have developed compound theories, not straightforward realist theories, and thus one can legitimately raise questions about whether they should be categorized as realists. But this is simply a labelling issue, which is of little consequence.
  - 33 Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 18. Also see p. 60.
  - 34 Nevertheless, Waltz does appear to make some policy predictions, as Colin Elman points out in 'Horses for courses', pp. 10–11. Of course, Waltz's theory allows for rational as well as misguided states. He is not saying that all great powers behave foolishly all of the time. Indeed, there have to be some savvy states if balancing coalitions are to form against especially aggressive great powers. His theory should be able to predict how those rational states will act, and he says as much when he writes: 'The theory leads us to expect states to behave in ways that result in balances forming.' *Theory*, p. 125. Also see pp. 71–72, 128; Waltz, *Realism and International Politics*, p. 167. It is the behaviour of reckless states that his theory cannot explain. And given how commonplace they are in his world, he has little choice but to concentrate on explaining outcomes, while maintaining that 'the behaviour of states and of statesmen . . . is indeterminate'. *Theory*, p. 68.
  - 35 Waltz, 'Reflections on *Theory*', p. 331.
  - 36 Waltz, 'Reflections on *Theory*', p. 329. Also see Waltz, *Theory*, p. 70.
  - 37 Two other studies which emphasize the connection between behaviour and outcomes in Waltz's work are Elman, 'Horses for courses', and James D. Fearon, 'Domestic politics, foreign policy, and theories of international relations', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 1, 1998, pp. 289–313.
  - 38 Waltz, *Realism and International Politics*, pp. xii–xiii; Waltz, *Theory*, p. 170.
  - 39 Randall L. Schweller, *Unanswered Threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), develops this line of argument.

- 40 Waltz, *Realism and International Politics*, p. xiii.
- 41 Stephen Van Evera, 'Primed for peace: Europe after the Cold War', *International Security*, 15 (3), 1990/1, p. 36.
- 42 Glaser, 'Theory of rational international politics', ch. 1, p. 24; ch. 2, p. 1; ch. 6, p. 1. Another option is to view Waltz's theory as a Weberian 'ideal type' that helps to make the workings of the international system intelligible, but does not explain how it works in practice. Stephen Turner, 'The Importance of social philosophy to Morgenthau and Waltz', in G. O. Mazur (ed.), *Twenty-Five Year Memorial Commemoration to the Life of Hans Morgenthau (1904–2005)* (New York: Semenenko Foundation, 2006), pp. 174–93. Also see Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 141.

## **PART III**

# Realist theories and human nature





# 9

## STRUCTURAL REALISM, CLASSICAL REALISM AND HUMAN NATURE

*Chris Brown*

### Reading Waltz in context

It is, I think, generally acknowledged that Waltz's major books are 'modern classics'. There are those who claim to see no merit in *Theory of International Politics* and to regard its success and influence as incomprehensible, but, for the most part, this is simply a way of expressing dislike of the ideas it contains rather than a genuine judgement as to its standing in the field.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, there are a great many writers who argue with greater sincerity that, while classic in its own terms, Waltzian realism has parted company with classical realism; indeed the name 'neorealism' implies discontinuity, and was coined (by Richard Ashley in 'The poverty of neorealism') precisely to make exactly this point – possibly why Waltz himself prefers the term structural realism.<sup>2</sup> What I will argue in this chapter is that this judgement, though in good faith, is misconceived, and that Waltz's theory has clear roots in the pasts of realism. In order to make this argument, I will first backtrack somewhat; if, as I suggest is the case, nearly everyone agrees that *Man, the State and War*<sup>3</sup> and *Theory of International Politics* are classic texts in so far as they demand that anyone involved in the field must engage with them – and most also consider that they are classics in so far as they set a standard of excellence in the field – then it is not unreasonable to treat them in the way that we might treat works of 'classical' political theory, and to pose the question 'how are classic texts to be read?'

Some post-structuralists/deconstructionists answer this question by offering what is sometimes called a 'symptomatic reading' – the locution is that of Louis Althusser, though the postmodern critic Frederic Jameson is a more accessible source. In *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson argues that interpretation

always presupposes, if not a conception of the unconscious itself, then at least some mechanism of mystification or repression in terms of which it would make sense to seek a latent meaning behind a manifest one, or to rewrite the

surface categories of a text in the stronger language of a more fundamental interpretive code.<sup>4</sup>

A symptomatic reading, in other words, pays attention to exclusions as opposed to surface content, and invites us to reconstruct the text to fill the gaps and silences that have been identified – an example is Ashley's 'Living on borderlines: man, post-structuralism and war' which offers a symptomatic reading of *Man, the State and War*, bringing out the ways in which the text escapes the control of the author, at some points privileging 'man', at others 'the state'.<sup>5</sup> There is something to be said for this approach; exclusions and omissions clearly are important and the author cannot be allowed to exercise authority over the interpretation of a text – but, still, such a reading is always open to the charge that one can make of any text whatever one wishes to. Rather than a symptomatic reading, but not wholly divorced from the idea, I would prefer to approach texts along contextualist lines – that is, we must read texts in contexts; more specifically, we must treat texts as speech-acts, and ask not just what the author is *saying*, but also what the author is *doing*.<sup>6</sup> Symptoms are important here, but what this centrally involves is an attempt to recreate as far as possible the context within which the author wrote; most of all, we must not assume that an author is addressing a timeless set of problems, much less a set of problems that we happen to be concerned with. This is a very difficult task, for two reasons. To illustrate the first, consider Quentin Skinner's work on Hobbes; a prodigious scholar with a command of the relevant classical and early-modern languages which has rarely been equalled, Skinner is probably familiar with everything that might have influenced Hobbes's work. Skinner's scholarship explicitly reflects this reading and so can claim to place Hobbes in his contemporary context – by following Skinner we can, in principle, see what worried Hobbes and what he wanted to do with his texts. It is impossible to imagine this kind of depth of context being available to even the most learned and industrious commentators on modern writers – we can do our best, but our best is bound to fall short of the ideal.

But there is a second, more intractable problem, which is perhaps best illustrated by a musical analogy. Consider the post-1945 movement towards 'authenticity' in classical music, the attempt to recreate the conditions under which works by, for example, Bach and Beethoven were first performed – the use of original or replica instruments, time signatures and notation of the period, smaller orchestras and choirs, different layouts, and, in general, original performance practice based on contemporary accounts. The result of this movement has been to change quite radically what we understand by the performance of, say, a Beethoven symphony or concerto – there is a great deal more lightness and speed than in the rather ponderous versions that used to be common, period pianofortes create a much crisper sound-world, and so on; even modern symphony orchestras usually pick up some of these changes. But what cannot be said is that we are hearing Beethoven's symphonies the way Beethoven's audiences would have heard them. The reason for this is quite simple – we cannot wipe out the auditory experiences of two hundred years by an act of will. Musically literate modern audiences will have heard Brahms, Wagner,

Bruckner, Mahler *et al.*, and even those who do not frequent the concert hall will have picked up much of the musical language of these composers via popular music (for example, the many film scores written by Mahler's pupils) and this will colour the way they hear Beethoven; there is no way this influence can be eliminated.

The analogy here is, I hope, clear. *Theory of International Politics* was published in 1979. This was before: the rapid expansion of rational-choice analysis and formal theory characteristic of much (US) IR of the last three decades; the framing of such work in terms of 'neorealism' and 'liberal-institutionalism' in the 1980s and more recent debates over relative versus absolute gains, offensive versus defensive realism, balancing strategies, soft-balancing and bandwagoning; the arrival also in the 1980s of the so-called Third Debate, with post-structuralist theory, Frankfurt-style Critical Theory, Feminism and Gender Studies making an entrance; the addition of Lacanian psychoanalysis to the list, and the rise of multiple varieties of constructivism in the 1990s and 2000s; the recent revival of interest in classical and Augustinian realism, and the Just War tradition; the attempt to establish Carl Schmitt as a canonical figure in IR; the emergence of debates on global distributive justice and more widely the emergence of international political theory as a recognisable sub-field; and, more parochially, the establishment of the 'English School' as a putatively distinctive approach to IR. And all this has been in the realm of theory – the end of the Cold War is also worthy of note. Of course, many of these developments were stimulated by readings of Waltz's work, or developed in opposition to such readings, but the musical analogy holds – post-Beethovenian musical language was, one way or another, heavily influenced by Beethoven's work but it still makes it impossible to listen to Beethoven with early nineteenth century ears. Similarly, how are we, in 2010, to read Waltz's work without everything that has happened since then in the field influencing our judgements?

The question seems to answer itself; it simply is not possible to achieve the kind of distance that this approach to reading a text requires – but we can at least make the effort, and, as it happens, I am well placed to have a shot at this task, because in 1980 I wrote a review essay on John Burton's *Deviance Terrorism and War* and Waltz's *Theory of International Politics*, which means I can at least see how I thought about things then, before all the developments listed in the previous paragraph.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, although about half of this essay is dedicated to Waltz, the main focus of the piece was on Burton, and my reading of Waltz was written *sine ira et studio* which makes it, I think, a more useful document. I may have been grinding axes, but not with a view to cutting down the author of *Theory of International Politics*.

Re-reading my own text for the first time in a quarter of a century has been an interesting experience. The first thing it brings to light is not strictly relevant to my topic here, but of interest nonetheless, and that is the focus on the nature of structure in the first response to Waltz's text. As is now almost entirely forgotten, the most immediate response to Waltz's argument (which was first presented in *The Handbook of Political Science* in 1975) was a philippic from Morton Kaplan, who took serious exception to Waltz's critique of his conception of a 'system'; Waltz distinguishes between the systems level properly conceptualised, and the level of interacting units,

and accused Kaplan of failing to grasp this distinction in his famous text *System and Process in International Politics*.<sup>8</sup> To my mind, and, given my interest at the time in structuralist and neo-Marxist theories of international relations this was an important issue to me, Waltz had much the better of this debate, but was vulnerable to the charge that his version of structure was no more capable of showing how structure was transmuted into process than Kaplan's. To make this point I refer in the review to the Marxist literature on the subject, and E.P. Thompson's recent critique of Louis Althusser, *The Poverty of Theory*;<sup>9</sup> Thompson suggests the need for 'junction concepts' and lays great stress on the notion of 'experience' – all this has quite a bit of resonance in terms of later constructivist thought, the agent-structure debate and, more recently, of critical realist theory; interestingly, Ashley would also use Thompson's work in his critique of 'the poverty of neorealism' in his 1984 *International Organization* article.

More to the point of this essay is the way in which in 1980 I understood Waltz's relationship with past realist writers. The simple answer is that I identified no great discontinuity here. Due attention is paid, of course, to the fact that Waltz presents his argument via a Popperian account of scientific method that certainly was not to be found in the classic texts of realism, and that he draws a distinction between reductionist and systemic theories that is somewhat different from that employed by those texts, in so far as they employ such a distinction at all, but these points of difference are outweighed by the substantial similarities between his overall conception of the world and that of the classics. He presents a strong and sophisticated account of the working assumption that states are unitary actors, a 'masterly' critique of theories of interdependence (and it is indeed masterly I should add, still very much worth reading – especially if you substitute 'globalisation' for 'interdependence' when the term appears in the text), and a subtle discussion of the balance of power – all key issues for the classical realists. Hence my judgement then that Waltz remains firmly in the 'conventional mainstream' of realist thought.

So many people have subsequently disagreed with this assessment that an element of auto-critique may be called for here. In my review I picked up Waltz's use of the terminology of a self-help system and his use of economic models, and I critiqued his assumption that he was producing explanatory (as opposed to 'metaphysical') theory – but I did not anticipate that these positions would transmute into the rational-choice versions of neorealism subsequently popular, that the behaviour of egoistic actors under anarchy (the 'anarchy problematic') would be studied by the use of increasingly complex econometric models. In my defence, I suspect Waltz himself did not anticipate this denouement – later statements and interviews suggests as much.<sup>10</sup>

Still, even accepting that there are elements of the argument I didn't pick up then, it still seems there is a big gap between my take on Waltz's position in 1980, and its later reception. How is this gap to be explained? In two ways, I think, one a matter of rhetoric, the other a matter of substance. The rhetorical points concern, first, the way in which authors present themselves, and, second, the way in which they critique others. As to the first point, there is a basic divide to be seen in

academic argumentation between those who in their own work stress continuity and those who stress rupture. In practice, we all stand on the shoulders of giants, as did the giants themselves and there is always a degree of continuity between even the most innovative work and past efforts in the field – the difference is whether, and to what degree, any particular writer is moved to acknowledge that link. Waltz in *Theory of International Politics* is closer to the latter camp than the former; he does not make positive claims for great originality, but neither does he emphasise the links between his work and that of earlier realists (as we will see below, *Man, the State and War* is a different kind of book, and there the problem is rather of discerning when Waltz is speaking in his own voice, and when he is reporting the work of others). There is an interesting contrast here with, say Robert Gilpin, whose response to being identified as a neorealist by Richard Ashley was to deny vigorously the charge, stressing the way in which he represents the rich tradition of political realism.<sup>11</sup> In the same collection Robert Keohane suggests that Waltz ‘[reformulates] and systematizes Realism, and thus develops what I have called Structural Realism, consistently with the fundamental assumptions of his classical predecessors’,<sup>12</sup> but, in his own response, Waltz simply does not address the issue of continuity with the past; he notes Richard Ashley’s charge that ‘[older] realists, despite some limitations, set a high standard of political reasoning from which I and other neorealists have regressed’, and he notes Keohane’s position cited above, but responds directly to neither charge.<sup>13</sup> Instead he simply sets out in detail and defends his original arguments.

This insouciance is, in many ways, admirable, but it does help critics to make the point that his work represents a clear break with the past, if they wish to do so – and they often will, because this leads into the second rhetorical point about the way in which academics criticise each other. A very familiar ploy here is the one Waltz notes in his comment on Ashley. In order to undermine the position of an author with whom one disagrees quite profoundly, it is helpful to be able to make the case that their position does not simply contradict one’s own but also that of some acknowledged past masters within the author’s own discourse. In effect, the ploy is to try to use people who would have been your enemies in the past to combat someone who is your enemy in the present. These figures from the past are praised for their sagacity in order to belittle the present foe.

In fact, of course, this is usually little more than a rhetorical trick. For example, Ashley refers favourably to E.H. Carr in the aforementioned essay as an example of someone who was steeped in the diplomatic culture of the past and who exhibited superior wisdom and judgement to Waltz, who has remained pretty firmly ensconced in the world of the academy. Actually, one cannot help feeling that Carr would have had very little time for the kind of post-structuralist work favoured by his admirer, and as to Carr’s allegedly superior judgement, I suppose support for the appeasement of Hitler before 1939, and of Stalin after 1945, could be described in those terms, but not by me – but this is beside the point, because Ashley’s invocation of Carr has very little to do with Carr’s work and everything to do with using him as a stick to beat Waltz with. Waltz spoils the game slightly by not responding, but

the very lack of a response does feed the predispositions of those who want to see him as instituting a rupture with the past.

But, although this is part of the story, it is only part of the story – there is another reason why Waltz's work is seen as instituting a serious break with the past and that concerns the much wider issue of how that past is understood. What actually are the roots of realism, and is Waltz's structuralist account actually out of line with those roots? The rest of this chapter is devoted to this question, and, as will become apparent, the matter hinges on an examination of the role of human nature in classical realist thought. The argument for a rupture between Waltzian neorealism and classical realism rests partly on the proposition that human nature plays less of a role for Waltz than it does for the classics – I want to suggest that while this is indeed the case, the way in which Waltz handles the issue of human nature can be related to both the major strands of realist thought, although, at the same time, it is distanced from them.

### Waltz, human nature and the roots of realism

The central problem for those who wish to argue against the discontinuity thesis is simply stated. Waltz is absolutely clear that what he is presenting is a theory of the international system, and that theories based on other levels, the individual or the state, that is, 'reductionist' theories, are profoundly unsatisfactory – and, on the face of it, most of the authors who are usually seen as the key figures in a genealogy of realism offer precisely such theories. The Machiavellian tradition of *raison d'état* is essentially based on a theory about the conduct of foreign policy and rests on a particular conception of what human beings are like; the Hobbesian account of an international 'state of nature' again rests explicitly on an anthropology, as the structure of *Leviathan* makes very clear; the Augustinian roots of Niebuhr's (and perhaps Morgenthau's) realism are firmly embedded in the notion of original sin and fallen man.<sup>14</sup>

Certainly one can find 'structuralist' positions in classical authors. Thucydides is an interesting case here. At the beginning of his history he states that the truest cause of the war whose story he is about to tell is 'the one least openly expressed, that increasing Athenian greatness and the resulting fear among the Lacedaemonians made going to war inevitable' which sounds like a clear structuralist argument (indeed an embryonic statement of the security dilemma).<sup>15</sup> He makes the structuralist case more explicitly later in the text when he puts into the mouths of the Athenian representative the proposition that they were compelled to expand their empire by necessity, and that the Spartans would have done the same had they been in a similar situation – the Athenian speech here is a nice early statement of the tenets of 'offensive realism'.<sup>16</sup>

Waltz understandably cites these and similar passages in Thucydides – the problem is one can find with equal ease statements in the same source which put the real driving force behind the war elsewhere. In the same speech cited above, the Athenians state,

[we] have done nothing remarkable, nor contrary to ordinary human behaviour, if we not only accepted an empire when it was offered but also did not let it go, submitting to the great forces of prestige, fear and self-interest – not as the originators of such conduct, moreover, since the rule has always existed that the weaker is held down by the stronger . . .<sup>17</sup>

Later, the Athenians make the same point in the ‘Melian Dialogue’:

According to our understanding, divinity, it would seem, and mankind, as has always been obvious, are under an innate compulsion to rule whenever empowered.<sup>18</sup>

Human nature is the driving force, to which individuals and peoples must submit, are under an innate compulsion.

The other classical writer favoured by structural realists is Rousseau, whose parable of the stag hunt is a staple for students of rational choice and the logic (and dilemmas) of collective action. Thus:

If it was a matter of hunting a deer, everyone well realized that he must remain faithfully at his post; but if a hare happened to pass within the reach of one of them, we cannot doubt that he would have gone off in pursuit of it without scruple and, having caught his own prey, he would have cared very little about having caused his companions to lose theirs.<sup>19</sup>

This is frequently used to illustrate the imperatives of a self-help system; ‘everyone’ would behave in this way because everyone would behave in this way – in other words we have to assume that if we don’t chase the hare someone else will, or if we are the only person who has seen the hare and so this does not apply, we have to assume that there may be another hare which someone else will see and chase, and so on. Either way the stag will be lost and we will go hungry, so we had better act now. But, again, it is the assumptions that Rousseau makes about human nature that do the work in this case; it is because human beings are unscrupulous in the pursuit of their own interests, and have little concern for the interests of others that they act in this way.<sup>20</sup>

In short, both Thucydides and Rousseau are ultimately offering first-image accounts of the motor of realism – and they are the best friends Waltz can find within the classical literature on the subject. For Augustine and the Augustinians, ancient and modern, political leaders are obliged to operate in a fallen world – the city of man as opposed to the city of God – and therefore must be wise and prudential (also, it is to be hoped, just) wielders of power, and this has nothing to do with structural features of the international politics of late antiquity (or the early twenty-first century); for Augustine, the hierarchical polity that was collapsing around his ears was as much a context as the incipient anarchical system being created by the barbarian tribes who were overrunning the Empire.<sup>21</sup> Again, Machiavelli simply



takes it for granted that politics is about the pursuit of interests; thus, the unstated assumption is that the Duke Valentino seeks to extend his power simply because he can – no further explanation is required – and if you want to preserve your power, or that of the city (*The Prince*) or to preserve republican forms of government (*The Discourses*) you had better be aware that this is the way of the world.

Without labouring the point further, I suggest a key feature of Waltz's thought and one that genuinely distinguishes it from classical realism, is that his theory of international politics is *not* derived from a theory of human nature, or even explicitly in reaction to a theory of human nature – indeed 'human nature' does not even appear in the index of *Theory of International Politics*. In *Man, the State and War*, of course, it does appear but of the three images set out therein, the first two ('man' and 'the state') are collapsed into one category in *Theory of International Politics*, 'reductionism'. Interestingly, when he wants to illustrate the follies of this way of thinking, it is to a theory of foreign policy (Lenin's theory of imperialism) that he turns, and not to a theory of human nature. Why so?

For the answer to this question we have to examine the complex picture of human nature actually presented in *Man, the State and War*. This is not as easy as it might be thought to be, because – unlike *Theory of International Politics* – this is a book that is built round a series of interlocking debates between different authors, classical and modern, and it is not always as clear as it might be what Waltz himself thinks on the subject. So, for example, at the outset of *Man, the State and War* we have the bald statement '[our] miseries are ineluctably the product of our natures. The root of all evil is man, and thus he himself is the root of the specific evil, war' (p.3) which Freyberg-Inan in her generally excellent book on realism and human nature takes to be an expression of Waltz's own view; she comments, correctly, that in this he sounds like St Augustine.<sup>22</sup> The problem is that while Waltz may indeed endorse this position, it actually occurs in the course of a discussion of precisely the Augustinian perspective that it is supposed to resemble, and it could well be (probably is) simply a summary of that position. If it is Waltz's view, then the use of the term 'evil' is interesting here, adding an unexpected theological dimension to what is otherwise, as noted above, a frequently expressed realist position, but, in any event, what is more significant is that it is clear from the rest of the book that Waltz believes that this sort of generalisation about human nature actually gets us nowhere, and a different kind of explanation for war is needed. Why? Given the general thrust of his argument elsewhere, one might have expected him to argue that because human nature is a constant it cannot explain war; war is the product of a particular set of social arrangements and must be understood in that context – reductionist theories will not do – and so we must move to the third image. Had he taken such a route he would have aligned himself with those realist writers who emphasise an unchanging human nature (Thucydides, Machiavelli and Hobbes) even if, unlike those predecessors, he doesn't think that ultimately this nature matters very much.

But, it seems, that this is actually *not* why he moves away from human nature. Rather, it is first, because, in any scientific sense, the content of human nature is

unknowable, but second, and more important, it is because, *contra* the position outlined above, human nature is actually a variable, not a constant. Thus,

[Because] of the difficulty of knowing such a thing as a pure human nature, because the human nature we do know reflects both man's nature and the influence of his environment, definitions of human nature such as those of Spinoza and Hobbes are arbitrary and can lead to no valid social or political conclusions.<sup>23</sup>

Here Waltz is discussing the critique of these accounts of human nature allegedly put forward by Montesquieu and Rousseau, but it is, I think, clear from the context that he is endorsing this position.<sup>24</sup> Reconstructing and rearranging his argument, it seems to be that while we humans do indeed have a nature, and, perhaps, judging from the existence of evil in the world, that nature is such that sometimes evil consequences flow from it, we can't actually specify this nature much beyond that, at least not in any scientific way, and, in any event, in practice, nature and nurture cannot be treated separately; therefore an emphasis on human nature gets us nowhere if we want to understand social phenomena.

This is quite a complex position, which touches base with the major strands of classical realist thought, but at a tangent. The initial emphasis on evil, if it were to be the case that this is indeed his emphasis, would link Waltz to the 'righteous realists', the Augustinian strand of thought identified by Joel Rosenthal, Alastair Murray and others.<sup>25</sup> But the Augustinians actually draw political conclusions from this position; their realism is a realism of prudence, where we are enjoined to question our own presuppositions and values (because we are fallen beings every bit as much as are our enemies), and to turn away from ambitious projects of social reform, which are doomed to failure because of the imperfect human material from which societies are constructed – human beings may strive to be moral (although, for Augustine, they can only achieve this status by God's grace, not by their own efforts), but collectivities will always be egoistic.<sup>26</sup> There is, I suspect, little here with which in practice Waltz would disagree (which is one of the reasons why Freyberg-Inan might be right in assigning the 'evil' statement to him) but he does not get to this position by the Augustinian route, even if he has the same starting point. From his perspective, and given his commitment to social science, and to a particular version of what social science involves, the Augustinian route leads into a dead end. In the terminology of *Theory of International Politics* this is metaphysics and he, Waltz, is engaged in science. One cannot build a model on this kind of foundation, even if the foundation is, in some sense, sound; Augustinian realism does not generate testable hypotheses and ultimately it remains a branch of *belles-lettres*. From a Waltzian perspective this is also, I think, the problem with Morgenthau's theory – Morgenthau wants to be objective and present scientific laws of politics, but his metaphysical commitments get in the way, although, for many, of course, it is Morgenthau's so-called 'metaphysics', his critique of positivism, as set out in, for example, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics* that is his most attractive feature.<sup>27</sup> In short,

Waltz is not an Augustinian realist, even if he shares some of the pessimism characteristic of that genre.

Neither does he follow Hobbes, Spinoza, Machiavelli *et al.* by rooting his theory in the drives produced by an unchanging human nature. But, again, there are points of contact with this strand of realism; he may not see human nature as constant, but he does, I think, share with these authors the view that the *interests* of states, which are ultimately generated by human nature, are, more or less, constant – the difference being that from his perspective these interests have to be seen as exogenous to a theory of the international system. States desire to survive and it is this desire which leads them to arms-race, or form balances or whatever; we don't need to ask why states desire to survive, they just do. From his perspective, to push the question further takes us into areas which it is not reasonable to expect a theory of the international system to be concerned with. It is this approach to interests – as constant but exogenous – which has dominated the thought of the 'rational choice realists' who have built on Waltz's work to construct modern neorealism by redefining the field as the study of how egoists pursue their exogenously given interests under conditions of anarchy – and indeed of their cousins, the liberal institutionalists who have offered a different reading of the possibilities of the anarchy problematic, but take the same view of interests, (or 'preferences' as Andrew Moravcsik would have it).<sup>28</sup> And, of course, it is this position that has been so effectively criticised by constructivist writers such as Friedrich Kratochwil and Harald Müller;<sup>29</sup> values and interests should not be taken as given but must be understood as produced in discourse, that is, produced in a relationship – as Kratochwil puts it, one root of the word 'interest' is 'inter-esse', 'the in-between of the me and the you'.<sup>30</sup> On this account, it simply isn't possible to produce a theory of international politics that is isolated from other levels of social and inter-personal interaction.

Still, without remotely wishing to suggest that Waltz is a proto-constructivist, it seems to me that there are elements of his thinking that would be rather more compatible with this critique than one might expect; the aspects of the work of the neorealists and liberal institutionalists criticised by Kratochwil actually owe more to the Hobbesian account of human nature than they do to the more nuanced story that Waltz has to tell. Indeed, when Waltz writes of man's nature interacting with his environment, one could almost imagine this thought being developed in the direction of Alexander Wendt's account of the different kinds of anarchy that might emerge in different kinds of environments<sup>31</sup> – but, of course, Waltz does not wish to go anywhere near that position, rejecting altogether any line of thought that relies on human nature. The point is that he excludes human nature because we can't (or at least don't) understand it, whereas the rational choice realists treat it as an exogenous variable because they believe that they do understand it, and that it generates interests, the nature of which can simply be taken for granted. But, on the other hand, for Waltz, although we can't (or at least don't) understand human nature, we do at least know that it is quite likely that 'our miseries are the product of our natures', which takes us back to Augustinian pessimism and away from both

the rational choice realists and the constructivists. Waltz's thought seems to oscillate between the Hobbesian and Augustinian poles, touching both while refusing to be identified with either.

Here, I suggest, is perhaps the most important, and certainly the most paradoxical, reason why Waltz is so difficult to relate to the roots of realism; it is not because he is totally separated from those roots, but because he is actually implicated in too many of them. Whereas we can settle for a Weberian (modified Nietzschean) reading of Morgenthau and, I would argue, perhaps controversially, a Hobbesian (out of Marx and Mannheim) reading of Carr, no such shorthand is available to us to summarise Waltz's position. Easiest simply to say that there is a rupture here, that Waltz really is the inventor of something called 'neorealism', a doctrine which has lost touch with past realist thought. Easiest perhaps, but inaccurate I think – better would be to say that finding a shorthand reading of Waltz that relates to the realist past is difficult because there is too much to say rather than too little.

Returning to the issue of human nature, so far I have tried to describe Waltz's position – but some degree of assessment of that position is also called for. Was he right to see human nature as essentially unknowable, and variable in its impact? When Waltz was developing his thoughts on structural realism in the 1970s, human socio-biology was in its infancy, and the first serious attempt by a scholar to talk about human nature in a scientifically defensible way – Edward O. Wilson's *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* – was as unpopular with biologists as it was with sociologists and anthropologists, and gave no reason for Waltz to change his judgement that there was nothing useful that a social scientist could say about the subject.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, the most trenchant critique of the scientific pretensions of socio-biology, by Marshall Sahlins, rejected the discourse on roughly the same, Durkheimian, grounds offered by Waltz for rejecting other kinds of 'reductionist' theories.<sup>33</sup> Since the 1970s, however, socio-biology, rebranded as 'evolutionary psychology', has developed in ways that are far removed from the simplicities of Wilson's work, and now, I believe, demands to be taken seriously.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, neuroscientists such as V.S. Ramachandran and Antonio Damasio are revealing ways in which human perceptions and behaviours are crucially shaped and determined by physical processes within the brain.<sup>35</sup> And, to complete the picture, many cultural anthropologists are now rejecting the politically correct relativism of their disciplinary forebears – perhaps rather disappointingly, it turns out that the 'coming of age on Samoa' was more or less like the coming of age everywhere else, and Donald Brown has proved that one can write a very substantial book full of 'human universals'.<sup>36</sup> Add all this material together and although we may not know of such a thing as a 'pure human nature', we (that is, the scientific community, broadly drawn) do know a lot more about the subject than we did thirty years ago. Does this have any implications for Waltz's position?

Scholars of international relations have been slow in coming to terms with this material, and probably the best-known work, by Bradley Thayer, is broadly supportive of rational-choice, game theoretic approaches.<sup>37</sup> More recent work, however, focuses on the ways in which choices are made that are not utility

maximising.<sup>38</sup> The results here are rather sobering; for example, there is good evidence that mentally healthy people tend to exhibit psychological biases that encourage optimism; such biases, known to evolutionary psychologists as ‘positive illusions’, may well have been adaptive in helping our ancestors to cope with hard times, but nowadays may serve instead to get us into trouble.<sup>39</sup>

It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of this work for international political theory, and I hope to write more extensively on this topic in the future, but obviously, any serious assessment would take us far beyond the scope of this particular chapter – still, it is interesting to ask whether, if it is indeed the case that we can now say rather more about human nature than we could in the 1970s, as I think it is, does what we can now say actually support the position Waltz took in *Theory of International Politics*? Was Waltz right to resist basing his theory on human nature? The answer, I think, is a tentative yes. Scientific work in this field has indeed identified biases in judgement, some of which are relevant to any theory of foreign policy behaviour – but, of course, Waltz had no intention of producing such a theory. At the macro level where he was working, the most relevant finding of the new learning is rather different. It is precisely that while there may be identifiable human behavioural biases and mechanisms that are the product of evolution and are constant across cultures and over time, the idea that human nature *as such* is a constant is not defensible. In the study quoted above, ‘positive illusions’ were present generally in all populations, but they varied in intensity as between individuals; mental states are important and, unsurprisingly, depressed people were less likely to have positive illusions than mentally healthy people; context is central – positive illusions are greater, for example, ‘in situations of ambiguity, low feedback, and where events are difficult to verify’; culture matters, ‘positive illusions are greater among Western (especially American) populations than Eastern populations’ (we might have guessed that one as well) and, finally, they vary according to regime type and decision-making process.<sup>40</sup> The point is that it is precisely *because* of these variations that it is possible to put together a theory which is intended to predict when positive illusions will be important – this is the goal of Dominic Johnson’s recent book.<sup>41</sup> If there were to be such a thing as a constant ‘human nature’ it could not be the basis for theory, which is precisely why Waltz was right not to construct his theory on such foundations, even if this meant that, in this respect, he had to part company with his illustrious forebears.

So, to return to the starting point of this chapter, how then should we read Waltz – as one in a line of realist theorists whose work is consistent with the ‘fundamental assumptions of his classical predecessors’ or as a figure who has broken with the past? The answer is ‘both and’ rather than ‘either or’. It is impossible to find any figure amongst the classics who puts things together in the same way that Waltz does, but most of the things that are put together by Waltz would be familiar to most classical writers. And this ability to take familiar material and to combine and recombine it is precisely why Waltz is an undisputed modern classic.

## Notes

- 1 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979). I am grateful to Kirsten Ainley, Kim Hutchings, George Lawson and especially Ken Booth for comments on earlier versions of this chapter; as always, I alone am responsible for errors that remain.
- 2 Richard K. Ashley, 'The poverty of neorealism', *International Organisation*, (38), 1984, pp. 225–86.
- 3 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959).
- 4 Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990) p. 60.
- 5 Richard K Ashley. 'Living on borderlines: man, poststructuralism and war', in James Der Derian and Michael Shapiro, eds, *International/Intertextual*. (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1989).
- 6 On this approach, see the discussion in James Tully, *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and his Critics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).
- 7 J.W. Burton, *Deviance, Terrorism and War* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1979). Chris Brown, 'International theory: new directions', *Review of International Studies* (7), 1981, pp. 173–85.
- 8 Morton A Kaplan, *Towards Professionalism in International Theory* (New York: Collier Macmillan, 1979), written largely in response to Waltz's chapter in Fred Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby, eds, *The Handbook of Political Science: Vol. 3 Macropolitical Theory* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1975).
- 9 E.P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (London: Merlin Press, 1978).
- 10 See Kenneth N. Waltz, 'Evaluating theories' *American Political Science Review* (91), 1997, pp. 913–18, and 'Realism revisited: an interview with Kenneth Waltz' (conducted by Fred Halliday and Justin Rosenberg), *Review of International Studies* (24), 1998, pp. 371–86.
- 11 See Robert Gilpin, 'The richness of the tradition of political realism', in Robert O. Keohane, ed., *Neorealism and its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).
- 12 Keohane, 'Theory of world politics: structural realism and beyond', in *ibid.*, p. 175.
- 13 Kenneth N. Waltz 'Reflections on *Theory of International Politics*: a response to my critics', in *ibid.*, p. 322.
- 14 Morgenthau believed that the objective laws of political realism are based in human nature (*Politics Among Nations*, Fifth edition, New York: Knopf, 1978), p. 4., and Ulrik Petersen makes a strong case for saying that he had a Nietzschean belief in the centrality of a human lust for power that seeks to dominate (Ulrik Petersen, 'Breathing Nietzsche's air: new reflections on Morgenthau's concepts of power and human nature', *Alternatives* 24.1, 1999, p. 83). Certainly Michael Smith is persuasive in identifying the Weberian roots of modern realism, and Weber was deeply influenced by Nietzsche; see Michael J. Smith, *The Realist Tradition from Weber to Kissinger* (Baton Rouge, LA: University of Louisiana Press, 1986). It is a moot point whether this is in any way compatible with Niebuhr's Christian (Augustinian) pessimism, although it produced similar results.
- 15 Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, trans. Steven Lattimore (Indiana: Hackett, 1998) p. 15.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 37.
- 17 *Ibid.* Different translations of the 'great forces' offer 'ambition' (Woodruff) or 'honour' (Crowley) instead of 'prestige'; these notions are so closely interwoven for the Greeks that distinguishing between them is genuinely difficult, although for us they point in somewhat different directions. R.N. Lebow lays stress on the importance of honour to the classical Greeks, but perhaps understates the importance of its synonyms, in his *The Tragic Vision of Politics: Ethics, Interests and Orders* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) and *A Cultural Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

- 18 Ibid., p. 298. Crawley is crisper and more poetic: 'Of the gods we believe, and of men we know, that by a necessary law of their nature they rule wherever they can.'
- 19 J.-J. Rousseau, *A Discourse on Inequality*, Part 2, trans. Maurice Cranston.
- 20 In fact, Rousseau distinguishes between pre-social human beings who exhibit *amour de soi* and socialised humans who are driven by *amour propre*; both are the forms of egoism, but the latter involves emulation, whereas the former is simply self-centred. Rousseauian realists would like states to be driven by *amour de soi* rather than *amour propre*.
- 21 James O'Donnell, *Augustine: A New Biography* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005) is a fascinating study which places Augustine's thought firmly in its historical context.
- 22 Annette Freyberg-Inan, *What Moves Man: The Realist Theory of International Relations and its Judgement on Human Nature* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2003) p. 73.
- 23 *Man, the State and War*, p. 166. Interesting that Spinoza is mentioned in this context; too little attention is paid by modern IR theorists to the work of Spinoza, who is coming to be seen as a much more central figure to the Enlightenment than was previously thought to be the case. See Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
- 24 In fact, I think that to Rousseau human nature was a little more important and a little less variable than this quotation would imply, but that's not the issue here.
- 25 See Joel Rosenthal, *Righteous Realists* (Baton Rouge, LA: University of Louisiana Press, 1991), Alastair Murray, 'The moral politics of Hans Morgenthau', *The Review of Politics* (58), 1996, pp. 81–107 and *Reconstructing Realism* (Edinburgh: University of Keele Press, 1996).
- 26 Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932).
- 27 London: Latimer Press, 1947.
- 28 Andrew Moravcsik, 'Taking preferences seriously: a liberal theory of international politics', *International Organisation* 51 (4), 1997, pp. 513–53.
- 29 Harald Müller 'Arguing, bargaining and all that', *European Journal of International Relations* (10), 2004, pp. 395–435; Friedrich Kratochwil 'Rethinking the 'inter' in International Politics' *Millennium* (35) 2007, pp. 495–511.
- 30 Ibid., p. 502, fn 13.
- 31 Alexander Wendt, 'Anarchy is what states make of it: the social construction of power politics', *International Organization* (46), 1992, pp. 391–426 and *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
- 32 Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975.
- 33 Marshall Sahlins, *The Use and Abuse of Biology: An Anthropological Critique of Sociobiology* (London: Tavistock Press, 1977).
- 34 The literature here is vast; for a recent, large-scale, authoritative and wide-ranging survey, see R.I.M. Dunbar and Louise Barrett, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of Evolutionary Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
- 35 Good popular introductions are V.S. Ramachandran, *The Emerging Mind: The BBC Reith Lectures, 2003* (London: Profile Books, 2003) and Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens*, New Edition (New York: Vintage Books, 2005). Interestingly, one of the few political philosophers to investigate this work is William Connolly, normally seen as a Foucauldian; see his *Neuropolitics: Thinking, Culture, Speed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).
- 36 On Samoa, see Dennis Freeman, *The Fateful Hoaxing of Margaret Mead* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999); Donald Brown, *Human Universals* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1991).
- 37 Bradley Thayer, *Darwin and International Relations: On the Evolutionary Origins of War and Ethnic Conflict* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2004).
- 38 See, for example, Stephen Peter Rosen, *War and Human Nature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005) and Raphael D. Sagarin and Terence Taylor, eds, *Natural Security: A Darwinian Approach to a Dangerous World* (University of California Press, 2008).
- 39 See Dominic D.P. Johnson, *Overconfidence in War: The Havoc and Glory of Positive Illusions*

(Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004). Nobel Laureate Daniel Kahneman comments 'the bottom line is that all the biases in judgment that have been identified [by evolutionary psychologists] in the last 15 years tend to bias decision-making toward the hawkish side'. Cited from Dominic D.P. Johnson, Rose McDermott, Emily S. Barrett, Jonathan Cowden, Richard Wrangham, Matthew H. McIntyre and Stephen Peter Rosen, 'Overconfidence in wargames: experimental evidence on expectations, aggression, gender and testosterone', *Proceeding of the Royal Society B*. 273 (2006) 2513–20.

40 Johnson *et al.*, p. 2518.

41 Johnson (2004). Interestingly, at an ISA Roundtable in San Francisco in 2008, Johnson presented this argument as a refutation of Waltz, whom he understood, wrongly I believe, to base his theory on the constancy of human nature.



# 10

## HUMAN NATURE AND WORLD POLITICS

### Rethinking 'man'<sup>1</sup>

*Neta C. Crawford*

The ideas about human nature that have dominated theories of world politics are largely those held by the classic realists: humans are assumed to be naturally aggressive, power-seeking, fearful, and rational. Our ontological assumptions and commitments determine not only our epistemology, but also our theories. Our theories then help us construct a world political reality in line with these assumptions and help shape the policies that we develop to cope with world political reality. It is vital, therefore, to make the assumptions and commitments of our ontology explicit. My focus here is on the assumptions about human nature that have shaped international relations theory.

My argument proceeds in three steps. First, through a focus on the work of Kenneth Waltz, I outline the assumptions about human nature that are common to realists and structural realists. To the extent that those assumptions are right, they help us understand international politics and make better foreign policies. Second, by attending to research in biology, in particular on the neuroscience of fear, I show that the dominant assumptions about human nature are at best incomplete and at worst mistaken. These assumptions have led to a self-fulfilling prophecy, where our assumptions about human natures have led us to make the very structures and practices that characterize Waltz's international system. The nature/nurture dichotomy – where human nature is understood as basic biology, and nurture, as social institutions and practices – is reformulated in favour of a more complete and complex understanding of *homo politicus*. Third, I then suggest an alternative interpretation of human nature and international politics. I have little space here to develop these arguments. Thus, this chapter simply gestures at what is possible.

## 'Man' in Morgenthau and Waltz

Realists ground their theories of international politics in explicit assumptions about human nature. As Hans Morgenthau says in *Politics Among Nations*, the first principle of political realism is that 'politics, like society in general, is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature . . . The operation of these laws being impervious to our preferences, men will challenge them only at the risk of failure.'<sup>2</sup> Classic realists like Thomas Hobbes and Morgenthau stress human aggressiveness, the drive for power, fear and rationality.<sup>3</sup> Further, they argue, we cannot trust others in an anarchic context. Human nature is fixed in Morgenthau's view. 'Human nature, in which the laws of politics have their roots, has not changed since the classical philosophies of China, India, and Greece endeavored to discover these laws. Hence, novelty is not necessarily a virtue in political theory, nor is old age a defect.'<sup>4</sup>

Morgenthau and other 'classic' realists believe that our political human natures are shaped by a drive for power: Morgenthau says, 'We assume that statesmen think and act in terms of interest defined as power, and the evidence of history bears that assumption out.'<sup>5</sup> Morgenthau believes that the 'essence' of national power is individual identification with the state. His argument is that the individual's drive for power is frustrated by the community, which leads individuals to 'identify . . . with the nation's struggle for power in the international scene.'<sup>6</sup> Because, Morgenthau argues, human nature is fixed, the dynamics of world politics are also fixed:

Though it is true that certain social arrangements and institutions have always existed in the past, it does not necessarily follow that they must always exist in the future. The situation is, however, different when we deal not with social arrangements and institutions created by man, but with those elemental bio-psychological drives by which in turn a society is created. The drives to live, to propagate, and to dominate are common to all men . . . The tendency to dominate, in particular, is an element of all human associations, from the family through fraternal and professional associations and local political organizations, to the state . . . In view of this ubiquity in the struggle for power in all social relations and on all levels of social organization, is it surprising that international politics is of necessity power politics?<sup>7</sup>

In these arguments, Morgenthau largely echoes the dominant reading of Hobbes, who says in *Leviathan* that humans have a perpetual and restless 'desire for Power after power'.<sup>8</sup> Realist readers of Hobbes emphasize his statements about a war of all against all and the necessity of force to back agreements – 'the bonds of words are too weak to bridle men's ambitions, avarice, anger, and other Passions, without the fear of some coercive Power.'<sup>9</sup>

Structural realists/neorealists like Waltz argue that appeals to human nature are unnecessary because structure determines the recurrent features of international politics. Thus, Waltz attributes the 'striking sameness in the quality of international life through the millennia' to the attributes of the system, the 'enduring anarchic character of international politics'.<sup>10</sup>

Waltz's discussion of human nature is rather nuanced and his use of the traditional image of human nature is subtle. In *Man, the State and War*, Waltz reviews assumptions about human nature that are commonly held by 'optimists' and 'pessimists'. Waltz concludes his consideration of the 'first image' by essentially arguing that we don't need to take a position on those assumptions.<sup>11</sup> Our human natures, he argues, are the same in times of war and in times of peace: 'the importance of human nature as a factor in causal analysis of social events is reduced by the fact that the same nature, however defined, has to explain an infinite variety of social events'.<sup>12</sup> If human nature is constant, and history is variable, then human nature cannot explain the variation:

Human nature may in some sense have been the cause of war in 1914, but by the same token it was the cause of peace in 1910. In the intervening years many things changed, but human nature did not. Human nature is a cause only in the sense that if men were somehow entirely different, they would not need political control at all.<sup>13</sup>

In *Theory of International Politics*, Waltz argues that to focus on unit level causes is to be 'reductionist'.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, Waltz is careful to say in *Man, the State and War*, that the 'human nature we do know reflects both man's nature and the influence of his environment' and he emphasizes the 'error involved in taking the social man as the natural man'.<sup>15</sup>

Yet, though Waltz argues clearly that it is not necessary to take a view of human nature to understand world politics, he does take one. I argue that Waltz's assumptions essentially amount to traditional realist assumptions. Specifically, in *Man, the State and War* and *Theory of International Politics*, Waltz's implicit assumptions about human nature – that our human natures are fixed, that we can't trust others, and that decision-makers are rational calculators who seek to promote their narrowly defined self-interests – are consequential for theorizing from a structural realist perspective. Thus, human nature, for Waltz, determines world politics as much or more than the anarchic structure of world politics.

How does Waltz take a view of human nature, even though he discounts the importance of human nature in explaining world political outcomes? First, he implies a fixed human nature. 'The assumption of a fixed human nature, in terms of which all else must be understood, itself helps to shift attention *away* from human nature – because human nature, by the terms of the assumption, cannot be changed, whereas social-political institutions can be.'<sup>16</sup>

More important is the content of this 'fixed' nature. In his interpretation of Rousseau's stag hunt, Waltz characterizes anarchy not simply as a context of uncertainty, but of distrust. He says, 'In cooperative action, even where all agree on the goal and have equal interest in the project, one cannot rely on others.'<sup>17</sup> Moreover, conflict is inevitable, in Waltz's view. He argues that 'Force is the means of achieving the external ends of states because there exists no consistent, reliable process of reconciling the conflicts of interest that *inevitably* arise among similar units in a

condition of anarchy.<sup>18</sup> In *Theory of International Politics*, Waltz says 'Nationally as internationally, contact generates conflict and at times issues in violence.'<sup>19</sup>

Further, explicating his arguments, Waltz appeals to earlier authorities who themselves held strong and particular views of human nature. 'From Machiavelli through Meinecke and Morgenthau the elements of the [*Realpolitik*] approach and the reasoning remain constant.'<sup>20</sup> Note, below, how Waltz leaps from assumptions about human nature (the 'rulers' interests' as defined by these theorists) to the nature of the state:

The elements of *Realpolitik*, exhaustively listed, are these: The ruler's, and later the state's interest provides the spring of action; the necessities of policy arise from the unregulated competition of states; calculation based on these necessities can discover the policies that will best serve a state's interests; success is the ultimate test of policy, and success is defined as preserving and strengthening the state.<sup>21</sup>

Neorealism thus substitutes the realist emphasis on a drive for power, with the assumption that 'states seek to ensure their survival'.<sup>22</sup> Yet, when Waltz says, 'success is defined as preserving and strengthening the state', he is implying an evolutionary theory of world politics: 'the international arena is a competitive one in which the less skillful must expect to pay the price of their ineptitude'. This is an evolutionary biology analogy in the sense that those states that fail to act appropriately do not survive.<sup>23</sup> The states that survive, and which ought to survive the 'unregulated competition' among states, are those most fit – most able to compete in the realm of power:

A self-help system is one in which those who do not help themselves, or who do so less effectively than others, will fail to prosper, will lay themselves open to dangers, will suffer. Fear of such unwanted consequences stimulates states to behave in ways that tend toward the creation of balances of power. Notice that the theory requires no assumptions of rationality or of constancy of will on the part of all the actors. The theory says simply that if some do relatively well, others will emulate them or fall by the wayside.<sup>24</sup>

In addition, although Waltz explicitly argues in *Theory of International Politics* that his theories do not depend on the assumption of rationality – 'Notice that the theory requires no assumptions of rationality or of constancy of will on the part of all the actors' – Waltz also argues that, 'Actors become "sensitive to costs" . . . which for convenience can be called an assumption of rationality.'<sup>25</sup> In his well-known 1981 *Adelphi Paper* on the spread of nuclear weapons, Waltz also presumes rationality: 'Where nuclear weapons threaten to make the costs of wars immense, who will dare to start them? Nuclear weapons make it possible to approach the deterrent ideal.'<sup>26</sup>

It should be noted, as an important aside, that though liberals and realists differ in important respects, they agree on the essentials in their understanding of human

nature. Even Immanuel Kant, a noted father of political idealism and the liberal institutional approach to world politics, echoes the dominant Hobbesian understanding of human nature.<sup>27</sup> In *Perpetual Peace*, Kant says, 'The state of peace among men living in close proximity is not the natural state; instead, the natural state is one of war, which does not just consist in open hostilities, but also in the constant and enduring threat of them.'<sup>28</sup> Kant believes that change is possible in world politics but he nevertheless describes human nature as depraved:

Given the depravity of human nature, which is revealed and can be glimpsed in the free relations among nations . . . one must wonder why the word *right* has not been completely discarded from the politics of war as pedantic, or why no nation has openly ventured to declare that it should be.

Kant answers his own question when he says,

The homage that every nation pays (at least in words) to the concept of right proves, nonetheless, that there is in man a still greater, though presently still dormant, moral aptitude to master the evil principle in himself (a principle he cannot deny) and to hope that others will also overcome it.<sup>29</sup>

In sum, Kant believes that it is possible to overcome our natural impulses, and to create a system for perpetual peace. For Kant, the mechanisms of change are inherent in 'nature'; indeed, he says that peace is '*insured* [or guaranteed] by that great artist nature'.<sup>30</sup> Specifically he proposes that the state of nature compels humans to form political communities for their own protection. Those communities must operate according to the rule of law. Reason dictates that the rule of law or right will come to dominate. Further, the 'growth of culture and men's gradual progress toward greater agreement regarding their principles lead to mutual understanding and peace'.<sup>31</sup> And finally, Kant argues, that the '*spirit of trade* cannot coexist with war'.<sup>32</sup> The mechanism for change is thus the interaction of the condition of war in the state of nature and human reason which will understand the limits of war and help humans create the mechanisms to overcome war and to achieve the rule of law among nations.

Note the different emphases, due to their different assumptions about human nature, that realists and liberals place on structure and agency. The realist and neo-realist approach, emphasizing constancy, stresses constant structure, or in evolutionary terms, a constant environment. The liberal approach, as I have described it in Kantian terms, emphasizing change, stresses human agency in the form of reason, as humans interact in and ultimately change structures. Not surprisingly, as Waltz described them in *Man, the State and War*, the realist approach is more pessimistic than the idealist approach.

Thus, although Waltz explicitly eschews a dependence on specific assumptions about human nature in constructing a theory of international politics, he has (albeit mostly implicitly) incorporated traditional realist assumptions about human nature

in to his theory of international politics. In sum, realist and neorealist (and many liberal) theories of world politics assume that,

1. There is a sharp distinction between nature and nurture; the influence of nature on nurture is one way – from nature to institutions.
2. Human nature is fixed; we can do little to modify our basic natures.
3. This human nature is characterized by the tendency to be hostile, aggressive, fearful and distrustful. We are rational power-seekers who are both tribal (saving our love, cooperation, and the occasional altruistic act for fellow members of narrowly defined in-groups) and slow to forgive. The conclusion is that this fixed human nature determines our culture and our political institutions. We are unlikely to moderate our aggressive natures for long.

This view of human nature has become so taken-for-granted that it is hardly questioned as the rock bottom of world politics.<sup>33</sup> There is very little research on 'human nature' in world politics because most of us think we know all we need to know. Policy-makers structure our institutions, including states, and policies, such as deterrence, in line with these taken-for-granted assumptions. Yet, as I suggested above and argue below, these assumptions are both inadequate and mistaken and therefore the theories and policy prescriptions that they imply may also be inadequate at best, and mistaken and dangerous at worst.

### **An alternative view of human nature**

I suggest three alternative propositions about 'man' that both challenge the dominant neorealist view and suggest alternative foreign policy conclusions. These propositions, rooted in a reading of research in biology, neuroscience and psychology, revise the traditional assumptions.

1. There is no sharp dichotomy between nature and nurture at a biological and social level. Biology and social institutions are co-constitutive. Moreover, simple genetic determinist arguments must be regarded with scepticism. The expression of any one gene is affected by both the other genes we inherit, and the epigenetic environment in which the genes are expressed. Indeed, the relationship between 'nature' and 'nurture' is so intertwined on a biological/environmental level as to be nearly indistinguishable. Single genes rarely determine our fates.
2. Humans (and other animals) are variable and revisable at a biological level: experiences can and do rewrite the biology of our individual brains.
3. It is not advisable to talk about human nature as a singular cluster of mostly negative *or* positive characteristics. Just as much as our biology can foster behaviours that are hostile, aggressive, fearful and distrustful, we can be gentle, cooperative, loving and trusting. Further, we are not simply self-interestedly rational or irrational/emotional: humans are reasoning. In other words,

emotions and cognitions cannot usefully be separated. Human reasoning abilities – our capacities to make arguments and evaluate them, to reflect, to build institutions, and to devise and revise practices – make us distinctly human and also distinctly flexible.

Abandoning the nature/nurture dichotomy, and a fixed view of 'human nature' necessitates the introduction of new, more precise, terms. There is human biology (which in many respects is not dissimilar from other mammalian biology) and human interactions and political institutions. Our biology, political cultures and institutions interact and this interaction helps constitute (and reconstitute) *homo politicus* – the human being in the political context. The next important question is, obviously, how these forces interact and to what effect – a question that can only be answered by examining specific biological-cultural-institutional complexes. Humans' basic flexibility allows us to make institutions and conduct social relations in many ways. Forces of path dependency and institutionalization have helped shape the particular historically specific conjunction of our current world. Although humans are well suited to detecting threats and feeling insecure, a more complete view of human capacity suggests that *political* systems rooted in fear and mistrust are not the inevitable outcome. The world could be otherwise.

It is extremely important for scholars of world politics to move beyond these simple starting propositions. The next step is to examine how our 'human natures' influence world politics and how our previous views of human nature have shaped the world we live in. In the next section I give an example of how a reformulated understanding of human nature could change our understanding of world politics. I focus on fear because it is so central to theories of world politics.

## The biology of fear

Fear is a private sensation that has biological correlates but is also influenced by our social construction of what we should fear or not fear. In other words, fear affects our brains at a neurochemical level, but our social understandings moderate and structure both our reactions to stimuli and what we do with fears.

A simplified schematic of the perception of potentially frightening stimuli and human response may be useful to illustrate both the co-constitutive relationship of nature and nurture, and our assumptions about fear in foreign policy. Fear begins with the perception of some potentially threatening stimuli. That perception has to be sorted and categorized. If we determine (and this occurs very quickly) that the thing we perceive is a threat, our bodies begin a familiar neurochemical and hormonal response which culminates in the release of adrenaline and other chemicals. The release of those chemicals can, in turn, rewrite the neurochemical circuitry of our brains – what neuroscientists call long-term potentiation and 'plasticity'.

Further, fear affects our cognitions and the construction of memory but it is also affected by our cognitions and memories. Fearful experiences understandably

prompt individuals to focus on potential future threats. The fearful are often less able to see how their defensive behaviour might be seen by others as threatening – enhancing what is already a cognitive bias. The fearful also have a decreased ability to calculate the costs, risks and benefits of options. And an individual's emotions and emotional states can be the basis of categorization: 'things that evoke fear, for example, may be categorized together and be treated as the same kind of thing, even when they are otherwise perceptually, functionally, and theoretically diverse'.<sup>34</sup> Further, an individual who has first-hand or bystander experience of a highly emotionally charged event will likely have strong *emotional* memories of that event. Brain research also demonstrates what we know historically: 'conditioned fear reactions are notoriously difficult to extinguish and once extinguished they can recur spontaneously or can be reinstated by stressful experiences'.<sup>35</sup>

For fear to be functional our brains have to do three things. First, we have to react to actual threats. Further, we have to stop the fear response once an actual threat has passed, so that our bodies can relax and recover. And third, we need to distinguish real threats from neutral or benign stimuli. If we can't do that, our brains and bodies are essentially worn down.

### **Fear, homo politicus and the structures of world politics**

I make three arguments about fear. First, fear is not only a private experience. Fear can be institutionalized within organizations and in patterns of action and reaction between groups, including states. Second, institutionalized fear may become a perceptual filter and analogical trigger. Third, fear may become a self-sustaining climate, almost independent of its initial trigger, and difficult to dislodge even in the face of evidence that the threat has diminished. These arguments suggest that the deliberate attempt to use fear as a precise tool of foreign policy is likely to be counterproductive and dangerous in the short and long term. Conversely, as Ken Booth and Nicholas Wheeler argue, trust can mitigate security dilemma spirals.<sup>36</sup>

To the extent that the anarchical structure of world politics, the lack of a hegemonic power to enforce law and order among nations, creates the conditions for insecurity, such insecurity also waxes and wanes. In other words, the structural condition of anarchy is relatively constant, but fear and the level of felt insecurity among nations is not constant. Foreign policy is, to a large degree, about managing threats and fear – we threaten others or make treaties with them so they will not become a threat to us.<sup>37</sup> How we think *and feel* about ourselves and others is as important as the brute facts of anarchy or military technology. Announced preventive war doctrines may initiate a spiral of anticipation.

Although neurobiologists and psychologists understand a great deal about the effects of fear on individuals, we know relatively less about the effects of fear on political communities and organizations. Yet in the same way that traumatic fear is written on the bodies of individual victims of violence – literally seared into the brain – traumatic fear can be institutionalized in foreign policies and military doctrine. This institutionalization of fear, in turn, writes itself on the bodies of



individuals. Thus, I am using biology, on one level, as both metaphor/analogy and on another level, to show how biology and institutional dynamics interact. The nature/nurture dichotomy is erased as we see biological and social processes interacting to produce a particular political reality.

While fear is a private experience, it is also socially (intersubjectively) moulded and understood. The things that individuals fear, what a group finds dangerous, and how they react to threats, is as much culturally and politically defined, as it is idiosyncratic to individuals.<sup>38</sup> The remarkable diversity in human cultures, long documented by anthropologists, extends to a diversity in responses to scarcity and threat.<sup>39</sup> Emotions can be heightened or soothed in particular cultural and institutional contexts. Emotions can also be mirrored in organizations, political climates, and the international system. These social mirrors can in turn affect individual emotions in an escalatory feedback loop of potentially spiralling fear. In sum, fear is not only written on our individual bodies, but through institutionalization, fear may also be written in the body politic, with political consequences.

Fear can be institutionalized. Institutionalization occurs when a group incorporates a belief, practice, or feeling into its repertoire of taken-for-granted knowledge of the world and its behavioural routines. During institutionalization, there is room for disagreement about how to deal with a novel problem. The organization then invents procedures for assessing and organizing knowledge about the problem (intelligence gathering and threat assessment in the case of terrorism). The organization then develops standard operating procedures and routines for handling challenges. While the response to a situation might have once involved a very conscious move to use new knowledge or been motivated by a fresh emotion or understanding, once institutionalized, the organization no longer makes an ad hoc response to a situation. The organization sees the world through the newly institutionalized beliefs and feelings, recognizes a situation as something that it should address and uses guidelines for data gathering and information processing that are appropriate for the newly institutionalized beliefs or feelings. Once the response is institutionalized, the problem and its solution are normalized and become, in many ways, taken for granted.

The routinized information sorting, categorization, and response becomes a schema that actors tend not to reflect upon. Schemas are 'higher order knowledge structures . . . that embody expectations guiding lower order processing of the stimulus concept.'<sup>40</sup> Like grammar, schemas provide a framework for understanding incoming information and quickly articulating a response. 'In particular, information that fits into existing schemata . . . is noticed earlier, considered more valid, and processed much faster than information that contradicts or does not fit into any particular schema.'<sup>41</sup> Schemas tend to persist, even in the face of disconfirming evidence. Individuals will often ignore information that disconfirms the schema, or in some cases, struggle to make the evidence fit the existing schema. Schemas may change if the incoming evidence is undeniably, unambiguously not in keeping with the existing schema. Thus, schema research supports what we know intuitively about individual decision-makers: humans classify evidence on the basis of abstract,

pre-existing notions, and they are loath to change their pre-existing beliefs, even when confronted with strong counter-evidence.<sup>42</sup>

Attention to threat and fear management can become an institutionalized schema within states as a pattern of organizing intelligence gathering, perceptions, and plans guiding action and reaction between individuals and groups. Fear is institutionalized, for example, in ethnic and racial conflicts when groups who are presumed to be dangerous to each other are physically separated. In colonial Africa, the colonizers' fear was institutionalized in pass books that the colonized had to carry so that the colonizers knew who someone was and whether they had good reason to be where they were at any given time. Fear is both acknowledged and institutionalized in the fence Israel built between Palestinians and Israelis in 2002 and 2003 and in the process of establishing and maintaining checkpoints along that border. In each case, an individual's fear may be both partly resolved and normalized through the practices of the organizations charged with meeting a particular threat. The fence allows some actual physical control of a perceived threat and the illusion of greater control. On the other hand, the passbook or the fence separating others may also remind, rehearse, reinforce and heighten the fear and animosity between groups. Institutionalized fear may increase individual fear.

Like pass books and fences, military strategies are the conscious and unconscious institutionalization of a fear schema. Defensive doctrines are certainly rooted in fear and uncertainty. Yet even ostensibly aggressive strategies may have fear at their root if the aggressive aim is rooted in a larger insecurity about the long-term intentions of the other. For example, fear of certain and imminent war led to the development of pre-emptive strategies in Europe prior to the First World War. In the late 1800s, Germany feared that war with Britain, France and Russia was likely, indeed inevitable. It was also common at the beginning of the last century to believe that the best defence is a good offence.<sup>43</sup> The German Chief of Staff, Alfred Von Schlieffen developed the Schlieffen Plan: Germany would pre-emptively strike France, and then after France was defeated in six weeks, Germany would strike Russia. The French also had an offensive strategy – Plan 17 – to avenge their losses in the Franco-Prussian war. So did Russia, which thought pre-emption could succeed quickly against both Austria and Germany. Assuming war was inevitable, all sides built up their military forces. When a crisis occurred (the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria in June 1914) reciprocal fear of surprise attack and mobilization escalated. Each side – Germany, France, and Russia – believed war was inevitable and thought they were doomed if their country did not go first. All mobilized in an action–reaction sequence. And when they went to war in August 1914, nearly all leaders thought pre-emption would work and that the war would be over in a few weeks or months.

Fear is institutionalized not only when it drives a state to adopt a particular military doctrine, but when actors assume that fear 'works' – that the deliberate production of fear in an adversary can coerce the target. Indeed, when not based on simple denial or destruction, military strategy rests on fear – the promise of more punishment withheld in exchange for capitulation or compliance. For example, the

German and Allied Second World War strategies of terror bombing depended on and institutionalized the production of fear in the belief that fear makes others capitulate. Fear did not work as the planners hoped in this case. More recently, the US Pentagon's 2003 'shock and awe' strategy for Operation Iraqi Freedom was as much about creating fear and paralysis among the Iraqi military as it was about using the US military's advantages in information, speed, and manoeuvre to destroy Iraqi military forces or kill their soldiers.

Fear was institutionalized in US deterrence doctrine during the Cold War – the US sought to prevent attack by threatening adversaries with a devastating response. Only the threat of 'mutual assured destruction', in this view, could assure US survival. Similarly, when Waltz argues that nuclear proliferation should not be feared, but rather 'welcomed' because it would help to 'maintain peace', he was assuming that the deliberate production of fear works and that fear ought to be institutionalized: 'Where nuclear weapons threaten to make the costs of wars immense, who will dare to start them? Nuclear weapons make it possible to approach the deterrent ideal.'<sup>44</sup>

Second, fear and other emotions may become perceptual filters and analogical triggers. Fear may be taken by institutional actors as information and become a filter by which organizations develop information about self and other. Just as individuals who are frightened tend to search for confirmation of their view of the threat and discount disconfirming evidence, organizations operating in a climate of fear may do so. Standard operating procedures may in fact put threatening information on the fast track. The biological and psychological tendency to recall previous fearful situations, and reason analogously, may magnify the effect of fear. Emotions may be translated into attributions of the other's hostile intentions. Fear thus affects the development and organization of institutional knowledge. Emotional relationships between groups and the emotional climate may be concretized in expectations and ways of creating knowledge.

United States threat-assessment practices during the post-9/11 era illustrate the institutionalization of fear in both perception and planning. The US shifted from basing military planning on a potential adversary's intentions and likely threats to the 'capabilities-based approach' where the US attempts to, 'anticipate the capabilities that an adversary might employ' and 'focuses more on how an adversary might fight than who the adversary might be and where war might occur'.<sup>45</sup> The 2001 United States *Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR)* suggests that the rationale for capabilities-based planning is uncertainty or 'unpredictability'.<sup>46</sup> The 'concept reflects the fact that the United States cannot know with confidence what nation, combination of nations, or non-state actor will pose threats to vital U.S. interests or those of allies and friends decades from now'.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, if one focuses on what might happen, the scenarios for threats proliferate. As General Ralph Eberhart, who was in charge of the military's role in homeland security in 2002 said of the possible threats: 'the list goes on and on. We can all envision the terrible things that might happen'.<sup>48</sup> Thus, according to the *QDR*, 'the United States will not be able to develop its military forces and plans solely to confront a specific adversary in a

specific geographic area. Instead the United States could be forced to intervene in unexpected crises against opponents with a wide range of capabilities.<sup>49</sup>

Third, fear may become a self-sustaining climate, almost independent of its initial trigger, and difficult to dislodge even in the face of evidence that the threat has diminished. Emotions and charged emotional relationships may permeate the international system and long outlast initial cause for emotions. There may, in other words, be an international climate of fear and distrust that is beyond any structural or material reasons that states may have to fear other states. Narratives of historical enmity, harm and aggression will rehearse and reinforce the fearful relationship. On the other hand, the development of a positive emotional relationship may help diminish or render irrelevant the structural reasons that states leaders might have to distrust and fear each other. In this way, emotions can create their own dynamics or spirals of action and reaction.

All these effects of fear are potentially self-reinforcing. Initial fear may be institutionalized in the adoption of an emotional attitude about the other and the world (that it is threatening), which affects the intelligence gathering and assessment functions of organizations. Fear may be institutionalized in the adoption of technologies (for example, fences, and x-rays of baggage at airports), rules of procedure and military doctrines that are intended to reduce the subjective sense of threat and fear, but which may simultaneously and inadvertently heighten fear. Fear determines perceptions and the responses to perceived threats (whether actual or anticipated).

The deliberate production of fear in others is thus very risky, and likely does not operate in the way that deterrence theory predicts. But the deliberate production of fear is at the root of deterrence and compellence strategies – the rational actor will respond to credible threats of unacceptable damage by backing down. In *Arms and Influence*, Thomas Schelling suggests that, 'it is the *threat* of damage, or of more damage to come, that can make someone yield or comply. It is *latent* violence that can influence someone's choice . . . It is the expectation of *more* violence that gets the wanted behaviour, if the power to hurt can get it at all.'<sup>50</sup> Sometimes.

The traditional rational actor view of foreign policy decision-makers de-emphasizes the effects of fear on perception, cognition and memory on the assumption that humans are rational calculators. Yet threats may only increase the adversary's intransigence precisely because the target is actually frightened and angry, triggering a cascade of both individual and institutional responses.<sup>51</sup>

Threats against authoritarian regimes may be particularly prone to failure because those regimes' decision-makers are already operating at high levels of fear. The already (individually and institutionally) fearful and stressed may be unable to distinguish between neutral and threatening stimuli and may overreact to either. Simple balancing strategies may be seen as aggressive, and trigger a hyper-active response. For example, Nikita Khrushchev may have felt the deployment of missiles in Cuba in 1962 was equivalent to the US missiles already deployed in Europe and a signal that US threats to Cuba would not go unanswered. Fear on the US side led to perception that the weapons were an immediate threat.

At the level of foreign policy decision-making, fear may not only increase the tendency to misunderstand or dismiss the adversary's point of view, but it may also cause decision-makers to ignore divergent interpretations or even stifle internal disagreement and dissent. Those who are afraid tend to look for more threats. The fearful tend to rally around the flag, and attempt to bolster their sense that they are right. Tom Pyszczynski, Sheldon Solomon, and Jeff Greenberg suggest that the fear of death can decrease tolerance for disconfirming information and views: 'when thoughts of death are salient, people generally become less tolerant and more hostile toward those with diverging views. In dozens of experiments, mortality salience has been shown to lead to more negative evaluations of those with different political orientations and attitudes toward a diverse array of subjects.'<sup>52</sup>

'Groupthink', a tendency to value consensus over critical thinking and an unquestioning adherence to the beliefs and decisions of the group – rises when actors are gripped by fear. When groupthink occurs, group members' 'striving for unanimity override[s] their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action' and leads to a 'deterioration in mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgment'.<sup>53</sup> To the extent that groups are already ethnocentric, nationalist and militarist, fear will likely magnify the salience of those beliefs and their policy impact.<sup>54</sup> Those who question the worldview dominant in strongly identified groups will be viewed negatively.<sup>55</sup>

Focusing on fear (and anger) may suggest why some regions seem to have long periods of war and crisis. Each crisis feeds the spiral of fear and distrust, and generations may grow up primed to fear their neighbours. Protracted, intergenerational conflicts are probably those where the baseline of underlying biology has shifted toward hyper-arousal among elite decision-makers on both sides, at the same time that fear becomes institutionalized in a positive feedback loop that is difficult to break or mitigate. Individual and group perceptions of repeated insults lead to anger which tends, like fear, to decrease the quality of information processing, while at the same time increasing group confidence and the willingness to take risks.<sup>56</sup> As Booth and Wheeler argue, security dilemmas are both about interpreting the other's motives, intentions and capabilities and about determining a response.<sup>57</sup> Fear thus keeps active security dilemma action-reaction dynamics that produce a spiral of mutual hostility and escalation.

How can foreign policy decision-makers ameliorate the deleterious effects of individual and institutionalized fear? At the organizational level, intelligence that disconfirms potentially threatening information that will induce fear should be forwarded alongside the threatening information. Decision-makers should be reminded not to discount the disconfirming evidence and organizations should be tasked with looking for non-threatening cues.

Fear is obviously not the only important emotional relationship between groups or states. The degree of empathy and trust that groups feel toward one another may account for the quality of their relationship. Richard Rorty has argued that dehumanization accounts for ethnic cleansing, while increased sentimentality and empathy account for our willingness to intervene in such conflicts.<sup>58</sup> Some historical

cases suggest that the development of empathy over long periods of time can have important political consequences. For example, increased empathy accounts, in part, for the end of legalized slavery and formal colonialism.<sup>59</sup> And Lynn Hunt argues that the development of human rights over the long term depends on the development of greater sympathy and empathy towards others, starting in the eighteenth century.<sup>60</sup>

Regions characterized by security communities or successful post-conflict peace-building, may have achieved their success by first ratcheting down the effects of fear and gradually increasing the effects of empathy and the capacity to trust. Indeed, the literature on fear and empathy I have reviewed suggests that confidence-building measures, such as data exchanges, cultural exchanges, exercises in conciliation, and the graduated reciprocation in tension reduction (GRIT), are extremely important if understudied by political science.<sup>61</sup> Trust building and maintaining mechanisms must be institutionalized in routine practices and expectations to have their greatest effects.<sup>62</sup>

### **What difference does human nature, old or new, make?**

As Waltz demonstrated a half century ago, both optimistic and pessimistic notions about human nature have shaped many theories of world politics. Indeed, they have influenced Waltz's own theorizing. While Waltz was right to warn international relations theorists from an overemphasis on 'human nature,' he was wrong to imply that human nature was both negative and fixed.

Negative views of human nature support those practices and institutions that depend on those views. If we believe that the escalation of conflict into war is inevitable, then its occurrence is understood as natural. A view that humans strive for domination, that domination and hierarchy are natural and inevitable, supports those who benefit from domination and hierarchy. I have suggested that we both acknowledge the persistence of these Hobbesian assumptions and re-examine their validity.

The questions about 'man' should no longer be, as Waltz phrased the debate between pessimists and optimists, whether humans are naturally aggressive or peaceful, or whether human nature is 'fixed' or can change, or whether it is nature or nurture that determines our drives, predispositions or capacities. Human biology, if that is how we define 'human nature', clearly has powerful aggressive and peaceful capacities that respond powerfully to environmental stimuli – including socialization and institutional contexts.

Anthropologists and historians have long described the diversity and malleability of social institutions and cultural practices, suggesting that simplistic views of human nature rooted in biological determinism were mistaken. Neuroscience confirms these findings. As Richard Rorty argues,

There is a growing willingness to neglect the question 'What is our nature?' and to substitute the question 'What can we make of ourselves?' . . . We have

come to see that the only lesson of either history or anthropology is our extraordinary malleability. We are coming to think of ourselves as the flexible, protean, self-shaping animal, rather than as the rational animal or the cruel animal.<sup>63</sup>

In *Man, the State, and War*, Waltz argues that, 'human nature is so complex that it can justify every hypothesis we may entertain'.<sup>64</sup> Our biology *is* complex, but that does not mean we ought to give up trying to understand the complex ways that our biology and social institutions interact. Thus, it should be clear that I do not intend to reduce all to biology. Neuroscience can tell us about our basic biological capacities, but social science, psychology, and philosophy can better help us understand why we do what we do. Biologists are finding that we are shaped in nearly equal parts by 'nature' and 'nurture'. Our biology matters but we are not prisoners of it. Our biological natures and our institutions interact.<sup>65</sup> Our cognitions, memories and emotions also interact.

Moreover, because of the human capacity for reflection and reason, we can understand and manipulate the forces that shape us. It is therefore important to attend to the complexities of interaction. Specifically, we must attend the ways that institutions can reinforce aspects of our 'natures' that promote conflict but conversely how other institutions engender cooperation. Similarly, we must attend to the ways our cognitions and emotions interact, influencing not only the process and content (how and what) of our cognitions, but how much and what we feel. In other words, while our amygdalas might react nearly instantaneously to a perceived threat, our pre-frontal cortex and hippocampus react nearly as quickly and can direct our behaviour. Moreover, we can train ourselves not to react fearfully to something. Further, because we are social animals who live in community and must make decisions and act together to achieve goals, we must argue and persuade others about both how to interpret situations and how to act.

I am thus, ultimately in agreement with Waltz (and Rousseau) in one sense: the structures we make matter and in some ways powerfully determine the kind of world we create. Where I disagree strongly with Waltz is in assuming that attention to human nature, understood as biology, is 'reductionist'. Waltz argues that competition and power balancing are to be expected in anarchic systems and that the international system is stable in the sense that disrupted balances will be 'restored in one way or another'.<sup>66</sup> The simple fact is that humans have structured world politics on the basis of assumptions about human nature, namely about fear, rationality, and distrust. Those assumptions have been institutionalized and become the 'system'. Our fears and our *beliefs* about how fear works, make this system. We need not wait for human nature to change for world peace to become possible, nor should we lament the capacity of human nature to change. Our biology has all the capacity we need. We can shape our institutions and foreign policies to work more or less better with our biology.

The realists' tendency to assume that we know all we need to know about *homo politicus* has likely done scholars and foreign policy decision-makers an enormous

disservice.<sup>67</sup> In assuming that distrust is natural, we have done too little research on empathy and trust and spent too little effort in devising policies to promote trust.<sup>68</sup> International relations scholars have put almost all of our eggs in the fear basket. There is potentially a great deal to gain by examining our long-held assumptions about human nature.

For example, research on fear suggests that long-held assumptions of deterrence theory are probably not simply wrong but dangerously so. Research in political psychology has shown that 'deterrence is inadequate as an explanatory theory of international relations because the growing body of empirical evidence' does not support the theory.<sup>69</sup> Recent research on fear implies that the notion that deterrence threats can be manipulated with great confidence is folly. We cannot expect decision-makers to respond to threats by doing elaborate (or even boundedly rational) calculations of costs, risks and benefits, yet policy-makers are still counselled as if this were possible. This is not simply because signalling resolve is difficult. Fear, and also anger and perceived humiliation, affect the ways people reason and react to threats: fear is a powerful source and re-enforcer of both the cognitive and motivated biases that interfere with the communication and reception of deterrent threats. Fear can become institutionalized and self-reinforcing.

To the extent that our theories, uninformed by research on fear, have guided decision-makers and shaped foreign policies by promoting the use of threats, they have made the world more dangerous rather than less. The path to decreased tension, conflict resolution, and improved security lies in re-examining the relationship between 'human nature', political practices and institutions and in devising policies that actually decrease fear and enhance trust.

## Notes

- 1 I thank Ken Booth, Karin Fierke, Joshua Goldstein, Peter Katzenstein, Robert Keohane, Markus Kornprobst, Peter Liberman, Catherine Lutz, Lisa Martin, Rose McDermott, Barry O'Neill, Janice Stein and Kenneth Waltz for comments.
- 2 Hans Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, Sixth edition, revised by Kenneth Thompson (New York: Knopf, 1985), p. 4.
- 3 There are, of course, other realists besides Hobbes and Morgenthau who I could have discussed. However, Hobbes and Morgenthau are used here as exemplars.
- 4 Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations*, p. 4.
- 5 Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations*, p. 5.
- 6 Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations*, p. 119.
- 7 Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations*, pp. 38–40.
- 8 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (New York: Penguin, [1651], 1986) p. 161.
- 9 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 196.
- 10 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: Random House, 1979) p. 66.
- 11 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959).
- 12 Waltz, *Man, the State and War*, p. 27.
- 13 Waltz, *Man, the State and War*, pp. 28–29.
- 14 Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 18.
- 15 Waltz, *Man, the State and War*, p. 166.



- 16 Waltz, *Man, the State and War*, p. 41.
- 17 Waltz, *Man, the State and War*, p. 168.
- 18 Waltz, *Man, the State and War*, p. 238: emphasis added.
- 19 Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 103.
- 20 Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 117.
- 21 Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 117.
- 22 Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 91.
- 23 For a discussion of evolutionary theories, analogies and metaphors in realism and idealism, see Jennifer Sterling-Folker, 'Evolutionary tendencies in realist and liberal IR theory', in William R. Thompson, ed., *Evolutionary Interpretations of World Politics* (London: Routledge, 2001) pp. 62–109.
- 24 Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 118.
- 25 Kenneth N. Waltz, 'Reflections on *Theory of International Politics*: a response to my critics,' in Keohane, ed., *Neorealism and its Critics*, pp. 323–45: 331.
- 26 Kenneth N. Waltz, 'The spread of nuclear weapons: more may be better', *Adelphi Papers*, no. 171 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1981). Also see Scott D. Sagan and Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate Renewed* (New York: WW Norton, 2002).
- 27 Just as there are other realists who I do not discuss, there are other liberals. Kant, like Morgenthau and Waltz, is the exemplar of a paradigm.
- 28 Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch* (1795) in Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, translated by Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983) pp. 107–43: 111.
- 29 Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, p. 116.
- 30 Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, p. 120.
- 31 Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, p. 125.
- 32 Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, p. 125.
- 33 Feminist and others have long been sceptical of essentialist understanding of 'human nature'. Specific international relations scholars who question and interrogate these assumptions include Hayward R. Alker, Ken Booth, Jennifer Sterling-Folker and J. Ann Tickner.
- 34 Paula M. Niedenthal, Jamin B. Halberstadt, and Åse H. Innes-Ker, 'Emotional response categorization', *Psychological Review*, vol. 106 no. 2 (April 1999), pp. 337–61:338. See also Daniel L. Schacter, 'The Seven Sins of memory: insights from psychology and cognitive neuroscience', *American Psychologist*, vol. 54, no. 3 (March 1999), pp. 182–203: 195–96.
- 35 Joseph LeDoux, 'Emotion: clues from the brain,' in John T. Cacioppo *et al.*, eds, *Foundations in Social Neuroscience* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002) pp. 389–410: 396.
- 36 Ken Booth and Nicholas J. Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma: Fear Cooperation, and Trust in World Politics* (New York: Palgrave, 2008).
- 37 Foreign policy is also certainly about managing trade, cultural exchange, and humanitarian intentions.
- 38 See Catherine A. Lutz, *Unnatural Emotions: Everyday Sentiments on a Micronesian Atoll and their Challenge to Western Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).
- 39 For instance, see Ashley Montague, ed., *Learning Non-Aggression: The Experience of Preliterate Societies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).
- 40 Robert Abelson, 'Psychological status of the script concept,' *American Psychologist*, vol. 36, no. 7 (1981) pp. 715–29: 715.
- 41 Yaacov Y.I. Vertzberger, *The World in Their Minds: Information Processing, Cognition, and Perception in Foreign Policy Decision Making*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989) p. 60.
- 42 When schemas are about how others think, feel, reason, and can be expected to act, they are 'folk psychology'.
- 43 See Jack Snyder, *The Ideology of the Offensive: Military Decision Making and the Disasters of 1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984).

- 44 Waltz, 'The spread of nuclear weapons: more may be better', *Adelphi Papers*, no. 171 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1981). Also see Scott D. Sagan and Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate Renewed* (New York: WW Norton, 2002).
- 45 United States Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, (Washington, DC: US GPO, 30 September 2001) p. 14.
- 46 Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review*, p. 6.
- 47 Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review*, p. 13.
- 48 Quoted in Philip Shenon and Eric Schmitt, 'At U.S. nerve center, daily talks on the worst fears', *New York Times*, 27 December 2002, p. A12.
- 49 Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review*, p. 6.
- 50 Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, CT: Yale, 1966) p. 3.
- 51 I have not explored humiliation and anger, which may also come into play in threat situations. See, for instance, Paul Saurette, 'You dissin me? Humiliation and post 9/11 global politics', *Review of International Studies*, 32 (2006) pp. 495–522; Khaled Fattah and K.M. Fierke, 'A clash of emotions: the politics of humiliation and political violence in the Middle East,' *European Journal of International Relations*, 15, 1, (2009) pp. 67–93.
- 52 Tom Pyszczynski, Sheldon Solomon, and Jeff Greenberg, *In the Wake of 9/11: The Psychology of Terror* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2002) p. 103.
- 53 Irving Janis, *Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Policy Decisions and Fiascoes* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982), p. 9. A thoughtful review, critique, and amendment of groupthink research is Ramon J. Aldag and Sally Riggs Fuller, 'Beyond fiasco: a reappraisal of the groupthink phenomenon and a new model of group decision processes', *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 113, No. 2 (May 1993), pp. 533–52. See also Paul 't Hart, Eric K. Stern, and Bengt Sundelius, eds, *Beyond Groupthink: Political Group Dynamics and Foreign Policy-making* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).
- 54 Pyszczynski, Solomon, and Greenberg, *In the Wake of 9/11*, p. 101. Diane M. Mackie, Elliot R. Smith and Devin G. Ray, 'Intergroup emotions and intergroup relations,' *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 2 (2008) pp. 1–15.
- 55 Pyszczynski, Solomon, and Greenberg, *In the Wake of 9/11*, pp. 45–52.
- 56 Mackie, Smith and Ray, 'Intergroup emotions and intergroup relations,' p. 8.
- 57 Booth and Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*, pp. 4–5.
- 58 Rorty, 'Human rights, rationality, and sentimentality'.
- 59 Neta C. Crawford, *Argument and Change in World Politics: Ethics, Decolonization and Humanitarian Intervention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
- 60 Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights* (New York: WW Norton, 2007).
- 61 On trust in international relations theory, see Booth and Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*. On GRIT, see Charles E. Osgood, *An Alternative to War or Surrender* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1962); Joshua S. Goldstein and John R. Freeman, *Three Way Street: Strategic Reciprocity in World Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1990); Alan R. Collins, 'GRIT, Gorbachev and the end of the Cold War,' *Review of International Studies*, 24, 2, (1998) p. 201–19.
- 62 On institutionalizing trust, see Neta C. Crawford, 'A security regime among democracies: cooperation among Iroquois nations', *International Organization*, vol. 48, no. 3 (Summer 1994) pp. 345–85; Michael Barnett and Emmanuel Adler, eds, *Security Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- 63 Richard Rorty, 'Human rights, rationality, and sentimentality', in Stephen Shute and Susan Hurley, eds, *On Human Rights: The Oxford Amnesty Lectures 1993* (New York: Basic Books, 1993) pp. 111–34: 115.
- 64 Waltz, *Man, the State and War*, p. 40.
- 65 See Steven Rose, *Lifelines. Biology, Freedom, Determinism* (London: Allen Lane, 1997).
- 66 Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 128.
- 67 Many scholars of international relations *have* studied the relation of human psychology to foreign policy decision-making. Their work is too numerous to cite here, but these

scholars include Robert Jervis, Janice Stein, Deborah Larson, Richard Ned Lebow, Yaacov Vertzberger, and Rose McDermott.

- 68 There are, of course, exceptions. For instance, see Booth and Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*; and K.M. Fierke, *Diplomatic Interventions: Conflict and Change in a Globalizing World* (New York: Palgrave, 2005).
- 69 Robert Jervis, Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Gross Stein, with contributions by Patrick M. Morgan and Jack L. Snyder, *Psychology and Deterrence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), p. 203.

# 11

## WOMAN, THE STATE, AND WAR

*Jean Bethke Elshtain*

In the late 1980s, a conference – the first of its kind – was held at the University of Southern California under the rubric ‘Woman, the State, and War’, playing off the title of Kenneth Waltz’s enduring work in political and international relations theory.<sup>1</sup> The premise guiding this conference was that questions of states and wars are substantially altered if viewed through the prism of the category *gender*. My book, *Women and War*, published in 1987, played a role in defining and generating this line of inquiry.<sup>2</sup> There was, however, a deep ambivalence at work in my book. I was never convinced that defining the state as a gendered category helped us to account for very much where statecraft and war were concerned. One needed to ask then, and needs to ask now: what new insights, theoretical advances, conceptual categories does ‘gendering’ the state offer? The burden of this chapter is devoted to meditating on this question by deploying Waltz’s ‘levels of analysis’ as developed in his classic works.

Let us put several items on the table here at the outset. I am not going to be concerned, in this chapter, with the empirical realities of women and political life, national and international. For example: there are women who wield official political authority – and that is a more significant number all the time – even as women are players, sometimes inadvertently, in world politics in other ways. There is massive evidence that women in many parts of the globe are sexually exploited, often being taken across international borders for that purpose.<sup>3</sup> Women are also victims of massive rape campaigns in situations of endemic violence. There are many such sites in sub-Saharan Africa at this moment. It should be noted that women are not exclusive victims of violence, of course, and in some situations men fare far worse. For example, in the Bosnian debacle in the 1990s an alarming number of women were raped, but Bosnian Muslim men and boys were murdered en masse. Women are also part of the shifting populations of guest workers, and women help to comprise the militaries of a number of countries, including the United States. I

will be focusing on formative feminist texts that locate violence and war variously. Later feminist 'IR' or 'gendered' analyses fall into or assume one of Waltz's levels, at least tacitly. The reader should note that my focus is not on 'official' international relations academic scholarship but, rather, on feminist texts that assume gender as the central explanatory category and purport to account for 'why war?'

Too, as we have learned from the work of economist Amartya Sen, women, or unborn female foetuses more accurately, have been selectively aborted by the millions in societies in which the male baby is normatively preferable. So even *in utero* women are regarded as a lesser type of human being in societies where abortion based on the baby's sex is rampant. The gender imbalance that results from this selective aborting of female babies will likely generate enormous problems in years to come. Finally, it should also be noted that, historically at least, assumptions about the ways in which women were the 'same as' or 'different from' men invited exploration along nearly every vector of political life, from domestic politics to war.<sup>4</sup>

All of these matters have been studied in some detail by now. Recognition of these sorts of gender questions and realities serves as backdrop to a consideration of the theoretical frameworks advanced by feminist analysts and how convincing or not they may be. I take a 'feminist' analysis to be one that pushes a feminist agenda of one sort or the other within the world of scholarship and without. Is gender a definitive or causal factor in international relations beyond those empirical considerations noted above, considerations that may increase problems and tensions within nation-states and in relations between them?

Let us begin with Waltz's 'levels of analysis' as we move beyond the empirical data on abuses and conditions in which gender is a salient concern to concepts that expand our conceptual reach, asking whether a levels-of-analysis approach helps us to pull back the scrim on the 'woman question' in the world of international relations. If we substitute 'woman' for 'man' in Waltz's title, do states and wars, as part of an overall explanatory framework, alter substantially?

## Reading Man, the State and War

I was fortunate to study international relations with Ken Waltz in the late 1960s. At the time, I was not particularly concerned with the 'man' portion of the title of Waltz's lucid volume as I read it as gender-inclusive, although it was obvious that men had been the central players in war and diplomacy. I recall being much impressed with the crisp clarity of his conceptual scheme. And I found Waltz's levels of analysis helpful in sorting out the hotly contested world of feminist theory. Going back over my dissertation, 'Women and politics: a theoretical analysis', transformed several times into my first book, *Public Man, Private Woman: Women in Social and Political Thought*, I discovered anew several Waltzian formulations.<sup>5</sup> In my introduction to the dissertation, for example, I say that it 'is a critique of much current feminist analysis because I have found that the solutions proposed to solve the problems of women in contemporary society often bear no logical relation to the area pin-pointed as the source of the problem in the first place'.<sup>6</sup>

In the dissertation's final chapter, 'Tactics, strategies, ends and means: foci for change and their implications', I insist:

Solutions to the problem of women run the gamut from what R.D. Laing has termed the individual pirouette of change and repentance to take-over of the machinery of the state. The questions involved in examining the political strategies of the women's movement and their foreseeable consequences are many. The analyst must relate proposals for change back to the causes assigned as the source of women's dilemma. There should be a logical relation between the image of what precisely is wrong, and where, and the prescriptions put forth to alter the situation and implement desirable change. As Waltz puts it: 'Is the image adequate, or has the analyst simply seized upon the most spectacular cause or the one he thinks most susceptible to manipulation and ignored other causes of equal or greater importance?' Corollary questions suggested by Waltz include whether or not the final proposals can be implemented and how attempts to implement them will affect other goals. I will relate these questions back to the four foci most commonly pinpointed as the source or sources of the problem of women in contemporary society, namely, (a) woman herself or man himself, (b) the relations between women and men, (c) various subsystems intermediary between the individual and macro-level structures, and (d) the macro-system itself or economic and political structures. In exploring the ways feminists have looked at the problem, I will attempt to determine whether their proposals for change bear a logical relation to the arena cited as the chief sources of the problem. It is obvious that one's proposals for what is necessary to give women equality will differ depending upon whether one locates the trouble in capitalist society, the family, or male chauvinism.<sup>7</sup>

In ways I had forgotten, I had adopted Waltz's structural analysis to my own purposes, with this difference: his structural analysis pitches itself to interstate relations and the presumption of an anarchic sphere within which those relations occur, with no final arbiter to disputes between and among states, save a resort to self-help on the part of states, whereas my structural approach ended, more or less, at the boundaries of states. When I talked about system I was referring to the domestic political arena. I concluded that women's inequality was overdetermined, that cause and consequence, the political and the personal, percolated in and through the social system, thus 'any image for change frozen at a level of complexity beneath the system is perforce inadequate'.<sup>8</sup> But it was also clear that one could not safely ignore levels beneath the level of the state.

Let us move to the present moment. As taken up by several generations of students of international relations, the conceptual money is placed on the structural or systemic level. But not so fast – or so I shall argue. There is wiggle room in Waltz's classic work. This wiggle room exists alongside rather air-tight formulations that privilege the systemic level. Sorting this out is an important task and it bears

implications for feminist theories. Further, as the contributors to this volume display in full, there are many creatures with many names inhabiting the universe of international relations. This pertains as well to international relations feminism which is indebted to one or another of the theoretical frameworks now up for grabs.

On the theoretical level, various camps of feminism throughout the 1970s and 1980s laboured to force premature closure and to circle the wagons around orthodoxies of one sort or another. Radical feminism was a dominant orthodoxy in the academy in the 1970s and formed the basis for feminist theorizing alongside its cousin, Marxist feminism. It boiled women's choices down to aligning with radical feminist separatism or remaining 'collabos mouthing male texts', with men represented, in a number of best-selling feminist texts, as vampires sucking women's life energy. Variations on the radical feminist theme – *that the problem lay in males themselves, in a distorted male nature* – often swamped other approaches.<sup>9</sup> Deformed 'maleness' not only explained domestic oppression of women but pertained in the world of states as well; thus, the author of a 1985 book proclaimed that 'sexism and the war system are two interdependent manifestations of a common problem', a problem that does not derive from structural causes so much as originating 'in the very roots of the human psyche'.<sup>10</sup>

At present, feminists in general are divided on 'human nature' – to the extent that they accept that there is any such thing – even as they are at loggerheads on the question of universalism and cultural particularism, as it is often put. Currently, there are gender analyses with universalist aspirations, often speaking the language of human rights and calling for full implementation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights even though there are cultures and regimes that violate such rights routinely; indeed, the whole point of such a defence is to defy such regimes and to work to transform them in the direction of a human rights respecting culture. Others insist vehemently that to reach for the universal is by definition to do damage to the culturally specific and to illegitimately seek to appropriate and to tame the 'post-colonial Other', the silenced denizen of a realm of suppressed knowledges and the like. Here, for example, one would locate most (but not all) 'constructivist' accounts. These were not yet on the horizon in the era that gave birth to 'general analysis', although there had been anthropologists who were thoroughgoing cultural relativists and eschewed anything that smacked of the 'universal'. One way or the other, for most feminist scholars of academic international relations, all pre-feminist 'IR theory' is suspect because of a systematic 'gender bias' that can take a number of forms.<sup>11</sup>

Feminist thinkers, with few exceptions, hold to one or more of the following assumptions: that increasing the number of women in positions of power will alter the world of politics, domestic and foreign; or that states that have undergone what might be called a 'feminist transformation' will engage one another in ways that are visibly different from the 'male dominant' state; or, finally, that transformed states will then encounter one another in a different sort of global arena, one in which 'soft power', said to be favoured overwhelmingly by women, pertains, and all 'militarism' has been eradicated. If one of these three presuppositions is present, what follows is a feminist analysis perforce. If none is detectable and, instead, gender is

construed as a 'neutral' analytic category detethered from any embrace of a 'better way', the analysis may not be feminist per se. But if gender is deployed at all, the analyst will implicate herself or himself in a set of assumptions about the reasons for military conflict that, even if unstated, implicate Waltz's categories. In feminist analyses, one reads that all three of Waltz's levels can be engaged or transformed. There are feminists who begin 'at the top', so to speak, arguing for change on the international level, something like 'global governance', that will compel other changes in turn. Others insist that nothing will change until the male psyche itself is remade, or – in extreme formulations one hears less of these days although variants on this assumption persist in some modes of discourse – the numbers of men in the overall populations are reduced, given that a poisoned 'maleness' can never be extirpated.<sup>12</sup> Let us turn to the first image, then, given its prevalence in the formative or 'foundation' phase of feminist theorizing, in the period under consideration, one that helped to lay the basis for all that followed.

### Is Waltz's discussion of first-image pessimism adequate?

With all this as backdrop, let us focus on Waltz on human nature. The dramatic declarations and interrogatories in *Man, the State and War* begin at the beginning: 'Does man make society in his image or does society make him?' and 'Can man in society best be understood by studying man or studying society?'<sup>13</sup> The answer, surely, is both/and, although Waltz's way of posing the question, or questions, appears to require that we chose one or the other. Waltz makes short shrift of most 'first-image' analyses, especially those of the 'optimists' who hold to the malleability and transformability of human nature. We can 'cure' what ails us. But he also goes after those 'pessimists' who insist, Waltz declares, that wars result from aggressive impulses and ignorance. First-image optimists are naive and propose trivial 'solutions' to the human nature question, with re-education often cast as a panacea to transform human psyches. The first-image pessimists, by contrast, see little hope for an ultimate transformation or radical alteration, human nature being what it is. Reality itself is always going to be flawed, they argue. Our social and political worlds are created by torn human beings, a large number of whom cannot resist the siren call of the *libido dominandi*, or lust to dominate, identified by St Augustine.

Optimists are undeterred by such considerations, for they are Rousseauians at heart: man is naturally innocent and society corrupts him – and her. Optimists presuppose a preternatural state of harmony, stunned into division and conflict by damaging developments that come to characterize what we call civilization. If we could but recall our original innocence, civilization might be recast. (That Rousseau did not believe this possible seems not to deter the optimists.) Waltz finds the optimists a hapless and hopeless group, for the most part, and his often hilarious take-down of their pop psychology and social relations 'solutions' to the problem of war is an exercise in shooting fish in a barrel. But he cannot rid himself of the first-image pessimists so quickly. He admires a number of them, including Sigmund Freud, Reinhold Niebuhr and St Augustine. He tells us that Niebuhr, himself indebted to



St Augustine, said wiser things about war and peace than many an international relations and policy expert.<sup>14</sup> Despite these encomiums, Waltz downgrades the salience of the ‘first-image pessimists’ with whom he finds an affinity, because, he argues: ‘The assumption of a fixed human nature . . . itself helps to shift attention *away* from human nature – because human nature . . . cannot be changed, whereas social-political institutions can be.’<sup>15</sup> But is this conclusion, or dismissal, of the most challenging and nuanced of those he calls pessimists persuasive? Can human nature be bleached out entirely if one would understand the multi-faceted and multi-causal world of international conflict? Has Waltz treated adequately the ‘pessimists’ he takes up?

Taking up these questions, one becomes aware of the slippage in Waltz’s interpretation of St Augustine and Reinhold Niebuhr. How so? First, he reduces their arguments to ‘psychological factors’, terms that are anaemic conceptually and, as such, are not up to the task of taking account of the gravity of their understanding of the human condition. Our flaws go much, much deeper than ‘psychology’, involving, as they do, the entirety of the human being, torn between division and wholeness, between *cupiditas* and *caritas*, between tearing apart and holding together, between judgment and mercy. For Augustine, this human nature is coded into the interstices of our very being and is reborn with the birth of each new human being. Because Augustine does not separate body and psyche or body and soul – he is radically anti-dualist – it is not licit to separate out ‘psychological factors’ as the explanatory locus of his account of human nature.

Interestingly, given Waltz’s many references to Augustine, there are but two footnotes to Augustine’s masterwork, *The City of God*.<sup>16</sup> As well, Sigmund Freud is deployed for the purpose of a quote or two but not treated seriously at any point in Waltz’s text. Freud is surely a candidate for ‘first-image pessimist’ but Waltz does not locate Freud precisely. He deploys Freud twice in footnotes to criticize simple-minded behavioural scientists, then a third time for the words that frame Waltz’s treatment of the implications of his third image.<sup>17</sup> That Freud hovers in Waltz’s text but alights nowhere within the three images surely has to do with the fact that Freud’s views do not mesh tidily with Waltz’s categories, no more than do St Augustine’s or Niebuhr’s.

Freud is too complex, too ambivalent, too aware of life’s messiness to offer a sure and certain riposte to the two dominating questions with which Waltz begins. Remember these are: Does man make society in his image or does his society make him? Can man in society best be understood by studying man or studying society?<sup>18</sup> For Freud, the answer, surely, is ‘both/and’. The same holds for St Augustine, whose powerful criticism of the performative implications of the civic theology of the late empire demonstrates in biting detail how the cultural representations that people absorb yield alterations – not for the best, in this case – for how they act. Human nature makes possible such deformations in the first instance; cultural forms and institutions then solidify some of the worst possibilities of human nature into what Augustine calls a ‘second nature’. Augustine avoids the reductionism of ‘all nature’ or ‘all nurture’ arguments.<sup>19</sup>

Augustine may be a ‘pessimist’ in Waltz’s terminology, although Augustine himself would prefer realism, given that his observations on human nature are empirical and historical as well as theological. Augustine finds room for hope – he would be an odd Christian if he did not – for the achievement of at least a measure of justice on this earth. It follows that Augustine’s position cannot be shoe-horned into Waltz’s ‘first-image pessimist’, as a rich treatment of Augustine demonstrates. We can safely say that Waltz has not treated Augustine adequately if one compares what Waltz has to say with Augustine’s work. (Augustine wrote over five million words. No single scholar could compass the whole. But within *The City of God*, the work Waltz cites, Augustine’s incisive, detailed, multi-layered account is on full display.)

A brief detour through Freud should help to clarify the ways in which he, another complex thinker, also slips through the grid set down by Waltz. Whether the first image *must* figure into any comprehensive account of ‘why war’ depends, surely, on just how rich that image is. Waltz has given us leave to do this, I believe. In his concluding chapter we find the wiggle room I noted earlier, as Waltz issues caveats and refers to tendencies, degrees, and emphases. He further suggests we put together bits and pieces of all three images. But the flexibility we discover at the book’s conclusion is weeded out at the beginning when we are told that human nature cannot be the cause of both war and peace. Why not?

Freud’s analysis, like Augustine’s, is not reducible to individual psychology; and he transgresses Waltz’s three images as he takes up war and peace questions. To the question ‘why war?’ Freud’s replies include man (and woman), the state, and the international system – each and all at once rather than one or the other or one then the other. The texts that invite this claim are: ‘Thoughts for the Times on War and Death’ (written by Freud in March and April 1915, less than a year after the outbreak of the First World War), and ‘Why War?’ (a 1932 exchange with Einstein).<sup>20</sup> War, for Freud, is a specific instance of aggression, one of those circumstances favourable to its release.

The human propensity to aggression does not so much cause war – as in Waltz’s first-image pessimism – as take advantage of war’s occurrence to play out horror on a grand scale. All of social life, for Freud, is a struggle within the self and between the self and the constraints of community. War is that struggle projected outward in a deadly form. Freud’s First World War essay shows him as one who shared liberal international hopes. But the war invited disillusionment in a way Freud decides is salutary in the final analysis. ‘We’ – modern Europeans – thought we had created societies in which high norms of moral conduct might pertain indefinitely, as one moved from transformed states to a pacific European community. (A variant on Waltz’s second image.) Instead, Freud continues, we are plunged into an implacable war that ignores the civilian/military distinction and tramples ‘in blind fury’ everything that stands in its way, cutting ‘all the common bonds’ and leaving such a legacy of bitterness that it all but precludes cultural renewal ‘for a long time to come’. The state monopolizes violence unto itself and then goes on to permit misdeeds and acts of violence that would disgrace the individual, treating its citizens ‘like children’ along the way.

When the moral ties ‘between the collective individuals of mankind’ (states) break down, there are ‘repercussions on the morality of individuals’. The collective superego says ‘Thou shalt not kill’, and punishes those who do. Suddenly, it raises no objections to killing and rewards those who do. The upshot? ‘Evil passions’ are no longer suppressed as the low morality shown by states in their relations to one another is matched by the ‘brutality shown by individuals’. (One could take strong exception to Freud’s analogizing between murder – wrongful death – and war-time killing under legitimate authority, but we must leave that be for now.)

This arouses discontent and embitterment. But should it? Perhaps things are not so debased as they seem, because our view of what was possible constituted an illusion that war had been destroyed. Freud then moves into a reprise of his account of moral development as a fragile process that does not eradicate ‘the deepest essence of human nature’, those ‘instinctual impulses’ that are not so much evil as amoral, and require the shaping, constraint, condemnation and praise that are the stuff of moral education. Civilization is attained through renunciation of untrammelled individual satisfaction. For Freud, there is an upside to all of this. ‘In reality, our fellow-citizens have not sunk so low as we feared, because they had never risen so high as we believed.’ What counsel does Freud offer? Endurance, a tough kind of stoicism. In his second major excursion into war and peace matters, Freud exchanges views with Einstein. Einstein queries Freud: ‘Is there any way of delivering mankind from the menace of war?’ Einstein has a few ideas of his own. As a universalist, Einstein would set up a judicial body to settle all national conflicts. Each nation would abide by the order issued. But what if there was insufficient force on the part of this impartial body to enforce its verdicts? And where would one find these paragons of impartial virtue, the members of the judicial body in question? A dilemma.

Freud is extremely polite but will have none, or little, of this. Instead, Freud tells Einstein to look at the complex relationship between right (*Recht*) and might (*Macht*) historically. The origin of settled civilization lies in an act of violence – parricide – that gives way to the rule of law over time. A complicated ‘scientific myth’ follows on how this all came about but, eventually, neither fear alone, nor self-interest alone, binds people together into a viable and enduring collective. What are required are communal feelings, the growth of emotional ties among members of the group. This is a complex process of identification as Freud unpacks it.

The upshot is that the justice or might of the community is rife with inner tension and discontent – for each individual born into it and for civilization as a whole. There are endemic, indeed constitutive, sources of unrest. Freud’s account of the movement from brute force to the might/right of the group locates complex interconnections between the psychic transformations of individuals and the coming together of collectivities. Each evolves from a situation in which compulsion gives way to rule-governance. Justice comes at a price just as peace is often bought at a terrible price. War can be a vehicle to peace, to the creation of more universalistic orders. Suffice to say that Augustine and Freud are thinkers whose work defies any bright lines between levels of analysis, for all levels are implicated if one seeks a comprehensive, coherent account of war.

What about feminist first-image analysts? There is no feminist first-image analysis about the origins of war that approaches Augustine, Freud, or Niebuhr in comprehensiveness and coherence. Historic feminist thinkers, for example, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, leading theorist of the American suffrage movement, pinpointed maleness and masculinity as the source of society's woes, including wars, pinpointing the male element as 'a destructive force, stern, selfish, aggrandizing, loving war, violence, conquest, acquisition, breeding in the material and moral world alike discord, disorder, disease and death.'<sup>21</sup> Such first-image assumptions vary, of course, with some thinkers citing 'nature' and others 'environmental conditioning' as an explanation for why men are so awful. One can, of course, point to many reductionist first-image examples, from Helen Caldicott's emphasis on wombs as the way to peace, to ardently argued pleas for a reduction of the numbers of males in the population to 15 per cent or so – useful to acquire sperm for reproductive purposes until women perfect parthenogenesis. One dominant first-image feminist account, hailed as a classic when it first appeared, claims that 'all men are rapists in situ' and, further, that, women must turn to a martial stance of their own to hold them at bay.<sup>22</sup> Male violence, yet again, is the explanation for violence in general.

Let me repeat: these were not marginal arguments – they were at the heart of the dominant radical feminist position and theorizing in the 1970s/80s. Given this sort of thing, it is unsurprising that later, serious scholars of gender and international relations would often go to considerable pains to avoid first-image arguments – and yet, they were and are very hard to avoid. Each time a gender analyst suggests that should women take over the reins of government it would lead to a substantive alteration in how a state behaves, she laces together Waltz's first and third images in a construction that is less than persuasive. But the case has not been made that between 'maleness' and the international system there is a one-way line of absolute causation. Whatever the differences that pertain between men and women as embodied beings – and we know there are some – they are not decisive, finally, for how states behave, particularly in the international arena, Waltz's central concern.

Waltz should not be interpreted as insisting on linear causation if it invites only trivially true claims. There is plenty of that sort of thing, within feminism and without, but there are other ways to think about what goes on inside human minds and beings and guides their action, including their participation as citizens in the wars of their countries. Waltz concludes his discussion of the human nature issue by assuming that nature is 'fixed'. This recognition directs our attention away from human nature because it cannot be changed but social and political institutions can. The conundrum here is that it is human beings, with their natures, who change institutions. It follows that human nature cannot be so fixed that it disallows all flexibility in social formations. Societies that fall into fixity and rigidity, that are unable to adapt, well, fall.

To be sure, there is a salutary warning in Waltz that needs to be put on the table before we move to the second image with the 'woman' question in mind, namely, Waltz's dismantling of the claims of social engineers who have often turned issues of conflict into questions of misunderstanding, confusion, and mental health. It

follows that there are ‘cures’ that will sweep away the glitches in human nature and solutions to conflict will follow. This way of thinking is pervasive in our therapeutic, Oprahfied society. Many in the world of religious studies also embrace simplistic formulations about changes of heart and go on to advance naive, if well-meaning, proposals for dragging us all to the altar of perpetual peace.

### Home sweet state

Let us turn to Waltz’s treatment of the second-image view, whether liberal, socialist, or some other, holding that the internal structure of the state determines whether, how, and when a state goes to war. If, as I have argued, you cannot seal off the human nature question from considerations of interstate violence, does it follow that what happens inside states also figures in their foreign policy behaviour? If the second image is not ‘dominant’, is it nonetheless necessary? States create strategic cultures, draw upon similar or vastly different cultural repertoires, as they interact with each other. One does not have to declare that ‘defects in states cause war *tout court*’ in order to argue that internal state structure plays a determinative role, if not a linearly causal role, in why states go to war. One does not have to be a Kantian – and I am not – to agree that there is such a thing as an identifiable ‘liberal peace’ of sorts and that there is an affinity between tyrannical and authoritarian states: witness today’s unholy alliances of Iran, Cuba, Venezuela, and the like. One could also point historically to the Hitler–Stalin pact, which was soon violated, to be sure, but that it was agreed to with such initial alacrity tells us about this affinity.

Early feminist theorizing was spotty in its consideration of state systems because the overriding assumption was that all states are patriarchal, ergo oppressive of women, and liberal democratic states might be the worst of all because they somehow disguise this fact. Taking a leaf from a hard-core Marxist notebook, one was treated to attacks on ‘bourgeois rights’ as bogus, a way to fool those caught in the coils of false consciousness – all that sort of thing. The state was the reflection of the dominant class, now cast as a ‘sex-class’ and retaining, thereby, a heavy dose of first-image assumptions. Such theorizing also invited moral-equivalence arguments (for example, all states are patriarchal, hence oppressive). To sum up: feminist theory got stuck at the level of ‘capitalist patriarchy’ with scarcely any consideration of democratic citizenship and of all the huge gains women had made through democratic contestation – all that was rather looked down upon in radical and Marxist feminism, even as some modes of contemporary postmodern analyses undermine liberal human rights orders by insisting this is but one way to organize things; others cultures do it differently. Yes, to be sure. But can one not make evaluations as between more or less free or unfree, just or unjust orders? One advantage of (some) postmodern or constructivist arguments (and these need not be postmodern per se) is that they do not, for the most part, make simplistic claims about patriarchy = wars, violence, and every other identifiable bad thing, including environmental degradation.

An earlier generation of women activists had also taken the internal structure of the state seriously, but they pushed in a different direction, extolling the ‘bourgeois

rights' condemned by radical and Marxist feminists. For them, the state was a locus of reform and, once reformed, the state pushed the international arena to transform itself in a more pacific direction. Prominent woman activists of the Progressive/First World War era held that only when women predominated in legislatures and bested militarism would the internal structure of states change for the better, as 'womanist' states – although the term was not in use then – would not fight one another. (One can see this as a variant on Kant's scheme for perpetual peace.) Cast in second-image terms, the argument was not so much about the transformative power of some female essence as insisting that the activities in which the overwhelming majority of women engaged, like mothering, afforded access to an epistemology, a way of thinking and a form of knowledge, that stressed arbitration and the pacific virtues. If men engaged in similar activities, they too could acquire the pacific virtues, an old argument given sophisticated new form by early 'care' theorists, as they came to be known.<sup>23</sup> At some point, hopefully, this way of viewing the world would win out, should a 'critical mass' of women control states and lead them to democracy and against autocracy, a common argument from analysts who fused feminism to internal peace efforts in the First World War era, for example.

A more sophisticated 'second image paving the way for structural transformation', if that is the best way to put it, emerged from the fertile mind and productive pen of the great American social reformer Jane Addams. Addams averred repeatedly that hers was no 'goody-goody' understanding of peace. The goody-goodies would include naive, absolute pacifists. Addams, on her own account, was a hard-headed pacifist internationalist. Today she would probably be called a 'liberal internationalist'.<sup>24</sup> Can the ties and feelings that Addams extolled, and that the 'long road of women's memory' exemplified, be extended to encompass cities, states, the international sphere? That, for Addams, was the question and the challenge as she developed a conceptual frame intended to challenge the influence of social Darwinism applied both to states internally and to the relation of states to one another in the international arena. To this end, mothers, Addams insisted, must play an active role. Leaders of states must learn the art that women understand so well – how to make peace through hard-won negotiation, arbitration, and compromise. When force, violence, conflict – including the industrial strike – are in evidence, this suggests a cultural atavism – an imperfect evolution from a martial to a non-violent modality within the internal structure of states as well as without. At one point such anomalies will no longer be sustainable and regressive social forms will be abandoned. The way in which Addams assigns institutions to carry this vision consists of an analogy: as immigrants are to the new US city, so states are to the international arena. A bewildering mix of nationalities – some 22 distinct languages and dialects could be heard in Chicago's nineteenth ward where Addams located her pioneer social settlement – interacted daily. Rather than contending violently – for some of the immigrant 'nations' in Chicago in the late nineteenth century had warred for centuries in the Old World – they found a way to get along and to compete peacefully in the New World. The immigrant city, for Addams, provided evidence of moral evolution as a new world offered in microcosm what international

life bids to become.<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately, one sees readily how the analogy breaks down: where is the international sphere's 'Chicago', its 'Illinois', or its 'United States'? Immigrants in Chicago were nestled within a rule-governed city – although corruption in Chicago was and is legendary – that is, in turn, located within a larger constitutional framework – the state of Illinois – which was, in turn, part of yet another thick law-governed entity, the constitutional republic of the United States. To criticize Addams' analogizing from the second image, as the causal vector moved from individual states to the international sphere, does not mean one must dismiss the determinative role the internal structure of states plays in their external relations altogether.

Addams spent her life trying to will a thickly law-governed international entity into being with the internal structure of decent states flowing out, so to speak, to constitute that international arena. If the city is the realm of civil society, then an international civil society can surely be brought into being. To this end, Addams promoted the League of Nations, extolled in salvific terms by many of her contemporaries, even as she rejected naive 'solutions' such as the Kellogg–Briand Pact 'outlawing' war. Addams does not break down her possibilities depending on male or female natures. She assumes a universally shared social ontology. But she does believe that certain practices women engage in are essential to forming the sort of state that will refrain from war. Hers is one of the more sophisticated attempts hoping to connect directly the internal ordering of states with prospects for world peace. Unfortunately, it breaks down given the flawed analogy that drives it. Yet we know – it is a lesson history teaches us – that tyrannies are more provocative and, in general, more aggressive than well-ordered constitutional states. We know that despotic and dictatorial states are more likely to prey upon the weak and vulnerable. It follows that the second image cannot be dispensed with altogether. What role gender plays in this analysis will depend upon one's orientation, one's embrace of a particular theory or agenda or ideology, and whether gender figures in a robust way where the internal structure of the state is concerned. It defies common sense to argue that the internal structure of states plays no role in helping to determine their external relations. The case for a 'democratic peace' is rather persuasive in this sense: internally stable, relatively long-lived, constitutional democracies tend not to fight each other. So a comprehensive coherent account of 'why war?' must incorporate features pertaining to the domestic ordering of the state. Although Waltz insists that 'no prescription for international relations written entirely in terms of the second image can be valid', he also adds that 'there is a large and important sense in which this' – the reference point is to bad states leading to war – 'is true. The obverse of this statement, that good states mean peace in the world, is an extremely doubtful proposition.'<sup>26</sup> But surely one can nuance the argument by insisting that 'good states' are less likely to war with one another, thus reducing the flashpoints that erupt into violence. There is no compelling evidence of the gender determination of any of this.

## War happens

Let us move to Waltz's third level, the level where Waltz puts his explanatory money. I have already indicated that Waltz leaves some questions hanging, some thinkers stranded, because he does not quite know where to put them. He privileges the third image, to be sure, but he cannot seal off this systemic level from *any* 'contamination' by the other levels of analysis. Can war happen without consideration of the other two levels? I do not think so. There are other questions. Might not structural realism invite a kind of moral equivalence – a state is a state is a state, as one shuns consideration of the issue of justice, liberty and equality within states, and what impact that has on foreign policy outcomes?

Women the world over want states; they are bound up with collectivities and with their particular communities. When I interviewed Palestinian women on the West Bank some years ago, I encountered nary a one who emphasized individual rights over the communal right, as they construed it, to a state of their own. So on the level of the state as an actor in an allegedly 'anarchic' realm, what does 'putting gender in' do, if anything? I noted at the outset that 'putting gender in' helps us to focus on all sorts of empirical data and to look at issues 'on the ground' in a way we might not otherwise do. But this is not the same as calling the state 'gendered' or assuming that somehow we can de-gender it or womanize it and it will behave differently. I cannot even imagine what on earth that would mean. Here Waltz's hard-headed arguments about the need for a coherent and plausible relationship between the alleged cause of disorder and the prescription posed remains helpful. Perhaps he is right, namely, that one must emphasize one image necessarily in any logic of explanation. But I do not take him to be saying that one must limit one's logic of explanation exclusively to one level.

What Waltz might have made more of is this: to have settled life of any kind you need civil laws and enforcement. It is this sort of settlement that continues to elude us on the systemic level. Still and all, states are not unitary actors, even though many seem to think foreign policies are articulations of some general will. The question, again, is one of degrees and emphases. So where does this leave 'woman' in relation to state and war? Here we need a deeper exploration of the identity of citizen, of women in their civic capacities – something omitted from radical feminist analysis and Marxism, for the most part, because citizenship was considered as delusional as 'bourgeois freedom' and did not figure in any significant way in texts embraced as 'feminist classics' in the 'founding era', so to speak.

Because Waltz admits that there is 'considerable interdependence' between his levels, it behoves us to consider that interdependence more systematically.<sup>27</sup> To speak of human nature and identities in a rich socio-culture or collective sense is to transgress the classical levels of analysis or three images in Waltz's model. The constructions of identities – not construed as mono-groups of sexual identity, race, ethnicity, but a far richer understanding, historical and socio-cultural – helps us to see how such identities cut across all three levels. These 'identities' are both individual and collective, implicating entire societies.



For example: in my discussion of just war theorizing in *Women and War*, I argue that, rather than obedience or disobedience to an abstract set of stipulative requirements, in times of war what really matters to how a nation-state as a collective identity ‘behaves’ is the structure of that nation’s history and experience, its strategic culture, if you will. The latter is far more salient in assessing how ‘decision-makers’ act than finely honed deontological argumentation or theoretical assumptions about international anarchy and the pursuit of self-interest narrowly defined. One assays the repertoire of possibilities available in particular societies at particular points in time. What dominates the political rhetoric? How do the citizens of *this* society by contrast to some other construe themselves domestically when it comes to relations between their state and others, and so on.

Waltz is surely correct that those who push a ‘single-cause’ explanation ride rough cycles of optimism and despair. One can see this despair played out in deadly ways when ideologists take over the state promising a ‘new socialist man’ or some such. When recalcitrant human material fails to conform automatically to the ideological utopianism, whole categories of human beings must be destroyed. In a less deadly way, one can see such cycles operating in democratic politics as well: wild optimistic expectations followed by sour cynicism because the world did not change overnight. Such warnings are always salutary. Surely one must add that if the ‘third image’ is pushed in a mono-causal or even mono-maniacal way, and other levels are ignored utterly, that, too, invites unreasonable expectation and despair: it is either world government or it is hell – that sort of thing. Aware of what Waltz calls the ‘conditioning effects’ of the state system, states are invited to act with a combination of prudence, alertness, tough-mindedness, yet openness to negotiation and compromise when possible. Whether states act in this way will be determined not only by the conditioning effect of systemic factors but by the determinative limits set by that state’s internal structure – or absence of limits, one should add.

That there is a ‘constant possibility of war’ does not really tell us very much. Indeed, being a constant it cannot explain change, if I understand Waltz correctly on these matters.<sup>28</sup> So our attention is appropriately directed to that which can be altered over time, namely, the internal ordering of states, and that, in turn, helps to determine which aspects of our human nature are given free rein or are curbed. Perhaps we cannot alter human nature but we know enough to know that context is hugely important in opening up or foreclosing certain possibilities. Ironically, then, the fact that ‘war happens’ requires that we give appropriate weight to all three levels that Waltz has identified rather than to rest our explanatory framework on one level alone. A permissive environment within which ‘war happens’ is not the same as one within which ‘war will always occur’. What accounts for the difference? To this point, feminist analysts who argue gender is determinative in a causal sense in ‘why war?’ have failed to make their case, even as studies of gender internationally and domestically have enhanced our knowledge and understanding in salutary ways.

One reason Waltz’s work is so enduring lies in the fact that he forces us to reason historically as well as politically, to ask the right sorts of questions, and to be clear-

headed throughout. The criticisms one makes of his 'levels of analysis' show just how indebted one is to his work in the first place. As a critical tool helping us to weed out all sorts of nonsense, Waltz remains enormously relevant. Where he falters – where we all falter – is in our constructive agenda, our arguments for how and why the world might be different. Waltz reminds us that in that search it is dangerous to oscillate between optimism and despair. A measured, tough-minded realism of the sort he exemplifies does not foreclose change altogether; rather, it persistently alerts us to how difficult it is. I count myself among the fortunate to have been Ken Waltz's student and I hope that at least a bit of the clarity and cogency of his thought has rubbed off.

## Notes

- 1 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959).
- 2 Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (New York: Basic Books, 1987).
- 3 To call such women 'sex workers', as 'politically correct' feminism dictates, is preposterous, as it suggests this is just another job and thereby fails to get to the ethical and human disaster and abuse of women that such sex trade involves.
- 4 Elshtain, *Women and War*.
- 5 *Public Man, Private Woman* was published by Princeton University Press, 1981.
- 6 Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Women and Politics: A Theoretical Analysis* (University Microfilms: Ann Arbor, MI, 1973), p. 5.
- 7 Elshtain, *Women and Politics*, pp. 346–47.
- 8 Elshtain, *Women and Politics*, p. 316.
- 9 For a full discussion of such approaches see Elshtain, *Public Man, Private Woman*.
- 10 Betty Reardon, *Sexism and the War System* (New York: Teacher College Press, 1985). Reardon indicated she was not pessimistic, as behavioural science would win the day. First, though, we had to resist cleaving the 'total human potential and personality' and move to some sort of androgynous personality.
- 11 See, for example, the discussion by Rebecca Grant, 'The sources of bias in International Relations theory', in R. Grant and K. Newland (eds), *Gender and International Relations* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 8–26.
- 12 See my discussion of these once popular extreme formulations – how widely circulated they are at present I cannot say – in *Women and War*, pp. 237–41. At the time in question – the mid-1980s – they were inescapable in feminism and peace movement activities.
- 13 Waltz, *Man, the State and War*, pp. 4, 5.
- 14 See p. 20 for the following: 'Reinhold Niebuhr, a theologian who in the last twenty-five years has written as many words of wisdom on problems of international politics as have any of the academic specialists in that subject, has criticized utopians, Liberal and Marxist alike, with frequency and telling effect.' I should note that in the world of Niebuhr scholarship there is division on whether Niebuhr's 'take' on St Augustine is adequate or wanting in significant respects.
- 15 Waltz, *Man, the State and War*, p. 41.
- 16 To be fair, Waltz could not possibly do full justice to all the thinkers he takes up briefly. But Augustine carries much of the conceptual weight for first-image pessimism, so a richer account of Augustine's position would have been welcome. Otherwise, one winds up tilting at windmills of one's own creation, at least up to a point.
- 17 The quote from Freud reads: 'So long as there are nations and empires, each prepared callously to exterminate its rival, all alike must be equipped for war.' See Waltz, *Man, the State and War*, p. 187.
- 18 Waltz, *Man, the State and War*, p. 4.

- 19 There is a mountain of Augustine scholarship, old and new, given the extraordinary revival of interest in every aspect of Augustine's work. For a discussion of the civic theology/cultural representations question – or at least an introduction to such matters – see Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Augustine and the Limits of Politics* (South Bend, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1995).
- 20 See Sigmund Freud, 'Thoughts for the Times of War and Death', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 14 (London: Hogarth Press, 1964), pp. 275–88; and Sigmund Freud, 'Why War?', *Standard Edition*, vol. 20, pp. 199–215.
- 21 Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Matilda Joslyn Gage, eds, *History of Woman Suffrage* (Vol. II) (Rochester: Charles Mann Publishers, 1881–1891), p.145.
- 22 I refer, of course, to Susan Brownmiller's *Against our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1975).
- 23 Here one should mention Sara Ruddick whose work on 'maternal thinking' presaged the 'care' end of the so-called (and helpfully so) 'care v justice' turn in feminist theory. See Ruddick's early groundbreaking essays, 'Maternal thinking' and 'Preservative love and military destruction: some reflections on mothering and peace', in Joyce Trebilcot, ed., *Mothering: Essays in Feminist Theory* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Allanheld, 1984), pp. 213–30 and 231–62 respectively.
- 24 Addams limned these themes in various essays but see, especially, *The Long Road of Woman's Memory* (New York: Macmillan, 1917).
- 25 Details on her arguments and a critical response can be found in Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Jane Addams and the Dream of American Democracy* (New York: Basic Books, 2002). See also Jane Addams, *Newer Ideals of Peace* (New York: Macmillan, 1915).
- 26 Waltz, *Man, the State and War*, p. 122.
- 27 Waltz, *Man, the State and War*, p. 186.
- 28 The quote is from Waltz, *Man, the State and War*, p. 238.

## **PART IV**

# War and security, causes and consequences



# 12

## UNDERSTANDING MAN, THE STATE AND WAR

*Hidemi Suganami*

### Introduction

I bought *Man, the State and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (hereafter *MSW*) in 1971 when working for a Master's degree in International Politics at Aberystwyth. The book was recommended by several teachers, its title was intriguing, and I found a copy in a local bookstore on my way to the railway station. I was travelling to London that day and began reading the book while waiting for the train. If the train had never come, I could have sat there, at the station buffet, and finished the book. Encountering *MSW*, already a classic by then, was an exciting experience. I saw everything I thought I knew, or had not even thought, about the causes of war expounded and challenged. And it gave me an idea of what 'a theoretical analysis' might mean – a question which had intrigued me then. Waltz wrote:

our subject is 'How to Think about War and Peace.' The chapters that follow are, in a sense, essays in political theory. This description is justified partly by the mode of inquiry – we proceed by examining assumptions and asking repeatedly what differences they make – and partly by the fact that we consider a number of political philosophers directly.<sup>1</sup>

Considering political philosophers does not necessarily make a work an exercise in political theory. What makes it so is its mode of inquiry combined with its subject-matter. Waltz's subject-matter is a range of positions taken on the causes of war and the conditions of peace, which are clearly 'political'. Waltz's main mode of enquiry is 'theoretical' in the sense that it aims to uncover the assumptions of the various positions taken and to work out their implications, thereby subjecting them to a sustained critical scrutiny. Such a mode of enquiry is especially pertinent to the field, such as the causes-of-war study, which is filled with a variety of often firmly held answers, all equally plausible at first glance and each having potentially serious

implications for our lives. Inasmuch as these answers are themselves ‘theoretical’ positions, in the sense of offering *general explanations* of the phenomenon of war, Waltz’s ‘theoretical analysis’ is more appropriately characterised as a ‘meta-theoretical’ (or ‘second-order’ theoretical) exercise; it is also ‘philosophical’ since his focus is on the conceptual and logical aspects of the argument that sustains each of the various positions examined.

When I read *MSW* for the first time, however, I could not make up my mind as to whether the first, second, or third image was the one to go for, so I read it again in 1973, when I was a PhD student in London. There, too, the book was on a number of reading lists, including C.A.W. Manning’s on the ‘Philosophical aspects of International Relations’. I began to consider a philosophical critique of substantive contentions about world politics a worthwhile intellectual pursuit, something I perhaps wanted to do if given a chance.

A chance arose in 1975 when I became a lecturer at Keele University in the UK. My immediate task was to learn to teach a second-year course on ‘International conflict’. I glanced at parts of *MSW* every year for a number of years to refresh my mind about some key moves that need to be made in dealing with certain common contentions regarding the causes of war and the conditions of peace: for example, ‘since war begins in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed’ – a standard essay title that acquired an important twist as feminism found its way into the study of war.

But I still remained somewhat uncertain about what the book was saying. So I read it again in 1985 when I began teaching an interdepartmental module on ‘the causes of war’ with a philosophy friend. I subsequently developed a final-year special subject on the causes of war and published a book on that subject some ten years later.<sup>2</sup>

My book, *On the Causes of War*, applies methods of analytical philosophy and ideas borrowed from formalism in literary theory to major debates among a wide variety of scholars who specialise in the study of the causes, origins and correlates of war(s). Its first chapter is dedicated to dissecting the moves Waltz makes in arriving at his conclusions, and the entire book was written as a set of correctives and fairly substantial supplements to *MSW*. My central question was similar to Waltz’s: what is the framework within which people debate, agree or disagree about what causes war?

Although my book is now fourteen years old, I still find it difficult to dissociate myself from the analysis that I conducted there with respect to Waltz’s key contentions. What follows, therefore, restates some of the things I wrote then, but there has been some rethinking as well as reformulation.<sup>3</sup> In particular, rereading *MSW* in writing this chapter, I realised that there is another side to it to which I had not given sufficient attention. This has to do with *MSW*, not as a meta-theoretical work on causal theories of war, but as a first-order theoretical work on international politics and, in particular, on the balance of power.

As a meta-theoretical work on causal theories of war, *MSW* does precisely what I had read into the book. But the book’s subtitle, ‘A Theoretical Analysis’, is

ambiguous. It can mean what Waltz apparently intended to mean in the passage quoted above – a philosophical analysis, aimed at uncovering the assumptions underlying various substantive arguments about the causes of war and tracing their implications, enabling us to have a deeper understanding of these various arguments and thereby to evaluate them or relate to them less dogmatically. But a more obvious meaning of ‘a theoretical analysis’ in the study of international politics must be an analysis of international politics itself. And this is what *MSW* also does.

*MSW* is therefore at once a meta-theoretical work on causal theories of war and a theoretical work on international politics itself. In what follows, I shall argue that, as a meta-theoretical critique of the main causal theories of war, the book conceals several problems. By contrast, as a theoretical work on international politics itself, offering a mechanistic explanation of how internationally things tend to work out the way they often do, the book gives us some valuable insight for which Waltz is more famous through the publication of his other major work, aptly titled *Theory of International Politics* (hereafter *TIP*).<sup>4</sup>

### The three images, the levels of analysis and the agent/structure dichotomy

I referred above to Waltz’s first, second and third images without even placing a footnote because everyone studying International Relations is expected to know what they are. But I suspect there is a common tendency to think of Waltz’s three images as themselves the ‘levels of analysis’. This assumption cannot go unchallenged, even though *MSW* is very importantly about the ‘level-of-analysis’ issue, as explained below.

As we learn from J. David Singer’s discussion, the ‘level-of-analysis problem’ has primarily to do with whether one should ask macro-level or micro-level *questions*, whether, that is, one should ask questions about the system as a whole – how it sustains itself, how it fluctuates, where it is going, etc. – or questions about the behaviours of its units.<sup>5</sup> By contrast, Waltz’s three images have to do with where to look for the *answers* regarding the causes of war. The difference is easy to see. And, interestingly, Waltz never uses the term ‘levels of analysis’, or even ‘levels’, anywhere in *MSW*.

Moreover, the three images, as Waltz initially defines them, have to do with the answers given to a very specific question regarding the causes of war – not what causes war, in fact, but where the *major* causes of war are found. He wrote:

Where are the major causes of war to be found? The answers are bewildering in their variety and in their contradictory qualities. To make this variety manageable, the answers can be ordered under the following three headings: within man, within the structure of the separate states, within the state system . . . These three estimates of cause will subsequently be referred to as images of international relations, numbered in the order given, with each image defined according to where one locates the nexus of important causes.<sup>6</sup>



So Waltz's three images, as he initially defines them, are not strictly speaking even about the causes of war in the sense of what they are, but more specifically about how the causes of war which have been identified can be ordered in terms of their relative importance. Weighing of causes is a very different exercise from finding them. What should also be noted here is that the relative importance of a cause can only be determined in comparison with other causes. It follows that all the three images implicitly take a multi-causal stance. For, without a prior acknowledgement that there are a number of causes that produce a war, it is impossible to assert that this or that kind of cause is a *major* one. But if each image asserts that the cause it highlights is the major one, meaning that the cause it selects is more important than the ones stressed by the other images, it will not be possible to combine the three images in a straightforward manner. It is impossible to say 'x is more important than y and z', 'y is more important than x and z', and 'z is more important than x and y' at the same time. A way out of this, which is the line Waltz broadly follows at the end of *MSW*, is to say that 'x, y, and z are all important but in different ways'. His main thesis is that 'man' and 'the state' are important because we cannot explain particular wars without reference to what they do but that 'the international system' is important because it explains the possibility and recurrence of war.

This is not an implausible line to take and is consonant with a common view (an 'overarching image' as we may call it) of world politics as a drama in which actors act to bring about changes in their relationships within a setting that broadly shapes their patterns of interaction. But Waltz's main thesis hides a number of problems, of a logical and conceptual nature, which I will tease out in the next section. There is one thing that needs to be noted at this point, however. It is the fact that Waltz has now introduced the level-of-analysis issue in its proper sense. Waltz is here dividing the questions of war into two kinds: unit-level, or disaggregated, questions regarding the causes of particular wars between particular states at particular times; and the system-level, or holistic, questions regarding the possibility and recurrence of war between any states at any time as a systemic feature. And he is saying that unit-level questions cannot be answered without paying attention to what human beings and states do but that answers to system-level questions are found in the nature of the international environment itself.

There is therefore an important transition in *MSW*: it begins by asking where the major causes of war are found and offers a tripartite scheme to classify some standard answers; but the book's concluding message is the importance of separating micro- and macro-level questions – 'why a given set of states came to fight a particular war at a particular time' and 'why the possibility and recurrence of war are features of the international environment'. It is not so much that the three levels of analysis are collapsed into two as that the three standard arguments identified at the beginning are synthesised as elements in an overarching image of world politics as a drama, comprising actors and the setting, or agents and the structure. And this separation or juxtaposition of agents and the structure is in turn sustained by Waltz's incorporation of the micro/macro distinction into his thinking.

The distinction between micro- and macro-level studies becomes the focal point of his 1979 book, in which he famously argues that his subject is a theory of international politics, not a theory of foreign policy, that is, he is addressing macro-level questions, not micro-level ones.<sup>7</sup>

### Waltz's argument for the third image

Waltz's central contention, formulated at the end of *MSW*, is that 'man' and 'the state' are important because we cannot explain particular wars without reference to them – or what they feel, think and do – but that 'the international system', or the nature of the international environment, is important because it explains the possibility and recurrence of war. He adds that the nature of the international environment is such that it not only explains why any war, and therefore this or that particular war, was possible, but also explains why some wars occur.

To arrive at these conclusions, Waltz makes two basic moves; he considers that there are two main ways in which a war may come about; and he combines this thought with the idea that there are two kinds of cause, 'efficient' and 'permissive'. According to Waltz, 'efficient' causes of war are 'immediate' causes which bring about an actual instance of war, which make states fight a particular war. A 'permissive' cause of war, by contrast, is war's enabling condition which Waltz also calls war's 'underlying' cause.<sup>8</sup>

One common way in which war comes about is where state A wants something that state B possesses and resorts to war to obtain it. In such a case, according to Waltz, A's desire for the object – 'the Malvinas factor' – is an efficient cause of the war that breaks out. But hidden underneath this efficient cause is what Waltz calls the permissive cause. This he says is found in, and it appears that he is thinking 'only in', the nature of the international system as a place where there is nothing to prevent war.<sup>9</sup>

The other way in which war comes about, according to Waltz, is where the fact that there is nothing in the international system to prevent war causes states A and B to compete for security, intensifying their mutual fear eventually to a point where one of them feels compelled to resort to a preventive war against the other. In this – 'Peloponnesian' – scenario, Waltz remarks that the efficient cause of war ('fear', in this case) 'is derived from' the permissive cause, the fact that there is nothing in the international system to prevent war.<sup>10</sup>

Since in Waltz's judgement the fact that there is nothing in the international system to prevent war works as the permissive cause that underlies every particular war, and also produces an efficient cause of some wars, he considers this feature of the international environment to be of fundamental significance in understanding the phenomenon of war. This, according to Waltz, accounts for the very possibility of war;<sup>11</sup> it explains why war is a constant possibility,<sup>12</sup> and why therefore states find it rational to be prepared to fight all the time;<sup>13</sup> it constitutes the underlying cause of war<sup>14</sup> and shows why prescriptions for peace aimed at man and the state are inadequate;<sup>15</sup> and it gives a 'final explanation'<sup>16</sup> of the origins of war among states.

And, of course, within the tripartite framework with which Waltz began, it is in the third location that this most fundamental cause of war in his thinking is found.

Meanwhile, having equated 'immediate' with 'efficient' causes or those which bring about a particular war, Waltz opines, 'the immediate causes of every war must be either the acts of individuals or the acts of states'; and because individuals and states are the first two locations in his tripartite scheme, he concludes, 'These immediate causes of war are contained in the first and second images'.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, Waltz characterises 'efficient causes' as 'accidental causes'<sup>18</sup> and remarks that 'the immediate causes of many wars are trivial'.<sup>19</sup> Clearly, therefore, Waltz is a third-image thinker; or, having reflected on the merits of the three images, he has voted for the third.

This is not to say that Waltz endorses a mono-causal thesis. As we saw, none of the three images can be treated as a mono-causal view. Waltz's three images, as he defines them himself, have to do with the hierarchy of causes in terms of their relative significance. He accords primary causal significance to the nature of the international environment, or the setting, while not forgetting causal inputs from the actors on the stage. And it is this overarching image of world politics as a drama, with its setting and actors, that enables him to synthesise his three images. He is a third-image thinker, however, in that he sees the drama of international politics as a story of repetition and recurrence shaped by the setting. Integral to Waltz's third-image view therefore is his structural-mechanistic theory of international politics and of the phenomenon of the balance of power in particular. I shall turn to this later. But first I want to re-examine Waltz's reasoning that makes him go for the third image.

## Problems in Waltz's reasoning

As I read and reread *MSW*, several problems suggested and gradually articulated themselves in my mind. What follows is a summary of my attempt to address them.

### *'The permissive cause, the international environment'*

Waltz argues that war occurs because there is nothing to prevent it in the international environment.<sup>20</sup> But an important point to notice here is that this absence of something that can prevent war is presented, in Waltz's scheme, specifically as the enabling condition of war. Waltz's contention has the following shape: the absence of X from the international environment is the condition that permits/enables war to happen. But if this statement is to be worth making, it will have to be that, in X's presence, war could not happen *at all*. For otherwise, war could happen in the presence, *as well as* in the absence, of X, in which case there would not be much point in stressing that war could not happen in the absence of X – for it could happen even in its presence.

However, there simply cannot be any such thing as X in the international system; it is impossible even to imagine what sort of thing X might be. To say, therefore,

that it is *missing* from the international system is meaningless. This point becomes clearer when we consider a statement, for example, that ‘if human beings had gills they could swim like fish’. This is not a particularly useful statement perhaps, but at least we know what gills are and how they function. By contrast, a statement that ‘if the international system were equipped with X, war could not happen at all’ is vacuous in that we cannot even describe what X is. All we can say of X is that it is supposedly an item in whose presence in the international system war could not happen at all. This, of course, makes it trivially true that, in the absence of X from the international environment, war is a constant possibility. But since we cannot even give a description of X without repeating ourselves in a circle, nothing of the sort can meaningfully be said to be ‘missing’ from that environment.

It may be objected that I overstate my case here. An anti-war device that rules out the very possibility of war is also missing *from my kitchen* but that would be too absurd a point even to think of; it is not quite so absurd, it may be objected, to remark that an effective anti-war device is missing from the international system – for it is. But the fact remains: for the absence of that effective anti-war device from the international environment to count specifically as the permissive cause of war, which is what Waltz argues to sustain his third-image thesis, the device would have to be of the sort that, if it were present in the international environment, the possibility of war would be ruled out; and there simply could not be such an entity. It follows that the nature of the international environment, *while undoubtedly war-conducive*, is not ‘the permissive cause’ of war. Even if there were to be a world government, (world civil) war could, and would, occur, as Waltz himself acknowledges, unless the world state were effective enough always to rule out such a possibility, which it could not.<sup>21</sup> Waltz’s central thesis which characterises ‘the international environment’ specifically as ‘the permissive cause of war’ must be rejected.

### ***A not so trivially true statement***

The logic underlying the above discussion is a simple one: nothing can properly be said to be missing from anywhere if it could not even in principle exist there. The same logic applies to the state: it is not possible even to imagine what Y would be like whose presence, or inclusion, in the internal structure of a state would make it not just improbable, but actually impossible, for it to engage in war; therefore the absence of Y from the internal structure of the state could not meaningfully count as war’s permissive cause.

It is more meaningful, however, to explore what features of human beings enable them to produce a phenomenon of war; it is arguably quite interesting to do so because the phenomenon of war is unique, or almost unique, to humankind. Certain aspects of human nature, understood as characteristics common to humans, make war a possibility within the human race, but lacking such qualities, other living organisms could not on the whole engage in war. And saying this is not only true, but meaningful – for we can state what these aspects are, present in humans and

mostly absent from the other species of animal, such that the phenomenon of war is possible within the human race but mostly impossible elsewhere.

Identifying those aspects of human nature which make war possible requires us to state what 'war' is. If 'war' is understood broadly as an inter-societal conflict involving organised violence, it is easy to see that a capacity of human beings to live in and organise societies is a permissive cause of war. Solitary animals, clearly, do not make war as they lack the requisite capacity to form societies. Indeed, humankind is almost unique in its ability to organise its separate societies so effectively as to make it possible for them to engage in a sustained military conflict, which war is. In a vast majority of cases, non-human animal fights take place between individuals and not between organised groups.<sup>22</sup>

Some 'social animals', however, are known to engage in inter-group conflict. Rapoport refers to fighting between two 'armies' of ants. However, 'an ant's response to another ant seems to be rigidly mechanical and can be analysed into stereotyped components, precluding any basis for assuming a planned course of action characteristic of human behavior'.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Huntingford reports that 'in a small minority of species of non-human animals [such as non-human primates] groups do sometimes defend territories and they use coordinated and occasionally injurious fighting to do so'.<sup>24</sup> But this is said to be relatively uncommon and, unlike human warfare, not to involve the use of weapons or specialised individual roles.<sup>25</sup>

The point here is not that war is unique to humankind. Rather, non-human animal species exhibit only exceptionally and to a very limited degree those qualities of human beings which contribute to making war a possibility among them. Waltz's discussion of human nature as a cause of war does not touch on this human/non-human comparison even though, I contend, it makes better sense to locate a permissive cause of war here than elsewhere in his tripartite scheme. Interestingly, he dismisses as trivially true the argument that, if we were all perfectly rational beings or perfect Christians, we would have no violent conflict; and at one point he notices a similar problem in the assertion that in the presence of a perfectly effective anti-war device in the international environment there would be no war.<sup>26</sup> Yet, curiously, he ends up according much significance to the nature of the international environment (or the absence of a perfectly effective anti-war device from the international system) while neglecting the parallel, and arguably more meaningful, argument concerning war-enabling capacities of humankind largely absent from non-human animals.

### ***The supposed relative insignificance of 'man' in the tripartite scheme***

For Waltz, 'man' is not a location where the most fundamental cause of war is found; it is worth asking what reasoning sustains this judgement.

At the beginning of *MSW*, Waltz defines 'the first image' as theories of war according to which the major cause of war is to be found in 'the nature and behavior of man'.<sup>27</sup> For the most part, he treats the first image as having to do with human

nature. But he also includes in his discussion of this image an explanation of war in terms of personality traits.<sup>28</sup> Human nature and personality traits are quite different things (one is universal, the other specific to a sub-type), but they may be considered to form part of 'the nature and behavior of man'. What is more problematic is Waltz's inclusion in the same category of certain concrete mental states of the leaders, such as their desire for a particular piece of territory or their fear of aggrandisement on the part of a rival state, towards the end of the book.<sup>29</sup>

The ability of human beings to entertain such common feelings as desire or fear at all, an especially greedy or paranoid personality, and a concrete desire or fear of a particular leader in a given situation may all be said to be 'within man'.<sup>30</sup> But clearly they are not 'within man' in the same sense: these quite disparate items pertain to all human beings as human beings, certain kinds of people or personality types, and specific individuals in concrete circumstances, respectively.

The 'within man' category gets expanded inordinately if all these things have to be accommodated in it. Importantly, this has led Waltz to depreciate unduly the overall significance of 'man' as a cause of war. For, in the earlier part of *MSW*, where he treats the first image as relating to human nature, he points out, rightly, that this factor fails to explain war specifically, in contradistinction to any other forms of human activity: 'the importance of human nature as a factor in causal analysis of social events is reduced by the fact that the same nature, however defined, has to explain an infinite variety of social events';<sup>31</sup> 'human nature may in some sense have been the cause of war in 1914, but by the same token it was the cause of peace in 1910'.<sup>32</sup> Towards the end of the book, however, where Waltz thinks of the first image as also containing such things as specific feelings, thoughts and acts of a given leader, he treats this image as inadequate because such things only (partly) explain particular instances of war, and entirely fail to explain war as such. The ultimate explanation of the latter, which he seeks, is found, he insists, in the structure of the international environment, not in the particular acts of individuals.<sup>33</sup>

But this criticism is unfair: the first image gets criticised for being uselessly too general and trivially too specific. Against Waltz, it can be argued that certain aspects of human nature explain the possibility (though not the actual occurrence) of war among human beings; that certain personality traits, such as a high risk-taking propensity, in combination with certain other factors, such as the number of poles in the system, may be found strongly correlated with the relative frequency of war; and that such character traits on the part of some specific individuals, together with their thoughts and actions, play a vital part in making intelligible particular outbreaks of war. Waltz's 'within man' category, when its ingredients are disaggregated and put to appropriate use, can prove quite informative.

### ***The internal structure of states and the acts of states***

It is common to think of the internal structure of a given state as its *attribute*. By contrast, when someone, say the president, acts on behalf of that state, his/her act is not normally said to be an attribute of the state. Rather, it is *attributed* to it; his/her

act is deemed to be an act of the state by imputation. Waltz does not appear to have seen much importance in differentiating these two kinds of remark. Most of the time he talks of the second image as a theory of war which sees the major cause of war in the internal structure of a given type of state;<sup>34</sup> but, towards the end of his book, as we saw, he argues that ‘the immediate causes of every war must be either the acts of individuals *or the acts of states*’ and that the immediate causes of war can therefore be seen to be ‘contained in the first *and the second images*’.<sup>35</sup> In other words, the internal structure of a given type of state and what that state is deemed to have done through an agent acting on its behalf are both subsumed under the ‘within states’ rubric. We should also notice here that while the second image was initially defined as an evaluative stance which sees a major cause of war in the internal structure of separate states, it has now been modified to denote a location where a cause of war can be identified. Waltz had, it may have been noted, made a parallel move with respect to his first image.

However, *an evaluative stance* with respect to the relative significance of a particular kind of cause (of war) and *a location* where a cause (of war) can be found are two entirely different things, as are *the internal structure of a given kind of state* and *what a state of that kind does or did through the action of its agent*. Waltz conflates the first two as well as the second two, and this, as explained below, contributes to his judgement that the third image is the one to go for.

As we saw, he criticises the first image by subjecting it to two separate, and (when combined) unfair, attacks. He also criticises both the first and second images by noting, quite rightly, that prescriptions for peace aimed at improving ‘man’ or ‘the state’ are useless, or worse than useless, because they are applied within the existing (war-conducive) international framework.<sup>36</sup> But now he is adding that what states do to produce a war – and recall this has come to be subsumed under the idea of ‘the second image’ through his above-noted double conflation – while constituting efficient causes of a particular war,<sup>37</sup> can only be what he considers as immediate causes of war, not war’s underlying cause, and that ‘the immediate causes of many wars are trivial’.<sup>38</sup> According to Waltz’s estimate, a ‘final explanation’<sup>39</sup> of the origins of war among states must be found in ‘the permissive cause, the international environment’,<sup>40</sup> a third-image conclusion sustained by a series of moves which, it should by now be clear, are highly problematic.

### ***A restrictive theoretical framework***

Waltz’s most fundamental move in need of reconsideration, however, lies in his adoption of the tripartite scheme itself. He is, of course, not the first to make use of this scheme. Manning, for example, wrote: ‘If the League was to succeed it must do so in spite of the nature of men, the nature of states and the nature of the society of states’.<sup>41</sup> It apparently seemed quite natural and obvious to him to organise his thought about the causes of the League’s poor record in terms of the trinity of men, states and the society of states, which subsequently became associated almost inseparably with Waltz’s name. And many readers of *MSW* appear to think that,

whatever else may be said about the book, its core message is clear and sound: that there are three ways of looking at international relations in general, and the causes of war in particular, and that they are based on the three key components of the world – man, states, and the system of states.

Undoubtedly, this tripartite scheme is accepted with great ease, and with conviction as to its validity, because it reflects a very common view of how modern political life is organised: human beings, as citizens, belong to separate states, and these in turn form a system or society of states. What is more natural than to extract from this experience the three locations of ‘man, the state and the international system’ as places where ‘causing’ goes on with respect to war? Modern political philosophers articulated and reinforced this popular perception by their narrative: men left the state of nature and formed separate states, and these, while in turn formally in the state of nature, constitute a system or society of states.

The fact that many of the thinkers Waltz examines in *MSW* are political philosophers has no doubt made the tripartite frame especially useful to his exposition. Had he studied a bewildering variety of historical accounts regarding the origins of particular wars and tried to sort them in a systematic and comprehensive manner in an effort to make sense of the diversity of interpretations, he would have seen straightaway that the tripartite scheme, while it may accord with our conventional view of the world political order, does not necessarily supply a good analytical device. The ingredients of causal narratives explicating how a state of peace between two states turned into a state of war cannot all be captured by Waltz’s tripartite scheme without enlarging each category artificially and ignoring some factors that clearly lie outside it.

Think of history, geography, economy and technology, which undoubtedly affect the behaviour of states. Where, within the tripartite scheme, do they belong? To say, for example, that history – historical memories and knowledge claims – belong to ‘man’, that geographic and economic conditions pertain to ‘states’, and that the level of technology is a ‘systemic’ feature, while not entirely implausible, is not going to help us evaluate the relative significance of the three locations of causes, for now so many incongruous items have been placed together under each rubric. The tripartite scheme is no more than one, though standard, way of characterising our political experiences. It is neither necessary nor sensible to squeeze every causal factor of war into the three places.

### ***Conceptual slippage***

In Waltz’s thinking, the *permissive* cause of war is the same as the *underlying* cause of war; they are said to explain the *possibility*, the *constant possibility* and the *recurrence* of war. But these assertions require some reservation.

First, Waltz’s idea of the permissive cause is equivalent to the enabling, or necessary, condition, in whose absence war, his subject, would be an impossibility. The ‘underlying’ cause is a less clearly definable concept, but Waltz contrasts it to ‘immediate’ causes and equates the concept of the underlying cause of war with the



idea of its permissive cause. But this final equation is problematic in that there may be a number of underlying causes of a particular war, or of a particular kind of war, without them being anything so exacting as the necessary condition of all wars. The instability of a bi-polar system in which each pole consists of a cluster of great powers allied together may well be *one underlying cause of specific wars*, most famously the First World War, but it certainly does not qualify as *the permissive cause of all wars*. Yet, by equating the two concepts, ‘permissive’ and ‘underlying’, Waltz has elevated a fact of doubtful significance – that war is possible in the absence of anything from the international system that could prevent war with absolute certainty – into a statement of the underlying cause of all wars. He has also effectively ruled out the idea that the phenomenon of war may have a number of underlying causes, the war-conducive internal structures of some states being an important candidate.

Second, there is no objection to the idea that if X explains the possibility of war and if X is continuously present, then that fact explains the constant possibility of war. But Waltz moves almost imperceptively from the correct proposition that war is a possibility in the international system to a different, more alarmist, idea that war can break out anywhere anytime in the international system and that war in fact recurs. That war recurs is empirically true but only in the sense that war occurs from time to time, every now and then. War, however, is a relatively infrequent phenomenon and inter-state wars increasingly so. Most countries are at peace with most other countries most of the time and between some countries the possibility of war has come to be effectively ruled out. Of course, there is nothing anywhere to rule out the logical possibility of war, but that would be a trivial statement to make. Far more significant is the fact that war is more, or less, likely depending on the circumstances not yet fully understood and that war is not always avoidable.

### **An interim summary**

I have presented my reasons for rejecting Waltz’s third-image thesis regarding the major cause of war. That there is nothing in the international environment to prevent war is a fact of doubtful significance as a permissive cause of war. In any case, this fact does not qualify as ‘the’ permissive cause: some permissive causes of war are found in the make-up of human beings as revealed when they are contrasted with non-human animals.

Moreover, Waltz’s conflation of certain incongruous items in the ‘within man’ and ‘within states’ categories is problematic. But, on reflection, this can be understood as resulting from, and supporting, Waltz’s transition, in his book, from the talk of the three images as he initially defines them to the talk of the level-of-analysis issue. I have already pointed to this transition. Waltz begins with an idea that there are three different estimates of the major cause of war (‘the talk of the three images’) and ends with an idea that there are micro- and macro-level questions to ask about the phenomenon of war (‘the talk of the level-of-analysis issue’), stressing, as we saw, the importance of the macro-level story which points to the recurrence and repetition in the lives of states seeking survival under anarchy.

But this transition, or switch, has a cost. Waltz has to find a way of grafting a micro/macro dichotomy on to what was initially a tripartite scheme. It is easy to say that the first two in the tripartite scheme were collapsed into one (by thinking of the first two as ‘agents’ and the third as ‘the structure’). But that does not tell a whole story. In collapsing the first two, Waltz moved (or had to move) away from the idea of the first location (‘within man’) as having essentially to do with human nature/personality traits towards a rather different idea that what statesmen feel, think and do in particular circumstances also fall into this location; in a parallel fashion, he also moved (or had to move) away from the idea of the second location (‘within states’) as having to do with the internal structure of a given type of states towards a different idea that what states can be said (by imputation) to feel, think and do in particular circumstances also belongs to this location.

Having already criticised arguments from human nature/personality traits and those pointing to the internal structure of states as yielding inadequate prescriptions for peace, he is now shifting his target. Causal factors found in the first two locations, such as what states or statesmen feel, think and do, he is now arguing, only contribute towards explaining particular wars as their immediate causes and are therefore, in his estimate, less significant than the underlying cause of all wars. If what he is calling the permissive cause of war really deserves to be treated as the underlying cause of all wars, his effective redefinitions of the first two images might perhaps have been worthwhile. In my judgement, they have made the overall argument even less sustainable.

To the extent, therefore, that Waltz’s third-image thesis concerning the major cause of war consists in his assertion that the nature of the international environment is the sole permissive, and therefore the underlying, cause of war and that the causes found in the first two locations are efficient and, often relatively trivial, immediate causes of war, his thesis – or his estimate of the relative significance of the various causes of war – cannot be sustained. There are too many problems in the meta-theoretical moves that Waltz makes in evaluating the main causal theories of war.<sup>42</sup> However, as I noted earlier, Waltz’s critique of the prescriptions for peace stemming from the first two images is persuasive. What underlies that critique is a structural-mechanistic theory of international politics which pays special attention to the states’ goal of survival under the conditions of anarchy, where the use of force remains the ultimate possibility, pushing the major powers in the direction of balance-of-power politics even against their leaders’ wishes. Although this theory came to be more fully developed and widely debated through the publication of his later work, *TIP*, Waltz had already given the essence of that theory twenty years earlier. I now turn to consider this aspect of *MSW*.

### **Waltz’s theory of international (balance-of-power) politics**

The germ of Waltz’s theory of international politics is found in the penultimate chapter of *MSW*, titled ‘Economics, Politics, and History’. Inspired by the well-known ‘stag hunt’ allegory used by Rousseau, Waltz cautions that ‘to expect each

country to formulate an economic policy that happens to work to the advantage of all countries is utopian'.<sup>43</sup> Each state's failure to do so is to the disadvantage of all states, including itself, he acknowledges; yet even if this were to be noted, the 'right' policies would not be spontaneously or universally adopted under anarchy.<sup>44</sup> Under this condition, states, each acting rationally, may produce a suboptimal outcome for all.

This logic underlies a tariff war, for instance. It is easy to say that 'A decision to reduce the barriers to trade among states would benefit some countries more than others, but in the long run and in the absolute terms it would benefit all countries'.<sup>45</sup> However, according to Waltz, under anarchy 'relative gain is more important than absolute gain'.<sup>46</sup> Waltz suggests that this is a proposition that will become clearer when considerations of political power are added to purely economic concerns for, in international politics, the use of force is not ruled out and the actual survival of the states is at stake.<sup>47</sup>

Logically, states, living under anarchy, have three options: to risk perishing, to seek domination, or to pursue the policy of the balance of power, that is, to prevent others from gaining preponderance by strengthening themselves or by coalition.<sup>48</sup> Of course, a drive for hegemony by any state may be successful despite the resistance of the other states; or for some reasons the other states may not resist. But no state would wish to risk perishing and 'for each state its power in relation to other states is ultimately the key to its survival'.<sup>49</sup> Waltz's point is that, given the condition of anarchy and the states' desire to survive, there is a natural tendency for states to try to prevent the others from gaining preponderance regardless of what the state leaders espouse. Furthermore, a condition of balance may become the conscious goal of a state or a system of states; then one would expect the balancing process to be one of greater precision and subtlety.<sup>50</sup> In any case, 'the most ardent desire cannot bring about' the abolition of balance-of-power politics so far as states live under anarchy and wish to survive.<sup>51</sup>

Though no longer striking, this is an early articulation in IR of the mechanistic theory of the balance of power. Causal mechanisms, embodied in such a theory, are said to be in operation,

where we are induced to behave in a certain way because of the workings of our mind or body, or because the social environment induces us to think and act in a particular manner; or, where, through the workings of the system in which our actions take place, they lead to unintended consequences.<sup>52</sup>

Waltz's balance-of-power theory points to the second and the third of these paths: the anarchical structure of the international system (plus the units' desire to survive) induces state leaders to think and act in such a way as to prevent one great power from becoming overwhelmingly dominant and this tends to produce balance-of-power politics, whereby the key players try to balance each other individually or by shifting alliances, possibly leading to a rough equilibrium of power among the major powers even if that end result is not what they consciously try to achieve.<sup>53</sup>

Waltz thinks, however, that mechanistic processes do not always work and the conditions under which they do so are often difficult to enumerate especially in the social sphere. Hence his carefully vague formulation that such a tendency for the balance of power – as a policy and as an outcome – will manifest itself ‘under certain conditions, conditions that have often existed in international politics’.<sup>54</sup>

## Conclusion

The status of a scholarly text as a classic is not necessarily undermined by the number of errors it has subsequently been alleged or found to contain. Once a text establishes itself as a work of outstanding significance, which *MSW* clearly did, other works in the same field tend to define their positions in relation to that of the classical text. The very act of engaging critically with *MSW*, as I, among others, have done, reinforces the status of the book as a classic.

One reason why *MSW* has been so well received has undoubtedly to do with the readiness with which Waltz’s tripartite scheme tends to be accepted. As noted earlier, this framework coincides with a common-sense view of how our political world is structured and its validity therefore tends to be assumed without question. Many of the thinkers that Waltz examined had in turn thought about the major causes of war in terms of the tripartite frame and therefore it made sense for him to use that framework in expounding them. The framework and the examples reinforce each other as do our own dominant conception of world politics and Waltz’s tripartite discussions. Waltz’s later juxtaposition of the acts of individuals or of states, on the one hand, and the structure of the international environment, on the other, also fits in with a common view of the world political scene as comprising ‘agents’ and ‘structure’, where the agents act in accordance with their beliefs and desires within the constraints of the structure of the social environment.

The particular way in which Waltz formulated and defended a third-image thesis on the causes of war is faulty but that does not undo the fact that the book contains very many astute observations. Note that the two scenarios of war that Waltz used were of the sort generally considered to be highly plausible in the context of the Cold War in which he wrote his book: either the Soviet Union will attack the West because it wants something that the West has, or the security competition between the two blocs will escalate to the point of no return where one of them is forced into attacking the other in a preventive war or a pre-emptive strike. Stemming from these two scenarios is a strategy for war-avoidance centred on skilful deterrence aimed to prevent an enemy assault as well as spiralling escalation of the conflict. Waltz’s analysis supplied a basis for this type of strategy, while his criticisms of the first two images entailed the rejection of (Christian) pacifism and liberal reformism as a way to peace. Providing such ideas, based on his first-order theoretical analysis of international politics, was a significant contribution in the context of the Cold War. *MSW* was the right book at the right time.

The Cold War is long over and war itself, in the sense of inter-state war, is no longer a prominent feature of world politics. There are many civil conflicts, violence associated with failing states, terrorist attacks and counter-attacks, and Waltz's tripartite framework is not acutely relevant to any of these contemporary phenomena. Besides, new perspectives have been added to the study of conflict, violence and war, which has shown IR's over-concentration on anarchy to be problematic. Besides, the very characterisation of world politics as taking place under anarchy presupposes, problematically, that the states are the more or less exclusive actors and that the contrast between centralised/well-governed states and the de-centralised/disorderly global international system is the key to understanding world politics.

Nevertheless, the theory of international politics that runs through *MSW* and was later elaborated in *TIP* continues to point to a causal potential and mechanism embedded in the anarchical structure of the international system – although there are many other causal potentials and mechanisms embedded in the global social universe, and describing this entity as an anarchical international system is only one representation of it in any case. And, importantly, causal potentials and mechanisms would only manifest themselves in the empirical world when requisite conditions were met; and so it was considered important to study the range of conditions under which this mechanism works or does not work. A large part of mainstream IR theory, after Waltz's two publications, has been an elaboration on this theme, and *MSW* played a pivotal role in inaugurating the move.<sup>55</sup>

*MSW* was born with some puzzling conceptual and logical problems. Nevertheless, the first-order theory of international politics which it contained had a discipline-defining significance for decades to come. For me, the book pointed to the possibility and importance of philosophical engagement in the study of world politics. I have been fortunate in encountering Waltz's book early on and in having been able to follow the path myself, inspired by his example.

## Notes

- 1 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), p. 2.
- 2 H. Suganami, *On the Causes of War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).
- 3 I thank Oxford University Press for allowing me to use parts of my book.
- 4 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979).
- 5 J. David Singer, 'The level-of-analysis problem in International Relations' in James Rosenau (ed.), *International Politics and Foreign Policy*, revised edition, pp. 20–29 (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1969).
- 6 *MSW*, p. 12.
- 7 *TIP*, pp. 121–22. Waltz remarked at the anniversary conference in September 2008 held at Aberystwyth that, in *MSW*, he chose 'images', rather than 'levels', because his wife, who read the manuscript, preferred the former to the latter for aesthetic reasons. Aesthetics apart, the two are quite distinct concepts.
- 8 *MSW*, pp. 231–33.
- 9 Note Waltz's reference to 'the permissive cause, the international environment'. *MSW*, p. 233.

- 10 *MSW*, p. 234. The fear, however, is 'derived from' the fact of international anarchy only through the actors' awareness of that fact. How the actors interpret that fact depends crucially on the nature of the relationship they are in. See Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
- 11 *MSW*, pp. 231–33.
- 12 *Ibid.*, pp. 188, 227.
- 13 *Ibid.*, pp. 160, 201, 220.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 232
- 15 *Ibid.*, ch. 3 *passim*, pp. 119–20, 122–23, 222, 231, 233–34.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 231.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 232.
- 18 *Ibid.*
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 235.
- 20 *MSW*, p. 188.
- 21 *MSW*, p. 228.
- 22 F.A. Huntingford, 'Animals fight, but do not make war', in J. Groebel and R. H. Hinde (eds), *Aggression and War: Their Biological and Social Bases* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 30).
- 23 A. Rapoport, *Conflict in a Man-Made Environment* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974, p. 114, p. 255n).
- 24 Huntingford, *op. cit.*, p. 33.
- 25 *Ibid.*
- 26 *MSW*, pp. 228–29.
- 27 *MSW*, p. 16.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 218.
- 29 *Ibid.*, pp. 218, 232, 234.
- 30 *Ibid.*, p. 12.
- 31 *Ibid.*, p. 27.
- 32 *Ibid.*, p. 28. If Waltz's suggestion is that human nature therefore has little to do with war, then so has international anarchy: there was nothing to prevent war in the international system in 1914 or in 1910.
- 33 *Ibid.*, pp. 230ff.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 12.
- 35 *Ibid.*, p. 232, italics mine.
- 36 *Ibid.*, pp. 54–55, 108, 113–14, 119–20, 122–23, 222, 233–34.
- 37 *Ibid.*, p. 232.
- 38 *Ibid.*, p. 235.
- 39 *Ibid.*, p. 231.
- 40 *Ibid.*, p. 233.
- 41 Manning, 'The "failure" of the League of Nations', in C.A. Cosgrove and K.J. Twitchett (eds), *The New International Actors: The UN and the EEC*, pp. 105–23, at p. 115 (London: Macmillan, 1970. Originally published in 1942).
- 42 'Meta-theoretical' in that the moves concern how to argue about causes of war and not substantively about what causes war.
- 43 *MSW*, p. 196.
- 44 *Ibid.*
- 45 *Ibid.*, p. 198.
- 46 *Ibid.*
- 47 *Ibid.*
- 48 *Ibid.*, pp. 205, 206–07.
- 49 *Ibid.* p. 210.
- 50 *Ibid.*
- 51 *Ibid.*, p. 208.
- 52 Suganami, *On the Causes of War*, p. 165.
- 53 In *TIP*, ch. 6, Waltz argues similarly.

- 54 *MSW*, p. 118. After the end of the Cold War, Waltz argued that at some point in the near future a multipolar balance-of-power system was likely to emerge. That was, according to him, what his structural theory would make us expect. See Kenneth N. Waltz (1993) 'The emerging structure of international politics', *International Security*, 18: 44–79.
- 55 Robert O. Keohane (ed.), *Neorealism and its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); David A. Baldwin (ed.), *Neorealism and Neoliberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); Wendt, *op. cit.*

# 13

## LOST IN TRANSITION

### A critical analysis of power transition theory

*Richard Ned Lebow and Benjamin Valentino*

Ken Waltz has grappled for his entire career with the causes of war. He made notable contributions to our understanding of this phenomenon in two seminal books. In *Man, the State and War* he made the case for war as a system-level phenomenon. In *Theory of International Politics*, he developed a system-level theory to account for hegemonic wars. In this paper, we address a related but distinct system-level explanation for war: power transition theories.

Since the end of the Cold War, the debate about the future of Asian security relations has been dominated by the question of a possible armed conflict between the United States and a rising China. Power transition theory has become an accepted framework for many thinking about this problem.<sup>1</sup> Former Assistant Secretary of State Susan Shirk summed up this perspective: ‘History teaches us that rising powers are likely to provoke war.’<sup>2</sup> Is such a claim justified? We identify and evaluate seven assumptions or claims of power transition theories and find them all wanting. This does not mean that conflict between the United States and China is improbable, only that power transition theory provide no basis for expectations to the contrary.

Our chapter has two principal sections. We describe and evaluate the logic of two dominant power transition theories: those of Organski and Kugler and of Gilpin, and identify several key empirical implications of these theories. We then evaluate these theories on the basis of a data set and case-specific evidence. We conclude with observations about the causes of great power wars and the implications of our findings for current debates about the likelihood of war between the United States and China.

#### **Power transition theories**

Organski and Kugler distinguish themselves from realists by asserting that the international system is more ordered than anarchic.<sup>3</sup> This arises from the ability of



the dominant power to impose its preferences on other actors. 'Certain nations are recognized as leaders . . . Trade is conducted along recognized channels . . . Diplomatic relations also fall into recognized patterns . . . There are rules of diplomacy; there are even rules of war.'<sup>4</sup> This order advances the wealth, security and prestige of the dominant power, but typically at the expense of the other great powers. Dominance is seldom absolute and war is still possible. The most serious wars are those between dominant powers and dissatisfied challengers. The latter are states who 'have grown to full power after the existing international order was fully established and the benefits already allocated'.<sup>5</sup> The dominant nation and its supporters are generally unwilling to grant the newcomers more than a small part of the advantages they derive from the status quo. Rising powers make war to impose orders favourable to themselves.<sup>6</sup> War is most likely and of greatest magnitude when a dissatisfied challenger and the dominant power enter into approximate power parity.<sup>7</sup>

Organski and Kugler advance a relatively mechanical and deterministic account of the conditions under which war occurs: '

The fundamental problem that sets the whole system sliding almost irretrievably toward war is the differences in rates of growth among the great powers and, of particular importance, the differences in rates between the dominant nation and the challenger that permit the latter to overtake the former in power. This leapfrogging destabilizes the system.<sup>8</sup>

They identify five wars of hegemonic transitions: Napoleonic, Franco-Prussian, Russo-Japanese and both World Wars.

Robert Gilpin's *War and Change in World Politics* also stresses the relative balance of military power between leading states and would-be challengers as a major cause of great power warfare.<sup>9</sup> Gilpin focuses more on the declining than rising powers. Dominant states make cumulative commitments that eventually exceed their capabilities. Imperial overstretch 'creates challenges for the dominant states and opportunities for the rising states of the system'.<sup>10</sup> The latter aspire to remake 'the rules governing the international system, the spheres of influence, and most important of all, the international distribution of territory'.<sup>11</sup> Dominant states see preventive war as the most attractive means of eliminating the threat posed by challengers, although there are other possible responses.<sup>12</sup> Hegemonic wars for Gilpin pit dominant powers against challengers. Such wars tend to be waged *à outrance* and draw in most, if not all, great powers. They reorder the system by creating a new dominant power or extending the existing ones.<sup>13</sup> As examples, Gilpin offers the Peloponnesian War, Second Punic War, Thirty Years War, the wars of Louis XIV, the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars and both World Wars.<sup>14</sup>

Few scholars have examined the core causal assertions of power transition theory. For example, we know of only one study that investigates the foundational claim that dominant powers actually have the capability to control the distribution of private goods in the international system.<sup>15</sup> It finds that power transition theories

greatly exaggerate the power of leading states to impose their preferences on the system.

In an effort to more carefully examine the causal mechanisms of power transition theory we employ multiple but simple tests. First, we identify seven key implications of power transition theories. Secondly, we examine these implications empirically, drawing on historical data on the relative capabilities of the great powers from 1640 to the present as well as several key cases for Organski and Kugler and for Gilpin.

### ***Key implications***

1. The international system is dominated by a single power capable of imposing to a significant extent its preferred form of order.
2. Dominant powers impose orders beneficial to their own security and material well-being.
3. The more beneficial the international order to the dominant power, the less likely it is to benefit other states, especially rising powers.
4. Power transitions among great powers are the result of differential rates of economic growth and have occurred with some frequency, at least in modern Europe.
5. Rising powers make war against dominant powers or are attacked by them before they are considered capable of initiating a successful military challenge.
6. Warring hegemon and challengers seek to defend or revise the international order in their favour.
7. War effectively resolves the conflicts of interest caused by power transitions.

### **Empirical examination of the implications of power transition theory**

#### ***Implication 1: The international system is dominated by a single power capable of imposing order***

Organski and Kugler insist that international relations are characterized by a hierarchical system with a dominant power at the top, with great, middle and small powers beneath it.<sup>16</sup> Gilpin maintains that hegemony imposed by a dominant power has been the ordering principle of the international system since the onset of the industrial revolution.<sup>17</sup> By dominant or hegemonic power, these authors mean a state that is so much more powerful than others that it has the capability to impose order on the system in the form of rules governing interstate trade and the conduct of war and peace. Organski and Kugler acknowledge that dominance is never absolute, but assert it is sufficient to impose a hierarchical order. It is important to distinguish their understanding of a dominant from what other scholars might call a leading great power: a state that is *primus inter pares* but not strong enough relative to others to impose its preferred order on the international system.

There is little empirical evidence for the existence of dominant powers in the modern state system. Kaufman, Little and Wohlforth find that since 1648, the system has been multipolar for 41 decades, bipolar for 8 and unipolar for 1.<sup>18</sup> Over five hundred years Spain, France and Germany tried and failed on multiple occasions to impose their preferences on the system. The United States aside, all would-be hegemonies were defeated in long, costly, and often multiple wars, by coalitions of other great powers. At best, bids for hegemony have been temporarily successful and geographically restricted.

To the extent that the European regional or international system has been to any degree ordered it was the result of negotiated compromises among *multiple* powers. These agreements followed destructive wars. Examples include the orders established by Westphalia, the Peace of Utrecht's settlement, the Congress of Vienna and the Versailles Peace Conference. The 1945 San Francisco Conference created the United Nations. Its charter embodied numerous compromises to accommodate the Soviet Union, traditional great powers like Britain and France, and even smaller powers, mostly European and Latin American. China was recognized as a great power even though it was not at the time.

### ***Implication 2: Dominant powers impose orders beneficial primarily to themselves***

Aspiring hegemonies have repeatedly tried to impose self-interested international orders but have consistently failed. This outcome is attributable in the first instance to the distribution of power within Europe and the international system. Since Rome, there has never been a European state powerful and fortunate enough – with the possible exception of Charlemagne's short-lived empire – to impose its preferences unilaterally on others. The second reason is the nature of hegemonic rule. It is a tyranny that cannot gain legitimacy unless it transforms itself into some other kind of order. At best, true hegemonies must impose control through a combination of force, threats of force and deals with local elites who benefit from outside support. Communist rule in Eastern Europe rested on an alliance between the Soviet Union and local bureaucracies, parties and armies. The leaders of these local institutions were overwhelmingly drawn from peasant backgrounds and experienced considerable upward mobility under communism. Self-interest and political preservation made many of them loyal to the Soviet Union.<sup>19</sup>

Negotiated and compromise orders offer something to most, if not all, major powers. The Westphalian system ended destructive religious wars and recognized the political and religious authority of princes, Catholic or Protestant, within their own realms. The Congress of Vienna restored the French Bourbons to the throne and created a 'Holy Alliance' against the twin threats of revolutionary change and French revisionism. Versailles created or recognized successor states of three former empires and rewarded the major victors with territory, colonies and reparations.

Even losing powers do not always lose at peace settlements. Westphalia, Utrecht and the Congress of Vienna legitimized changes in the territorial status quo but did

not inflict draconian punishments on defeated major powers. The exceptions are the settlement of the Franco-Prussian War and the Congress of Versailles. The former transferred the French province of Alsace-Lorraine to Germany and imposed a major indemnity, leaving France a revanchist power, although one that had become largely reconciled to the territorial status quo by the first decade of the twentieth century. The Congress of Versailles took substantial territory from Germany, denied the much desired *Anschluss* between it and Austria and imposed hefty reparations. It made Germany accept responsibility for the war, hand over its battle fleet and limit the size of its post-war armed forces, terms that rankled Germans as much, if not more, than their territorial losses.<sup>20</sup> The Soviet Union, was also denied any of the benefits of the settlement and was for some time excluded altogether from political and economic relations with most of the rest of Europe by means of a *cordon sanitaire*. Japan received territorial compensation but remained a revisionist power. For the first time in the aftermath of a major European peace settlement, revisionist great powers outnumbered satisfied ones. The United States, the leading status quo power, withdrew into quasi-isolation. In these circumstances, it was only a matter of time before the revisionist powers challenged the territorial status quo.

***Implication 3: The more beneficial is the international order to the dominant power, the less it benefits other states***

Organski and Kugler define a rising and dissatisfied power as one with at least 80 per cent of the capability of the dominant power. If no such states exist, they consider the contenders to be the next ‘three strongest states in the system’.<sup>21</sup> Houweling and Siccama, along with de Soysa, Oneal and Park, point to a problematic connection between Organski and Kugler’s two principal variables: relative power and status quo evaluations.<sup>22</sup> This is disputed by Lemke and Reed who claim that ‘power transition theory does not assume, argue, or suggest that the power a nation obtains or enjoys predetermines its evaluation of the status quo’.<sup>23</sup> If so, power transition theorists must specify the conditions under which states, rising or otherwise, will or will not be reconciled to the status quo.

Organski and Kugler depict the international hierarchy as a pyramidal structure, maintained largely by force or the threat of force, which benefits those at the apex at the expense of the satisfaction of other powers.<sup>24</sup> In practice, international orders are not anything close to ‘zero sum’ games because other great and rising powers are not usually denied the benefits of the existing system. As noted, this is because no modern state has had the ability to impose an international order without making significant compromises to other major actors. Thus, even a quasi-hierarchical order of the kind imposed by imperial China in the Pacific rim or the United States on the defeated axis powers in the aftermath of the Second World War gained powerful adherents. The United States extended its security umbrella over Germany, Italy and Japan and assumed a disproportionate share of the burden of common defence, allowing a fair degree of free riding in both countries. This arrangement freed funds

for much needed post-war reconstruction, which was further facilitated by American credits and investment. As Germany and Japan grew in economic strength vis-à-vis the United States, hegemonic stability theorists expected them to challenge the post-war economic order organized and maintained by the United States.<sup>25</sup> Instead, they remained its strongest supporters because of the benefits they derived from the status quo. Whatever gains they might have made by challenging the system were not worth the risks this entailed.

#### ***Implication 4: Power transitions occur periodically and result from differential rates of economic growth***

To attribute war to power transitions presupposes transitions. Since power transition theories suggest that differential rates of growth are by themselves a cause of war, we believe it essential to exclude possibly endogenous measures such as actual military capabilities from any measure of power. These capabilities reflect state choices about how to direct their resources, not their latent potential for war-making. Some scholars investigating power transitions have utilized the ‘Correlates of War’ composite index of national capabilities, which includes the number of military personnel and military expenditures.<sup>26</sup> Measured in this way, power transitions could be an effect of war (or of the prospect of war) rather than a cause. A state might become more powerful than its adversary because of investments made in preparation for a war decided upon for other reasons. Even lagging these measures does not eliminate the possibility of endogeneity since most European major powers have viewed war as a constant feature of the international system.

Organski and Kugler circumvent this problem by relying on GNP as their sole measure of state power.<sup>27</sup> Although this measure avoids endogeneity, it represents a very incomplete measure of state power. A state’s total population is also critical to its latent military power since population is a key determinant of a state’s ability to mobilize military forces. For most of history, the size of a state’s army has been the single most important factor in determining success or failure on the battlefield. States with large populations can compensate for lower GDPs by fielding more troops; states with higher GDPs can compensate for lower populations by equipping their armies with more effective weaponry or by hiring mercenaries.

To test this implication of power transition theory, we examined the frequency and character of power transitions in interstate relations between 1648 and 2000. To create a single measure of state power we multiply each country’s GDP by its total population.<sup>28</sup> Measures of both GDP and population were derived from data compiled by Angus Maddison.<sup>29</sup> In the case of empires, the GDP and populations of contiguous territories were included. Figures 13.1–13.4 below plot the evolving distribution of power in Europe (plus the United States and Japan) from 1640 to 2000.

Some might object that this measure puts too much weight on population, overestimating the power of very populous states like Russia while underestimating the power of smaller states like Britain. Indeed, with at least 70 per cent more

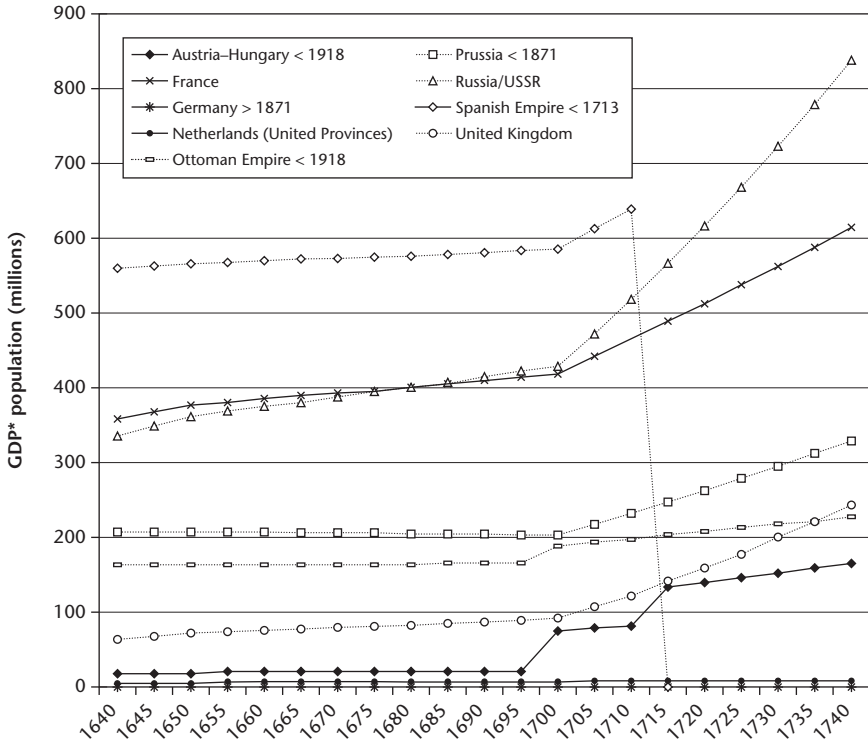


Figure 13.1 State power 1640–1740

citizens than the next most populous European state Russia had by far the largest population in Europe throughout this period. Since at least 1648, however, GDP and population have been very closely correlated, at least among the great powers. This relationship is robust because prior to 1900 the economic productivity of nearly all the major powers, Britain aside, derived principally from agriculture, and agricultural productivity was largely a function of population.<sup>30</sup> Thus, Russia not only had the largest population in Europe, but the largest GDP from the mid-1700s to the mid-1800s. While falling behind the United States and Japan, Russia's GDP never dropped below the third highest in Europe during the entire period.

Our measure of power seems to accord reasonably well with outcomes in international affairs. Although Russia was not always victorious in its wars, it never suffered a long-term loss of a substantial proportion of its territory or population. Measured in square miles, Russia's territory (even excluding its Siberian territories) increased by more than any other European power from 1640 to 1950.<sup>31</sup> Wohlforth (1997) argues that 'Russia is by some measures the most successful imperial enterprise in history.'<sup>32</sup> It would be difficult to argue that Britain did better during this period. Britain controlled a vast amount of territory abroad and enjoyed naval supremacy. However, Britain never controlled substantial territory in Europe and never conquered another major European power on its own. When major rebellions occurred

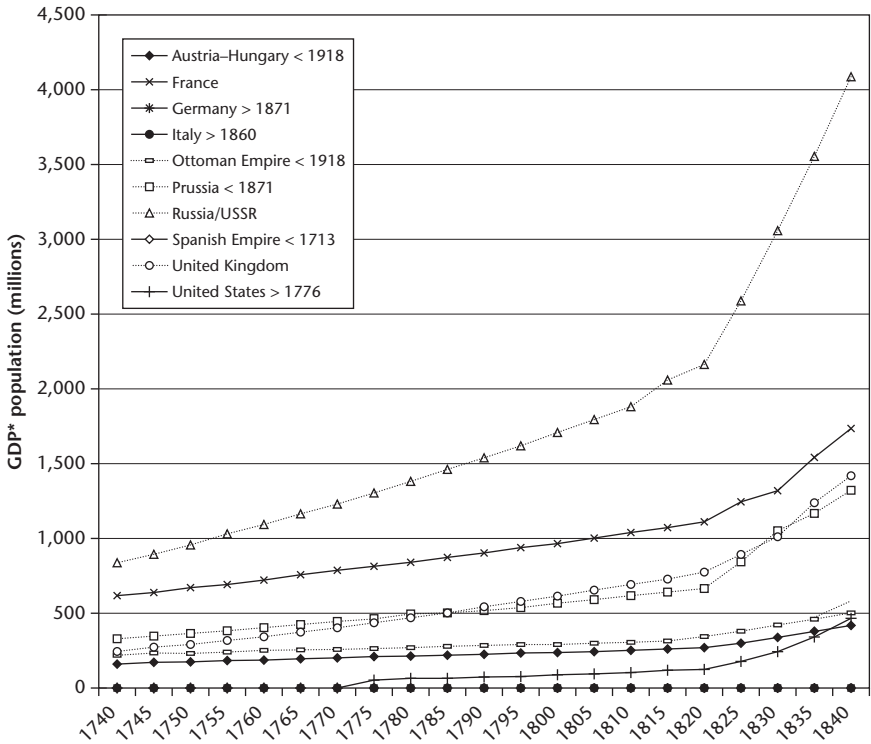


Figure 13.2 State power 1740–1840

in its colonies, first in America and later in Ireland and India, it was not able to defeat them.

Our measure reveals three patterns that are especially anomalous for power transition theory. First, contrary to most understandings of power transition theory, power transitions between the top and second ranked powers are extremely rare. From 1640 to 1950 there is only one power transition involving European states. It occurred around 1715 when Russia surpassed the Spanish Empire as the most powerful state in Europe following the Wars of Spanish Succession. It has maintained this lead ever since. Russia’s lead over France grew from 14 per cent in 1720 to more than 260 per cent in 1865, at which point France was surpassed by the United Kingdom. If we include the United States as an actor in the European theatre, we add a second power transition in 1895 when the United States surpassed Russia. It is important to note that neither of these transitions involved war.

Second, even transitions among lower-ranking great powers are rare. When they do occur they seldom result in a substantial, lasting shift in the balance of power between states. Apart from the transition between Russia and the Spanish Empire there are no power transitions between major powers in the century from 1640 to 1740 (Figure 13.1). From 1740 to 1840 (Figure 13.2) the only power transition between European great powers occurs when the UK surpassed Prussia in the late

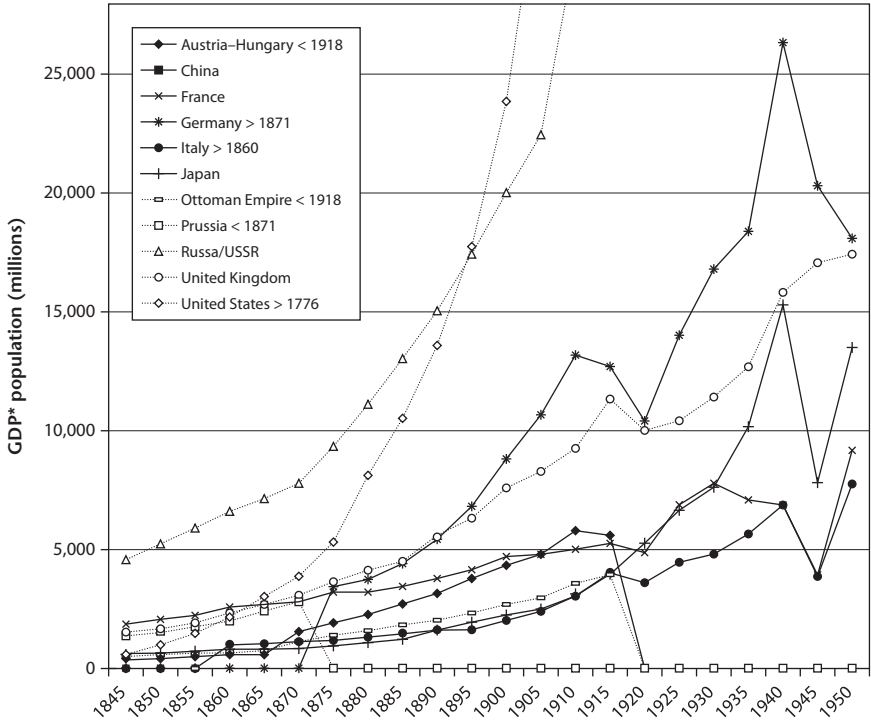


Figure 13.3 State power 1845–1950

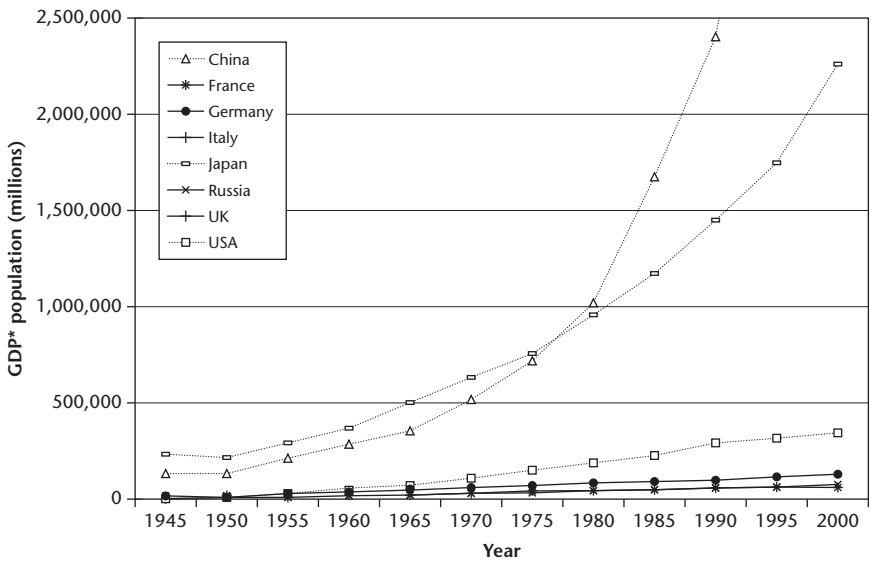


Figure 13.4 State power 1945–2000



1700s (and then only by a few percentage points). The period between 1845 and 1950 includes several more transitions, although with the partial exceptions of the rise of Germany and Austria-Hungary starting around 1870, none of these produce a significant advantage in power for the rising state. Only the rise of the United States, which moved it from the fifth strongest great power in 1840 to the first in 1895, produced the kind of power shift that could plausibly provide a state with a qualitatively different ability to influence international outcomes.

Third, almost all major power transitions appear to be the result of war, not a cause of it. This pattern is most evident in transitions associated with rapidly declining powers. The Spanish Empire was far and away the strongest power in Europe until it all but dissolved following a series of wars in the early 1700s. Likewise, the dissolution of Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire following the First World War wiped two major powers from the map of Europe. These powerful empires collapsed as a result of wars waged primarily with states for which there was no possibility of imminent transition. Rising powers owe much to war, but it is only a partial explanation for their ascent. The rapid rise in the power of Germany and Italy in the second half of the nineteenth century was primarily a result of wars of unification. The rise of the United States may again be an exception, although only if one excludes the wars against Indian tribes and nations.

### ***Implication 5: Rising powers attack dominant powers or vice versa***

Power transition theory focuses on war between the two most powerful states in the international system. These wars are inherently risky, so leaders must be highly motivated to start them. Rising powers must feel excluded from the system and denied its rewards *and* convinced that military challenges are likely meet with success. Dominant powers must believe that a rising challenger threatens not only their standing in the system but their security and material interests. Leaders must be confident of mobilizing domestic support for a war. They must exploit existing rivalries to ensure that they can face the dominant power with the support, or at least the neutrality, of major third parties. None of these conditions are easy to achieve, and collectively require political skill and fortuitous conditions. Moreover, these conditions must be met during the window when the rising power perceives itself, or is perceived by the dominant power, to be pulling abreast in military capability. Perceptions of the changing balance of power may be a necessary, but far from sufficient condition, for the kind of wars predicted by power transition theories.

Strategically, it makes more sense for rising powers to attack smaller powers or former great powers in serious decline – although such wars are not the subject of power transition theory. Elsewhere Lebow finds strong evidence for this pattern.<sup>33</sup> For the same reason it usually makes more sense for leading powers to attack targets of opportunity (that is, lesser and declining powers) as a means of augmenting their power. They may then be in a stronger position to deter or buy off a challenger.

The most recent manifestation of this pattern may be the American attack on Iraq, urged on the Bush administration by many neoconservatives as a way of ‘locking in’ American hegemony in the expectation of a possible future challenge from China.<sup>34</sup> By far the most sensible policy for leading powers in dealing with rising powers ought to be efforts to moderate their challenge by incorporating them into the system if they are outside of it, or if they are inside, to provide more symbolic and material benefits to reconcile them to the status quo. Historically, this is how European great powers responded to the rise of Sweden, Russia, Prussia, Germany, Japan and Italy. From the 1960s on it was a key component of the Western response to the Soviet Union.

We should accordingly expect to find relatively few wars between dominant and rising powers. What wars that occur should result from motives unrelated to power transitions or from miscalculation; a dominant or rising power initiated what it thought would be an isolated war against a third party but it escalated into a wider struggle that involved rising and dominant powers on opposing sides. Louis XIV’s Dutch War (1672–79), the Nine Years War (1688–97), the War of Spanish Succession (1701–14) and the First World War all arguably fit this pattern. In each instance, a dominant power thought incorrectly that it could extend its power at relatively low cost.

### ***Implication 6: Hegemonic states and rising powers go to war to defend or revise the international order***

Power transition theorists have been surprisingly reluctant to engage historical cases in an effort to show that wars between great powers actually resulted from the motives described by their theories. Organski and Kugler identify five wars they claim their theory should explain: the Napoleonic, the Franco-Prussian, Russo-Japanese, and the two World Wars.<sup>35</sup> They exclude the Napoleonic War from their study on the grounds that there is insufficient data on the power capabilities of the participants. They exclude the Franco-Prussian War and the Russo-Japanese War because they maintain they were fought without allies. They are left with two cases, both of which they insist resulted from the motives postulated by power transition theory, but they offer no historical evidence to support their assertion.

The Peloponnesian War is the only conflict for which Gilpin attempts to marshal evidence to show that the war resulted from power transition dynamics. Quoting Thucydides, he asserts that it was a preventive war initiated by Sparta.<sup>36</sup> Gilpin calls the war a ‘hegemonic war’, defined as a conflict between or among great powers, arising from growing disequilibria in power and fought with few limitations. Hegemonic wars, he argues, result from the perception by one or more of the great powers that ‘a fundamental historical change is taking place and the gnawing fear . . . that time is somehow beginning to work against it and that one should settle matters through pre-emptive war while the advantage is still on one’s side’.<sup>37</sup> Gilpin offers seven additional examples of hegemonic war: the Second Punic War, the Thirty Year’s War, the wars of Louis XIV, the French and Napoleonic Wars and

the two World Wars. 'At issue in each of these great conflicts', Gilpin writes, 'was the governance of the international system'.<sup>38</sup> It is difficult to evaluate the appropriateness of several of the wars on Gilpin's list: the Thirty Years War describes multiple wars among multiple European powers, Louis XIV was involved in several wars, and it is not clear which Gilpin intends to include, and the French Revolutionary Wars ought reasonably to be broken down into the wars of the First through the Seventh Coalition.

Neither set of authors do much more than assert a fit between cases and theories. For Organski and Kugler, the two World Wars qualify because they occurred before the power of the coalition of challengers could overtake that of the coalition led by the dominant country.<sup>39</sup> They offer no evidence that the initiators of these conflicts understood the balance of capabilities and likely changes the same way as 'objective observers' (that is, the authors) did, or that they went to war for reasons having anything to do with the balance of capabilities. The Peloponnesian War aside, Gilpin does not discuss in detail any of the wars he attributes to power transition. He does not identify the combatants or the initiators or provide estimates of the balance of capabilities and expected changes in its direction. He makes no attempt to show that the initiators went to war because they feared future defeat if they remained at peace.

Gilpin's account of the origins of the Peloponnesian War is certainly not the only interpretation of the war. He draws heavily on Thucydides but ignores the extraordinary complexity of this text and the ways in which the narrative of Book One undercuts Thucydides' authorial statement earlier in the same book. Thucydides' understanding of the underlying causes of the Peloponnesian War has little to do with power transition in the sense understood by Gilpin. As Lebow argues, a more nuanced reading of Thucydides indicates that Spartiates felt threatened by Athens' rising prestige, not its military power, and went to war to protect their identity, not their security.<sup>40</sup> Most of literature on power transition that follows Organski and Gilpin makes notable efforts to devise measures of capability and other indicators of power but devotes little attention to validating their claims by examining the motives, calculations and decisions of historical actors. A careful look at post-1648 wars offered in evidence by Gilpin and Organski and Kugler indicates that *none* of these conflicts can persuasively be attributed to power transition.

The two principal wars of Louis XIV were motivated primarily by the French king's insatiable quest for *gloire*. Louis had little concern for the power of neighbouring states and insufficient awareness of the likelihood that they would combine against him.<sup>41</sup> The French Revolutionary Wars were initially motivated by fear and hatred of a revolutionary regime, not by concern for a changing balance of power. Austria, Prussia and Britain, the leaders of the First Coalition (1792–97) falsely expected their war against revolutionary France to be a cakewalk. Subsequent French offensives were motivated by a desire to export the revolution and Napoleon's wars against the Rhenish states and Prussia (1806), and his invasion of Russia (1812), were pure wars of expansion, not of pre-emption or prevention. Neither our measures of power nor accepted historical interpretations of the

initiators' motives for the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars are congruent with power transition theories.

The First World War is frequently described as a preventive war by international relations theorists, but rarely by historians. The power transition claim rests on Germany's alleged fear of Russia and corresponding need to implement the so-called Schlieffen Plan before Russian railway construction and mobilization reforms (the former financed by France) made it unworkable, leaving Germany vulnerable to invasion on two fronts. But as Figure 13.3 indicates, Russia was substantially more powerful than Germany *before* 1914; it had a roughly equivalent GDP and more than twice the population. Although Russia's railroad and mobilization programmes might have made it more prepared for war in the immediate future, they did not affect the long-term balance of power between Germany and Russia.

New historical evidence further undermines the long problematic claim that Germany was motivated to go to war in 1914 by concern for Russia's rising power. Germany's Chief-of-Staff Helmuth von Moltke wanted war for reasons that had little to do with strategic calculations. He hated France and sought war as a means of upholding and strengthening the Junker aristocracy and its values against rising commercial classes and the growing appeal of materialism. Military exercises indicated that Moltke's offensive strategy was unlikely to defeat France but that a good defence could handily repel, if not crush, a combined French and Russian assault. Moltke withheld this information from the chancellor and Kaiser and played up Germany's need to conduct an offensive before 1917 in the hope of stampeding them into war.<sup>42</sup> The chancellor was influenced by Moltke, but the Kaiser – the real decision-maker in Berlin – was inclined to draw his sword after Sarajevo for reasons of honour and self-validation.<sup>43</sup>

The Second World War is an equally problematic case for power transition. Hitler's war in the west and invasion of the Soviet Union were not driven by a fear of growing Russian or French power. Indeed, Hitler rejected the utility of conventional measures of military and economic power, emphasizing instead the determining influence of will power, morale, leadership and racial purity. Hitler did (irrationally) fear the encirclement of Germany by France, Britain and Russia, a situation he brought about by his military aggression. He saw Germany's advantage over these countries in the late 1930s as fleeting, not because they were growing faster than Germany, but because none of them had fully mobilized the latent power they possessed and because he saw a passing opportunity to divide his enemies and defeat them piecemeal.

Beyond Hitler's recognition that he could not challenge the United States before becoming the undisputed master of Europe, there is little indication that longer-term estimates of the balance of power between Germany and its adversaries entered into his calculations.<sup>44</sup> This is equally true for Mussolini, a rank opportunist. His goal was colonial expansion in the Mediterranean and Africa, and his attack on France was motivated by his belief that Hitler would win the war and that Italy had to join him to gain any spoils.<sup>45</sup> Japan possessed powerful military forces but nothing close to the power capabilities of either the Soviet Union or the United States. Its

occupation of Manchuria and invasion of China was classic imperialism and more influenced by domestic politics than strategic calculations. Its attack on the United States and other colonial powers in the Pacific was initiated in the unreasonable expectation that Washington would seek a negotiated peace after sharp setbacks and that, in the absence of American support, China would also come to terms. To the extent that timing was critical, it was the tactical calculation that within years the Western embargo on oil would make it impossible for Japan to wage a naval war.<sup>46</sup>

### ***Implication 7: War effectively resolves the conflicts of interest caused by power transitions***

For power transition theories, war serves the function of finalizing or continuing one state's dominance over another, leaving the victorious state in a better position to impose or maintain a favourable international order. However, none of the wars cited by power transition theorists resulted in the long-term reduction of the vanquished state's power.

As noted, Organski and Kugler identify five power transition wars: the Napoleonic, Franco-Prussian, Russo-Japanese, and the two World Wars. France was defeated in 1815 by a coalition of power. The victors stripped France of its conquests but made little effort to permanently dismember or weaken it; their primary goal was to restore the monarchy and do so under conditions that would help it gain legitimacy. France accordingly maintained its superiority in power over Britain and Prussia until 1870. Germany's superiority over France increased following the Franco-Prussian war, but as Figure 13.2 indicates, this had more to do with the increasing rate of growth of German power than any reduction in France's rate of growth or its loss of Alsace-Lorraine. Indeed, France's power continues to grow at roughly the same or faster rate in the 25 years after the war as it did in the 25 years before. Russia suffered a major defeat in the Russo-Japanese war of 1904–1905, but its superiority over Japan actually increased after the war. Germany's power was only temporarily reduced by the First World War despite its loss of considerable territory. Even after Germany's crushing defeat and partition at the end of the Second World War, West Germany alone again surpassed France and Britain in total power by 1960.

The collapse of Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire in the wake of the First World War are the only exceptions to this pattern. Austria was unambiguously an initiator in the First World War, and the Ottoman Empire entered in the hope of gaining spoils. The War destroyed both empires. Since Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire were the fifth- and seventh-ranked powers in Europe respectively, it also seems unlikely that their demise would have substantially increased the ability of the victorious allies to impose their preferences on the system as a whole, as power transition theories expect.

War has not solved power transition problems because most wars do not significantly degrade the basic sources of the vanquished state's power: its GDP and its population. The bloodiest wars seldom kill more than 1–2 per cent of a combatant

country's population. Even more devastating population losses can be recovered quickly. Russia lost perhaps 25 million citizens in the Second World War, but its population rebounded and surpassed its pre-war levels by 1956.

The only way by which war can reduce a state's long-term power is through permanent partition, dissolution, or conquest and occupation of territories containing a large fraction of its population and economic resources. A few states have pursued such aims (e.g. Napoleonic France, Wilhelminian and Nazi Germany), but have not achieved them. Because conquering and controlling large populations is so difficult, long-term conquest is rarely the outcome of war between two states of roughly equal power – the kind of states that power transition theories expect to go to war.

## Conclusions

Our data offer no support for power transition theories. Since 1648, no power has been in a position to impose its preferences on other actors and to dictate the rules of war and peace. Power transitions involving leading powers are rare. They are hardly ever the result of gradual differences in economic growth rates, as power transition theories expect them to be. Our only examples of such transitions are the United States overtaking Russia in the late nineteenth century and China overtaking the United States in the late twentieth century – neither of which involved a war.

Leading states often aspire to the status of a dominant power. Many are not content with their position and advantages and attempt to gain more power through further conquests, and by means of their augmented power impose their preferences on others. Habsburg Spain, France under Louis XIV and Napoleon, Wilhelmine and Nazi Germany and the United States in the post-Cold War era are all cases in point. None of these states was seriously threatened by rising powers or coalitions of great powers. They went to war because they thought they were powerful enough to become more powerful still. The perception of strength, not of weakness and threat, is the precondition for many, if not most, superpower wars.

Our evidence indicates a pattern of conflict that is virtually the reverse of that predicted by power transition theories. Great power wars arise in the absence of hegemony, not because of it. These wars lead to power transitions and peace settlements that often impose new orders by virtue of a consensus among the leading powers. These orders are never dictated by a single power and endure as long as a consensus holds among the major powers responsible for upholding them.

Power transition theories make very narrow claims. They attempt to explain a small subset of war: so-called 'hegemonic wars'. A good theory of war would have to account for these conflicts and other kinds of wars as well. It is not our goal here to lay the foundations for such a theory, but we do want to highlight two findings that strike us as relevant to such an enterprise. The first is the pattern of adversaries against which leading and rising powers make war. With a few notable exceptions, leading powers avoid intentionally challenging other great powers. They generally

prefer to make war against smaller, third parties and once-great but now seriously declining great powers – although they have frequently been drawn into war with other great powers when these smaller wars escalate. Rising powers devote a high proportion of their income to their armed forces and wage frequent wars of expansion. In the period under discussion, Prussia, Russia, Germany and Japan generally avoided attacking leading powers, their preference being once again for smaller third parties and once-great but declining powers. Even the United States when it was a rising power conformed to this pattern, making war against Spain and Mexico.

Second it is important to distinguish between power and perceptions of power. Our raw measure of power, based on population and GDP shows considerable stability in the European rankings of leading powers. Figure 13.5 shows that Spain’s dominance in the post-Westphalia period gave way to Russia in the early 1700s, which was not surpassed by the United States until 1895. The United States maintained its position as a leading power until China overtook it in the 1980s.

This ranking of leading powers bears at best a passing relationship to contemporary perceptions of leading powers represented by the lower line in Figure 13.5. By most accounts, France was perceived as the leading power from the early seventeenth century until the defeat of Napoleon. Later, Britain and Germany were perceived as leading powers. Yet Russia remained the leading power by objective

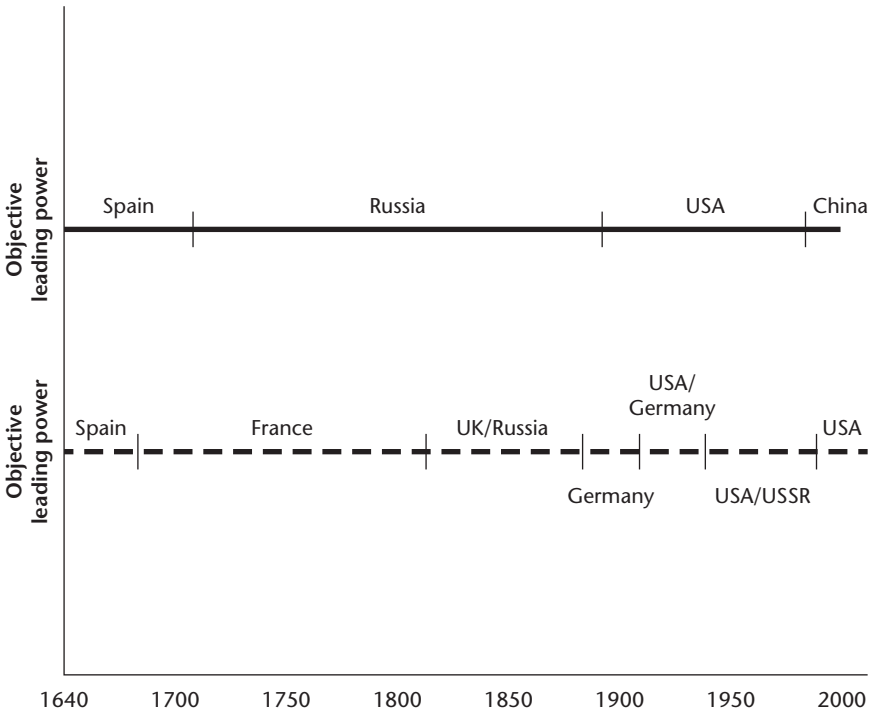


Figure 13.5 ‘Objective’ and perceived leading powers

measures for this entire period. The perception that the United States was the world's leading power did not take hold until the end of the First World War, close to thirty years after it became the most powerful state by our measure, and has continued for almost three decades after it was surpassed by China.

What accounts for this discrepancy between power and perception? We do not believe it is simply an artefact of our measure, which is the most objective representation of latent material capabilities available. Rather, we believe the discrepancy is attributable to agency. Different leaders or elites pursue different goals and devote widely varying fractions of their available income to military power. In pursuit of *gloire*, Louis XIV devoted extraordinary resources to his military, putting himself and his country deeply into debt. Prussia under the Hohenzollerns did the same. Frederick the Great spent over 90 per cent of Prussia's income on his military, a figure way out of line with that spent by the great powers of his day.<sup>47</sup> In 2008, the United States, the modern-day Prussia, spent \$417 billion on defence. This amounted to 47 per cent of the world total defence expenditures, although US GDP is only about 20 per cent of world GDP.<sup>48</sup> Great powers that spend disproportionately on the military and use it to make conquests stand out among their peers and can achieve leading power status in their eyes even this status is not warranted by their capabilities. For purposes of status and balancing, perceptions of power appear more important than actual power or capabilities, just as perceptions of threat are more important than perceptions of power.

Also striking is general ignorance among leaders and the media of the actual power balance – as opposed to the military balance. There has been much discussion among US policy-makers and in the US media of the rising power of China and concern that it could challenge the United States at some point in the not too distant future. There has been no recognition that the transition between China and the United States actually occurred several decades ago. China's military power does not reflect its latent power, and this is largely a matter of choice. China's defence expenditures, while rising rapidly in the last several years, have remained well below those of the United States both in absolute terms and as a percentage of China's GDP for decades. China's material capabilities have not given it the power to restructure the international system in its favour, let alone conquer a great power like the United States. As we noted above, no state in the last 350 years has achieved this kind of hegemony. China, however, is already more than powerful enough to deny the United States the ability to conquer China, or even control the international agenda in Asia. More importantly, no conceivable war with China will long divert it from its path to power since, apart perhaps from a full-scale nuclear conflict, no war could permanently diminish its population or undermine its productivity.

Should war come between the United States and China in the future it will not be a result of a power transition. The greater risk is that conflict will result from the misperception that such a transition is imminent, and the miscalculation by decision-makers in the United States (or China) that China will soon be in a position to do what no state has done before – unilaterally dictate the rules of the international system. Power transition theory would be made self-fulfilling – generating its own



corroboration where history has failed to oblige. Power transition is not unique in this respect. Realism more generally may be to some degree self-fulfilling. Security discourses in China and elsewhere in Asia – much more than in Europe – tend to take realism’s fundamental propositions as verities. It would be ironic if US–China relations deteriorated because each power based its expectations on how the other will behave on theories that lack empirical validation.

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# 14

## HEGEMONY, EQUILIBRIUM AND COUNTERPOWER

### A synthetic approach

*Cornelia Beyer*

#### **Introduction**

This chapter<sup>1</sup> takes up what can be regarded as Kenneth Waltz's most important claims – notably the importance of material facts and a law-like tendency towards international power equilibrium – and explains why these are still important in understanding a world marked by hegemony, international terrorism and the emergence of possible new challengers to US dominance. Whereas material factors still represent the most important indicators of global power, a 'tendency towards equilibrium' can explain shifts and processes in international affairs appearing as balancing, or its absence (as in the aftermath of the Cold War and in the case of international terrorism). Also, I will argue, on the basis of much more accumulated IR theory than was available when Waltz developed his views in the 1970s, that while material facts are important in understanding continuity in international relations, we have to complement this by understanding ideas as an engine for change. Hence, I attempt to overcome, to an extent, the differences between structural realism and constructivism, believing that only in a synthetic manner can IR progress.<sup>2</sup> I regard the ideas of Waltz as fundamental to an understanding of international relations, but we have to include additional factors.

The chapter is organised in three parts. First, I discuss the structure of current international affairs as one of dominance by the United States; second, I look at the nature of US hegemony and its possibility of survival in the presence of possible new challengers, in particular China; and third, I focus on one of the major current threats (apart from these challenges) to international security, international terrorism.

The first part of this chapter, therefore, reflects on the question of unipolarity. It argues that in material and ideological terms the United States is still the most dominant power, even if not the only 'great power'. Ideas and material factors are here discussed as mutually constitutive. This, then again, supports the argument that both realist and constructivist interpretations are needed in order to understand

international developments in general and the complex reality of the US dominance in particular.

Second, I will focus on a comparable underlying logic in balance of power thinking and rational choice thinking, arguing that in both there is an idea of a natural tendency towards equilibrium; it is to be reached via rational strategies of balancing on the one hand, and cooperation and conflict on the other. The assumption of a tendency towards equilibrium underlies all structural realist premises, and for realists this idea explained the character of international relations in the Cold War. After the end of that period, however, the dynamics of international relations changed. Under the condition of unipolarity – which lacks, in Waltz's view, any actual balancers<sup>3</sup> – the tendency towards equilibrium remains in fact latent. The implications of this will be discussed below.

In the remaining part of the chapter, international terrorism is offered as an illustration to examine the effects of hegemony in mind and matter with regard to the Middle East. It argues that disequilibrium at the sub-state level results in adverse effects on global stability.

### Unipolarity, dominance and hegemony

Structural realism, as influenced by economics,<sup>4</sup> takes a predominantly materialist perspective on all human affairs, including international relations. For Waltz, the structure of the international system is defined by the distribution of power, and especially the number and constellation of dominating powers. Domination is based on the command of superior power resources (capabilities), such as 'size of population and territory, resource endowment, economic capability, military strength, political stability and competence'.<sup>5</sup> 'Political stability' and 'competence' are factors that are not obviously material; they remain relatively under-explained by Waltz, and are often not used at all in structural realist explanations. All other factors are distinctly material in nature and are obviously opposed to ideational factors, such as ideology, propensity to peace, aggressiveness, and so forth. The latter are even explicitly excluded as markers of power by Waltz.<sup>6</sup> The material 'capabilities' then are measured relationally to describe the distribution of power within the system, and therefore to distinguish certain states (according to structural realism the only important actors within the international system) as 'poles of power'. In Waltz's words: 'The structure of the system changes with changes in the distribution of capabilities across the system's units.'<sup>7</sup> The international system's configuration, therefore, is referred to in terms of material polarity in order to describe the centre(s) of domination and the number of dominating states.<sup>8</sup>

Historically, Waltz argued, we have lived through different constellations of polarity.<sup>9</sup> In the case of the current international system, however, we find an obvious anomaly: the system is often referred to as being marked by 'unipolarity',<sup>10</sup> meaning there is only one dominant power (the United States) with no significant challenger(s). Waltz, in his *Theory of International Politics*, did not initially think of unipolarity as a theoretical puzzle or even as a possibility, but now argues (with

strong support from others)<sup>11</sup> that unipolarity is a global reality.<sup>12</sup> However, this view has also faced opposition: Mearsheimer and Huntington, for example, argued against the notion of unipolarity, based essentially on a disagreement as to the definition of the term. Neither disputed the reality of the United States as materially the most dominant power, but they opposed understanding it as the only materially powerful state. The existence of other great powers – notably China, the European Union, India, Russia, Japan and Brazil – even if comparatively minor to the United States in terms of capability, was sufficient for them to argue that the current international system is multi-polar.<sup>13</sup> That said, it has to be stated in support of Waltz that though China's growth rates have been striking,<sup>14</sup> it does not match the United States in either GDP<sup>15</sup> or military power. Russia can compete to any extent only in the military dimension and in natural resources.<sup>16</sup> In its combination of the most important material factors, the United States still dominates internationally<sup>17</sup> and is widely predicted – depending in part on the outcome of the current economic disturbances – to be likely to do so through the coming decades.<sup>18</sup>

Yet, it is not only material factors that can explain US dominance in international affairs: ideational factors also have to be considered, as a tool and resource of power. The United States has not only been seen by many observers to be a unipolar power, but also a hegemon.<sup>19</sup> 'Hegemony' implies more than just having preponderant material capabilities at one's disposal; additional factors also play a role, such as the capacity to exercise power (based on these material capabilities) and 'soft power' or ideological power, meaning the capability to change others' behaviours by influencing their belief system, their way of thinking, and even their rationality.<sup>20</sup> It can be argued that hegemonic influence has been apparent, for example, as ideological power which led to the EU's compliant and cooperative approach to relations with the United States in the Global War on Terrorism.<sup>21</sup> This cooperation was hard to explain only in material or other terms.<sup>22</sup> Mere material considerations would lead us to expect balancing of the European Union towards the United States.<sup>23</sup> Thus, we have to understand current US dominance in international affairs in many more dimensions than simply viewing it just through the materialist lens.<sup>24</sup> The whole discourse about 'new imperialism', for example, discusses the exercise of this power through foreign policy;<sup>25</sup> while constructivists and some critical scholars focus on 'soft power'<sup>26</sup> – ideas, discourse and norms<sup>27</sup> – as the basis of US power.

## Hegemony in mind and matter

In this section, I will argue that we have to reconcile realist and constructivist approaches if we are to understand the multi-dimensional reality of US predominance.<sup>28</sup> In my view, the opposition between a focus on ideas or on material factors is an unnecessary one:<sup>29</sup> whereas realism argues for 'reality' being presented in material terms, such as military strength and economic power, constructivism highlights the importance and shaping power of ideas, with norms being particularly significant. The opposition between the 'material' and the 'ideational', however, is a false one: human affairs are structured by both; each is 'real', 'true' and 'important'.

One can regard the material and the ideational as quite distinct; they are, however, closely interrelated and partly interdependent. Material factors have fundamentally shaped human affairs from the beginnings of our existence. While historically life has been constrained by material natural conditions such as water, mountains, deserts, and so forth, ideas (in particular, norms) also have a constraining power on individuals, societies and states. For material change to occur, ideas have to be expressed in creative or destructive action. Humans act as the creators of ideas and as the mediator between ideas and the material. Regarded by realists as material facts (population) and in constructivism as bearers of ideas (agents), humans operate in both dimensions, able to transform the ideational into the material, and vice versa.

On the one hand, ideas can develop in response to the material world;<sup>30</sup> modern science, ideologies and arguably even religions refer in one way or other to matter, trying to explain it (through science), change it (through ideology) or transcend it (through religion). Non-natural matter (such as the United Nations building in New York, weapons arsenals, state-border fortifications, the means of production or the international transport system), on the other hand, is dependent on ideas as there is no matter, apart from nature itself, which would exist in its particular realisation without ideas. Every non-natural material 'particle' of the state and the international world is the outcome of preceding ideas, which have resulted in human actions in order to create these 'facts'. Non-natural material facts are therefore the accumulated result of ideas. States and institutions can be regarded as material facts, as they only exist so long as they are represented in matter (infrastructure, government buildings, the police, the media, and so forth) but they are also the result of ideas and continue to exist because of these ideas. The 'state', historically, had to be invented,<sup>31</sup> and it continues to exist only due to the shared belief in its reality and feasibility. In the words of Alexander Wendt: 'Sovereignty is an institution, and so it exists only in virtue of certain inter-subjective understandings and expectations.'<sup>32</sup>

Ideas are needed for creating and changing material facts. The state, the European Union,<sup>33</sup> the United Nations, transnational enterprises, none of these would be in existence without preceding ideas. Wars, revolutions and even terrorism depend on a preceding ideology, or an idea.<sup>34</sup> Change, therefore, creative and destructive, is the result of ideational factors, but it has to be realised by affecting the material. Ideas can also serve as stabilising factors, such as in the case of national identities, and international and societal norms. The third element which is needed for explaining the interrelated nature of the material and the ideational, and which both realist and constructivist approaches regard as important, is agency (the human factor), which represents a two-way transmission belt between the material and the ideational. Agency is directly contemplated by constructivism, in terms of (other-regarding) active and reactive behaviour. In structural realism it is understood indirectly, in the form of (self-regarding) reactive behaviour in Waltz's defensive version.<sup>35</sup> In the international world, for example, it is to be found in the processes of exercising policies of conflict and cooperation: internal and external balancing, diplomacy, economic interaction, the creation of institutions, or military interventions. Policies are the product of ideas, but material change only happens after action by the agent,

usually involving the use of other non-natural material elements (such as weapons or the means of production) and resulting in material change (such as a shift in polarity, the accumulation of wealth, and the destruction or creation of state entities or institutions).<sup>36</sup> Even the most appealing idea cannot be realised without successful agency; the latter, however, is itself dependent on material potential again, such as weapons and energy resources held by states. Wars, revolutions, the creation of new political entities, the political discourse via the media are all highly dependent on material resources, and all are realised via agency. For example, violence depends on financial and energy resources and weaponry, politically creative acts need an economic backing and an infrastructure, and even political discourse is dependent on media.

IR as a discipline struggles to reconcile the differences between realism, as a materialist approach to world affairs, and constructivism, as focusing mainly on the ideational. In concluding the first part of this chapter, it should now be apparent that material and ideational factors are both necessary for understanding, among other things, the predominant position of the United States in the world. It is not the only great power, but it is the most dominant in both the ideational dimension (its discourse and ideology) and in the material dimension (its economy, armament) which together combine into hegemony.<sup>37</sup> US hegemony then rests on material foundations, but was created and is maintained via the promotion of ideas.

### **Structural realism, rational choice and the search for equilibrium**

Unipolarity, which is traditionally represented by dominance in material terms, is not the only possible configuration for the international system, nor has it ever proven everlasting.<sup>38</sup> Waltz argues that unipolarity leads to counter-balancing and therefore to the re-creation of ‘international politics proper’.<sup>39</sup> He assumes that we have a historically observable, law-like tendency towards a ‘balance of power’, which is reflected in his prognosis of a return to multi-polarity. Let us therefore assume that structural realism proclaims material ‘equilibrium’ as the ideal situation; thereby space is opened up for agency, as ‘the state’ fulfils the need for equilibrium through its balancing behaviour. A balancing mechanism only makes sense under this assumption: it is the attempt to correct an asymmetry in international affairs, and to recreate the balance of power, with two equal poles as the preferred constellation.<sup>40</sup> Most assumptions of structural realism about states’ behaviour, and the stability of the system, direct us towards this understanding. Note the following views of Waltz himself: ‘bipolarity is most stable’; ‘in an asymmetric constellation, the weaker power will balance against the stronger one’; and ‘symmetric powers will also balance against each other, but not if they can coalesce (align with each other) or bandwagon (align with a stronger one) against a dominating power’. The tendency towards equilibrium here is not regarded as a normative postulate, but is assumed to be a rational outcome (hence to be expected),<sup>41</sup> depending on the presumably universal strategy of competitive,<sup>42</sup> self-regarding, reciprocal behaviour, accumulating

resources in response to gains by the relevant other state. It also only applies over the *longue durée*. If understood normatively, the tendency towards equilibrium would even be all-inclusive, and not applying only to the major states.

A reciprocal logic, interestingly, also underlies institutionalist thinking, such as the notion of ‘tit-for-tat’.<sup>43</sup> Tit-for-tat rose to prominence due in particular to its use in rational-choice theory. According to Axelrod, it describes the most effective strategy of interaction in many cooperation games, and proclaims a strict reciprocity: cooperation is answered with cooperation, defection with defection. Here too, therefore, we find a self-regarding, reciprocal mechanism directed towards equilibrium, even if not measured in material capabilities but in positive or negative action towards the other. Both ‘strategies’, balancing and tit-for-tat, thus assume as the expected action a reciprocal behaviour that recreates or maintains equilibrium. This might take the form either of direct positive or negative action towards the other, as in tit-for-tat, or by positive action internally and/or with others against the third state, as in balancing.

A problem for rational-choice theory (tit-for-tat in particular) – and this will be important for the discussion in the third part of this chapter – is that inequality between the actors is usually not discussed: in most simulations there is an implicit assumption of equality amongst them.<sup>44</sup> But if unequal actors are facing cooperation games, the weaker actor cannot expect to affect the stronger actor much by relying on the logic of tit-for-tat; equilibrium might then not be achieved.<sup>45</sup> In an asymmetric constellation, the more powerful actor does not have to fear defection from the weaker actor as a response to its non-cooperation; it can bear the potential costs without losing as much as it gains from non-cooperation, whereas the weaker actor might just lack the capability to respond with appropriate negative action. The hegemon can therefore depart from the logic of reciprocity and engage in more exploitative behaviour. Thus, a marked asymmetry in international affairs represents a strategic problem for the weaker states. The cooperation of the hegemon in such a constellation cannot be ensured via reciprocal action towards it. Whether the hegemon chooses to cooperate or defect, in the absence of equality or sufficiently powerful balancers, is therefore at its own discretion.<sup>46</sup> We might, finally, have to contemplate that while equilibrium here refers only to material factors, it might also be present as a long-term tendency within the sphere of ideas.

Structural realism addresses the inequality problem – remaining within the rationale of self-help – via the invention of coalition, or ‘bandwagoning’, among the weaker states, who then together balance against the strong state. However, and the end of the Cold War is an example of when material balancing is no longer feasible, weaker powers can also try to change their interaction with others to make it less competitive.

## Hegemony and equilibrium

As long as the Cold War persisted – two great powers opposing each other in both material and ideological terms, under the condition of rough equality between them



– reciprocity, tending towards negative, conflictual behaviour,<sup>47</sup> was at least partly applied,<sup>48</sup> as well as balancing. The outcome maintained an approximate equilibrium between the two superpowers. Realists would claim that neither was in need of intensive cooperation with the other as both were self-sustaining (I do not count *détente* or peaceful coexistence as intense forms of cooperation, rather as a de-escalation of their confrontation). However, in the realist view, towards the end of the Cold War the United States had outspent the Soviet Union, which could no longer maintain its empire or its competitive behaviour due to its internal economic difficulties and an overall decline in capability and power.<sup>49</sup> In the absence of other strong alliance partners, it had to change towards more cooperative behaviour in order to maintain its internal political stability (in which it nonetheless failed).<sup>50</sup>

Constructivism would interpret this transformation as caused by a change of the underlying logic of interaction into a social, other-regarding one.<sup>51</sup> Due to an internal change in ideas, the weaker power started to accept asymmetry and abstained from balancing. In response, the new hegemon (the United States) was perceived to cease to base its international politics on calculating the costs and benefits with regard to the former antagonist. By becoming partly cooperative, it was thought to no longer use its power in a solely competitive way. Hegemony is not directly addressed in Wendt's work, but the interpretation above can be derived from the larger sociological rationale. This interpretation concurs with the realist invention of cooperation under asymmetry, hegemonic stability theory. This assumes the role of the hegemon to be a collectively beneficial one in ensuring international order via the installation of institutions, the implementation of norms and the facilitation of cooperation.<sup>52</sup> The hegemon, thus, uses its power to inspire the transformation of anarchy from a self-help system into a social system. Adler's constructivism, for example, theoretically solves the collective-action problem in this way.<sup>53</sup> The hegemon's material domination, under the condition of its other-regarding behaviour,<sup>54</sup> is accepted by the other states as more profitable than threatening.<sup>55</sup> The hegemon thus acquires ideational power: namely soft power and legitimacy.<sup>56</sup> This is the basis for a transformation of Hobbesian anarchy under the hegemon's rule into a Lockean or Kantian one, with a reduction in self-help and balancing.

The change from balance of power towards cooperation under asymmetry at the end of the Cold War, transforming conflictual bipolarity into hegemonic unipolarity, was therefore inspired by ideas and material changes and resulted in new ideational and material facts.<sup>57</sup> The emergence of the new *global* hegemony in the early 1990s (in opposition to the formerly geographically closely defined sphere of influence of the United States) depended historically on 'new thinking' and the loss of competitive capability in the Soviet Union, and on an increase in military spending and the promotion of a 'new world order' by the new hegemon. This new world order was supposed to replace traditional power politics after the end of the Cold War, via the expansion of US liberalism with its claim to global validity. It inspired global processes – globalisation, the promotion of human rights and a 'third wave' of democracy – resulting in material and ideological changes. Furthermore,

the United States created additional international institutions and supported existing ones, even though partly with less vigour than in the preceding era. These institutions can be understood as the material representation of socialisation and cooperation, and they served for stabilising US hegemony. Therefore, by the positive efforts of the hegemon, ideational and material 'facts' were created which transformed the logic of interaction in the direction of coordination and cooperation. Tit-for-tat still applied internationally, but was biased towards more positive interaction. The tendency towards equilibrium was thought to be satisfied by direct interaction and cooperation among unequal partners (as opposed to indirect competitive interaction, as in balancing).<sup>58</sup> This particular idea of 'equilibrium by cooperation' essentially reduced the urge for explicit policies of balancing.

However, as the notion of 'overstretch' implies,<sup>59</sup> with time the hegemon can become overly entangled in its own institutions, in the demands of others, and in over-exercising its own ideology. It starts to suffer under its own leadership, in subjective or objective terms. It can now calculate its still-existing potential for 'freedom of action', depending on its overarching capabilities. It therefore can choose to stop engaging in altruistically cooperative, socialising behaviour and start to 'free ride' within its self-created system. Furthermore, integration under hegemony does not necessarily lead factually and materially to more international equilibrium. As mentioned before, this is essentially an idea on which hegemony is based and which has to actively be realised in material terms. If it is not, then this might promote increasing international and global resentment and frustration with this constellation. Both failures of hegemony can result finally in erosion of the hegemon's legitimacy and of the 'ideological glue' on which cooperation depends. The process by which anarchy matures is endangered, and a possible outcome is that the world of states falls back into self-help anarchy and balancing, with the formation of counter-power towards the former hegemon. Only the institutions created in the Cold War and after under hegemony – even if their creator, the hegemon, defects – can then serve as material stabilising factors leading to continuity.<sup>60</sup> As formalised cooperation forums, these institutions maintain cooperation even in the absence of a strong supporting state acting as the hegemon.

After 9/11, the United States, under the presidency of George W. Bush, acted in a highly self-regarding and non-cooperative fashion, abandoning international institutions and even refuting elements of internationally shared norms and laws which it had helped to create.<sup>61</sup> Also, around the turn of the millennia it became increasingly obvious that the tendency towards material equilibrium remained merely dormant in the global realm, between as well as within states.<sup>62</sup> Both processes resulted in a decline of the hegemon's international legitimacy,<sup>63</sup> and in the reduction of the strength of those 'social bonds' that tied other nations to the United States. In response to this, the ideas and actions of many states formerly submerged in hegemony changed.<sup>64</sup> The European Union, for example, started to 'soft balance' against the United States in the wake of the Operation Iraqi Freedom. India, Russia and China were deliberating on increased cooperation between them and possibly against the United States, to replace a non-benign unipolarity with multi-polarity.<sup>65</sup>

Also, in many states anti-Americanism was on the rise. If we now assume that the tendency towards equilibrium in ideational and material terms is still present as a latent underlying dynamic, we can expect opposing ideologies to emerge, together with a recurrence of material balancing.

### Equilibrium and integration as mutually dependent

With a possible coalition of China, Russia, and perhaps others, against the United States, a future system would have to tackle the issue of how to prevent a 'de-evolutionary' turn in international relations towards traditional power politics, and how to integrate two possible antagonists – an Eastern and a Western alliance, if we extrapolate – under the institutions of global governance. Global governance, the cooperation of states and other actors in, under and in compliance with common institutions, is a Western, US-led creation. It was created mainly in the Cold War period and its aftermath, and is therefore historically still in its infancy. It is questionable how far these institutions, and the thickness of accompanying interaction processes described by the term 'interdependence', can solve the possibly re-emergent problem of competition, in the long term, between two or more great powers. Some would argue that similar processes in the interwar period failed to prevent the Second World War.<sup>66</sup> The outcome will depend on the strength of the existing institutions and the development of ideas (materialised via agency)<sup>67</sup> by both the emerging challengers and the challenged combined. The latter will decide if we manage to remain in an international Lockean or Kantian anarchy, marked by friendly international relations, by compliance with international norms and by cooperation. A new emerging bi- or multi-polarity would not necessarily have to fall back into structural realism's pure logic and, with regard to the still-existing nuclear threat, surely *must not*. This can be prevented by the hegemon's compliance with its benign role as a guarantor of integration and cooperation under common institutions, and by its support for the effective *realisation* of increasing global equilibrium. *If* indeed the tendency towards equilibrium is satisfied, I argue that balancing as an oppositional behaviour does not necessarily need to occur, even under asymmetric conditions. Also, international interactions under bi- or multi-polarity do not have to escalate into major competition if there is a common ideology or idea. Such an idea could reflect a belief in further integration in global governance on an equal and democratic basis, with strong institutions binding the two or more poles together. If, however, the hegemon violates the promises and ideas on which its benign hegemony rests, this will indeed result, as Waltz forecasts,<sup>68</sup> in an 'accumulation of crises' and in the threatened erosion of integration, of socialisation, and of the maturation of anarchy. The most capable states might then refer to traditional strategies of balancing, with a possibility of conflict, should a transition of power take place and a potential new hegemon emerge.<sup>69</sup> It is argued that global cooperation under common institutions is the most powerful idea for international peace,<sup>70</sup> and it seems to this author that Waltz also came close to arguing this in *Man, the State and War*.<sup>71</sup>

## An illustration of the synthetic approach: terrorism in the Middle East

Finally, it is important to extend the theory of ‘tendency towards equilibrium’, and the mutuality of both ideas and material facts, to the sub-state level. This helps us to understand the dynamics underlying international terrorism, currently a very prominent security threat particularly in relation to the hegemon. Terrorism reflects major opposition to the latest ‘new world order’ proclaimed by the United States (even if exercised by a minority) and is hence potentially a first sign of grander processes within international relations. Let us for this purpose turn now to Waltz’s first proposition made in his essay entitled, significantly, ‘Continuity in International Politics’.<sup>72</sup> Waltz writes: ‘Terrorism does not change the imbalance of world power’ (at least in the short term) and it might even aggravate this fact (or at least the application of power in international affairs). Both elements of the proposition could be observed empirically in the aftermath of 9/11. However, international terrorist attacks are very much a *symptom* of, rather than a peripheral occurrence within, hegemony; they are a result of the imbalance of world power, and possibly indicate important tendencies, which might lead to future change.

We must remember here that, according to Waltz, balancing takes place in a rather unequal relationship of power, whereas bandwagoning is frequent in more equal relationships of power.<sup>73</sup> The power relationship between the states of the Middle East (the main breeding ground of international terrorism)<sup>74</sup> and the United States (in the past its main target)<sup>75</sup> is highly unequal, so balancing should classically be expected. Overall, the Middle East finds itself in a starkly weaker position than the United States and the ‘West’ in general, in both military and economic terms, with declining relative values for GDP growth and per capita GDP.<sup>76</sup> The Middle East can be counted as a semi-peripheral region of the world, with half its states belonging to the developed and half to the developing world.<sup>77</sup>

According to structural realism, all of these factors should lead us to assume that the states of the Middle East would try to balance the United States. Any attempt to balance the United States could assume the form of regional integration in the Middle East, and would probably involve seeking alignment specifically with China, but also with Russia. However, with the exception of Iran and Syria, there is as yet little sign of such balancing among Middle Eastern states; they seem rather to prefer alignment with the United States,<sup>78</sup> to which opposition remains at a somewhat tentative level. In line with the argument in the preceding section, this absence of balancing can be explained by looking at the extent of socialisation of the elites in Middle Eastern states, and therefore the extension of ideas and hegemony in this area at the unit level. This process has been described by Galtung as the empire’s strategy of creating ‘client elites’ among the bridgehead states in the periphery, connecting these states with the ‘core elites’, and making them serve as transmitters of ‘coercion’ or power over the populations not under the hegemon’s direct influence.<sup>79</sup> Balancing by states in the Middle East is therefore prevented by the immersion of their elites in the ideological hegemony of the United States. The Global War on Terrorism is a critical instance of this ideological hegemonic

influence, as it separates ‘friendly’ from ‘unfriendly’ states through the ‘with us or against us’ rhetoric and thereby produces friction. Though so far, apart from the cases of Iran and Syria, this has not led to open balancing either.

However, opposition is exerted not from the unit level but from below, by a *sub-state* rather than a state actor. Terrorism directed against Western countries, and the United States in particular, is currently regarded as a sub-state phenomenon,<sup>80</sup> even if it might be sponsored or harboured by states.<sup>81</sup> This kind of violence is also based on material and ideational factors combined, and it is a result of disequilibrium reflected on the sub-state level.

First, sub-state opposition is presumably due to the fact that, at the regional or national levels, insufficient balancing takes place to satisfy in real terms the tendency towards equilibrium, which has negative effects particularly at the sub-state level. However, due to the latent presence of this tendency there exists a desire for positive change towards more parity. This, I would argue, entails oppositional behaviour from below the state level in order to compensate for the absence of opposition at that higher level.

Let us try to retrace the empirical link between the absence of balancing at the state level and sub-state terrorism. First, the lack of balancing may be a cause of frustration for those populations not directly affected by ideological integration under hegemony. Equilibrium can be understood, even if this is not explicitly part of IR theory, as a general, rather intuitive, popular desire. This is particularly the case if disequilibrium has been experienced, affecting the peoples in the form of poverty and widespread unemployment (cf. the ‘relative deprivation’ thesis),<sup>82</sup> and in cultural and ideological terms. Therefore, arguably, the lack of balancing is resented by large parts of the Middle Eastern population, and this resentment is a breeding ground for terrorism and a basis for its support. Terrorists capitalise on the frustration, which they need to legitimise their actions and to find human resources for recruitment. They not only capitalise on it, they instrumentalise it by attempting, or promising to attempt, a recreation of the equilibrium, and to reinstall ‘justice’, or even a certain alternative regional or world order. Many terrorists, furthermore, claim to be fighting against infidels, meaning states or peoples rejecting their religions. Terrorists, therefore, use religions or political ideology as a framework for their struggle, but they are also clearly motivated by questions of material power relationships and by their experience of suffering aggression. Economic causes, for example, have been discussed extensively.<sup>83</sup>

Second, the Middle East region is experiencing both direct and indirect (or ‘structural’) violence, exerted particularly by the United States.<sup>84</sup> The enactment of power in an oppositional (offensive or violent) way leads to more violence (and hence to *counter-violence*) rather than submission,<sup>85</sup> particularly in the absence of soft power. Therefore, counter-violence derives from the logic of tit-for-tat, which assumes reciprocity in relationships both of conflict and cooperation, rather than reciprocity in the accumulation of capability. Hence, it can be supposed that violent action against an actor – for example in the form of military intervention – will be responded to with violent counter-action. Even if, according to rational choice

theory, tit-for-tat assumes non-cooperation or defection rather than violence, this argument can be derived by taking its logic further and apply it to material conflict. It can be argued that the experience of violence exercised by the West against the Middle East is a reason for terrorist organisations in this region to engage in counter-violence.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, US-led globalisation can be seen as the spread of an ideological or cultural influence that not all Middle Eastern populations exposed to it will approve of, and this can support the counter-action referred to above.

Therefore, we can assume that terrorists are attempting to work towards equilibrium, in terms of material, political and ideational improvements for the populations of the Middle East and between the states of the Middle East, on the one hand, and the United States and the West, on the other. For that purpose, other actors would – according to the theory of structural realism – choose to balance. This being impossible for terrorists as sub-state organisations, with no means of establishing a military force or a strong economic system, or of developing any other nationally or even regionally significant capabilities, they are restricted to finding a response in different kinds of action. Their most effective weapon (that of ‘the weak’),<sup>87</sup> especially if they are not capable of forming mass movements, is violence expressed as terrorism. Terrorism can be a very effective type of action, as low-cost measures result in politically very important effects (general shock among the target population which in turn exerts pressure on a particular government). Terrorists therefore use violence in order at least to signal their dismay at and rejection of US power, and to exert pressure on target governments to change their policies. They apply violence here in a tit-for-tat fashion in order to mimic balancing and to counter material or structural violence from the West. Significantly, Ivan Eland has argued that terrorist attacks mostly occur in direct response to Western (or US) interventions.<sup>88</sup>

In conclusion, in the absence of state-led balancing (where it might have been expected), sub-state actors seek to apply violence in a tit-for-tat fashion in order to signal opposition to the power with which their state remains out of balance. As ‘true’ balancing *per definitionem* does only take place between at least formally ‘equal’ actors (that is, states), terrorism is a substitute in those cases where balancing for certain political reasons might be expected but remains absent. Material and ideological factors interact in relations between the United States and the states of the Middle East and in some of them transform potential balancing behaviour at the unit or even regional level into sub-state violence. Ideological power, exerted by the United States to create its sphere of influence, constrains the elites in the Middle East and – up to the present – has hindered balancing behaviour. This constraining factor is absent at the sub-state level, which is subject to a higher exposure to the negative effects of this hegemony. Therefore a counter-ideology is formed, and on this basis material opposition is exercised. However, material constraints at the sub-state level at the same time limit the action radius of the terrorists, and condemn them to individual, isolated attacks in a tit-for-tat fashion.

Terrorism, therefore, does not change the balance between the major powers in international affairs, and here I agree with Waltz. However, terrorism is a sign of weakness in a supposedly hegemonic situation. Terrorism against the West can

therefore indicate an erosion of hegemony if the hegemon is not capable of extending its ideological umbrella. In the long term, if hegemony in terms of soft power and legitimacy is not strengthened, sub-state opposition might spill over to the unit or even global level. Indeed some Middle Eastern states, since the advent of the Global War on Terrorism, have directed their foreign policies increasingly towards the East, for instance by cooperating with China in the oil economy.<sup>89</sup>

## Conclusion

There exist at least two possible scenarios for the future of international relations. First, there is the prospect of growing opposition to the United States at the global, international and sub-state levels because of increasing frustration with the malign effects of the new world-order. Second, there is the possibility that the United States might re-occupy the role of a benign hegemon, and integrate the world increasingly into what can be termed a global 'transnational state', hence an effective and hopefully democratic global governance. The decisive element here will be if the tendency towards equilibrium can be satisfied, and therefore possibilities for global governance on a more egalitarian basis be provided.

In both cases, the material and ideational dimensions are important in explaining the continuities in the current international system, as well as indicating its possible demise. For an improved anticipation of future international relations, we should not forget structural realism's claims, but they must be combined with constructivist interpretations.

Furthermore, an important contribution of structural realism is to be found in promoting the idea of a 'tendency towards power equilibrium', which can serve as a force for stability. This very simple but profound idea, it has been argued, can be used in explaining international interactions even in the absence of traditional balancing; and it can, for example, be applied for describing the causes of possible new conflicts, such as resulting from an emergent Asia as a new challenger or from international terrorism as violence directed against the West.

## Notes

- 1 I would like to thank Ken Booth, James Connelly, Caroline Kennedy-Pipe, Justin Rosenberg, Alexander Wendt, Tom Kane, Andrew Liaropoulos, Kamran Matin and Colin Tyler, participants in the security-studies seminar at the University of Hull and in the Waltz Conference at Aberystwyth University, for very helpful comments on this chapter. Particular thanks to Kenneth Waltz for his cooperation in the interviews, and my parents, Hannelore and Wolfgang Beyer, as well as Peter Barnes, for their support and patience in the final stages of writing.
- 2 Compare Gunther Hellman (ed.), 'The forum: are dialogue and synthesis possible in International Relations?', *International Studies Review*, 29 (5), 2003, pp. 123–53.
- 3 Kenneth N. Waltz, 'America as a model for the world? A foreign policy perspective', *Political Science and Politics*, 24 (4), 1991, pp. 667–70, p. 669.
- 4 Structural realism was particularly influenced by microeconomics; Kenneth Waltz in interview with the author, 2007.
- 5 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979), p. 131.

- 6 Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 99.
- 7 Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 97.
- 8 Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 129–31.
- 9 Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 162.
- 10 Luke McInerney, 'Unipolarity in post-Cold War international politics', *Global Topics*, 1/2002, pp. 1–11, p. 1; John Ikenberry, 'Power and liberal order: America's postwar world order in transition', *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, (5) 2, 2005, pp. 133–52, p. 133; Stephen Brooks and William Wohlforth, 'American primacy in perspective', *Foreign Affairs*, (81) 4, 2002, pp. 20–33, p. 21.
- 11 Charles Krauthammer, 'The unipolar moment', *Foreign Affairs*, (70) 1, 1990/1, pp. 23–33; William Wohlforth, 'The stability of a unipolar world', *International Security*, (24) 1, 2006, pp. 5–41; David Wilkinson, 'Unipolarity without hegemony', *International Studies Review*, (1) 2, 2002, pp. 141–72, to name a few.
- 12 Kenneth N. Waltz, 'The continuity of international politics', in Ken Booth and Tim Dunne (eds) *Worlds in Collision: Terror and the Future of Global Order* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 348–54, p. 350.
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- 14 International Monetary Fund, *World Economic Outlook, October 2008* (Washington, DC, 2008).
- 15 Worldbank, 'Gross domestic product 2008', <<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/DATASTATISTICS/Resources/GDP.pdf>>(accessed 7 October 2009).
- 16 Therese Delpach, 'Nuclear Weapons and the New World Order', *Survival*, 40 (4), 1998/9, pp. 57–76. Russia, we are told, is currently second militarily, see Jonathan Karl, 'Rice: Russia's military moves "a problem"', 14 October 2007 <<http://abcnews.go.com/WN/story?id=3728855>>(accessed 23 August 2008), compare also CIA Factbook, Russia <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/rs.html>> (accessed 22 November 2008).
- 17 Cornelia Beyer, *Counterterrorism and International Power Relations: The EU and ASEAN in Hegemonic Global Governance* (London: IB Tauris, 2010), ch. 7.
- 18 Compare, for example, National Intelligence Council, *Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World* (Washington, DC, 2008).
- 19 William Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalisation, U.S. Intervention, and Hegemony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Tony Evans, *U.S. Hegemony and the Project of Universal Human Rights* (New York: St Martins Press, 1996); Cynthia Weber, *Faking It: U.S. Hegemony in a 'Post-Phallic' Era* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Robert Wade, 'U.S. Hegemony and the World Bank: the fight over people and ideas', *Review of International Political Economy*, (9) 2, 2002, pp. 215–93; Barry Posen, 'Command of the commons: the military foundation of U.S. hegemony', *International Security*, (28) 1, 2003, pp. 5–46; Rosemary Foot, S. Neil MacFarlane and Michael Mastanduno (eds) *U.S. Hegemony and International Organisations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); John Owen, 'Why American hegemony is here to stay', *Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft*, 1/2003, pp. 71–86; Simon Bromley, 'Reflections on empire, imperialism and United States hegemony', *Historical Materialism*, (11) 3, 2003, pp. 17–68, to name a few.
- 20 Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992–2007), Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (Brighton: Harvester, 1980).
- 21 Beyer, *Counterterrorism and International Power Relations*.
- 22 For example, it cannot solely be explained via a shared threat posed by terrorism, which for the European Union remains on a historically relatively low level; compare Beyer, *Counterterrorism and International Power Relations*, ch. 4.
- 23 Robert Pape, 'Soft balancing against the United States', *International Security*, (30) 2, 2005, pp. 7–45 and T.V. Paul, 'Soft balancing in the Age of US Primacy', *International Security*,



- (30) 1, 2005, pp. 46–75 detected and explained only ‘soft’ balancing of the European Union.
- 24 Compare also Jonathan Joseph, ‘Hegemony and the structure-agent problem in International Relations: a scientific realist contribution’, *Review of International Studies*, 34 (1), 2008, pp. 109–28.
- 25 David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
- 26 This term is not generally used by constructivists, but – by referring to power via ideological attraction – also shows that there is a possible link between scholars influenced by realist thought and constructivism.
- 27 Compare for example Qinxing Ken Wang, ‘Hegemony and socialization of the mass public: the case of postwar Japan’s cooperation with the United States on China policy’, *Review of International Studies*, 29/2003, pp. 99–119, William Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalisation, U.S. Intervention, and Hegemony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
- 28 Compare, for a similar approach, Samuel Barkin, ‘Realist Constructivism’, *Review of International Studies*, 29 (5), 2003, pp. 325–42.
- 29 Robert Keohane, ‘Ideas part-way down’, *Review of International Studies*, (26) 1, 2000, pp. 125–30.
- 30 Daniel Chirot, *How Societies Change* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 2000).
- 31 Chirot, *How Societies Change*, p. 11.
- 32 Alexander Wendt, ‘Anarchy is what states make of it: the social construction of power politics’, *International Organization*, (46) 2, 1992, pp. 391–425, p. 412.
- 33 Craig Parsons, *A Certain Idea of Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003).
- 34 Daniel Philpott, *Revolutions in Sovereignty: How Ideas Shaped Modern International Relations* (Princeton, CA: Princeton University Press, 2001); Johan Galtung, *Peace and Social Structure. Essays in Peace Research, Vol. III* (Copenhagen: Ejlers, 1978), p. 298.
- 35 Wendt and Waltz in interviews with the author, 2007 and 2008.
- 36 See here the agent-structure debate, for example David Dessler, ‘What’s at stake in the agent-structure debate?’, *International Organization*, 43 (3), 1989, pp. 441–73.
- 37 Cornelia Beyer, *Violent Globalisms: Conflict in Response to Empire* (London: Ashgate, 2008), chs 2 and 3; Beyer, *Counterterrorism and International Power Relations*.
- 38 Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Decline of American Power: The US in a Chaotic World* (New York: AK Press, 2003).
- 39 Waltz in interview with the author, 2007.
- 40 Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, pp. 163–70.
- 41 Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 132. Waltz here describes the above-mentioned argument, but seems to come to a slightly different conclusion, as otherwise his aforementioned assumptions would be contradicted. Equilibrium, for him, is what states strive for, but it is factually realised only among the great powers.
- 42 Defensive, in opposition to offensive, realism is proclaiming power parity as the aim of competition.
- 43 Robert Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984) and Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).
- 44 Sarah Joseph, ‘Power and rational choice’, in Sarah Joseph, *Political Theory and Power* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988), pp. 16–30.
- 45 Sonja Vogt and Jeroen Veesie, ‘Social support among heterogeneous partners’, *Journal of Economic Interaction and Coordination*, 1/2006, pp. 215–32.
- 46 Beyer, *Counterterrorism and International Power Relations*, ch. 7.
- 47 Compare, for example, the Cuban missile crisis.
- 48 Robert Keohane, ‘Reciprocity in International Relations’, *International Organization*, 40 (1), 1986, pp. 1–27.
- 49 William Wohlforth, ‘Realism and the end of the Cold War’, *International Security*, 19 (2), 1994/5, pp. 91–129.

- 50 Gerhard Simon, 'The end of the Soviet Union: causes and relational contexts', *German Foreign Affairs Review*, (47) 1, 1996, pp. 9–21.
- 51 Wendt, 'Anarchy is what states make of it'.
- 52 John Ikenberry and Charles Kupchan, 'Socialization and hegemonic power', *International Organization*, (44) 3, 1990, pp. 283–315.
- 53 Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett, 'A framework for the study of security communities', in Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett (eds) *Security Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 29–65, pp. 52–55.
- 54 It could be argued that the United States did not act in an other-regarding or altruistic fashion, but in informed self-interest. Nonetheless, it cooperated.
- 55 Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 30 and 34.
- 56 According to Gilpin, legitimacy is a key basis for hegemony; Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, p. 30. This is close to the argumentation of Antonio Gramsci, described in James Martin, 'Antonio Gramsci and political analysis: hegemony and legitimacy', PhD thesis at the University of Bristol, 1993.
- 57 Wohlforth, 'Realism and the end of the Cold War'.
- 58 Dani Rodrik, 'Sense and nonsense in the globalization debate', *Foreign Policy*, 107/1997, pp. 19–37, p. 19; David Held and Anthony McGrew, *Globalization/Anti-globalization* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).
- 59 Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500–2000* (New York: Random House, 1987).
- 60 John Ikenberry and Charles Kupchan, 'Socialization and hegemonic power', *International Organization*, (44) 3, 1990, pp. 283–316, p. 315.
- 61 Renee de Nevers, 'Sovereignty norms and the war on terror: a hegemon meets international society', paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, 17 March 2004; Rens van Munster, 'The war on terrorism: when the exception becomes the rule', *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law*, 17 (2), 2004, pp. 141–53.
- 62 Francois Bourgoignon *et al.*, 'Declining international inequality and economic divergence: reviewing the evidence through different lenses', *Économie internationale*, 100, 2004, pp. 13–25; Arne Melchior *et al.*, 'Globalization and inequality: world income distribution and living standards, 1960–1998', NUPI Rapport, *Studies on Foreign Policy Issues*, 6B:2000; The World Bank, *World Development Report 2006: Equity and Development*, 2006, <[http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INT/WDR2006/Resources/WDR\\_on\\_Equity\\_FinalOutline\\_July\\_public.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INT/WDR2006/Resources/WDR_on_Equity_FinalOutline_July_public.pdf)> (accessed 23 December 2008); and International Labor Organization, '2008 World of Work: Income Inequalities in the Age of Financial Globalization', 2008, <<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/inst/download/world08.pdf>> (accessed 23 December 2008).
- 63 Beyer, *Violent Globalisms*, pp. 41–46.
- 64 This is discussed with regards to legitimacy and authority of the United States in Beyer, *Counterterrorism and International Power Relations*, chs 4 and 5.
- 65 World Views: 'Is a new, regional power bloc emerging to challenge the US?', *San Francisco Chronicle* (16 February 2007), [http://sfchronicle.us/cgi-bin/blogs/worldviews/detail?blogid=15&entry\\_id=13564](http://sfchronicle.us/cgi-bin/blogs/worldviews/detail?blogid=15&entry_id=13564) (accessed 19 October 2009); Jeremy Page, 'Giants meet to Counter US Power', *Times Online*, 15 February 2007, <[http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/us\\_and\\_americas/article1386812.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/us_and_americas/article1386812.ece)> (accessed 23 November 2008).
- 66 Compare Alexandru Grigorescu, 'Mapping the UN-League of Nations analogy: are there still lessons to be learned from the League?', *Global Governance*, (11), 2005, pp. 25–42.
- 67 Vaughn Shannon, 'Wendt's violation of the constructivist project: agency and why a world state is not inevitable', *European Journal of International Relations*, (11) 4, 2005, pp. 581–87.
- 68 Waltz, 'The continuity of international politics', p. 352.
- 69 Compare A.F.K. Organski, *World Politics* (New York: Knopf, 1958) and A.F.K. Organski and Jacek Kugler, *The War Ledger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

- 70 For example, Alexander Wendt, 'Why a world state is inevitable', *European Journal of International Relations*, (9) 4, 2003, pp. 491–542; compare also the discussion in Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959, ch. VI), Commission on Global Governance, *Our Global Neighbourhood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).
- 71 Waltz, *Man, the State and War*, ch. VI.
- 72 Waltz, 'The continuity of international politics', pp. 350–53.
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# 15

## BEYOND WALTZ'S NUCLEAR WORLD

More trust may be better

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The publication in 1981 of Kenneth Waltz's Adelphi Paper, 'The spread of nuclear weapons: more may be better', turned the conventional wisdom on its head by arguing that the spread of nuclear weapons did not have to be a terrifying prospect. Instead, he argued that just as nuclear weapons had played a decisive role in preventing war between the superpowers, so it should be expected that they would play the same role in relation to new nuclear powers. He based his thesis on the assumption that the fear of nuclear war was so overwhelming that the leaders of nuclear-armed states would always be deterred from going to war against each other.<sup>2</sup> Against this powerful case (repeated in various forms since) this chapter rejects the Waltzian proposition that fear of nuclear destruction can serve as a permanent basis of international order. It argues, instead, that lasting order depends upon the building of trust between the nuclear-armed and arming, and disarming, powers. By trust I mean a situation where

two or more actors, based on the mutual interpretation of each other's attitudes and behaviour, believe that the other(s) now and in the future, can be relied upon [at a minimum] to desist from acting in ways that will be injurious to their interests and values [and at a maximum] . . . promote each other's interests and values.<sup>3</sup>

The concept of trust has been marginalised in the theory and practice of international relations, and this has had negative consequences for exploring viable alternatives to a nuclear-armed world.<sup>4</sup> For the most part, the mainstream has conceded the view that because of the inescapable uncertainties that confront governments about the motives and intentions of others – the security dilemma – it is dangerous to trust in the peaceful intentions of states that have the capabilities to inflict great harm, as trust can prove to be misplaced.<sup>5</sup> The chapter argues that

trust can never be separated from the condition of uncertainty, so rather than seek to abolish uncertainty, the challenge is to open up space for trust-building *under uncertainty*, and it will be argued that such space is potentially available in many situations. A key contribution here has been the theory and practice of security communities, and I argue that a promising example of the possibilities of nuclear trust-building was the security community that developed between Argentina and Brazil in the 1980s. The episode reveals the promise of trust in replacing nuclear threats by a new international politics in which force is progressively delegitimated as an instrument of state policy. Having explored the factors that promoted trust between Buenos Aires and Brasilia, the chapter considers the lessons that can be learned for nuclear trust-building elsewhere.

### **Anarchy, nuclear weapons, and the causes of war**

Given the centrality that Waltz was later to accord nuclear weapons in the prevention of war, it is noteworthy that he had not reached a similar conclusion in *Man, the State and War*. Instead, the central thesis of his first classic book was that 'war occurs because there is nothing to prevent it'<sup>6</sup> – not even the destructive potential of nuclear weapons. Waltz provided a systematic framework for understanding the causes of war which located explanations in three alternative 'images'. The first focused on human nature. Waltz criticised Morgenthau and Niebuhr's human nature pessimism, considering that if human nature explains war, it must also explain cooperation and peace. He was equally dismissive of arguments claiming that humans are inherently peaceful and that war and conflict are primarily the outcome of corrupting social structures. The second image explains the causes of war in terms of the peaceful or warlike character of particular states or particular types of regime. Waltz rejected this approach because he considered that all types of states have gone to war. He argued that the first and second images explain why particular wars occur (he called these the 'efficient' causes of war), but to understand war as a recurring phenomenon, we have to turn to the third-image explanation of international anarchy which is the 'permissive' cause of all wars. Particular leaders might be peacefully inclined, and some governments might be defensively oriented, but 'No matter how good their intentions', Waltz argued, 'policy makers must bear in mind the implications of the third image.'<sup>7</sup> In the absence of a supreme authority to settle disputes between conflicting sovereigns, the possibility *always* exists that states will resolve their differences by force. Waltz did briefly consider whether the levels of destructiveness provided by nuclear weapons changed this verdict.<sup>8</sup> His conclusion was that the atomic bomb had no more revolutionised international politics than the advent of other weapons that had been heralded in earlier times as the weapons to end all wars. He cautioned in 1959 against any such nuclear optimism, believing that 'The fear of modern weapons, of the danger of destroying the civilizations of the world, is not sufficient to establish the conditions of peace.'<sup>9</sup> He did not develop this reasoning further,<sup>10</sup> but the implication was clear: despite the arrival of increasingly

destructive weapons, major war was still possible, given the anarchic structure of international politics.

The only solution to the relationship between war and international anarchy revealed by Waltz's theorising was the abolition of anarchy through the creation of a supreme authority – a global Leviathan. Though this 'may be unassailable in logic', he argued it was 'unattainable in practice'.<sup>11</sup> His argument was that the same conditions that compel states to compete militarily in the 'state of nature' prevent them from developing the levels of trust that would make a peaceful world state possible. And even if governments could be persuaded to abolish anarchy and enter into such a global arrangement (which he strongly doubted), the levels of force that would be required to hold a world government together could easily lead to civil war and the collapse of the world state. Consequently, in the 'absence of tremendous changes in the factors included in the first and second images', Waltz argued that 'war will be perpetually associated with the existence of separate sovereign states'.<sup>12</sup> Waltz's dismissal of world government as a 'utopian' solution to the problem of war challenged the views of a small but influential group of thinkers, both within and outside governments, who had argued in the 1940s and 1950s that international anarchy could not be tolerated in the field of nuclear weaponry. This group had argued that it was imperative to create a world nuclear authority that would effectively limit the rights of states to manufacture nuclear weapons.<sup>13</sup> A far-sighted example of such thinking in the United States was the Acheson–Lilienthal Report of March 1946 which proposed that states should collectively renounce the right to possess nuclear weapons, and advocated placing all nuclear materials and technologies under an International Atomic Development Authority which would be established as part of the newly founded United Nations. The Acheson–Lilienthal plan for managing the military implications of the splitting of the atom foundered on the growing mistrust and suspicion between the United States and the Soviet Union as Cold War tensions rose. This lack of trust was manifested in the US refusal to eliminate its existing stocks before the Soviet Union had renounced nuclear weapons (and of course, had agreed to be subjected to intrusive long-term verification). As a result, Moscow moved quickly to develop its own bomb. Nuclear deterrence rather than disarmament became the dominating feature of superpower relations during the Cold War.

The idea of nuclear deterrence as a means of providing mutual security for nuclear-armed states represents an alternative to the position, on the one hand, that anarchy must be replaced by a world nuclear authority, and on the other that nuclear weapons have had no significant impact on the probability of war between states (Waltz's view in *Man, the State and War*). From the start of the nuclear age, theorists of what became known as mutually assured destruction (MAD) argued that by making war mutually destructive for both sides, nuclear weapons had robbed the superpowers of war as the ultimate instrument for settling conflicts of interest between them. Even conventional war was argued to be potentially catastrophic if it involved nuclear-armed powers, since conflict at the lowest level carried the risk of it escalating into a nuclear exchange. The attraction of nuclear deterrence to some

governments and their supporters has been the promise that an individual state could provide for its own security without limitations on its sovereignty, or even more far-reaching modifications of world political organisation, as envisaged by nuclear disarmers or advocates of a world nuclear authority.<sup>14</sup> The MAD notion that nuclear weapons had revolutionised interstate behaviour fundamentally challenged Waltz's third-image argument in *Man, the State and War*. However, his views in the 1950s on the essential irrelevance of nuclear weapons to the ultimate question of war underwent a shift by the 1980s, such that he became convinced that nuclear weapons had transformed the likelihood of war. He wrote: 'Although the possibility of war remains, *nuclear weapons have drastically reduced the probability of its being fought by the states that have them.*'<sup>15</sup> What is more, Waltz pressed the case of deterrence theory in a direction that even its most vigorous supporters had been wary of advancing, namely, the thesis that the benefits of nuclear deterrence are such that they should be spread beyond the existing nuclear states: the proliferation of nuclear weapons might be an international good.

Waltz's policy prescription confronted head-on the conventional wisdom underpinning the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) which had been signed in 1968. The Treaty had recognised *de jure* the five nuclear-weapon states (NWS) that had manufactured and tested nuclear weapons before 1 January 1967 (the definition of a NWS under Article IX of the NPT). However, the Preamble to the Treaty stated that 'the proliferation of nuclear weapons would seriously enhance the danger of nuclear war', and in Article VI, the NWS committed themselves to 'pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a Treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control'. Waltz's 'proliferation optimism' not only challenged the non-proliferation norm in 'international nuclear society',<sup>16</sup> it also had profound implications for his 'third-image' theory that international anarchy is the permissive cause of war.

### More may be better

Waltz based his controversial conclusion that the 'measured spread of nuclear weapons is more to be welcomed than feared'<sup>17</sup> on his assessment of the effects that nuclear weapons had in promoting cautious superpower behaviour during the Cold War. Compared with his earlier discussion in *Man, the State and War*, he was now so impressed with the historically novel war-preventing character of nuclear weapons that he argued that all that was necessary for successful deterrence was a secure second-strike capability. He wrote: 'In a conventional world, one is uncertain about winning or losing. In a nuclear world, one is uncertain about surviving or being annihilated.'<sup>18</sup>

Given this belief in deterrence, Waltz dismissed the concern that the spread of nuclear weapons to rival states in war-prone regions would intensify fear and suspicion, increasing the risk of one side launching a pre-emptive nuclear attack. He argued that nuclear pre-emption is only viable,

if the would-be attacker knows that the intended victim's warheads are few in number, knows their exact number and locations, and knows that they will not be moved or fired before they are struck. To know all of these things, and to know that you know them for sure, is exceedingly difficult.<sup>19</sup>

Far from nuclear weapons emboldening regional adversaries to use force, Waltz maintained that 'The probability of major war among states having nuclear weapons approaches zero.'<sup>20</sup>

Once each side has achieved a secure capacity to deliver nuclear weapons against an opponent's cities, there is no need, according to Waltz, for states to continue to accumulate nuclear arms. This proposition led him to contend that the spread of nuclear weapons would reduce and not intensify competitive pressures between regional rivals.<sup>21</sup> He did not specify how many weapons were required for nuclear sufficiency, but predicted: 'New nuclear states are likely to . . . aim for a modest sufficiency rather than vie with each [other] for a meaningless superiority.'<sup>22</sup> Waltz's 'minimum deterrent' thinking challenged those influential US nuclear strategists who argued that US deterrence policy would be enhanced if Washington developed nuclear war-fighting capabilities, such that it would be able to wage and even prevail in a nuclear war. For Waltz, this was foolish thinking, since nuclear weapons have no 'war-winning' ability: their only rational function is deterrence.

Waltz's proliferation optimism rests on the core assumption that all leaders – irrespective of the character and values of the state in question – will rationally decide to avoid war (including conventional war) when faced with the risk of nuclear devastation. Thus it is not a cause of undue concern to him that the nuclear club has become enlarged beyond the NPT's original five NWS to include Israel, India, Pakistan and North Korea. This is because the Waltzian iron rule is that 'whoever gets nuclear weapons behaves with caution and moderation', and whoever gets nuclear weapons does not 'get attacked militarily'.<sup>23</sup> This was the same Waltz who in 1959 had argued that international anarchy was a perpetual 'permissive' cause of war in the system. How, then, should we explain the new and profound faith that he came to place in *rationality* as the key to peace between nuclear-armed states?

Waltz has accepted that 'for convenience' he can be assumed to be relying on an 'assumption of rationality'.<sup>24</sup> By this he means that nuclear weapons have created a huge awareness on the part of *all* decision-makers who possess them that any use of nuclear weapons against their state would be catastrophic. He has driven this point home by arguing that, ultimately, 'Deterrence does not depend on rationality. *It depends on fear. To create fear, nuclear weapons are the best possible means.*'<sup>25</sup> In *Man, the State and War*, Waltz had argued that world government was the only logical solution to the violent conflicts generated by an anarchic system, but his later analysis of nuclear dynamics led him to identify a trumping causal factor – fear – that could reduce the risks of war between nuclear-armed states to nearly zero.<sup>26</sup>

As we learn more about the nuclear dangers of the Cold War, especially how close the superpowers came to nuclear war during the Cuban missile crisis,<sup>27</sup> and



again during the Able Archer crisis of 1983,<sup>28</sup> it is becoming increasingly evident that 'the bomb' cannot rescue leaders from the mistrust, misperceptions, miscalculations, and accidents that have propelled states into war in the past, and which in the nuclear age could lead to unparalleled catastrophe. Waltz does not accept, but is well aware of such criticisms, as is evident from his debate with Scott Sagan, whose position is that 'more will be worse'. Sagan claims that in not opening up the black box of decision-making inside the state, Waltz has ignored the role of strong military organisations inside the state in propagating the following proliferation risks: biases towards preventive war thinking during the dangerous period when a rival state is developing nuclear weapons; organisational routines that militate against the building of survivable nuclear forces, increasing the dangers of pre-emptive nuclear strikes in times of crisis; and the risks of accidental or unauthorised use of nuclear weapons. Sagan substantiated his claims with empirical evidence from the Cold War and the India–Pakistan nuclear rivalry, predicting, *contra* Waltz, that we should expect to see these dangers increase if more states become nuclear powers.<sup>29</sup>

Waltz has not retreated from his pro-proliferation stance in the face of such criticisms. He responded to Sagan, for example, by challenging his reading of both the Cold War and the international politics of South Asia. Waltz has dismissed the evidence that nuclear historians have accumulated showing how close the super-powers came to nuclear war during the Cuban missile crisis; and he has been equally unperturbed about deterrence failing between India and Pakistan.<sup>30</sup> In reply to Sagan's claim that there was a significant risk of inadvertent nuclear war during the crises over Kargil in 1999 and in 2001–02, when India was fully mobilised for war against Pakistan, Waltz repeated his belief that 'Nuclear Weapons make crises stable, which is an important reason for believing that India and Pakistan are better off with than without them.'<sup>31</sup> Waltz, then, remains optimistic that the rationality instilled by nuclear fear will ensure that deterrence continues to pass whatever future tests it faces.

The impossibility for governments to accept that 'more may be better' is that it rests on a gamble of cosmic proportions, namely, as Martin Amis once pithily put it, that deterrence can 'last out the necessary timespan, which is roughly between now and the death of the sun'.<sup>32</sup> One might assume 99 per cent confidence that nuclear deterrence will indefinitely prevent war between states possessing nuclear weapons, including conventional wars that might otherwise have occurred. But is the price of a 1 per cent likelihood that deterrent rationality might one day fail (bearing in mind that such a percentage increases significantly over say a 100 year period)<sup>33</sup> worth paying, given the terrible consequences of any nuclear wars that do occur?

Many in the existing NWS are willing to take such a risk, while also strongly opposing the spread of nuclear weapons to other states. But should we accept 'life in a nuclear-armed crowd',<sup>34</sup> and – despite Waltzian assurances to the contrary – the foreboding prospect, as Colin Gray despairingly argued, that there will be 'the occasional nuclear war'?<sup>35</sup> Is there an alternative to Waltz's nuclear world? Accepting the inevitability that nuclear weapons will be used again, Campbell Craig asks whether life in a nuclear-armed anarchy is 'likely to be better or worse than [that]

associated with the establishment of global governance'.<sup>36</sup> Craig has not specified what he means by this in relation to the control of nuclear weapons, but if he envisages the creation of a global nuclear authority that would control all nuclear weapons and materials, it is evident that achieving this will require a radical transformation in attitudes and beliefs on the part of the existing nuclear-armed powers (including those currently outside the NPT).

The fundamental problem confronting such a radical transformation is how states that are mistrustful of the motives and intentions of others can be persuaded to eliminate their nuclear weapons when others might cheat, with all the dangers of nuclear blackmail that this would entail. A disarmed nuclear world that was bereft of trust would be one in which the security dilemma would operate with great ferocity because states could have little confidence that others would come to their rescue if they were blackmailed or attacked by a state that had secretly hidden nuclear weapons. Fearing defections by others, states would hedge by concealing some weapons, and this led Waltz to argue that returning to zero would lead to 'the most dangerous kind of world' because 'If any country is foolish enough to get rid of them, and then someone discovers that these other countries have them, there will be a rush to rebuild them.'<sup>37</sup>

The challenge, then, for those who are not prepared to rest global security perpetually on the shared fear of nuclear catastrophe is to navigate a safe path to zero. This depends upon establishing and sustaining a form of 'global nuclear governance'<sup>38</sup> (this will require norms, rules, and institutions but not necessarily a world government) that will reassure states that others have disarmed and are not about to reveal a hidden arsenal to the world. To be credible, it would also be necessary for any such disarmament agreement to provide machinery for enforcement in the event that any government did try to break out. Although some have argued that the threat to rearm with nuclear weapons in the event of a break-out would be sufficient to keep a disarmed world stable, basing security in a disarmed nuclear world on nuclear fear is as problematic and worrying a basis for peace as it is in Waltz's proliferating nuclear world.<sup>39</sup>

Is there a political alternative to reliance on the fear of nuclear destruction that can provide security between both nuclear-armed and disarming states? The remainder of this chapter maps out an alternative path to achieving a world free of nuclear weapons which is rooted in the theory and practice of security communities as trust-builders in international relations.

### **Nuclear trust-building through security communities**

The transition from a situation in which the members of the nuclear club possess thousands of weapons between them, to one in which there are only a few hundred, or even zero, is much more than a technical question of verifying that the last few weapons have been dismantled. What is at stake in any such transition is whether the nuclear powers can learn to base their security on mutual trust rather than mutual fear.

Trust is basic to all society. In the words of the political theorist John Dunn, 'The question of whom to trust and how far is as central a question of political life as it is of personal life.'<sup>40</sup> But is the trust that is available in 'civil life' possible in world politics, or is John Mearsheimer correct in arguing that there is 'little room for trust among states'.<sup>41</sup> The latter view argues that not only is trust in short supply in world politics, but, perhaps more tellingly, that to trust can actually be dangerous.

Realists are correct in arguing that uncertainty cannot be eliminated from international politics, but they are wrong to conclude that this necessarily prevents political trust between states and societies. Trust and uncertainty are not antithetical.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, trust always develops under the condition of uncertainty, and never entirely escapes it. If humans had certainty about the motives and intentions of others, they would not need trust. Trust is one of the mechanisms by which humans try to cope with life's risks and uncertainties; states need trust to avoid becoming trapped in spiralling mistrust triggered by security dilemma dynamics. The latter come into play when hostility is driven by mutual fear and suspicion, but decision-makers fail to appreciate that their adversary is acting out of defensive rather than aggressive intent.<sup>43</sup>

The promise of trust-building at the international level is the emergence and development of regional security communities, and ultimately the achievement of a global security community.<sup>44</sup> The concept of a security community was developed by Karl Deutsch and his colleagues in the mid-1950s. They defined a security community as:

a group of people which has become 'integrated'. By INTEGRATION we mean the attainment, within a territory, of a 'sense of community' and of institutions and practices strong enough and widespread enough to assure . . . dependable expectations of 'peaceful change' among its population. By SENSE OF COMMUNITY we mean a belief . . . that common social problems must and can be resolved by processes of 'peaceful change'.<sup>45</sup>

The building of trust between former enemies – and the transformation of identities that this presupposes – is crucial to the emergence of a security community. Deutsch's normative project was the eradication of war and the promoting of peaceful change, and the litmus test of a security community is that the participants do not target each other militarily. Nuclear weapons, then, would have no relevance in relations between the members of a security community, though they may be kept for a deterrent role vis-à-vis states outside the security community.

An important case of nuclear trust-building was the rapprochement that took place between Argentina and Brazil in the 1980s.<sup>46</sup> Earlier, there had been growing concern that the two rivals might develop nuclear weapons, and few (notably officials in the Carter administration) were optimistic – *contra* Waltz's thesis – that nuclearising their conflictual relationship would have positive consequences for security. Yet Brazil and Argentina were able to find a different path. Through a process of mutual reassurance and high levels of transparency, each came to trust

that the other was only pursuing a peaceful nuclear programme. From a trust-building perspective, three factors seem to have been decisive to the cooperation that was achieved between Argentina and Brazil in relation to the nuclear issue: (1) mutual sensitivity to the dangers of spiralling mistrust ('security dilemma sensibility', to be discussed below) on the part of key leaders and diplomats; (2) recognition that moves to promote trust entail an acceptance of both uncertainty and vulnerability; and (3) the development of common interests and shared values at both the elite and inter-societal levels.

### *Security dilemma sensibility*

A key precondition for developing trust between two antagonists is that decision-makers on both sides come to appreciate that others might be acting out of fear and not malevolence, and, crucially, that each side recognises the role that their own actions have played in provoking that fear. Such sensitivity on the part of leaders to fear-based hostility may be called 'security dilemma sensibility'.<sup>47</sup> In the Argentine–Brazilian case there is evidence that successive leaders were not only able to exercise such empathetic responsiveness to each other's security concerns, but also used this knowledge to develop policies that signalled their mutual trustworthiness.<sup>48</sup> In the late 1970s, there were anxieties in Buenos Aires – and especially also in Washington – that a nuclear deal between Brazil and West Germany might signal Brasilia's determination to acquire nuclear weapons. Recognising the dangers of a regional nuclear arms race, and believing that this could be averted, key Argentinean officials, led by the ambassador to Brazil, Oscar Camiliòn (he was ambassador from 1976 to 1981) publicly emphasised their confidence in the peaceful intentions of the Brazilian programme.<sup>49</sup> This expression of trust in Brazil's nuclear motives was reciprocated in Brasilia's acceptance of the peaceful nature of the Argentine nuclear programme. These moves paved the way, along with the 1979 Corpus–Itaipú agreement (which resolved the dispute between Argentina and Brazil over the use of the river Paraná's water resources), for a decisive breakthrough in 1980. During that year, reciprocal presidential visits led to the signing of a number of agreements, including one that was highly significant in establishing cooperation on the peaceful uses of atomic energy.<sup>50</sup>

The nuclear rapprochement faltered in the early 1980s as both countries focused on internal economic and political problems, and Argentina fought a war against the United Kingdom over the Falkland Islands. However, the rapprochement dramatically accelerated with the transition to civilian rule in both countries. The human factor was also crucial<sup>51</sup> as can be seen in the reflections of the Argentine diplomat Julio C. Carasales who witnessed the process of growing nuclear cooperation at first hand. He told a conference in 1996 that the personal commitment of Raúl Alfonsín (elected head of state in Argentina in 1983) and José Sarney (elected as Brazilian president two years later) and the active participation of their key advisers was a key factor in the building of trust.<sup>52</sup>

This leadership-driven process produced a series of 'confidence and security building measures' (CSBMs) such as military-to-military contacts, mutual exchange of information, scientific and technical exchanges, and active cooperation between the two foreign ministries. In 1985 this process of increased transparency was formalised with the creation of joint working groups involving members of both countries' nuclear establishments.<sup>53</sup> The joint groups provided a forum within which Argentine and Brazilian nuclear officials could inform each other of developments that might give rise to suspicion and mistrust. A good example of this was the prior notice given to the Alfonsín government of Sarney's speech in September 1987, announcing that Brazil had mastered the technology of uranium enrichment.<sup>54</sup> Closer relations were both symbolised and deepened by Alfonsín inviting Sarney and his nuclear officials in 1987 to visit Argentina's uranium-enrichment plant at Pilcaniyeu. The growing mutual trust was further strengthened a year later when the Brazilian leadership reciprocated by inviting Alfonsín and his nuclear advisers to inspect its previously undisclosed enrichment facility at Aramar.<sup>55</sup> By opening up each side's sensitive nuclear facilities to the scrutiny of the other, these visits were highly significant in promoting confidence in each other's peaceful nuclear intentions.<sup>56</sup>

### ***Accepting uncertainty and vulnerability***

The high levels of nuclear transparency achieved between Brazil and Argentina in the second half of the 1980s certainly did not eliminate all uncertainties about each other's nuclear motives. As noted above, trust and uncertainty are mutually implicated, and to trust to any degree is always to risk betrayal. The corollary of this is that actors seeking to build trust must be willing to accept their vulnerability to betrayal if their positive expectations about the motives and intentions of others prove misplaced.<sup>57</sup> In the case of Argentina and Brazil, Presidents Alfonsín and Sarney would have been unusually trusting state leaders had they not borne this consideration in mind when they met in Foz de Iguacu to pledge once more that their nuclear programmes were solely for peaceful purposes. Despite suspicions on the part of some elements in both governments that the other might be secretly developing weapons,<sup>58</sup> they pressed on in the absence of solid guarantees that the other party was not feigning trustworthiness as a cover to pursue a weapons programme. As Carasales later reflected, the nuclear rapprochement took place because both sides placed their 'trust in the other's good faith and in the possibility of checking up on suspicious activities by visits, exchanges, etc., none of which were enforceable.'<sup>59</sup>

### ***The development of common interest and shared values***

The transition to democratic rule in both Argentina (1983) and Brazil (1985) led to the deepening of trust between the two countries, not least because it brought to power leaders who were aware of the growing political and economic costs and risks

of pursuing a unilateral approach to security. Positive relationships between leaders spilled over into the inter-societal level as Argentina and Brazil became partners across a whole range of political and economic issues. Thus the nuclear issue was one aspect, albeit a critically important one, of the wider process of cooperation and increasingly economic integration that was developing between the two countries.<sup>60</sup> Andrew Hurrell has argued that democratisation was an important motor in leading both countries to redefine their interests in ways that promoted this integration, and that this changing conception of interests sprung from a redefinition of identity. The need to nurture their fledgling democracies and promote joint economic development became the shared values of Argentine and Brazilian policy-makers. Rivals became 'friends', a transformation Hurrell described as the emergence of a 'loosely knit security community'.<sup>61</sup>

By the early 1990s, Alfonsín's and Sarney's successors now trusted each other sufficiently to establish a new joint organisation, the Argentine–Brazilian Agency for Accounting and Control of Nuclear Materials (ABACC). The organisation comprises inspectors and officials from both countries and serves to reassure the political and military leaders of both states that their counterparts are not covertly developing nuclear weapons. This is not to say that everyone in Argentina and Brazil had total confidence about each other's future nuclear motives and intentions. The existence of ABACC, for example, cannot guarantee against the possibility (however remote) that Brazil and Argentina might at some future date decide that their security depends upon developing nuclear weapons. The key point is that this uncertainty is not incompatible with relations of trust, and nuclear threats will not figure in the planning of either country's political and military leaders as long as Buenos Aires and Brasilia continue to act on the basis of the trust they have established.

The framing of the transformation in relations between Argentina and Brazil in terms of a developing security community would be countered by proponents of offensive realist logic, who start from the same structural explanation as Waltz, but give it a different operational significance in the nuclear (and other) areas. Offensive realism is predicated on the assumption that, given the inescapable uncertainty about the motives and intentions of others, states have no choice but to behave aggressively. Rationality demands it. This is not because others are assumed to be predatory or malevolent in intent, but because in a condition of anarchy major states can only be secure if they maximise their power.<sup>62</sup> Mearsheimer, the founding theorist of offensive realism, has applied this reasoning to the Deutschian claim that Western Europe became a security community in the 1950s. Mearsheimer controversially argued in his 1990 'Back to the future' article that Europe up to that point had only remained peaceful because the United States' commitment to Western Europe has pacified Europe's traditional security anxieties. He predicted that if the US presence was removed, European states would return to the competitive security policies of the past as they once more viewed each other with fear and suspicion.<sup>63</sup> Offensive realism accepts that states occasionally cooperate together, but such arrangements cannot endure as they represent the pursuit of narrowly defined interests, and are frequently aimed at third parties as part of the

balancing process. This realist understanding of international politics sees little or no role for state leaders and diplomats to change this singular logic of anarchy, and it gives rise to a very different explanation of the nuclear rapprochement between Brazil and Argentina.

Analysts who favour this realist view argue that the nuclear cooperation that developed between Argentina and Brazil was driven by the need to forge a common front against the nuclear non-proliferation policy of the United States. On this interpretation, Argentina's public expressions of confidence in Brazil's peaceful nuclear intentions in the late 1970s countered Washington's claims to the contrary, and in being welcomed by Brasilia an alliance was created between the two South American nuclear powers against what was perceived as the hegemonial nuclear policies of the United States and the NPT regime it supported. This view is advanced by Jacques Hymans who maintained that US pressure 'angered the Argentines and Brazilians so much that they patched up their differences with each other in order to form a common diplomatic front against the US.'<sup>64</sup> This realist argument views US pressure as the prime explanation for the nuclear cooperation that developed between Brazil and Argentina in the 1980s. In the absence of this factor, offensive realism would argue that Buenos Aires and Brasilia would have been compelled by the logic of anarchy to engage in a regional struggle for power and security, leading to a nuclear arms race.

Even if it is accepted that opposing US pressure on the nuclear issue encouraged Argentine–Brazilian cooperation in the late 1970s, the realist explanation fails to recognise how far the nuclear trust-building moves taken by the governments of Alfonsín and Sarney contributed to a change in the identities of Brazil and Argentina from mistrustful rivals to trusting partners. The process of democratisation in both countries was essential to this transformation, but it is neglected in realist accounts like Hymans. Such explanations of the social world marginalise the importance of agency; there is a tendency to assume that any set of decision-makers would have been compelled by these structural pressures to act in this way. But as Carasales emphasised, the personal commitment of both Alfonsín and Sarney to the nuclear rapprochement was critical in this case; such a level of cooperation and trust might not have been achieved under different leaders. Consequently, there are good reasons for identifying the Argentine–Brazilian case as an important challenge to the offensive realist claim that anarchy is incompatible with trust between states. What the case shows is that regional rivals, on the point of turning their relationship into being nuclear adversaries, can develop sufficient confidence about the motives and intentions of each other such that the threat or use of force ceases to be a factor in their relations.

### **The Argentine–Brazilian case as a model of denuclearisation through trust-building**

Can the Argentine–Brazilian case of nuclear trust-building be generalised as a model for reversing nuclear rivalries and conflicts in other cases? It is the conten-

tion of this chapter that there were special regional circumstances that caution against thinking that it provides a ready-made template for all other situations where states have developed nuclear weapons, such as South Asia or the Korean peninsula. That said, there are nonetheless important lessons that can be learned from this case for regions where there is the potential for a nuclear arms race, such as the Middle East.

The first lesson is the great danger of potential nuclear rivals crossing over the nuclear threshold by testing and developing nuclear weapons. Neither Brazil nor Argentina tested or weaponised nuclear devices, and this made cooperation far easier than would have been the case had each side developed operational nuclear weapons. The latter circumstance would have increased fear and suspicion on both sides, and developing policies that promoted mutual confidence in such a context would have been much harder to achieve. A comparison with the South Asian nuclear situation is instructive here.<sup>65</sup> India and Pakistan have crossed the nuclear threshold, and though both store warheads separately from delivery vehicles (to reduce the risks of accidental or inadvertent war), fear and suspicion of each other's nuclear intentions has been magnified in a situation where missile flight-times are as short as 5–10 minutes, and both sides know that the other has the capability to rapidly assemble and deploy nuclear forces.

The variation in levels of nuclear weapon development between India and Pakistan on the one hand, and Argentina and Brazil on the other, reflects the fact that the two South American rivals never experienced the levels of enmity and violence between them that have so embittered relations between the South Asian nuclear powers. In his own reflections on the lessons that might be learned from the Argentine–Brazilian case for nuclear trust-building elsewhere, Carasales had recognised how important the favourable geopolitical setting had been to success. The rapprochement had succeeded because 'Argentina and Brazil were not enemies, just competitors. But the situation in other parts of the world . . . is completely and absolutely different.' Nevertheless, he suggested that 'Perhaps we followed a particular way that could be of some use.'<sup>66</sup>

The second lesson is the importance of democratisation. Speaking at the same conference as Carasales in 1996, Gideon Frank, then Director General of the Israeli Atomic Energy Commission, claimed that the most important lesson that other regions should learn from the cooperation that was achieved between Argentina and Brazil (he was clearly thinking of his own region) was the value of 'democratisation [because] . . . Only in a democratic regime can you have confidence in the intentions of a country.'<sup>67</sup> It is evident that the major transformation in Argentine–Brazilian nuclear relations took place only after both countries had become democratic states,<sup>68</sup> and it is a fascinating counterfactual whether the trust they established could have been achieved without the process of democratisation. As discussed above, the personal commitment of Alfonsín and Sarney to developing better relations was very important, and it is a moot question whether leaders with such a strong belief in the potential of Argentine–Brazilian cooperation would have emerged without the process of democratisation in both countries.



The third lesson that can be learned from this case is the importance of decision-makers exercising security dilemma sensibility. Understanding the role that one's own actions might have played in provoking fear on the part of an adversary and designing policies that promote reassurance are crucial to the building of trust between adversaries. Carasales appreciated the importance of this and he argued that one of the most important lessons of the Argentine–Brazilian nuclear rapprochement was that:

You have to be sincere since no moves in this field can have the slightest chance of success if they are taken with the ulterior motive of cheating the other party, or guiding it into a false sense of security. As a first step, a country should open itself to the other party on the understanding that this policy will be reciprocated.<sup>69</sup>

Even if nuclear decision-makers are persuaded that the threat posed by another state might be fear-based rather than the consequence of ambition – always a hard call<sup>70</sup> – operationalising security dilemma sensibility into policies that signal a state's peaceful/defensive intentions in the way that Argentina and Brazil did will be very difficult to achieve if this entails accepting a level of vulnerability that could lead to unacceptable costs if trust proves misplaced. I argued above that vulnerability is an integral property of trust, but trust is easier to promote when, as in the Argentine–Brazilian case, there is a *margin of safety* such that states are not dangerously exposed if their acts of trust are exploited by their adversaries.<sup>71</sup> The quandary here is that unless leaders are prepared to make their countries (and themselves) vulnerable in situations where they perceive little or no margin of safety (the latter is always open to interpretation, and attitudes to it will vary over time), how can they communicate that they can be trusted in situations of high distrust and suspicion?

The Argentine–Brazilian nuclear rapprochement took place under favourable conditions for trust-building, but it still stands as an important rebuttal of the offensive realist logic which predicts enduring security competition between major regional powers, and a struggle for relative nuclear advantage. Perhaps these dynamics have been only temporarily suppressed in South America, and future leaders of Brazil and Argentina will preside over a competition for regional hegemony that will have a nuclear dimension. From his 'defensive realist' perspective Waltz would argue that a future nuclearisation of the Argentine–Brazilian relationship will not, *contra* Mearsheimer, negatively impact on their security. However, there are good reasons for thinking that this case shows that there can be an alternative to both Mearsheimer's and Waltz's nuclear worlds in which trust has replaced the fear that leads states to seek security in the bomb. The challenge that this successful experiment in nuclear trust-building leaves us with is how to develop policies that apply the positive lessons from this case (the importance of policy-makers exercising security dilemma sensibility, the significance of democratisation, and the agency of leaders and officials) to those hard cases of nuclear distrust where

policy-makers remain stubbornly resistant to living with the uncertainties (and hence vulnerabilities) that are necessary to the building of trust.

There are no risk-free nuclear futures available to us. When decision-makers in the nuclear powers weigh the risks of taking a 'leap of trust'<sup>72</sup> that might prove costly and dangerous, they need to remember that misplaced suspicion brings its own risks and costs. To give way to the impulse to mistrust, if hostility is fear-based, risks trapping states in spiralling distrust that could have been avoided, and this increases the risks that crises might end in the use of nuclear weapons. Despite Waltz's sustained arguments to the contrary, there is enough historical evidence from both the Cold War and South Asia to suggest that these risks will only increase if nuclear weapons spread further. It is too great a wager with the lives of the millions that would be killed in a future nuclear war – or even wars – to rely on fear to keep the arsenals indefinitely at bay. If governments and wider global civil society are serious about ridding the world of nuclear weapons and ensuring that a non-nuclear world becomes a more secure one, then radical rethinking and related policy initiatives are needed to replace security based on nuclear fear with robust security communities embedded in relations of trust.

## Notes

- 1 This chapter was first presented at a conference on "The King of Thought": Theory, the Subject and Waltz, Aberystwyth University, 15–17 September 2008. I am grateful to the conference participants for their comments and questions on my paper and wish to thank Ian Clark, Tim Dunne, David Gill, Andrew Hurrell, Sara Kutchesfahani, Tristan Price, Nick Ritchie, Len Scott, William Walker, and especially Ken Booth for their comments on earlier versions of this chapter. I would also like to thank Simon Davies whose PhD first drew my attention to the importance of the Argentine–Brazilian case of nuclear trust-building for thinking about the possibilities of nuclear abolition.
- 2 Kenneth N. Waltz, 'The spread of nuclear weapons: more may be better', Adelphi Paper 171 (London: International Institute of Strategic Studies, 1981), p. 30.
- 3 This definition is taken from Ken Booth and Nicholas J. Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation and Trust in World Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 230.
- 4 Exploring the contribution that multidisciplinary approaches to trust can make to building cooperation between nuclear-armed and arming states is the subject of my 3-year ESRC/AHRC Fellowship on 'The challenges to trust-building in nuclear worlds' that is part of Research Councils UK's Global Uncertainties Programme: Security for All in a Changing World'. More details of this project are available at ([http://www.aber.ac.uk/interpol/en/research/DDMI/research\\_trust\\_building.html](http://www.aber.ac.uk/interpol/en/research/DDMI/research_trust_building.html)).
- 5 See Booth and Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*, pp. 229–34, 251–61.
- 6 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), p. 188.
- 7 Waltz, *Man, the State and War*, p. 238. See also Campbell Craig, *Glimmer of a New Leviathan, Total War in the Realism of Niebuhr, Morgenthau, and Waltz* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), p. 129.
- 8 Craig, *Glimmer of a New Leviathan*, p. 131.
- 9 Waltz, *Man, the State and War*, p. 236. See also Craig, *Glimmer of a New Leviathan*, pp. 144–45.
- 10 Campbell Craig argued that *Man, the State and War* is notable for its lack of attention to the nuclear question, with 'The specter of nuclear war [playing] a subordinate role . . .

- even as it was dominating the actions of men and states in the world outside'. He argued that Waltz could not take a normative position on the issue of nuclear war in his 1959 work because to do so would have robbed the book of its 'methodological argument' and undermined Waltz's 'consistency as a theoretician interested in analysis rather than justification' (Craig, *Glimmer of a New Leviathan*, p. 131).
- 11 Waltz, *Man, the State and War*, pp. 228, 238. See also Craig, *Glimmer of a New Leviathan*, pp. 129, 131.
  - 12 Waltz, *Man, the State and War*, p. 228, quote at p. 238.
  - 13 Daniel Deudney has labelled such thinking 'classical nuclear one-worldism' which he has defined as the belief that 'nuclear explosives pose a radical challenge to the core security-providing function of the state and that a world state is necessary to provide security'. He has identified John H. Herz's *International Politics in the Atomic Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959) and Kenneth Boulding's *Conflict and Defense: A General Theory* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962) as representing the 'theoretical apogee' of this view. Daniel H. Deudney, *Bounding Power: Republican Security Theory from the Polis to the Global Village* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 246. See also William Walker and Nicholas J. Wheeler, 'Weak states, responsible sovereignty, and the fitness to bear nuclear arms' (unpublished paper on file with the author).
  - 14 Deudney made a similar argument and has labelled this position 'deterrence statism' (Deudney, *Bounding Power*, p. 247).
  - 15 Kenneth N. Waltz, 'Nuclear myths and political realities', in Kenneth N. Waltz, *Realism and International Politics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), p. 291 (emphasis added).
  - 16 This concept is developed in Walker and Wheeler, 'Weak states, responsible sovereignty'.
  - 17 Waltz, 'The spread of nuclear weapons', p. 30.
  - 18 Waltz, 'The spread of nuclear weapons', p. 6.
  - 19 Waltz, 'The spread of nuclear weapons', p. 16.
  - 20 Kenneth N. Waltz, 'The origins of war in neorealist theory', in Waltz, *Realism and International Politics*, pp. 64–65.
  - 21 Waltz, 'The origins of war in neorealist theory', pp. 64–65. See also Waltz, 'The spread of nuclear weapons', pp. 21–23; Scott D. Sagan and Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate Renewed* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003), pp. 29–33.
  - 22 Waltz, 'The spread of nuclear weapons', p. 22.
  - 23 Scott Sagan, Kenneth Waltz and Richard K. Betts, 'A nuclear Iran: promoting stability or courting disaster', *Journal of International Affairs*, 60 (2), 2007, p. 137. See also Waltz, 'Nuclear myths and political realities', p. 137. Scott Sagan, in his debate with Waltz, attacked the latter's assumption of state rationality using organisation theory. He substantiated his case with empirical evidence from the Cold War and South Asian nuclear experiences, emphasising that the 'inherent limits of organizational reliability' means that 'the spread of nuclear weapons is more to be feared than welcomed' (Sagan and Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons*, pp. 46–88, 90–108, 156–84, quote at p. 184).
  - 24 Quoted in Sagan and Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons*, p. 50.
  - 25 Sagan and Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons*, p. 154 (emphasis added).
  - 26 Waltz, 'The origins of war in neorealist theory', p. 64. By identifying such a pivotal role for nuclear fear in the prevention of war, Waltz, according to Craig, cannot sustain his claim as to 'the predominance of third-image over first-image factors' since the logic of Waltz's argument in 'The Spread of Nuclear Weapons' was that the 'First-image factor of nuclear fear is dominant in questions of war and peace' (Craig, *Glimmer of a New Leviathan*, pp. 157–65, 169–73, quote at p. 157). Deudney has gone so far as to argue that Waltz's great faith in nuclear deterrence can be seen as a functional surrogate for world government (Daniel Deudney, 'Dividing Realism: Structural Realism versus Security Materialism on Nuclear Security and Proliferation', *Security Studies*, 2(3/4), 1993, pp. 12–16).
  - 27 See Len Scott, *The Cuban Missile Crisis and the Threat of Nuclear War: Lessons from History* (London: Continuum, 2007).

- 28 Nicholas J. Wheeler, 'To put oneself into the other fellow's place: John Herz, the security dilemma and the nuclear age', *International Relations*, 22(4), 2008, pp. 499–500; Len Scott and Nicholas J. Wheeler, 'How the world came to the verge of nuclear war', WalesOnline.co.uk, 10 November 2008, available at: [www.walesonline.co.uk/news/welsh-politics/welsh-politics-news/2008/11/10/how-the-world-came-to-the-verge-of-nuclear-war-91466-22220874/](http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/welsh-politics/welsh-politics-news/2008/11/10/how-the-world-came-to-the-verge-of-nuclear-war-91466-22220874/). For a counter-view see Vojtech Mastny, 'How Able Was "Able Archer"? Nuclear Trigger and Intelligence in Perspective', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 11(1), 2009, pp. 108–23.
- 29 Sagan and Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons*, pp. 46–88, 90–108, 156–84.
- 30 Sagan and Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons*, pp. 109–24.
- 31 Sagan and Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons*, p. 122.
- 32 Quoted in Craig, *Glimmer of a New Leviathan*, pxvii; see also p. 172 and Ken Booth and Nicholas J. Wheeler, 'Beyond nuclearism', in Regina Cowan Karp (ed.), *Security Without Nuclear Weapons? Different Perspectives on Non Nuclear Security* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 55.
- 33 For a brief discussion of the argument about probabilities seeking to 'prove' deterrence failing, see Joseph S. Nye, 'The long-term future of nuclear deterrence', in Roman Kolkowicz, (ed.), *The Logic of Nuclear Terror* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987), p. 235.
- 34 The phrase was first coined by Albert Wohlstetter, Thomas Brown, Gregory Jones, David McGarvey, Henry Rowen, Vincent Taylor and Roberta Wohlstetter in their *Moving Toward Life in a Nuclear Armed Crowd?*, PH76-04-389-14, final report prepared for the US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency in fulfilment of ACDA/PAB-263 (Los Angeles, CA: PAN Heuristics, 4 December 1975; revised 22 April 1976), available at: [www.albertwohlstetter.com/archives/npec\\_releases\\_moving\\_toward\\_life\\_in\\_a\\_nuclear\\_armed\\_crowd\\_1975.html](http://www.albertwohlstetter.com/archives/npec_releases_moving_toward_life_in_a_nuclear_armed_crowd_1975.html) (accessed 3 September 2008).
- 35 Colin S. Gray, *The Second Nuclear Age* (London: Lynne Rienner, 1999), p. 31.
- 36 Craig, *Glimmer of a New Leviathan*, pp. 171–72, quote at 171.
- 37 Sagan, Waltz and Betts, 'A nuclear Iran', p. 146.
- 38 See Justin Alger, 'A guide to global nuclear governance: safety, security and nonproliferation', Centre for International Governance Innovation, September 2008.
- 39 See Jonathan Schell, *The Abolition* (London: Picador, 1984); Michael J. Mazarr, 'Virtual nuclear arsenals', *Survival* 37 (3), 1995, pp. 7–26; Michael J. Mazarr, (ed.), *Nuclear Weapons in a Transformed World: The Challenge of Virtual Nuclear Arsenals* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1997); Michael J. Mazarr, *Virtual Nuclear Arsenals: A Second Look* (Washington, DC: CSIS, January 1999). For criticisms of this idea, see Booth and Wheeler, 'Beyond nuclearism', pp. 36–40, Booth and Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*, p. 208; Kenneth N. Waltz, 'Thoughts about virtual nuclear arsenals', *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 20 (3), 1997, pp. 153–161; Avener Cohen and Joseph F. Pialt, 'Assessing virtual nuclear arsenals', *Survival*, 40 (1), 1998, pp. 129–44.
- 40 John Dunn, 'Trust', in Robert E. Goodin and Philip Pettit (eds), *A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p. 641.
- 41 John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), p. 32.
- 42 Barbara A. Misztal, *Trust in Modern Societies* (Cambridge: Polity, 1996), p. 21; Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett, 'A framework for the study of security communities', in Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett (eds), *Security Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 46; Barnett and Adler, 'Studying security communities in theory, comparison, and history', in *Security Communities*, p. 414; Christopher Berzins, 'The puzzle of trust in international relations: risk and relationship management in the organisation for security and cooperation in Europe', PhD thesis, LSE, Spring 2004, p. 35; Aaron M. Hoffman, *Building Trust: Overcoming Suspicion in International Conflict* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2006), pp. 377–78; Guido Möllering, *Trust: Reason, Routine and Reflexivity* (Oxford: Elsevier, 2006), pp. 7–9, 40.
- 43 Robert Jervis has been the most prominent thinker since Herbert Butterfield's essay in *History and Human Relations* in developing and elaborating the psychological dynamics

- that underpin the security dilemma. It is Jervis who introduced the concept of the 'spiral model', in which policy-makers fail to 'recognize that one's own actions could be seen as menacing and the concomitant belief that the other's hostility can only be explained by its aggressiveness' (Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), pp. 58–113, quotation at p. 75. See also Booth and Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*, pp. 42–58.
- 44 Barnett and Adler, 'Security communities', p. 414.
- 45 Karl Deutsch, Sidney A. Burrell, Robert A. Kann, Maurice Lee, Martin Lichterman, Raymond E. Lingren, Francis L. Loewenheim and Richard W. Van Wagenen, *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area: International Organization in the Light of Historical Experience* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 5.
- 46 Booth and Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*, pp. 234–6, 241–2.
- 47 Booth and Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*, p. 7; Wheeler, 'To put oneself into the other fellow's place', pp. 493–509.
- 48 Simon J. Davies 'Community versus deterrence: managing nuclear proliferation in Latin America and South Asia', *International Relations*, 18 (1), 2004, p. 60.
- 49 Jacques E.C. Hymans, *The Psychology of Nuclear Proliferation: Identity, Emotions, and Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 160–61.
- 50 Andrew Hurrell, 'An emerging security community in South America?', in Adler and Barnett, *Security Communities*, p. 235; Davies, 'Community versus deterrence', pp. 58–59; Hymans, *The Psychology of Nuclear Proliferation*, p. 161.
- 51 The role of the human factor in trust-building is discussed in Booth and Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*, pp. 155–56, 166–67, 235, 237–38, 246–48.
- 52 Julio Carasales, 'The evolution of the Argentine–Brazilian nuclear rapprochement', paper presented to the seminar on 'Argentina and Brazil: The Latin American Nuclear Rapprochement', sponsored by the Shalheveth Freier Center for Peace, Science, and Technology and the Institute for Science and International Security, 16 May 1996, Soreq, Israel, available at: [www.isis-online.org/publications/israel96/596am3.html](http://www.isis-online.org/publications/israel96/596am3.html) (accessed 10 April 2007).
- 53 Hurrell, 'An emerging security community in South America?', p. 241.
- 54 Hurrell, 'An emerging security community in South America?', p. 241.
- 55 Hurrell, 'An emerging security community in South America?', p. 241; Paulo S. Wrobel, 'From rivals to friends: the role of public declarations in Argentina–Brazil rapprochement', in Michael Krepon, J.S. Drezin and M. Newbill (eds), *Declaratory Diplomacy: Rhetorical Initiatives and Confidence Building* (Washington, DC: Henry L. Stimson Center, 1999), pp. 142–47.
- 56 J. R. Redick, *Nuclear Illusions: Argentina and Brazil*, Occasional Paper No. 25 (Washington, DC: Henry Stimson Center, 1995), pp. 22–23.
- 57 Annette C. Baier, *Moral Prejudices: Essays on Ethics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 152.
- 58 Julio C. Carasales, 'The so-called proliferator that wasn't: the story of Argentina's nuclear policy', *Nonproliferation Review*, 6 (4), 1999, p. 58.
- 59 Carasales, 'The so-called proliferator that wasn't', p. 57.
- 60 Hurrell, 'An emerging security community in South America?', pp. 241–42.
- 61 Hurrell, 'An emerging security community in South America?', p. 250.
- 62 Mearsheimer and Waltz share certain key assumptions, crucially that the international system is anarchic and populated by units wishing to survive. However, they part company on the question of whether states seek to maximise their power (Mearsheimer) or maintain their positions in the system (Waltz). Waltz's position has been labelled 'defensive realism' because of what Randall Schweller called the 'status-quo bias' in Waltz's theory (Randall L. Schweller, 'Neorealism's status-quo bias: what security dilemma?', *Security Studies*, 5 (3), pp. 90–121). Even without taking into account nuclear weapons, Waltz's theory posits that a minimum order would be the rational outcome of security competition in a system characterised by anarchy, the determination of states to

- survive, and an unequal distribution of power among the state units. See Booth and Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*, pp. 35–36.
- 63 John J. Mearsheimer, 'Back to the future: instability in Europe after the Cold War', *International Security*, 15 (4), 1990, pp. 5–56. See also Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, p. 394.
- 64 Hymans, *The Psychology of Nuclear Proliferation*, p. 161.
- 65 I am indebted to Simon Davies who first compared these cases in his PhD. See his 'Community versus deterrence'. See also Simon Davies and Nicholas J. Wheeler, 'Nuclear proliferation and security after the Cold War' in J. Davies (ed.), *Security After the Cold War* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 1996), pp. 36–159.
- 66 Carasales, 'The evolution of the Argentine–Brazilian nuclear rapprochement'.
- 67 Gideon Frank, 'Concluding Remarks' to the seminar on 'Argentina and Brazil: The Latin American Nuclear Rapprochement'.
- 68 Davies, 'Community versus deterrence', p. 68.
- 69 Carasales, 'The evolution of the Argentine–Brazilian nuclear rapprochement'.
- 70 Booth and Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*, pp. 30–34, 39–40.
- 71 The concept of a 'margin of safety' is discussed in Booth and Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*, pp. 91, 241.
- 72 The 'leap of trust' idea is developed in Möllering, *Trust*, pp. 105–121. See also Booth and Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*, pp. 234–37. Möllering calls it the 'leap of faith'.



## **PART V**

# Continuity and change in the international and in the world





# 16

## HOW HIERARCHICAL CAN INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY BE?

*Ian Clark*<sup>1</sup>

Both Waltzian neorealism and international-society approaches appear equally committed to anarchy as the starting point for theories of International Relations (IR). Both also have problems in dealing with unusual concentrations of power. The reason is that, if a concentration of power were to become a source of authoritative decision-making, this might herald an incipient hierarchy. This, in turn, could undermine the anarchical nature of the system or society. This chapter asks how far international society can travel down the road of hierarchy, while still remaining basically anarchical.<sup>2</sup> We had already been encouraged to reclaim 'hierarchy as an interesting and variable characteristic of international relations'.<sup>3</sup> What made it seem so specifically was the onset of unipolarity, as a result of which, we were told, 'international hierarchy is once again in the news'.<sup>4</sup>

For this reason, the chapter investigates the contemporary distribution of power, and its capacity to support practices of international legitimacy. What are we to do in a world that is 'out of balance'?<sup>5</sup> This draws attention to hegemony as one potential such practice, given the prevailing condition of US primacy. It seeks to enhance IR theory with respect to understanding concentrations of power. With the exception of hegemonic stability theory (HST) – which suffers from its own problems – IR theory has so far not actively engaged with this problem. In fact, it is striking that both Waltzian neorealism and international-society approaches have been equally evasive on this issue. To both, concentrations of power are something to be avoided, and, were they to occur, would represent an unnatural condition, a 'system' or a 'society' failure. Neither manages to say anything very interesting about how best to deal with such a concentration, were one to eventuate. Each offers a theory for avoiding such concentration; neither develops a theory of hegemonic management, should one occur. This is a major gap.

The argument will be presented principally through a structured opposition between primacy and hegemony.<sup>6</sup> It registers the complaint that IR thinking about

the concentration of power has been expressed almost exclusively through the language of material distributions of power. This has been its main shortcoming.<sup>7</sup> In fact, theories about concentrations of power need also to bring out the complex constitution of power, not just its distributional consequences. Ideas of legitimacy and hegemony are two such ways of enriching our understanding of power.

The concept of hierarchy positions this argument relative to Waltz's world. There is a possible tension between anarchy and hegemony, given that any hierarchical ordering principle might be thought incompatible with an anarchical society. This prompts the question whether practices of legitimacy are sustainable, even in such conditions of exceptional predominance as have recently emerged. Its starting point, it must be clearly stated at the outset, is that no such hegemony presently exists. Theoretically, however, these questions address some arresting themes that have been central to the post-Waltzian debate.

### Primacy and hegemony

Hegemony is arguably the ultimate litmus test for international legitimacy: it is the very hard case. Practices of legitimacy take place within an international society, and successful legitimation, so it would seem, has been most attainable when there has existed some semblance of equilibrium.<sup>8</sup> Historically, international society has been deeply distrustful of concentrations of power, so much so that its basic ethos has been described as 'anti-hegemonial'.<sup>9</sup> To the extent that legitimacy rests upon an acquired consensus, this has been most readily achievable within a relatively even distribution of power that respects checks and balances – what early nineteenth-century practitioners called a 'just equilibrium'. To regard hegemony as a possibly legitimate status may then appear paradoxical or self-contradictory. How, in short, is the legitimacy that arises within equilibrium to be replicated in conditions that, by definition, are its antithesis? Can the 'anarchical society'<sup>10</sup> tolerate any legitimate hegemony? This unease is compounded by the perception of hegemony as an expression of hierarchy, and hence as potentially inconsistent with anarchy. Hegemony, so it might seem, erodes legitimacy and anarchy as traditionally conceived within international society. This chapter challenges both of these conclusions.

Unfortunately, what we have witnessed is an unhelpful conflation of the concepts of hegemony, on the one hand, and primacy on the other. Too often, the United States is described as the current hegemon, when nothing is intended beyond its enjoyment of degrees of material primacy.<sup>11</sup> This is explicit in Posen's remark that those 'who recommended a policy of "primacy" – essentially hegemony . . . have carried the day'.<sup>12</sup> Likewise, the conflation is apparent in the suggestion that 'US hegemony is the result of objective material conditions', while 'the perpetuation of US primacy is a matter of policy'.<sup>13</sup> Any understanding of the wider theoretical significance of US predominance needs first to disentangle the two concepts of primacy and hegemony.

These, in turn, relate to more fundamental accounts of power, the material and the social. The materialist viewpoint regards primacy as a substantive power that is

possessed, rather than as something that is social and bestowed by others. In its most recent formulation, 'hegemony is about raw, hard power . . . US hegemony is the result of objective material conditions'.<sup>14</sup> There is on this view no distinction to be made between hegemony and primacy, as both describe material distributions. At the very least, hegemony is simply a referent for such material power. According to John Mearsheimer, 'a hegemon is a state that is so powerful that it dominates all other states in the system'.<sup>15</sup>

Such material accounts of primacy stand in sharp contrast to those that emphasize the essentially social, or *recognized*, status of hegemony. Even if this rests on material power, that alone is not sufficient. 'The brute material condition of having one state holding a preponderance of military resources may produce great influence and strength for that state', observes Hurd, 'but without a successful strategy of legitimation the social relation of hegemony or "Great Power" status is not created'.<sup>16</sup> Simpson goes further: 'hegemony is a juridical category dependent on the "recognition" of "rights and duties" and the consent of other states in the system'.<sup>17</sup> It is this understanding of hegemony as socially bestowed, not unilaterally possessed, that is critical, and the concept of hegemony is best limited to this usage alone. Only on the basis of this distinction can we begin to appreciate that a whole range of recent international problems resides exactly in the widening divergence between US primacy and US hegemony, since this 'disjuncture between the power structure and the social order is becoming rather stark'.<sup>18</sup>

Accordingly, we must take seriously those two contrasting readings of power. One regards primacy as an attribute of the leading state, and denotes what it 'has'; the other treats hegemony, and the power of which it is constituted, as something acknowledged by others, and with reference to how it is socially regarded. Otherwise expressed, in the latter view, 'hegemony is a state or condition of the system itself, and *not a property belonging to the hegemon*'.<sup>19</sup> In order to anchor this distinction, the chapter makes appeal to the underlying logic of English School theory, and invites the conclusion that hegemony be regarded as one possible institution of international society.<sup>20</sup>

It is highly revealing that disagreements about which material distribution of power is more conducive to stability have been largely replicated in the literatures on international legitimacy and hegemony. Over the past half-century, there have developed two disparate clusters of theory that address stability from the seemingly distinct routes of legitimacy and hegemony. These express similarly contested judgements about which distributions best foster stability. At first glance, they appear downright contradictory. The first emphasizes a relatively even *dispersal* of power as a precondition of (consensual) legitimacy, and hence of stability. The other, especially in its variants of HST, is committed instead to the benefits of a *concentration* of power in a single hegemon.

Tellingly, however, neither is exclusively a theory of international distribution. Thus far, too much of the ongoing debate about the post-Cold War structure of power has been about its distributional pattern, and the likely durability of United States primacy. Its conflation of primacy and hegemony leads to other significant

dimensions of power becoming squeezed out. Once we bring them back in, the interesting puzzle is how a legitimate order, normally associated with consensus amongst a number of states in relative equilibrium, might possibly be replicated in conditions of US predominance. Legitimacy and hegemony, it then transpires, have much more in common with each other, despite their opposed preferences about distributions of power, and both invite reflections on our ‘anarchical’ understanding of international society.

## **Anarchy and hierarchy in international society**

This section traces a series of linkages between its principal concepts: anarchy, hierarchy, and hegemony. Its ultimate question is about the compatibility of hegemony and international society. To get there, we need to pose intermediate questions about the compatibility of hierarchy with international society, and whether hegemony – if it is indeed a form of hierarchy (and not anarchy) – is beyond international society’s pale. In Dunne’s words, ‘how far is an international society composed of a plurality of sovereign states compatible with hierarchy?’<sup>21</sup>

Dunne had given voice to the worry that trends in the early 2000s might portend a form of hierarchy that would threaten international society. While acknowledging that ‘the sovereign states system has historically admitted many formal and informal hierarchies’, he remained concerned that recent developments might have a more disruptive significance.<sup>22</sup> One way of expressing this is that he feared a US-imposed hierarchy might be emerging exogenously to threaten international society from the outside. The alternative perspective addressed here is whether a legitimate hegemony could be developed endogenously from the inside, and without such ‘anti-social’ implications.

It is at this point that English School theory confronts Waltz’s world, and the first encounter actually suggests considerable potential compatibility. This emerges very clearly in Waltz’s identification of one tendency in international politics:

The smaller the group, and the less equal the interests of its members, the likelier it becomes that some members – the larger ones – will act for the group’s interest, as they define it, and not just for their own. The greater the relative size of a unit the more it identifies its own interest with the interest of the system . . . in any realm populated by units that are functionally similar but of different capability, those of greatest capability take on special responsibilities . . .<sup>23</sup>

The theme of the ‘special responsibilities’ of the great powers is pervasive in the literature on international society. Just as interesting is Waltz’s account of the underlying logic seemingly at work:

The smaller the number of great powers, and the wider the disparities between the few most powerful states and the many others, the more likely the former

are to act for the sake of the system and to participate in the management of, or interfere in the affairs of, lesser states. The likelihood that great powers will try to manage the system is greatest when their number reduces to two.<sup>24</sup>

The question posed here for both Waltzian theory and international-society writers alike is why this general tendency for the greatest to seek out special responsibilities should seemingly cut out at two. Why should it not continue to apply in the case of the sole great power, enjoying its unprecedented disparity with the many others? These are questions that need to be answered, and not simply evaded.

One answer for many is that hegemony is *ab initio* incompatible with international society.<sup>25</sup> This seemingly rests upon the syllogism that hierarchy is a different ordering principle from anarchy, hegemony is an expression of hierarchy, and therefore hegemony cannot be a form of anarchy. Waltz had famously associated hierarchy with domestic politics, and anarchy with the international. 'The ordering principles of the two structures are distinctly different', he maintained, 'indeed, contrary to each other'.<sup>26</sup> It followed then that to 'move from an anarchic to a hierarchic realm is to move from one system to another'.<sup>27</sup>

These categorical assertions have been regularly challenged,<sup>28</sup> and often presented as a continuum rather than a dichotomy.<sup>29</sup> Some have recently challenged the validity of anarchy as a general representation of all international politics, pointing out that it has not been empirically tested, simply assumed.<sup>30</sup> Waltz, of course, had clearly stressed that these ordering principles are ideal-types and, in practice, all 'societies are mixed. Elements in them represent both of the ordering principles'.<sup>31</sup> There are very few 'pure' cases.<sup>32</sup> It is now rather accepted that the two principles can indeed be so 'mixed', and that many political systems are effectively hybrids. Accordingly, we have been encouraged to think instead of 'hierarchy under anarchy'<sup>33</sup> or 'hierarchy *in* anarchy',<sup>34</sup> while others urge us to explore the 'social logics of hierarchy that exist alongside, but cannot be explained by, the logic of anarchy'.<sup>35</sup> It is precisely such a social logic of hierarchy that is potentially illuminating with respect to hegemony. This requires us to think of hierarchy in its consensual form, and as issuing from 'relational authority' that 'rests on a bargain between the ruler and the ruled premised on the former's provision of a social order of value sufficient to offset the latter's loss of freedom'.<sup>36</sup> If this is once accepted, it avoids any absolutist rejection of hierarchy as inconsistent with international society. A focus upon legitimacy opens up the possibility of 'genuine hierarchy', and not simply 'inequality under anarchy'.<sup>37</sup>

How does hegemony then relate to hierarchy, and, in turn, to anarchy? Some have differentiated between formal and informal hierarchies, suggesting that formal systems take us (too far) toward the pole of governance, while informal systems do not. Hegemonies have, accordingly, been suggested as one type of informal hierarchy.<sup>38</sup> Others consider hierarchy and hegemony as discrete forms of rule, but with hegemony as a subset of hierarchy. However, since IR scholars have been so wedded to anarchy, they have been reluctant to acknowledge hierarchy openly, and

have fallen back instead upon the more comfortable notion of hegemony.<sup>39</sup> Donnelly explicitly acknowledges hegemony as one instance of his category of 'hierarchy in anarchy'.<sup>40</sup>

Finally, and for completeness, we need some overview of where hegemony is located in relation to anarchy. Donnelly is ambivalent. For all that he works with 'hierarchy in anarchy', his mapping of the conceptual possibilities concludes that the 'entire field is anarchic', but with the notable exception of that cell into which hegemony falls.<sup>41</sup> Although not explicitly grounding his scheme on an anarchy/hierarchy distinction, Pape yet differentiates 'Balance of Power Systems' from 'Hegemonic Systems', and seems implicitly to replicate the distinction between anarchy and hegemony in this way.<sup>42</sup> This separation, he insists, represents a 'key boundary'.<sup>43</sup> He accepts that there are varying degrees of hegemony but, whereas Donnelly confines hegemony to the capability of the hegemon to exercise control simply over the external behaviour of subordinate states, Pape points to categories of hegemonic states that additionally control their internal behaviour.<sup>44</sup> The implication, again, is that some forms of hegemony transgress the bounds of acceptable 'anarchic' relationships.

The challenging questions to emerge from these conceptual schemes are just how much hierarchy the anarchical society can tolerate, and how much hierarchy does hegemony actually entail. There is no doubt that some see hegemony amounting to a new organizing principle, and hence as a structural change.<sup>45</sup> It denotes a shift from anarchy. This is because hegemony, we are told, 'is a hierarchical political arrangement'.<sup>46</sup> Ikenberry concurs: in a hegemonic order, 'the relations of power and authority are defined by the organizing principle of hierarchy'.<sup>47</sup> This appears to place hegemony beyond the pale of the anarchical international society. Others are more flexible, and end by viewing a hegemonic order as 'a particular configuration of anarchy and hierarchy'.<sup>48</sup>

On this latter reading, the anarchical society can evidently persist, even in conditions of hegemony. It is this version of hegemony that we will carry forward into the remainder of this discussion: although a form of hierarchy, it remains consistent with the overall anarchical ordering of international society. Although the formal principles of anarchy and hierarchy remain distinct, their embodiment within a particular political system need not be mutually exclusive, but can be 'mixed', as Waltz had already suggested. This echoes the claim that 'in some areas of international politics, international authority and international anarchy do coexist'.<sup>49</sup> Although hegemony does indeed denote an element of hierarchy, it is no more inconsistent with international society than are those many other institutions historically developed within it. On those grounds, there can be no principled objection to hegemony, as a form of hierarchy, as necessarily inconsistent with an otherwise anarchical society.

### **Beyond primacy: legitimacy and hegemony**

How do legitimacy and hegemony relate to hierarchy, and how should we think about concentrations of power? To date, those arguments that focus upon legitimacy

have tended largely to assume that stability arises where power is dispersed in a roughly equal manner. They understand legitimacy to pertain to agreement and consensus, at the very least amongst the major powers, and thus to require some acknowledgement of the equal status of those powers. Those arguments that dwell on hegemony, by contrast, consider stability as derivative of the concentration of power. 'Fragmentation of power . . . leads to fragmentation of the international economic regime', insisted Keohane, whereas 'concentration of power contributes to stability'.<sup>50</sup> Stability, so it would appear, is most likely when there is available a hegemon, both able and willing to play this role. How is it that two theories, both concerned with distributions of power, have reached such diametrically opposed conclusions?

One answer is that, while interested in distributions of power, neither theory sees these as the sole determinants of international stability. The former introduces one intervening variable – legitimacy – between material power and stability. The latter injects an alternative variable – hegemony – that is again distinct from purely distributional concepts. Despite the sharp disagreement between them as to their respective preferences for dispersal or concentration of power, they in fact share a highly significant common belief that stability is a function not simply of material distributions, but also of the degree of shared values. It is this shared feature that offers the prospect of a theory of international society – applicable to conditions of primacy – combining the virtues of both legitimacy and hegemony.

The first cluster includes those political theorists who have long claimed a direct correlation between legitimacy and stability. This is because legitimacy denotes an acceptable, or authoritative, set of political conditions, and is less likely to meet resistance, or to require maintenance by coercive or other means of inducement. Such a view has been prevalent since Max Weber's seminal discussion.<sup>51</sup>

This relationship was imported into IR most famously via the work of Henry Kissinger. 'Stability', he concluded, 'has commonly resulted not from a quest for peace but from a generally accepted legitimacy'.<sup>52</sup> Historically, that relationship was demonstrated in the post-1815 period: 'the period of stability which ensued was the best proof that a "legitimate" order had been constructed'.<sup>53</sup> Kissinger's 'legitimacy' was, of course, defined minimally as 'an international agreement about the nature of workable arrangements and about the permissible aims and methods of foreign policy', and as 'the acceptance of the framework of the international order by all major powers'.<sup>54</sup> This connection between legitimacy and stability has since been further explored by various international historians and theorists.<sup>55</sup> On these views, international stability derives from more than the material distribution of power alone: the critical intervening variable is the attainment, or otherwise, of a shared conception of international legitimacy.

The second cluster dwells instead upon hegemony as the most likely condition for international stability, and HST is the best known of its sub-theories.<sup>56</sup> Most famously, this has concentrated on stability in the international economic order, and grew directly from Charles Kindleberger's analysis of the causes of the Great Depression.<sup>57</sup> However, by extension, it has been applied also to the wider political



and security order, particularly through the notion of hegemonic wars in the work of Robert Gilpin.<sup>58</sup>

HST's core proposition is that 'hegemonic structures of power, dominated by a single country, are most conducive to the development of strong international regimes whose rules are relatively precise and well obeyed'.<sup>59</sup> HST undoubtedly starts from the concentration of power. This was most readily discernible in the interest shown in any putative American decline, as likely to impact adversely on future stability, because 'as the distribution of tangible resources . . . becomes more equal, international regimes should weaken'.<sup>60</sup> However, although HST starts from material distributions of power, it does not end exclusively there. The concentration of power is necessary, but not sufficient. Intrinsic to it is that the hegemon 'is recognized by others as having special rights and duties'.<sup>61</sup> Gilpin himself had insisted that 'hegemony . . . is based on a general belief in its legitimacy'.<sup>62</sup> What this suggests is that legitimacy-based and hegemony-based theories of stability are not as radically opposed as their initial assumptions about preferable distributions of power. Indeed, if both were valid, we might conclude that legitimacy has the potential to trump *any* specific balance of power.

This then confronts directly the relationship between legitimacy and hegemony. For much social science, the idea of hegemony already embraces that of legitimacy. 'The concept of hegemony', it is typically observed, 'is normally understood as emphasising consent in contrast to reliance on the use of force'.<sup>63</sup> For example, while acknowledging that HST 'defines hegemony as preponderance of material resources', Keohane had been mindful also that theories of hegemony needed to 'explore why secondary states defer to the leadership of the hegemon. That is, they need to account for the legitimacy of hegemonic regimes'.<sup>64</sup> Others too restrict the term hegemony only to a situation where a substantial element of legitimacy is present.<sup>65</sup> Does hegemony then hold any possible attraction for the anarchical society?

## History and hegemony

In practice, one historical version was to construct a 'collective hegemony', as in the European Concert, as a *de facto* way of combining both concentration and dispersal at the same time.<sup>66</sup> Analytically, in a collective hegemony, two separate axes of legitimacy come into play. The first is between the great powers collectively, on the one hand, and the remainder of the states, on the other: it is for the smaller states to bestow recognition, with regard to the responsibility that the great powers will exercise on behalf of international society as a whole. What this conceals, however, is the important second axis to be found in the mutual relations amongst the great powers: if they are to accept their collective rights and duties, they must agree also upon norms for their joint exercise. There is, therefore, along with the *vertical* axis between the great powers and the remainder of international society (the putative expression of incipient hierarchy), simultaneously also a *horizontal* axis amongst the great powers (the putative expression of continuing anarchy). The

highly pertinent question is whether the horizontal in some way facilitates the vertical: is it easier for international society to entrust a *group* of great powers – where power is dispersed, and there is some reassurance from the checks and balances amongst them – than a *single* hegemon, in which unrestrained power is concentrated?

This might be thought one practical demonstration of how hierarchy and anarchy can be reconciled. A collective hegemony draws legitimacy from the reassurance to smaller states entailed by its dispersal of power within the hegemon. It enjoys, to some degree, the best of both worlds: it affords the benefits of ‘simplification’ by central direction and management, and the collective goods associated with a concentration of power, while retaining the essential checks and balances normally available only from a dispersal of power. Its virtue, overall, resides in its potential for an acceptable trade-off between expected benefits and feared costs.

Much depends on how the hegemony works. Ian Hurd has set out two possibilities. The first sees hegemony as entrenching the dominant position of the already most powerful, and therefore as objectively ‘entirely in the favour of the strong’. This is quite different from his alternative model, where legitimacy functions as a constraint on the strong, not simply on the weak. In this case, successful maintenance of hegemony ‘requires that the strong subscribe to a minimum standard of compliance with the legitimized rule or institution’. The result is that ‘the strong . . . may be induced to alter their behaviour by the effects of legitimated rules’.<sup>67</sup> The outcome, in this second version, is ‘to increase the autonomy of all parties, not to compromise the autonomy of the less powerful in order to increase the autonomy of the more powerful’.<sup>68</sup> This latter way of thinking emphasizes the institutional dimension – the empowerment of the *institution* of hegemony – rather than simply the enhancement of the power of the *hegemon*. This restates the importance of the original distinction drawn between hegemony and primacy.

Fundamental to any such view of hegemony is that it is understood as an institution of international society. Within the English School version, the institution of the great powers generally serves to simplify the processes of international politics. It does so because of the inherent power differentials that characterize it.<sup>69</sup> Specifically, the great powers can contribute to the promotion of international order by exercising various ‘managerial’ functions.<sup>70</sup> Two principal, and interconnected, theoretical points emerge. The first is that any such notion of the role of the great powers is meaningful only within a conception of international society where certain values are shared. This is not the universe normally depicted in neorealist accounts, and within which the concept of primacy is typically deployed. Secondly, such a conception places a particular emphasis upon the kind of power by which great powers are constituted: it results from a status recognized and bestowed by others, not a set of attributes and capabilities possessed by the claimant. To be a great power is to be located in a social relationship, not to have a certain portfolio of material assets. Both considerations apply with equal force to the concept of hegemony.

## Anarchic and hegemonic behaviour

Primacy poses a challenge to international society, whereas hegemony need not. The task, therefore, is to ensure that the state enjoying primacy behaves in a hegemonic way, in conformity with expectations created by the institution of hegemony. This is quite contrary to the prescriptions of most neorealists. For them, concentration of power *is* the problem, and can be addressed only by its reduction. Surprisingly, even those who hold wholly opposing views on the likely durability of US primacy nonetheless agree on this conclusion. Those who see primacy as unstable, and likely to be short-lived, insist that the problem is not a behavioural one. 'The United States has a hegemony problem because it wields hegemonic power. To reduce the fear of US power, the United States must accept some reduction in its relative hard power . . .'<sup>71</sup> Those, on the other hand, most optimistic about the durability of US primacy tend nonetheless to concur, suggesting that there will be unease 'no matter what Washington does': 'Nothing the United States could do short of abdicating its power would solve the problem completely'.<sup>72</sup> Primacy, as well as its resulting discontents, is evidently a function of capabilities, not of diplomatic behaviour. 'Prophylactic multilateralism', we are therefore warned, 'cannot inoculate the United States from counter-hegemonic balancing'.<sup>73</sup> This again, however, brings out the conflation between primacy and the quite different social relationship of hegemony. In Walt's terms, the hegemon's problem is not simply what it 'has', but what others think it will 'do'.<sup>74</sup> Hegemony offers a distinctive strategy for addressing the problems engendered by primacy, going beyond any solution that relies simply upon the US divesting itself of some of its material capabilities, or in which other states manage to balance successfully against it.

What would represent hegemonic behaviour, and how does this differ from standard 'anarchic' accounts? There remains an interesting ambiguity, even within those arguments that do concede hegemony is rooted in legitimacy. This ambiguity is puzzling, because it seems to be predicated upon a notion of legitimacy derived solely from self-interest. The puzzle is that legitimacy is normally understood to constitute a ground for compliance different, in principle, from self-interest.<sup>75</sup> And yet when it comes to discussions of hegemony, the most commonly identified source of legitimacy is said to be this satisfaction of self-interest. This is demonstrably so in HST, where the other actors benefit from the public goods and stability provided by the hegemon. The hegemon delivers 'a sufficient flow of benefits to small and middle powers to persuade them to acquiesce'.<sup>76</sup> According to HST, 'other states will cooperate with a benign hegemon because they benefit strategically and economically'.<sup>77</sup>

This is equally so in some Gramscian accounts, although here the issue is more complex, and there is considerable diversity of interpretation.<sup>78</sup> At one end are those who introduce an element of false consciousness: hegemonic legitimacy is a construct of the powerful, and the ruled are seduced into the belief that their interests are thereby served. As Lukes had pointed out, 'the most effective and insidious use of power is to prevent such conflict from arising in the first place'.<sup>79</sup> The problem of what gives rise to the hegemon's legitimacy remains. The implied answers scarcely

reach beyond the satisfaction of self-interests. 'To become hegemonic', suggests Cox, 'a state would have to found and protect a world order which was universal in conception . . . an order which most other states . . . could find compatible with their interests'.<sup>80</sup>

What emerges then is a version of hegemony that is based in the 'consent' of the ruled (and hence in voluntary compliance), but in which consent appears a function purely of self-interest and benefit. There is no logic of appropriateness going beyond those interests, and this is the principal omission. One sophisticated attempt to fill it has been provided by Ned Lebow, in his elaboration of the Greek notion of *hegemonia*.<sup>81</sup> His central claim was that successful *hegemonia* 'requires acquiescence by allies or subject states, and this in turn rests on some combination of legitimacy and self-interest'.<sup>82</sup> In this version, legitimacy is indeed separated out from self-interest, albeit that its source is then left indeterminate.

What might its source be? In some neo-Gramscian versions, a different emphasis is discovered. The motif is less the provision of benefits, and more the moral quality of leadership. Hegemony is a creation of 'a specific intellectual and moral dimension',<sup>83</sup> or the exercise of 'political and moral direction'.<sup>84</sup> This edges analysis away from satisfaction of self-interests, narrowly construed. In his own account of *hegemonia*, Lebow had indeed specified just this need for agreed principles going beyond the distribution of benefits to subordinates. Of equal importance, he had stipulated, was that the hegemon behave in ways consonant with its own principles. Those principles impose constraints on what would otherwise be unrestrained behaviour, since the most powerful states are not externally bound. Hence, there is great need for self-restraint: 'Internal restraint and external influence are thus closely related. Self-restraint that prompts behaviour in accord with the acknowledged principles . . . both earns and sustains the *hegemonia* that makes efficient influence possible'.<sup>85</sup> If the hegemon sets the rules, it is obliged also to abide by them. For example, Pericles had understood that, to maintain Athenian *hegemonia*, 'Athens had to act in accord with the principles and values that it espoused'.<sup>86</sup>

As a corollary, how is the hegemon's compliance with its own principles to be encouraged by others? Arguably, we have already been given substantial insight into this process, but in language misleadingly referred to as 'soft balancing'. There are measures of so-called soft balancing much better understood as strategies for preserving the legitimacy of a hegemonic order. Unfortunately, the same conflation once again takes place, and 'soft balancing' is depicted exclusively as a set of practices in the context of primacy, when it is more appropriately relevant to the maintenance of a viable hegemony. 'Soft balancing', we are told, 'involves the use of diplomacy, international institutions, and international law to constrain and delegitimize the actions of a hegemonic United States'.<sup>87</sup> This is taken as an alternative to military balancing, and also as a hesitant step beyond the material-capabilities approach, but it is confusing that the language of 'balancing' is still retained. It should be approached instead from the perspective of attempts to 'institutionalise' hegemony. Soft balancing can then be considered, not as action to impede or (materially) weaken the hegemon, but instead as a symptom of a legitimacy deficit, and as an

indication of what is required to address it. Its intent is not to create any new distribution of power that will constrain the hegemon externally, but rather to encourage the hegemon's adherence to its own self-restraint. The imagery of balance is in this way quite misleading. Just as primacy is about distribution, and hegemony about legitimacy, what is depicted as soft balancing is not about restoring any kind of balance at all, other than in the hegemon's sense of its own priorities, and between its professed beliefs and actions. What it seeks to establish is the legitimacy of the hegemonic order. To be sure, a crisis of legitimacy (including one for a hegemon) does result in disempowerment, but this is a consequence of that power's social nature, not any outcome of balancing behaviour.<sup>88</sup>

The critics of soft balancing insist that such activities amount to no more than standard diplomatic bargaining, and object that this should not be confused with balancing.<sup>89</sup> If there is no intention to balance the capabilities of the hegemon, then the language of balance should be eschewed. We can agree, and yet reach this same conclusion by a different route. The imagery in the depictions of soft balancing is, to be sure, misleading. What it refers to is not any attempt physically to reduce the power capabilities of the hegemon, but rather to constrain it by other means. Soft balancing can 'increase the costs' of the hegemon's exercise of its power.<sup>90</sup> This latter is a symptom, not of diminished material assets, but of legitimacy deficits.<sup>91</sup> At this point, soft balancing needs to be viewed, not as a proactive policy to reduce the material power of the hegemon, but as evidence of the friction that its loss of legitimacy entails. This emerges even more clearly in those other analyses of soft balancing, where the theme of 'legitimacy denial' is very much apparent.<sup>92</sup> In Nye's words, 'even when a military balance of power is impossible', he suggests, 'other countries can still band together to deprive the US policy of legitimacy and thus weaken American soft power'.<sup>93</sup> Soft balancing is tantamount to a strategy of legitimacy denial. Brooks and Wohlforth are certainly correct to insist that this represents something other than balancing, but they miss an equally important point when they then wish to reduce it to mere bargaining. Hegemonic delegitimation may well be an outcome of bargaining strategies, but the two are not the same thing. Second-tier states can choose to balance the hegemon, or to bargain with it: neither is tantamount to a challenge to its legitimacy.

## Conclusion

Legitimacy-based and hegemony-based accounts share much in common, even if seemingly pulled apart by divergent prescriptions for the distribution of power. Both provide additional insight into the kind of power that characterizes anarchy. Neither hierarchy, nor hegemony as an instance of it, is incompatible with an anarchical society. What would be incompatible with international society is any unchecked primacy. One major problem at the moment is then the tension between the seeming 'fact' of US primacy, and its (in)ability to translate this into a socially acceptable hegemony. This argument thus rejects that view of hegemony, criticized by Reus-Smit, as 'simply the material capacity of a dominant state to dictate the

rules of the international system'.<sup>94</sup> Instead, it argues that the most appropriate theoretical departure point is that already provided by the English School, precisely because of its potential to view hegemony as a social institution. Within such a conception, the advantages of hierarchy need to be reconciled with the demands of anarchy, in the exceptional conditions of primacy.

Historically, tolerable degrees of consensus have most readily been attained in conditions of relative equilibrium. The challenge, in a situation of primacy, is to reconcile the particular needs and interests of the leading power with those of international society at large. If, as English School theorists believe, the great powers traditionally have been allowed to enjoy special rights and responsibilities within international society, what follows likewise is the need to negotiate special rights and responsibilities for the hegemon as well. The central puzzle is how to develop this analogous role of great-power management, given the simultaneous absence of equilibrium, and in a setting correspondingly more redolent of the unacceptable face of hierarchy.

This involves dealing with two interconnected conceptual, and political, problems. First, since international society has always manifested some tendency to resist the emergence of a 'hegemon', how is this concern best allayed in present conditions? This can come only from the social expectations generated by the institution of hegemony, and the manner in which the hegemon's behaviour manages to satisfy them. Secondly, while international society has shown past willingness to accept the special role of a group of great powers, how is it to be persuaded to accord this role to a single great power? The answer, in this case, must presumably include a shared acceptance of the need to work from the distribution of power we have, rather than from one we might otherwise prefer. An English School appreciation of hegemony as an institution of international society allows for the possibility of hierarchy in anarchy, responding to a social logic, unaccountable in terms of anarchy alone. This resolves the problem in theory. To resolve it in practice remains a supreme political challenge.

IR theory today confronts its own challenges. Central to these is its continuing engagement with the understanding of power. This chapter has sought, through the opposition between primacy and hegemony, to focus attention on two different accounts of power. It is common enough to map the materiality of power, and its seeming distributions. On the other hand, the compelling case can be made that *effective* power must always be harnessed, in Ruggie's telling phrase, to 'legitimate social purpose'.<sup>95</sup> Control over outcomes is always likely to be more complete in the context of the latter than in the former alone. This chapter has explored the connection between the two. It needs to be recognized, however, that this entails some sleight of hand. The reason is that when we talk about a *distribution* of power, we invariably mean by it measures of power in that material sense. The much harder challenge for IR theory is to make sense of a concept of the distribution of power that includes the complexities of that social purpose. States, to be sure, inhabit 'structures' of power, but these are never reducible to the simple material distributions that many analysts associate with Waltz's world.

## Notes

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# 17

## WALTZ AND WORLD HISTORY

### The paradox of parsimony

*Barry Buzan and Richard Little*

Waltz's *Theory of International Politics (TIP)* is one of the iconic texts in modern IR literature. The theory has provoked fierce reactions from classical realists, through liberal institutionalists to post-positivists. It also provided the springboard for an ongoing and very lively theoretical debate both amongst contemporary realists, and between them and neo-liberals, who are more than willing to work within Waltz's methodological framework. Our aim is not to contribute to either of these very different responses, but rather to reassess *TIP* from a world historical perspective. What that means is comparing the account offered by Waltz with the accounts of the international system and its evolution offered by those who study history at the system level.

What this perspective reveals is that *TIP* represents a much more limited theory of international politics than Waltz acknowledges. His starting position is that throughout history the 'texture of international politics remains highly constant, patterns recur and events repeat themselves endlessly'.<sup>1</sup> He argues that to account for these recurrent patterns it is necessary to seek out an unchanging factor in international politics that can be identified across the span of world history and he asserts that what has persisted over time is the anarchic structure of the international political arena and it is this unchanging structure that can be used to account for the enduring behavioural patterns and texture of international politics. Indeed, in subsequent work he went on to extend the argument by insisting that the 'logic of anarchy obtains whether the system is composed of tribes, nations, oligopolistic firms or street gangs'.<sup>2</sup>

A world historical perspective fails to endorse Waltz's view. Instead, it indicates unequivocally that the texture of international politics is not constant and patterns do not recur endlessly. Texture and patterns vary very considerably across time and space. There have been times when the conditions laid out in Waltz's theory have been present, but they are very far from being as universal as Waltz implies. The argument we make, therefore, complements the one made by Ruggie in an early critique of

*TIP* where he argued that the theory is so broad-brushed that it cannot even identify the most important structural change that has taken place in international politics over the past thousand years: when Medieval Europe gave way to the modern state system.<sup>3</sup> Although it is true that Waltz adopts a very parsimonious approach to theory-building in order to extend the reach of his theory we argue that, paradoxically, as a consequence of the conditions he lays down, the theory simply cannot be applied to substantial areas of the macro-historical canvas. To the counter-argument that anomalies can be found for all highly general theories, we say that the anomalies revealed by a world historical perspective are so large as to undermine the theory's claim to universality: it simply doesn't work for huge swathes of time and place.

What we do in this chapter, therefore, is to show why this paradox occurs and how other theorists have endeavoured to highlight and accommodate the complexity and variation in international politics. We do so through the lens provided by the main components of Waltz's theory: units, system, structure and process. Then in a final section we examine the implications of Waltz's theory for the periodization of world history and show that the periodizations developed by theorists who adopt a less parsimonious approach to theory-building can more effectively accommodate the variation and evolution that has occurred in international politics across the course of world history. We end by suggesting that despite its universalist aspirations, Waltz's theory provides an inadequate framework for looking at world history, but that the theory can and is proving very useful to world historians who are examining more specific periods when the conditions that he lays down apply.

## Units

At the heart of Waltz's theory is the notion of 'like units'. The reference to the term 'units' is deliberate because Waltz acknowledges that the nature of the units that operate under conditions of anarchy can take many different forms. He distinguishes between city states, empires and nations, and as already noted, considers that his theory can be extended to tribes, firms and street gangs.<sup>4</sup> It is because these units are so very different that it is not possible to account for the unchanging texture of international politics in terms of their internal characteristics. The parsimonious decision to exclude the internal characteristics of the units from theoretical consideration is essentially dictated by the theory's terms of reference. Waltz wants to account for the persistence of anarchy and this cannot be done by making reference to the internal characteristics of the units that constitute the anarchy because they have self-evidently varied so dramatically across time. However, Waltz takes the argument one step further by suggesting that, at any particular point of time, if an internal development within a unit gives it a power advantage over the other units, then there will be a tendency for this development to be emulated by these other units, although he is quick to qualify the more profound implication of this position by insisting that the theory does not lead one to expect that emulation 'will proceed to the point where competitors become identical'.<sup>5</sup> But in what sense, then, are these units 'like units'? Waltz argues that they are 'like' units in the sense

that they are functionally undifferentiated by which he means that they are 'alike in the tasks that they face, though not in their abilities to perform them'.<sup>6</sup>

If Waltz's position is accepted, then his parsimonious definition of units creates the potential for him to apply his theory across the course of world history. Moreover, the application of his theory is left apparently untouched by the various attempts to establish typologies based on the assumption that the nature of the state has undergone very substantial transformations over time.<sup>7</sup> Unsurprisingly, however, the assumption that it is possible to bracket the internal structure of the units has been challenged on various counts, although all presuppose that the theory implicitly makes more assumptions about the nature of the units than Waltz acknowledges. Explicitly, Waltz argues that the units are defined by a hierarchical political structure. Nexon argues, however, that implicitly the theory makes additional and significant assumptions about the units: that the ties between units are relatively sparse, that collective identification between units is weak, that ties within states are dense and that collective identification within states is strong. In other words, the theory rests on a kind of billiard ball model of units.<sup>8</sup> But can this view of units be applied to the units that prevail in many historical periods? Nexon argues that the dynastic states that operated in early modern Europe simply don't fit Waltz's model because they had internal structures much looser and more fragmented than those assumed by Waltz. Drawing both on the terminology of historians who have examined this period, and on network analysis, he identifies these units as *composite states* and opens the possibility for comparison with units in other historical periods that can also be embraced by this ideal type.

Osiander also critiques Waltz's assumptions about units, arguing that his formulation presupposes 'homogeneous actors' so that the resulting systems are made up exclusively of, for example, tribes, empires or some other kind of unit. It follows that although Waltz makes reference to a wide range of possible units that can interact in an anarchy, his theory effectively precludes the possibility of heterogeneous systems whereby firms, for instance, interact with street gangs or nations with tribes. But Osiander insists that 'heterogeneous not homogeneous systems have in fact been the norm in western civilization'.<sup>9</sup> He is certainly not the first theorist to make this claim. In the context of Europe, Tilly recognizes that empires, city-states and national states co-existed for a period before the national states, because of their success in waging war, eventually emerged as the dominant unit.<sup>10</sup> By contrast, Spruyt argues that three different political forms emerged from feudalism: city-states and city leagues as well as sovereign states. Sovereign states persisted, according to Spruyt, because they were more successful at reducing transportation and information costs as well as being able to produce the most credible commitments in the international system.<sup>11</sup>

When one moves on to a world historical canvas, it becomes necessary to accommodate a very much wider array of units than Waltz allows, and to accept that these units have co-existed and interacted in many international systems. In a rather crude attempt to provide a typology of units, which highlights the very restricted nature of units identified by Waltz, we structurally differentiated units on two dimensions, as mobile or immobile on one dimension and hierarchical and non-hierarchical on the other (see Figure 17.1).

|                         | HIERARCHICAL                              | NON-HIERARCHICAL                         |
|-------------------------|---|--|
| TERRITORIALLY<br>FIXED  | Empires<br>National states<br>City states | Sedentary<br>tribes                      |
| TERRITORIALLY<br>MOBILE | Nomadic<br>empires                        | Hunter-gather<br>bands<br>Nomadic tribes |

**Figure 17.1** Structural differentiation of units by political structure and mobility<sup>12</sup>

A further problem with Waltz's conception of units has been extensively investigated by Ferguson and Mansbach, who insist that the historical record reveals the norm as being 'layered and overlapping polities'.<sup>13</sup> From their perspective it is often simply not possible to identify a system of clearly differentiated units and they discuss international politics in terms of nested polities. The line of argument is also endorsed by Oslander.<sup>14</sup> It replicates and extends an earlier critique of Waltz made by Ruggie who focused on Medieval Europe, which he argued 'reflected "a patchwork of overlapping and incomplete rights of government."' <sup>15</sup>

The full significance of these critiques of Waltz's position on units only becomes fully apparent as we move through the other elements of his theoretical framework.

## Systems

Although Waltz is almost invariably identified as a systems theorist, his approach to systems thinking has rarely been subjected to rigorous interrogation. Goddard and Nexon take up this challenge, arguing that as a consequence of the general failure to identify the nature of Waltz's approach to systems thinking many of the critiques that have been directed at *TIP* simply miss their mark. They insist that Waltz's approach is more sophisticated and sociological than is generally acknowledged, particularly by constructivists who claim that Waltz has essentially eschewed sociological thinking.<sup>16</sup> By contrast, they insist that Waltz's approach to the international system mirrors the approach employed by structural functional sociologists, such as Talcott Parsons, who looked to the functional processes that maintained the social structures of systems. Like the structural functionalist view of the social system, Waltz accepts that the international system is infinitely complex, but he presupposes that we can understand this system by analysing the complexity in terms of distinct functional systems. So, although Waltz focuses on the international political system, he does not do so at the expense of acknowledging the need to identify the existence of an international economic system or an international social system. But according to Goddard and Nexon it is crucial to recognize that for Waltz these separate systems, are analytical rather than ontological: so they are only abstractions from the integrated complexity of the international system as a whole, not systems that exist

independently in their own right. So, although Waltz insists that we need a theory of international politics, he presumably accepts that we must also have a theory of the international economy and a theory of international society.

Although this assessment is sustainable by a textual analysis of *TIP*, it is difficult to come away from the book without sensing that Waltz, while acknowledging the existence of other systems, at the same time also privileges the political system. One critique along these lines argued that the international political system is only a specific sector of a multi-sectored international system and that we require a distinctive lens to observe each sector. It acknowledged the utility of using a specific lens to highlight what is going on within a particular sectoral system, because we can thereby reduce the complexity of the whole to manageable proportions, but also pointed to the danger of 'sectoral blindness', a condition associated with the tendency for any given discipline to focus exclusively on one sectoral system, losing sight of the fact that this sector is necessarily abstracted from a larger whole.<sup>17</sup> It can be questioned whether it is possible to delineate clearly a sectoral system, given that these systems in the real world are inextricably interwoven. Indeed, it can be suggested that 'the distinction between sectoral boundaries is to be found as much in the equipment of the observer as in the thing observed'.<sup>18</sup> Is it indeed valid to establish a theory that is restricted to a specific sectoral system? These various concerns moved the present authors to explore the varieties of system that are clearly international without being political,<sup>19</sup> in the process picking up on the historical literatures about the extensive economic systems of the ancient and classical worlds.

From Goddard and Nexon's perspective, the analytical/ontological distinction effectively deals with Buzan's concerns, but this solution is unlikely to satisfy those historical materialists who argue that the very idea that the distinction between political and economic systems can be grasped in terms of distinct analytical constructs fails to recognize that this move itself is embedded in and promotes the historical construction of capitalism.<sup>20</sup> In other words, this particular historical materialist perspective views the opening up of a divide between politics and economics as a product of capitalism. Following the ideas of Polanyi and Wolf, Rosenberg argues, for example, that whereas pre-capitalist relations rested on personalized domination, where there was no separation between politics and economics, capitalism is associated with the emergence in the nineteenth century of an impersonal state and a depoliticized and inherently universalizing global economic market.<sup>21</sup> As the result of this development, it has been argued by Wood, that 'the totalizing logic and the coercive power of capitalism become invisible'.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, it follows that because of the inability of conventional International Relations theorists to penetrate this logic, they become doomed to participate in its reproduction.

Acknowledging Rosenberg's initiative as 'pioneering', Teschke has gone on to argue that the idea of a clear structural break at this historical juncture, while 'conceptually compelling', has to be examined in much more historical detail if the emergence of the modern state system, characterized by depersonalized states and states-system and a depoliticized market is to be comprehended. Modernity is not

a structure but a process that reflects uneven development across Europe over several centuries. Rosenberg, therefore, is seen to leave the 'complex historical co-development (but not co-genesis) of capitalism, state, and states-system underexplored'.<sup>23</sup>

Although not using the terminology, Teschke is clearly acknowledging the need to disaggregate sectoral systems as well as stressing the need to subject the processes within these systems to systematic historical analysis. From his perspective, Waltz's analysis suffers from 'sectoral blindness'. But he also suggests that Waltz's belief that the 'enduring character of international politics accounts for the striking sameness in the quality of international life through the millennia' must be viewed as 'less the result of historical observation than the consequence of a theorem superimposed on, but not checked by, historical evidence'.<sup>24</sup> However, Teschke's assumption that we can privilege process over structure indicates that his approach is very different from the one promoted by Waltz. It is necessary, therefore, to look more closely at the idea of structure.

### ***Structure, structural change and structural transformation***

Waltz starts from the assumption that one of the key differences between social and natural systems is the fact that social units are influenced by the structures of the systems of which they form a part. It follows that units and structures must be clearly differentiated and, in the context of the international political system, Waltz defines the units as autonomous states interacting within an anarchically structured international system. Waltz accepts that these autonomous states are free agents but insists that if they move beyond the constraints set by the structure of the system, then there will be costs that may even lead to the elimination of the unit. Waltz also aims to show 'how the structure of the system affects the interacting units and how they in turn affect the structure'.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, he wants to eschew the idea that the international system can be compared to a mechanistic self-regulating system like a boiler with a thermostat. In that case, the system has been established to achieve a goal – to maintain the water at a constant temperature. In the case of the international system, Waltz argues, there is no overarching goal. The reproduction of the anarchic structure is the unintended consequence of the component units endeavouring to survive. Structure and agents, therefore, are mutually constituted.

We will look in more detail in the next section at the processes that Waltz associates with anarchy. The aim here is to identify the problems that arise when Waltz's approach to structure confronts the macro-historical canvas. On the face of it, Waltz appears to be arguing that there has been no structural change in international politics across the millennia: that is, that it has remained anarchic. In the first place, we need to qualify this categorical assessment. On the one hand, Waltz acknowledges that polarity affects the structure of the international system and, as a consequence, the processes that operate within the system. In other words, the patterns of behaviour that characterize a bipolar system are different from those that characterize a multipolar system. Waltz does not pursue the logic of his own argument into the behaviour that arises in unipolar systems, because such systems



void the process of balancing, a key component of his theory (more on this below).<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, he allows that anarchy can give way to hierarchy. Here he presupposes that there are two fundamentally different ways that politics can be organized. Units can be ordered on the basis of hierarchy, on a vertical plane, or anarchy, on a horizontal plane. This distinction is a purely analytical one. In the complex real world, there will be elements of hierarchy in any anarchy and *vice versa*. But Waltz is confident in his judgement that the dominant units in the contemporary world are positioned in relation to each other on an anarchic basis.

From Waltz's world historical perspective, therefore, it is possible to observe system change if there is a shift in polarity within an anarchy, and also system transformation, if anarchy gives way to hierarchy. He recognizes that both change and transformation are regular historical features, although he insists that anarchy is, nevertheless, a very resilient political structure. But Waltz is also very clear that although his theory can account for the reproduction of anarchy, he can say nothing about why or when either system change or system transformation will occur. To make progress on this front he insists that it is necessary to develop theory at the unit level of analysis.

Several problems with Waltz's conception of structure have been identified. As already indicated, even if we accept his approach to structure, it is anomalous that he has not explored the implications of unipolarity. From a world historical perspective, this is without doubt a dominant structural feature of international politics. This is very apparent in Watson's intriguing pendulum metaphor (see Figure 17.2), which is based on his synoptic reading of world history. Although it does not purport to provide a fully developed theory of world history, it does make some important claims. It reveals that anarchy is not the sole subject matter of IR, but simply

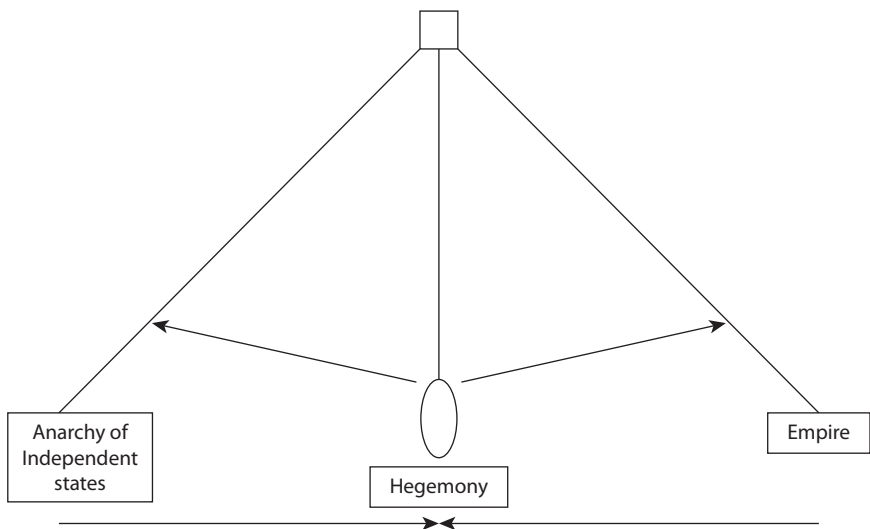


Figure 17.2 A simplified version of Watson's metaphorical pendulum<sup>27</sup>

represents one end of a spectrum. At the other end lies 'empire' where independent communities are directly administered from an imperial centre. As the pendulum moves away from anarchy, communities increasingly come under the control of a dominant power. Within hegemony, for example, communities can no longer pursue independent foreign policies. From Watson's perspective, history cannot be characterized in terms of a predetermined and regular movement from anarchy to empire. On the contrary, empire and anarchy represent extreme positions and for most of world history, communities have operated between the ends of the spectrum because systemic pressures push the pendulum away from the extremes and, as a consequence, there is a significant tendency for the pendulum to move to the lowest point in its swing.

Watson's pendulum model problematizes Waltz's assessment of polarity. But as the earlier discussion on units foreshadowed, Waltz's theory is also unable to accommodate the idea of structurally differentiated units and the idea of heterogeneous systems. His approach to structure makes it impossible to engage with the structural differentiation of units, and yet world history not only demonstrates that heterogeneous systems are a very common feature of world history but also that the structural differentiation of units inevitably has an impact on the interaction between units. This factor is very apparent in the case of hegemonic systems. The Roman Empire, for example, had to interact with empires in the east and tribes in the west and the resulting patterns of behaviour were very different.<sup>28</sup> By the same token, the Chinese had to deal with nomadic tribes in the north and centralized states in the south. In the north, war was endemic, whereas in the south it was almost completely absent.<sup>29</sup> From Waltz's perspective, of course, if these empires do represent examples of systems, then they are systems that operate in the absence of a structure. In a previous discussion of this issue we established a typology of international systems that embraced the structural and functional differentiation of units. This typology illustrates that world history demonstrates a complexity that simply cannot be accommodated by Waltz's theoretical framework.

|                                  | STRUCTURALLY<br>DIFFERENTIATED                           | STRUCTURALLY<br>UNDIFFERENTIATED                     |
|----------------------------------|--|--|
| FUNCTIONALLY<br>DIFFERENTIATED   | Medieval<br>systems                                      | Republican systems<br>EU-type unions                 |
| FUNCTIONALLY<br>UNDIFFERENTIATED | Classical systems of<br>heterogenous<br>autonomous units | Pure Walzian<br>Westphalian systems<br>of like units |

**Figure 17.3** Types of international system: linking structural and functional differentiation<sup>30</sup>

Before leaving this topic, it is essential to flag the constructivist challenge to Waltz's conception of structure. Constructivists argue that Waltz displays a clear materialist bias and they aim to replace his material view of structure with an approach based on intersubjective agreement. From a constructivist perspective, even power needs to be analysed in intersubjective terms.<sup>31</sup> However, more attention has been focused on anarchy. Wendt argues that anarchy needs to be viewed as a culturally determined phenomenon and what Waltz fails to recognize is that anarchy viewed as units positioned on a horizontal plane operates as an empty signifier until it has been given cultural content. The nature of anarchy, according to Wendt, is profoundly affected by whether the units operate as enemies, rivals or friends. Building on the conception of intersubjective agreement, these competing types of relationship generate very different cultures/structures of anarchy. On the face of it, this approach has the potential to account for a very much broader swathe of world history than Waltz's conception of structured systems. So too does the approach of the English School, which also sees structure as social, and views structural continuity and change either in terms of how legitimacy is constructed,<sup>32</sup> or how the primary institutions of international society rise, evolve and decay.<sup>33</sup>

## Process

Although the international system obviously embraces a complex mass of intersecting processes, Waltz is only interested in abstracting the specific process of balancing, which he claims explains how anarchy is structurally reproduced, so generating the enduring texture of international politics. From Waltz's perspective, a degree of insecurity is endemic in any anarchic system and, as a consequence, the component units are necessarily attuned to respond to changes in the systemic distribution of power. It is important to recognize that Waltz is not looking at this process from a foreign policy perspective, but from a systemic one.<sup>34</sup> Balancing in his model is a product of the system and not the result of self-conscious policies pursued by the component units of the system. What his theory reveals is that structural pressures are much more efficacious in a bipolar system than in a multipolar system. This is because the structural consequences of a shift in the distribution of power in a bipolar system are very much clearer than a similar shift in a multipolar system. As a result, Waltz's model presupposes that a multipolar system is very likely to be characterized by instability whereas a bipolar system is much more likely to be characterized by stability.<sup>35</sup> One reason for this is that in a bipolar system it is much easier for the units to coordinate their strategies and establish a mutually agreed distribution of power.<sup>36</sup>

The problem with this move is that the original materialist line of argument is being overlaid, effectively, with an essentially constructivist line of argument. There may be nothing wrong, in principle, with this move – indeed, it is advocated by Goddard and Nexon – but it is clearly not compatible with Waltz's original intentions.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, the need for a move of this kind becomes even more apparent if we shift the focus to unipolarity. Waltz, as noted, fails to make this move

in *TIP* and has never worked out systematically the implications of his framework for a unipolar system. Instead, he simply assumes that it will be possible for other states to match the power of the hegemonic state and that unipolarity will thereby be a short-lived phenomenon. But apart from the fact that this evades rather than confronts the theoretical issue, world history fails to support this assessment because there are many examples of very long-lasting unipolar systems.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, although Wohlforth's discussion of unipolarity is primarily developed in the context of the contemporary world, the general thrust of his argument suggests that unipolarity is certainly not necessarily incompatible with long-term stability.<sup>39</sup> As the example of China illustrates, unipolarity can be simultaneously compatible with the existence of both peaceful and war-prone systems. It is difficult to see how this difference can be accommodated except by bringing in a constructivist perspective.

Once a constructivist perspective is brought into the frame, the balancing process begins to look a good deal more complex. Waltz argues that there are only two dimensions of balancing that need to be taken into account. The systemic distribution of power can be affected by internal balancing, when a state enhances its military potential by innovation or the reallocation of resources, and by external balancing, when a state establishes a military alliance with one or more states. But this assessment ignores the fact that it is also possible to affect the distribution of power by intersubjective agreement. So there is no doubt that the major European peace treaties established in the early modern and modern periods had a profound effect on the distribution of power.<sup>40</sup> The English School has extended this point to argue that the balance of power needs to be identified as a central institution of the European international society and that the behaviour of the European great powers was profoundly influenced by the acknowledgement that the balance of power was required to sustain the system of European states. The balance of power was viewed as a social phenomenon and not as the unintended outcome of states striving to survive.<sup>41</sup>

The assessment of balancing has been taken much further by the argument that the nature of this process underwent a fundamental change during the nineteenth century, which is increasingly seen to identify the point in time when we move from the early modern era of history through to the modern era, thereby challenging the conventional argument in IR that the shift can be dated from 1648 and the Treaty of Westphalia. Teschke notably endeavours to establish a sharp distinction between what he calls a 'dynastic predatory equilibrium' and 'the balance of power'.<sup>42</sup> From his perspective, in the early modern era, dynasties on mainland Europe used their dynastic connections to expand their territory, but in order to maintain good relations with other major dynasties they also sustained a dynastic equilibrium through a process of mutual absorption of territory. He contrasts this activity with the process of active balancing that Britain began to pursue, in the attempt to prevent territorial expansion on the continent, and which then came to prevail in the modern era. By the same token, although coming from a very different perspective, Schroeder argues that in the early modern era, this dynastic 'cooperative system-conforming conduct [was] indistinguishable from naked aggression'.<sup>43</sup> He

establishes a sharp contrast between this 'cooperative' dynastic balancing process and the attempt by the great powers in the nineteenth century to institutionalize and maintain an intersubjectively agreed equilibrium within Europe. Although Waltz inconsistently makes some provision for this process of conscious balancing in the context of bipolarity, with references to arms-control agreements between the United States and the Soviet Union, for example, his theoretical orientation ensures that mutual cooperation of this kind is rigorously eschewed in the context of multipolarity.

### Historical periodization

Waltz's *TIP* does not attempt to offer any kind of periodization of world history. It can be argued that Waltz, and indeed realists in general, tend to downplay, or even negate, the idea of periodization because they operate within what Wight identified as the 'realm of recurrence and repetition'.<sup>44</sup> It follows that for critics, *TIP* illustrates what Linklater calls 'the immutability thesis', while for Osiander, it provides 'impressive testimony to the virulence of today's discourse of eternity'.<sup>45</sup> By the same token, Teschke argues that Waltz's theory is inherently ahistorical because it presupposes the existence of 'one transhistorical "covering law"' and, as a consequence, 'history turns into a non-problem'.<sup>46</sup> There is obviously some truth to this claim, because, as demonstrated earlier, Waltz's theory even erodes the boundary line between pre-history and history, usually associated with the emergence of the state. However, as Waltz sees it, anarchy stretches across this timeline and encompasses relations amongst tribes in pre-historic times as well as relations amongst the many different types of units with state-like structures that have emerged across the course of history. Despite the abundant evidence of Waltz's clear commitment to identifying and accounting for continuity in international politics, it is not true to suggest that he eschews all conception of change. In terms of the big picture, he accepts that, in principle, anarchy can give way to hierarchy and bipolarity can give way to multipolarity, but there is no way that this recognition of the potential for political transformation and change can translate into even an embryonic theory of historical change. Waltz is crystal clear that his theory can only account for continuity and it becomes necessary to examine a different level of analysis to account for a move from anarchy to hierarchy or from bipolarity to multipolarity.

Another obstacle to thinking about periodization arises from Waltz's peculiar usage of functional differentiation. By confining functional differentiation purely to the political sphere, Waltz is able to eliminate it from the international and link it exclusively to hierarchy, by his logic of linking anarchic structure and the generation of 'like units' as discussed above. Although Waltz drew on sociological ideas (mainly Durkheim) for key parts of his theory, his reading of them eliminated much of their content. The result was that only an impoverished rendition of differentiation theory got discussed in IR. Differentiation theory is one of the central approaches in both Sociology and Anthropology. At the risk of some oversimplification, it can be represented as embodying three distinct types of differentiation:

- *Segmentary* (or *egalitarian*) differentiation is where every social subsystem is the equal of, and functionally similar to every other social subsystem. In Anthropology and Sociology this points to families, bands, clans and tribes. In IR it points to Waltz's anarchic systems of states as 'like units'.
- *Stratificatory* differentiation is where some persons or groups raise themselves above others, creating a hierarchical social order. In Anthropology and Sociology this points to feudal or caste or aristocratic or military social orders, though it can also be about the conquest and absorption of some units by others. In IR it points to the many forms of hierarchy: conquest and empire, a privileged position for great powers (the only bit that features in neorealism), and a division of the world into core and periphery, or first and third worlds.
- *Functional* differentiation is where the subsystems are defined by the coherence of particular types of activity (e.g. economy, law, politics, science, religion, military, society, etc.). The idea was initially drawn from biological metaphors about the different subsystems that compose living organisms. Functional differentiation is mainly studied in Sociology where it is generally thought of as the essential characteristic of modernity, closely related to the idea of a division of labour. In IR this points, *inter alia*, to international political economy, world (or global civil) society, transnational actors, and the debates about deterritorialization. But in Waltz's scheme this wider panoply simply disappears. Functional differentiation is reduced to something inside politics, and then eliminated from the international.

The sense of history in this fuller understanding of differentiation theory involves an idea of progress in which more complex forms grow out of the simpler ones that precede them. Although such progress is common, it is not inevitable. Social forms can end up in stasis, or can degrade back to simpler types. Segmentary, stratificatory and functional differentiation form a sequence in that the higher tiers depend for their existence on having developed out of, and overcome, the one that came before. The sequence is thus both historical (from primitive to modern and postmodern) and qualitative (from simple to complex). This does not mean that higher forms of differentiation eliminate those below them. The logic is structural: social orders are characterized by the co-presence of different forms of differentiation, the key question being which form is dominant in shaping the social structure as a whole. This framing puts into context the debates in IR about the nature and direction of the contemporary international system which seems to contain elements of all three forms, with the dominant segmentary one (territorial states, sovereign equality, anarchy) being questioned by both stratificatory elements (the return of empire, hegemony, core-periphery) and functional ones (globalization, deterritorialization, transnational actors, an increasingly autonomous global economy). A richer understanding of differentiation theory along these lines provides many possible insights for IR, but for this discussion its interest is that it generates an overall framing for thinking about not just how states evolve, but about how the whole international system/society has developed. As opposed to Waltz's

version, this differentiation theory restores the full meaning of functional differentiation and offers powerful insights into periodization that Waltz's emaciated version cannot.<sup>47</sup> It is not possible, even in principle, therefore, to use Waltz's theory to throw light on the question of historical periodization. His theory can tell us something about how anarchy is maintained but nothing about historical shifts from anarchy to hierarchy or bipolarity to multipolarity and vice versa. It cannot think at all about shifts outside the segmentary/stratificatory framing, like those opened up by functional differentiation. This is a key reason why neorealism cannot cope with the Medieval order, which combined elements of stratificatory differentiation (popes, emperors) and functional differentiation (churches, guilds).

The limitations of neorealism notwithstanding, IR theorists should be able to make a contribution to the work of world historians, particularly with the task of identifying meaningful breaks in the course of world history. As Teschke acknowledges, however, 'periodization is not an innocent exercise' because it 'implicates IR theories with respect to the adequacy of criteria adduced to theorize the continuity or discontinuity of international orders'.<sup>48</sup> Yet the reality is that IR theory as yet has offered relatively little to world historians. As we have noted elsewhere, there is no IR theory that has matched the success of the ambitious theoretical framework developed by Wallerstein.<sup>49</sup> His theory, operating at the intersection of political and economic systems, generates two major turning points in world history. Before 10,000 BCE he identifies the existence of mini-systems, where the division of economic labour never extended beyond the boundaries of a common culture. These systems then gave way to world systems where the division of labour extended beyond any single culture and for millennia the dominant political form was the world empire. After 1500 CE, however, world empires gave way to a single capitalist world economy, at the centre of which interacted a series of states that were all sufficiently strong that they could withstand any state with imperial aspirations.<sup>50</sup> Although this framework was still regarded by McNeill in the 1990s as the 'leading candidate' for world historians, he also argued that they were 'still fumbling around in search of an adequate conceptualization of human history'.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, with the further passage of time, it increasingly reflects a Eurocentric flavour.

We are firmly committed to the view that IR theory has the potential to provide a framework that will promote a coherent and intelligible approach to the task of writing world history and also that world history provides the most appropriate setting for developing and testing IR theory. Whatever its failings, our attempt to bring together mainstream IR theories and world history did generate a framework which both located international relations within a world historical setting, and provided a distinctively IR approach to historical periodization which located the changing nature of units at the centre of deep-seated historical transformation.<sup>52</sup> Although we would now pay more attention to the nineteenth-century transformation centred on industrialization and capitalism, we still broadly accept this and other theoretical conclusions that we drew. Yet despite our best endeavours, there is more than a whiff of Eurocentrism about our historical periodization and

particularly the decision to tie a primary turning point to 1500 CE, defined in terms of an emerging global system. On the one hand, this assessment underestimates the fact that other civilizations had been reaching outwards before this point, and on the other, that distinct regional international systems persisted across the globe up to the nineteenth century.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, we are in good company. Historical materialists, such as Rosenberg, for example, have come under similar criticism.<sup>54</sup> We think that the English School provides the most promising approach for bringing IR theory and world history together in a sustained conversation, and have committed our future work to developing that line.

## Conclusion

*TIP* has had a huge impact on International Relations. Indeed, it can be argued that most of the major theoretical advances made in the field over the last thirty years have come about as the result of theorists attempting either to challenge or qualify Waltz's theoretical stance. His work still survives as a focal point for the field, primarily because Waltz expresses his position in such clear and unequivocal terms. In essence, his theory calls upon the process of balancing to account for the reproduction of the anarchic structure of international politics. In developing his argument, he makes the historical claim that the process of balancing is associated with patterns of behaviour that have persistently recurred across history. From the start, it has been this transhistorical claim that has been most frequently subjected to criticism. The critics have almost invariably wanted to highlight how insensitive his theory is to historical change and understanding. As Cox asserted, Waltz's attempt to achieve theoretical clarity comes at the cost of an 'unconvincing mode of historical understanding'.<sup>55</sup> Given that there is an almost inescapable methodological tension between generalizing theory and historical specificity, Waltz is not alone here.

If this criticism is accepted, then it is perhaps unsurprising to find that Waltz's work has been essentially ignored by historians in general and world historians in particular. But the criticism does, in fact, miss its target, because Waltz was never attempting to accommodate historical change. His theory only claims to account for historical continuity. Moreover, it is not just Waltz who has been ignored by historians; so have the vast majority of IR theorists. Yet there are signs that the situation may be changing. Certainly Eckstein, a formidable historian of antiquity, has examined in detail the extensive literature spawned by Waltz's *TIP* and accepts that it provides the basis for a framework that enables him to offer a fresh and convincing account of the rise of the Roman Empire.<sup>56</sup> From Eckstein's perspective, researchers working in this area have not acknowledged that the Mediterranean region constitutes a system and they have been too preoccupied with unit-level explanations, failing to recognize the extent to which the actors operating in this region were profoundly influenced by the anarchic structure of the system.

Eckstein's research, at the very least, reveals that Waltz's theory, and the theoretical developments that it has prompted, can have a clear heuristic value for



historians. But, Eckstein then goes on to reiterate Waltz's much bolder claim, arguing if realist theory can be shown to be valid for the ancient Mediterranean world then 'this would enhance confidence in Realist theories as an explanation across the entire history of international relations'.<sup>57</sup> The aim of this chapter has been to demonstrate the fallacy of this position. While it is true that Waltz's model is so parsimonious that it can be applied to the Hellenistic Empires in the Eastern Mediterranean as well as to the super powers of the late twentieth century, paradoxically, its parsimony also renders it inapplicable to many international political systems that have existed during the course of world history. But the chapter also demonstrates that IR has a growing number of theoretical tools that acknowledge the need for a less parsimonious approach to political systems and recognize the need to move beyond the analysis of political systems. It will be a matter of competition to see which theoretical approach proves more productive: Waltz's bare-bones parsimony, or more fully fleshed approaches such as the English School. Only by drawing on more encompassing views of theory can IR hope to make a significant contribution to the study of world history. In our view, an understanding of world history is necessary both to know how we got to where we are, and to provide ideas beyond Westphalian ones about what kind of international systems and societies might be possible in the future. World history is what IR should be trying to explain, and only when it does so will it be able to assume its proper place in the social sciences.

## Notes

- 1 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979), p. 66. This is certainly not an outdated position. Alexander Cooley has relatively recently made reference to 'the astonishingly similar types of . . . behavior evident across many different types of different polities, cultures and historical eras'. See *Logics of Hierarchy: The Organization of Empires, States, and Nations in Transit*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005)
- 2 Kenneth N. Waltz, 'Realist thought and neorealist theory', *Journal of International Affairs* 44 (1), 1990, pp. 21–37, p. 37.
- 3 John Gerrard Ruggie, 'Continuity and transformation in the world polity: towards a neo-realist synthesis', *World Politics*, 35 (2), 1983, pp. 261–85.
- 4 Waltz, *TIP*, p. 91.
- 5 Waltz, *TIP*, p. 124.
- 6 Waltz, *TIP*, p. 96.
- 7 See, for example, Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power: A History of Power from the Beginning to AD1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Philip Bobbitt, *The Shield of Achilles: War, Peace and the Course of History* (London: Allen Lane, 2002); and Walter C. Opello and Stephen J. Rostow, *The Nation-State and Global Order: A Historical Introduction to Contemporary Politics* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1999). Opello and Rostow, for example, distinguish between the Ancient Roman State, the Feudal State, the Medieval State, the Absolutist State, the Liberal State, the Antiliberal State and the Managerial State.
- 8 See ch. 1 in Daniel H. Nexon, *Religious Conflict and the Struggle for Power in Early Modern Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).
- 9 Andreas Osiander, *Before the State: Systemic Political Change in the West from the Greeks to the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) p. 13.

- 10 Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital and European States AD990–1990* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990)
- 11 Hendrik Spruyt, *The Sovereign State and Its Competitors: An Analysis of System Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).
- 12 Taken from Barry Buzan and Richard Little ‘Reconceptualizing anarchy: structural realism meets world history’ *European Journal of International Relations* 2 (4), 1996, pp. 403–38. The units identified in the typology are discussed in some detail in Barry Buzan and Richard Little, *International Systems in World History: Remaking the Study of International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
- 13 Yale H. Ferguson and Richard W. Mansbach, *Politics: Authority, Identities and Change* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), p. 294..
- 14 Osiander, *Before the State*.
- 15 Ruggie in ‘Continuity and transformation’ is citing Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London: New Left Books, 1974) p. 37. See also Edward Keene, *Beyond the Anarchical Society: Grotius, Colonialism and Order in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) who stresses the importance of divided sovereignty continuing into the nineteenth century, and Daniel H. Deudney, *Bounding Power: Republican Security Theory from the Polis to the Global Village* (Princeton: Princeton University Press) who discusses the Philadelphian System in terms of negarchy.
- 16 Stacie E. Goddard and Daniel H. Nexon ‘Paradigm lost? Reassessing *Theory of International Politics*’, *European Journal of International Relations* 11 (1), (2005), pp. 9–61.
- 17 See Barry Buzan, Charles Jones and Richard Little, *The Logic of Anarchy: Neorealism to Structural Realism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) pp. 30–33. The argument is developed in Section 1, written by Buzan. See also Barry Buzan and Mathias Albert, ‘Differentiation: a sociological approach to International Relations theory’, *European Journal of International Relations* 16 (3) (2010).
- 18 *Logic of Anarchy*, p. 32
- 19 Buzan and Little, *International Systems*.
- 20 As it happens, this line of argument builds on the relationship between the observer and observed. Indeed, in his section to *Logic of Anarchy* Jones notes ‘that the observer is also a participant, that viewpoint makes a difference to what is perceived, and that far from rendering objectivity unattainable, this perception in the observed world is the very condition of scientific understanding’, p. 231.
- 21 Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957 [1944]); Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1982; Justin Rosenberg, *The Empire of Civil Society: A critique of the Realist Theory of International Relations* (London: Verso, 1994). See also Douglass C. North, John Joseph Wallis and Barry R. Weingast, *Violence and Social Orders: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting Recorded Human History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
- 22 Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 245.
- 23 Benno Teschke, *The Myth of 1648: Class Geopolitics and the Making of Modern International Relations* (London, Verso, 2003), pp. 40–41. For responses to Teschke’s thesis from Spruyt, Axtmann, Agnew, with Teschke’s reply, see ‘1648 and the myths of Westphalia’ *International Politics* 43 (5), 2006, pp. 511–73.
- 24 *Myth of 1648*, p. 15. Teschke is citing Waltz from ‘Reflections on *Theory of International Politics*: a response to my critics’ in Robert O. Keohane, ed., *Neorealism and its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 53.
- 25 Waltz, *TIP*, p. 40.
- 26 But see William C. Wohlforth, ‘The stability of a unipolar world’, *International Security* 24 (1), 1999, pp. 5–41. For further discussion, see ch. 6 in Richard Little, *The Balance of Power: Metaphors, Myths and Models* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
- 27 Based on Adam Watson, *The Evolution of International Society*, (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 14–16, 122–25. This figure is simplified because it omits suzerainty and dominion. Watson locates hegemony and dominion on either side of the pendulum’s resting point.

However, our figure is in line with Watson's view of hegemony representing the norm position in international relations.

- 28 See the discussion in the second section of *Logic of Anarchy*
- 29 David C. Kang, 'Status hierarchy and war in early modern East Asia'. Unpublished article.
- 30 Taken from Buzan and Little 'Reconceptualizing anarchy', p. 430
- 31 Stefano Guzzini, 'The concept of power: a constructivist analysis', *Millennium* 33 (3), 2005, pp. 495–521.
- 32 Ian Clark, *Legitimacy in International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
- 33 James Mayall, *Nationalism and International Society* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990); Barry Buzan, *From International to World Society? English School Theory and the Social Structure of Globalisation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); K.J. Holsti, *Taming the Sovereigns: Institutional Change in International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
- 34 See the debate between Waltz and Elman on this point. Colin Elman, 'Horses for courses: why not neorealist theories of foreign policy?', *Security Studies* 6 (1), 1996, pp. 7–53, and Kenneth N. Waltz, 'International politics is not foreign policy', *Security Studies* 6 (1), 1996, pp. 54–57.
- 35 It follows that Schroeder's historical evidence, suggesting that in multipolar Europe most states most of the time failed to pursue a balancing strategy, fails to recognize Waltz's systemic perspective but is not, in any event, necessarily incompatible with Waltz's argument about the inherent instability of multipolar systems. See Paul W. Schroeder, 'Historical reality versus neorealist theory', *International Security* 19, 1994, pp. 108–48.
- 36 For a fuller discussion, see Little, *Balance of Power*, ch. 6.
- 37 Goddard and Nexon, 'Paradigm lost?'
- 38 For a comprehensive discussion of the balance of power from a world historical perspective, see Stuart J. Kaufman, Richard Little and William C. Wohlforth, eds, *The Balance of Power in World History* (London: Palgrave, 2007). What the analysis and case studies in this book demonstrate is that from a world historical perspective, hegemony and unipolarity occur just as frequently across time and space as bipolarity and multipolarity.
- 39 Wohlforth, 'The stability of a unipolar world'.
- 40 See, for example, the discussion of these agreements in Clark, *Legitimacy in International Society*; Edward Vose Gulick, *Europe's Classical Balance of Power*, (New York: WW Norton, 1967) and Andreas Osiander, *The States System of Europe, 1640–1990: Peacemaking and Conditions of International Stability*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).
- 41 See Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, Third edition, (London: Macmillan, 2003) and Herbert Butterfield, 'The balance of power', in H. Butterfield and M. Wight, eds, *Diplomatic Investigations: Essays in the Theory of International Politics*, (London: Allen & Unwin 1966). See also Richard Little, 'The balance of power and great power management' in Richard Little and John Williams, eds, *The Anarchical Society in a Globalized World*, (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2006).
- 42 See Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*, pp. 233–36. It is important to note that Teschke is drawing on an essentially Marxist framework and he attributes the expansionist aims of these dynastic states to domestic rather than international factors.
- 43 See Paul J. Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics: 1763–1848*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 67.
- 44 Martin Wight, 'Why is there no international theory?' in Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight, eds, *Diplomatic Investigations: Essays in the Theory of International Politics* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1966), p. 26.
- 45 Andrew Linklater, 'The achievements of critical theory' in Steve Smith, Ken Booth and Marysia Zalewski, eds, *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 282; and Osiander, *Before he State*, p. 11.
- 46 Teschke, *Myth of 1648*, pp. 4 and 15.
- 47 This discussion is drawn from: Buzan and Albert, 'Differentiation'.

- 48 Teschke, *Myth of 1648*, p. 2.
- 49 Barry Buzan and Richard Little 'Why international relations has failed as an intellectual project and what to do about it' *Millennium* 30 (1), 2001, pp. 19–39.
- 50 Immanuel Wallerstein, *Geopolitics and Geoculture: Essays on the Changing World System*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
- 51 William H. McNeill, 'The changing shape of world history' in P. Pomper, R.H. Elphick and R.T. Vann, *World History: Ideologies, Structures and Identity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).
- 52 Buzan and Little, *International Systems in World History*.
- 53 See Barry Buzan and Richard Little, 'World history and non-Western IR theory' in Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, eds, *Non-Western International Relations Theory: On and Beyond Asia* (London: Routledge, 2009).
- 54 See Justin Rosenberg, *The Follies of Globalization Theory* (London: Versa, 2000) and John M. Hobson 'Deconstructing Rosenberg's "Contribution to the critique of the global economy": a review from a non-Eurocentric bridge of the world', *International Politics*, 42 (3), 2005, pp. 372–80.
- 55 Robert W. Cox, 'Social forces, states and world orders: beyond International Relations theory' in Keohane, *Neorealism and its Critics*, p. 243.
- 56 See Arthur M. Eckstein, *Mediterranean Anarchy, Interstate War, and the Rise of Rome* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006) and *Rome Enters the Greek East: From Anarchy to Hierarchy in the Hellenistic Mediterranean, 230–170 BC* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008).
- 57 Eckstein, *Mediterranean Anarchy*, p. 10.

# 18

## HUMAN INTERCONNECTEDNESS<sup>1</sup>

*Andrew Linklater*

Waltz's structural realist perspective contains the most impressive defence of the 'recurrence theorem' – the notion that certain 'propelling' principles have ensured that the same geopolitical forces have repeated themselves over the millennia, invariably ruining human hopes and moral aspirations.<sup>2</sup> A distinctive methodology is used to analyse the 'striking sameness' of international politics – to understand the 'dismaying persistence' of specific trends. To explain recurrent phenomena, Waltz makes a powerful case for abstracting states–systems from the wider totality of social and political existence while recognising that, in reality, everything is intricately connected with everything else.<sup>3</sup>

Support for the recurrence theorem can be found in perspectives that have rather different methodological commitments. Process sociology as developed by Norbert Elias also contends that realist dynamics are as old as encounters between human groups, but that approach develops an alternative 'grand narrative' to the one constructed solely around the 'recurrence theorem'.<sup>4</sup> The main difference is evident in Elias's observation that it is always important to ask what any abstraction has been abstracted from, and necessary to examine the interrelations between the material, ideational and emotional dimensions of human existence in order to understand long-term patterns of development that have shaped the evolution of social systems.<sup>5</sup> As well as highlighting the compulsions of 'self-help' systems, Elias stressed that the 'scaling up' of social and political organisation and the 'widening of the scope of emotional identification' have shaped long-term trajectories that have come to affect humanity as a whole. Whereas structural realism has focused on the properties of an anarchic system that has been abstracted from the larger totality of social and political life, process sociology has promoted 'high-level synthesis' to explain rising levels of interconnectedness over the millennia.<sup>6</sup>

Process sociologists recognise that forms of social learning that are integral to the rise of larger territorial monopolies of power and to lengthening chains of

interdependence have long outpaced the growth of cosmopolitan attunement to the needs and interests of other people. As a result, the analysis of long-term patterns is linked with a 'cognitive interest' in promoting an understanding of how humans might live more amicably together in the coming phase of global integration. The structural realist emphasis on how knowledge can contribute to learning how to control relations within anarchic systems is transcended by the contention that the central stake in social analysis is much greater, namely how to regulate a web of social, economic and political relations that are in danger of spiralling out of control. Elias was not naively optimistic about the prospects for mastering the social world. But his comment that the contemporary era may form part of 'humanity's pre-history' leaves open the possibility that some future grand narrative may trace the evolution of collective learning processes that enabled societies to coexist without the levels of violent and non-violent harm that attended the earlier stages of human interconnectedness.

### The recent fate of grand narratives

Borrowing from process sociology, the following discussion contains some preliminary observations about an overlapping but alternative grand narrative to that found in neorealism, one that incorporates the latter's strengths in a more synoptic discussion of how relations between groups have shaped the overall trend towards higher levels of human interconnectedness. It is important to begin by recalling that recent times have witnessed the virtual collapse of grand meta-narratives – the almost total demise of approaches that portray the human past as an unbroken ascent from ignorance to reason, domination to freedom, and barbarism to civilisation. Such interpretations have not been entirely friendless in recent years,<sup>7</sup> but the broad consensus in the social sciences is that those endeavours are now embarrassing and obsolete. On that argument, scholars should remain on guard against efforts to revive progressivist narratives that had disastrous effects on non-European peoples in the age of the overseas empires.

Elias argued that the critique of the nineteenth-century grand narratives was essentially correct, but the gains came with the cost of 'throwing the baby out with the bathwater'. Those interpretations of the past had appeared in an era when detailed understanding of societies beyond Europe was limited and invariably filtered through an ethnocentric lens that provided Europeans with flattering self-images. But the aim of understanding human history in its entirety, and the conviction that the analysis of long-term processes that have affected humanity as a whole should stand at the centre of social inquiry, were not preposterous. In his view, a major challenge facing the social sciences was recovering long-term perspectives without perpetuating tired myths about inevitable progress and historical finality. Nineteenth-century meta-narratives could be conceived as transitional steps towards more detached, post-European perspectives that analyse the trend towards 'the globalisation of human society'.<sup>8</sup> Recent approaches to world history with that focus belong to a tradition that includes Marx's pioneering discussion of the evolution of

the species from the earliest small-scale societies to the global web of economic and social relations that was appearing in the mid-nineteenth century. Anticipating dimensions of process sociology that aim to integrate elements from the biological and social sciences in a synoptic approach to the development of the species, Marx stressed the importance of comprehending the distinctive features of the biological constitution of human beings that made history and therefore higher levels of interconnectedness possible. The analysis was geared towards understanding the rise of universal structures of political consciousness with significant cosmopolitan potential – with the capacity to increase human control over largely unmastered social processes. Similar normative tendencies can be found in process sociology, but they are subdued, given its express commitment to detached social inquiry.

Sophisticated studies of the growth of human interconnectedness are in their infancy, rather like the processes they examine. The former are undergoing a transition from the unsurprising condition in which the societies that had spearheaded global integration constructed images of the past that largely celebrated their achievements. A more detached conception of human history had to await the challenges to the European sense of racial and cultural superiority, and the collapse of the overseas empires. Only then could Western thought begin to recognise the contribution that different civilisations and inter-civilisational encounters have made to human development.<sup>9</sup> It is probable that ‘the human web’ will become more intensive and extensive in the coming centuries unless, as is perfectly possible, catastrophic events throw the dominant tendencies of the last six thousand years into reverse.<sup>10</sup> But if no such rupture takes place, future generations armed with more synoptic conceptual frameworks may conclude that nineteenth- and twentieth-century studies of world history took the first faltering steps towards more accurate grand narratives that explain rising levels of global interconnectedness.

Efforts to account for the past few thousand years of history have proliferated in recent decades, most concentrating on understanding the trends that have shaped human development since then, forcing all people into a single stream of world history and generating interrelated problems that raise the question of whether humans can develop more universalistic structures of consciousness that prepare them for the challenges of the next phase of ‘global integration’. Recent grand narratives stress the overall trend towards the ‘scaling up’ of social and political organisation that began with the revolutionary transition from nomadic hunting and gathering groups to settled agricultural societies that took place at the end of the last Ice Age.<sup>11</sup> Most focus on the rise of the first cities in the Ancient Near East from around the ninth millennium BCE, on the appearance of the first city-states in that region about five millennia later, and on the rise of the first agrarian empires during the next two thousand years. Most argue that similar processes occurred, probably independently, in other regions including Egypt, the Mediterranean, the Indus valley, China’s Yellow River region, Mesoamerica and the Andes.<sup>12</sup> Several accounts now exist of how the major regional civilisations that had earlier widened the spheres of social and political interaction within their respective domains began to coalesce with the dawning of the Columbian epoch. Reflecting the shift from

modernist, Eurocentric worldviews to more detached viewpoints, those approaches reject narratives that describe history as a progressive journey from barbarism to civilisation. As an example, Toynbee's *Mankind and Mother Earth*, which is still one of the best accounts of the coalescence of regional civilisations, is insistent that all teleological or progressivist orientations corrupt knowledge of the past.<sup>13</sup>

It is paradoxical that studies of human interconnectedness are largely unconnected, having appeared over recent years as mainly separate endeavours.<sup>14</sup> There is no detailed assessment of whether the methodologies that underpin those studies are compatible, and whether they provide partial interpretations that are best combined in a higher synthesis. Future work in the area must address parallel endeavours in International Relations that have also evolved in separate ways, selectively borrowing from the literature on world history. Further investigation is required to determine how far their methodological commitments and substantive findings are compatible with grand narratives in the social sciences more generally.<sup>15</sup> There is a key role for theorists here. The theoretical analysis of diverse approaches can proceed with the aim of producing conjectures about the general course of human history that can then be tested against the findings of specialised scholarly inquiries. Over an extended period, the process of moving back and forth between theoretical inquiry and historical analysis may lead to breakthroughs to grand narratives that satisfy those sceptics who doubt that the sweeping overview of the past can escape distortion and over-simplification. Those fears raise large issues that cannot be considered here about how far synthesis lags dismally behind analysis in the social sciences, about the costs that attend the advances that are gained through academic 'overspecialisation', and about the political implications of approaches that prefer the 'retreat into the present' to the investigation of long-term processes.<sup>16</sup>

One might expect future grand narratives to broadly support the anti-progressivism that is evident in Toynbee's writings as well as in neorealism and process sociology. A shared contention is that, in some basic respects, world politics have not changed over the millennia. As noted earlier, Waltz argues that the international political realm displays certain recurrent patterns, and adds that there is no obvious escape from the security challenges that often drive the great powers into rivalry and outright war. Elias maintained that the continuities between different periods of history are as marked as the contrasts, and observed that there has been a broad trend towards the formation of larger territorial concentrations of coercive power that may only end when the long history of 'elimination contests' between 'survival units' culminates in the establishment of a worldwide state. Elias advanced a broadly realist account of the principal dynamics of anarchic systems (seemingly without engaging with the literature in International Relations). His thesis was that it will be a very 'advanced civilisation' indeed that succeeds in promoting high levels of individual and collective self-restraint without the enforcement mechanisms that a stable, monopoly of power can supply.<sup>17</sup> A level of self-restraint that rivals what is usually only possible under such conditions might forever elude the human race, but 'it was worth trying' to make progress in that direction.<sup>18</sup>



The parallels between neorealism and process sociology are relevant to the thesis that International Relations has failed as an academic discipline, a judgement that emphasises the low visibility and marginal influence of its key texts even in those areas of social-scientific investigation where the analysis of state power, geopolitics and war has been central.<sup>19</sup> In developing that argument, Buzan and Little support closer links between International Relations and world history. Their position resonates with the claim that has been made by leading world historians such as McNeill that future grand narratives should attach central importance to the impact of ‘encounters between strangers’ on the evolution of societies. It is possible to extend that thesis by analysing the advances that process sociologists have made towards constructing high-level theoretical syntheses that recognise the influence of, *inter alia*, state-formation, imperial expansion, geopolitical rivalry and major war on the long-term trend towards the globalisation of human society.<sup>20</sup>

### ‘Scaling up’ social and political organisation

As already noted, many grand narratives start with the interrelated ecological and social transformations that began around twelve thousand years ago when the last Ice Age came to an end. They note that changes in material production (specifically the shift to settled agricultural societies) led to larger settlements, to new structures of social (including gender) inequality, and to states and empires with an increased ability to project military and political power and wage war over greater distances; they focus on how longer networks of military, political, economic and social interdependence forged evolutionary pathways that continue to this day, and which seem likely to remain dominant. Even so, there is no obviously correct starting-point for explorations in world history; all points of departure are, to some extent, arbitrary.<sup>21</sup> For reasons of convenience, it is useful to pay particular attention to the contention that ‘the general principle of cultural development’ since Neolithic times has led to ‘a decrease in the number of autonomous political units and an increase in their size’.<sup>22</sup> Its importance is evident from the fact that hunting and gathering groups had been the dominant forms of social organisation from the emergence of the first anatomically modern humans around 100–150 thousand years ago until around the middle of the fourth century BCE when the first city-states appear. The nature of that transition is underlined by recalling the short time-span between the rise of the first state-organised societies and the construction of territorial states and empires that became entangled in the pathways described by Carneiro. There is evidence that some hunting and gathering groups experimented with settled agricultural ways of life only to return to traditional modes of production, perhaps because of a collective realisation that increasing labour-time was not accompanied by improvements in diet and health but by deteriorating conditions.<sup>23</sup> Some may have migrated to more remote areas to escape the stranglehold of ‘civilisation’. (Groups that are still being discovered, most recently along the Peruvian–Brazilian border, may reflect that wider trend). But in the fourth millennium BC in the Near East, and then in the other regional civilisations, the initiative shifted to the process of

state-formation – both ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ (where societies felt they had to try emulate the pacemakers in their region if they were to survive).

Time and again, larger territorial concentrations of physical power have emerged from ‘elimination contests’ between survival power units. Realism and process sociology largely agree about the reasons for the dominance of what Elias called the ‘monopoly mechanism’.<sup>24</sup> Both perspectives maintain that states are usually motivated less by the desire to expand their military power and political influence to the absolute limit than by the modest goal of controlling strategically significant areas – or ensuring that adversaries do not dominate them. The long-term result of the monopoly mechanism is that societies have become entangled in ever-widening theatres of war, binding more and more people by their ‘hands and feet’ in the strategic interconnections that are one of the main indices of the globalisation of human society.<sup>25</sup>

Such points about the impact of state-building, widening strategic relations and rising levels of interconnectedness raise questions about the relative influence of economic and political forces on that overall trend. From a theoretical standpoint, it is important to heed the Marxists’ warning against rigidly separating the two domains. They have argued that production had little autonomy from the political domain in pre-modern social systems where states employed force for the purpose of ‘primitive accumulation’ and/or were centrally involved in promoting trade networks in order to acquire the material resources that would enable them to extend and consolidate their power.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, merchants would have been unable to conduct business across frontiers unless coercive institutions had been able to protect trade routes from pirates and predators. Only with the emergence of industrial capitalism did ‘economics’ acquire significant autonomy from ‘politics’ and come to exercise a (seemingly) relatively independent influence on the material realities of increasing interconnectedness and on its moral and cultural counterparts.<sup>27</sup> From the earliest periods, closer material ties between social systems developed alongside and frequently stimulated cultural breakthroughs that made inter-group communication and understanding possible. Merchants, for example, were often key ‘cross-cultural brokers’, just as trade settlements were critical in fashioning a ‘bare bones morality’ that made it possible for people to become bound together in longer webs of interconnectedness.<sup>28</sup>

If Braudel is right about the early history of Islamic civilisation, there have been periods when economic ties ran along track lines that religious groups had previously created, thereby enlarging circles of mutual understanding and trust around which new trade networks could develop.<sup>29</sup> Again, it is important to ask how far the economic sources of interconnectedness ultimately depended on the role of states and other actors in pacifying the routes along which ideas and commodities dispersed. In the Ancient Near East, separate states seem to have pacified ‘Mesopotamia’ to the point where economic and cultural integration could develop. Political unification came later.<sup>30</sup> In Mann’s felicitous phrase, closer economic and cultural ties in the ‘interstices’ that states were powerless to control led to major transformations of religious consciousness. Crucial was the quest for new social

bearings during periods of unsettling and unpredictable change in which people found themselves flung together and bound to others over greater distances. The first monotheistic religions have been described as examples of that quest for new forms of world orientation during episodes of disconcerting large-scale change. Universal belief-systems were not only crucial in providing new cognitive maps for those entangled in longer social webs. In addition to making it easier for people to become better attuned to one another over greater distances, world religions represented an advance in levels of ‘cultural memory’ that made ‘the formation of (still) wider communities’ possible.<sup>31</sup>

### Changes in emotional identification

To summarise, any account of human interconnectedness must analyse changes in the organisation of coercive power and transformations of modes of production, noting how their respective causal influence has shifted over time (where it makes sense to separate them). But the investigation of material realities has to be coupled with an examination of cultural perspectives and ideological changes that made it easier for people from different societies to orientate themselves to the imperatives of growing interconnectedness, and to become more adept at interacting with outsiders. The concept of attunement is useful because it draws attention to the socio-psychological dimensions of structural change, and particularly to transformations of the emotional ties that simultaneously bind people together in longer networks while separating them from those who are the object of fear, hatred, envy or distrust.<sup>32</sup> That is to focus on what Elias described in the 1930s as the non-existent field of ‘historical psychology’ or ‘historical social psychology’.<sup>33</sup> By emphasising that lacuna in social-scientific inquiry, Elias argued for moving to a higher plane of understanding that examined how changes in social and political structures were accompanied by the reconfiguration of personality systems – that is, by movements in ‘the scope of emotional identification’ with other persons, and specifically in the patterns of self-restraint (or ‘conscience’) that govern, *inter alia*, the capacity to cause violent and non-violent harm.

Studies of the first cities and states have highlighted the main issues by focusing on the difficulties in binding people together on an entirely unprecedented scale. Many collapsed because viable solutions eluded them.<sup>34</sup> Those that succeeded did so by designing new frameworks of thought and action that harmonised responsibilities to kin members and loyalties to the state (as in the case of the ancient polis), or gave traditional deities their rightful place in a universal pantheon (as in the case of Sumerian civilisation). Whether ‘scaled up’ societies survived or fragmented and collapsed depended to a large degree on how far they extended ‘the scope of emotional identification’ to embrace at least the most powerful social strata – to ensure recognition of their worldviews and to protect their material interests. ‘Higher levels of conceptual synthesis’ were involved in meeting the challenges of rising levels of interconnectedness.<sup>35</sup> As is the case with all social systems, just as important was the ability to embody collective norms in personality systems so that

compliance occurred almost ‘instinctively’ – without agents hesitating to consider alternative courses of action, or estimating whether self-interest required conformity or transgression. Without such inventiveness, the long-term trend towards larger territorial monopolies would not have taken place. To rephrase the point, the monopoly mechanism has not been a sufficient condition for the success of larger ‘survival units’; it was often followed by fragmentation where powerful strata decided that it was in their interests to defect, often forging stronger alliances with ‘outsiders’ than with ‘insiders’. During the early phases of state-formation, failure in binding people together in stable communities may have been more common than the number of successful experiments. But occasional success was all that was needed to tip the balance in favour of the ‘scaling up’ of social organisation (and not least because of the process of secondary state-formation mentioned earlier).

Problems of order and legitimation were acute not only within social systems but also in relations between them, raising questions about their ability to become attuned to the needs of strangers that have interested analysts of rising levels of human interconnectedness ever since Herodotus and Thucydides reflected on the political challenges that confronted the ancient Greek world. As Thucydides observed, international systems or societies have been no different from separate cities and states in having to devise workable solutions to the ways in which people are compelled to live together by forces they may neither understand nor control. Neorealists and process sociologists are in broad agreement with Thucydides’ additional claim that global ‘civilising processes’ in Elias’s technical sense of the term usually lag behind ‘domestic’ equivalents, and can quickly dissolve when societies fear for their security or survival.<sup>36</sup> As Elias maintained, from the earliest times, societies have tolerated levels of violence against outsiders that were usually outlawed within the group, or at least in dealings with ‘high status’ members.<sup>37</sup> Similar restraints, however fragile, are not entirely absent from relations between states. The English School has investigated global civilising processes that (whether by appealing to shared interests in maintaining international order or by invoking a vision of a universal moral community) are designed to curb the power to harm. Related modes of analysis have explored the problems that result from the ‘upward pressure on the optimal scale of states’, and from increases in the amount of destructive power that is deemed necessary for survival; they have also recognised the importance of understanding how far those who have been thrust together in international systems have developed levels of ‘we feeling’ that can underpin collective responses to shared predicaments and problems.<sup>38</sup>

What societies can hope to achieve in that sphere has long been debated. The standard realist argument which is echoed in process sociology emphasises the strength of the loyalties that bind individuals to the specific ‘survival unit’ that provides protection from internal and external threats. Advocates of the two approaches agree that power struggles and elimination contests will continue to block the path to any significant widening of the scope of emotional identification. On that last theme, Elias observed that the idea of ‘humanity’ is a ‘blank’ space on the ‘emotional map’ of most people, notwithstanding growing social awareness of

global integration.<sup>39</sup> He stressed that the universal human rights culture indicates that the scope of emotional identification may not be confined to the nation-state forevermore. But such advances, and the recent fate of the global norm that prohibited torture illustrates the point, do not alter the fact that restraints on violence can weaken quickly when people fear for their security. That said, recent debates about the status of the torture norm have revealed that such conventions cannot be swept to one side in societies that pride themselves on their 'higher' civilisation.<sup>40</sup> The question arises whether there are significant global trends that point towards a future phase of interconnectedness that may reduce the violence that has invariably accompanied the rise of larger monopolies of power and the struggles between them.

As is well known, social and political thinkers in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries approached that question by asking how far the growth of world commerce would lead to higher levels of emotional identification between the members of different societies. Liberal voices in such explorations were overly optimistic about future possibilities, and not least because of a failure to recognise how far asymmetries of power and wealth block sympathy for vulnerable groups. If the evolution of the modern state reflects more general trends, then high levels of 'functional interdependence' between upper and lower social strata (that is, the former's recognition that they must rely on weaker groups in order to satisfy their interests) is an important precondition for major extensions of emotional identification.<sup>41</sup> In this context, it is worth noting that, from the late eighteenth century, liberal and neoliberal analyses of increasing interconnectedness have argued that the attendant constraints and compulsions force diverse human groups to become attuned to one another over greater distances, and to acquire levels of foresight and restraint that can allow them to coexist with minimum violence and insecurity. Over the last three decades, environmental problems have led to innovative arguments for reshaping moral and political horizons so that people can exercise greater influence over global processes that largely escape their control. For their part, the economic upheaval and uncertainty caused by the recent global financial crisis have led to calls for institutional arrangements that can reduce the insecurities of interconnectedness that impinge on everyday life. Familiar questions are raised about how far people can combine loyalties to family, nation, state, and so forth with stronger emotional identification with the universal and regional organisations that are now essential for controlling global processes.<sup>42</sup>

### **The ambiguities of interconnectedness**

It is important at this juncture to turn to recent debates about the relevance of notions of cosmopolitan or global citizenship for 'making world culture'.<sup>43</sup> Critics argue that such ideas are oxymoronic; their advocates contend that they are essential for adapting to the compulsions of global integration, and for ensuring that moral and political consciousness does not continue to lag behind the processes that force more and more people more closely together.<sup>44</sup> A major question is how far the species can progress in reaching binding and enforceable agreements on how to end

avoidable harm and suffering. No less important is whether different cultures can find common ground in a grand narrative that harnesses the more sophisticated self-understandings of the age to a cosmopolitan political project that can combine moral legitimacy with respect on the grounds of practicality.

One approach with an ancient pedigree uses the notion of the ambiguities of interconnectedness to support collective action to promote a global civilising process with cosmopolitan ambitions.<sup>45</sup> Kant's 'universal history with a cosmopolitan intent' noted that people now enjoy the enormous benefits of global commercial and intellectual exchange. They are more able to identify with distant peoples, and to come to their assistance by bringing serious human rights violations to the attention of the wider world. But as systematic cruelty to newly discovered peoples illustrated, and as Chinese and Japanese anxieties about the encroachment of the European powers revealed, modern societies have also become skilled in causing harm in the most remote places.<sup>46</sup>

Kant constructed an image of the complexities of long-term human development which has affinities with recent narratives that argue for radical extensions of the scope of emotional identification in the light of the capacity to cause more destructive forms of harm over greater distances.<sup>47</sup> An interesting, but largely overlooked, characteristic of contemporary world society is the growing number of politically aware people in very different social and cultural locations that have (not least because of climate change) a similar 'harm narrative', one that provides some grounds for cautious optimism that levels of transnational solidarity may yet keep pace with, or at least not fall further behind, future advances in global integration. Of critical importance is public recognition of how inventiveness with respect to the power to harm has led to enormous destructive power over the natural world, continuing the elimination of non-human species that occurred during the first waves of state-formation, but now adding the threat to human security in societies that are most vulnerable to the effects of environmental degradation, and raising questions about whether the species may be coming to a tipping-point that will transform all life on the planet.<sup>48</sup>

Such views may only help to strengthen the pessimistic belief that history is little more than one form of domination after another rather than a gradual ascent to greater freedom although, in making that point, Foucault insisted that it is unnecessary to be either for or against the Enlightenment.<sup>49</sup> Certainly, there is no obvious reason to flinch from an account of progressive features of world politics over the last two centuries that include the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade and colonial slavery, related struggles to end the other cruelties of imperialism, and more recent efforts to embody egalitarian commitments in the human rights culture and in international criminal law. Opposing pointless suffering, transnational civil society actors work for 'moral progress' in world affairs.<sup>50</sup> More and less troubled interpretations of modernity are often combined in writings on the growing realisation of how daily routines require individuals to take a moral stand on matters that, however indirectly, affect distant strangers and the future of humankind.<sup>51</sup> Awareness of the different ways in which individuals can harm, and be harmed by

each other, in their course of living everyday life often underpins a sense of urgency about assuming the roles and responsibilities of world citizens in response to many different global issues, but most obviously in connection with environmental hazards. In short, a global ‘harm narrative’ is emerging alongside advances in interconnectedness that may foster shared understandings of the civilising process that must be undergone if societies are to succeed in living together harmoniously.

## Grand narratives and cosmopolitan prospects

As noted earlier, that emergent approach to the past shares some features with the Kantian vision of how grand narratives can inform cosmopolitan ethical dispositions. There is a link with the darker side of Kant’s image of the development of the species which contended that it was hard to contemplate history without ‘a sense of distaste’. Displays of ‘wisdom’ were evident ‘here and there’, but history as a whole appeared to be woven from ‘folly and childish vanity’, often combined with ‘malice and destructiveness’.<sup>52</sup> The upshot was bemusement about what to make of a species that took pride in its supposed superiority.<sup>53</sup> But, rather like McNeill in more recent times, Kant believed that an appreciation of the long journey that the species had undergone could promote levels of emotional identification with all other peoples that might reduce the lethality of inter-group encounters.<sup>54</sup> In other words, grand narratives that considered the ambiguities of human interconnectedness could promote substantial detachment from the short-term preoccupations of one’s own nation or the transient concerns of the era; they could create a deep concern about the burdens that the living may bequeath to future generations, and about how ‘moderns’ will be judged in coming eras.<sup>55</sup>

Critical interpretations of Kant’s unfashionable belief in immutable, universal ethical principles often obscure his interest in how people can solve the growing problem of harm in world politics. It is useful to recall his belief that people in the original state of nature had a moral duty to enter into a civil constitution with everyone they were in a position to injure.<sup>56</sup> History would have developed along a very different course had they displayed the levels of self-restraint and foresight that are required by that principle. But lacking those attributes, they had become trapped in an international state of nature that exposed societies to disruptive external events over which they had limited control. Escape could only occur by learning through painful experience the profound wisdom of the Stoic idea that people owe one another the duty to refrain from inflicting unnecessary injury, and by proceeding to work towards a ‘cosmopolitan condition of general political security’ that protects all people from cruelty or excessive violence.

Kant regarded the ‘harm principle’ as one element of a global ethic that could meet the challenges of growing interconnectedness. Of course, large issues arise about how far diverse cultures can agree on what counts as indefensible harm, but suffice to add that without some shared understandings, the major civilisations would not have developed similar laws of war that were designed to limit suffering. Transnational solidarity is most easily anchored in the capacity to sympathise with

the efforts that most people make to live as long as possible with minimum suffering.<sup>57</sup> There is no obvious need to look elsewhere to explain how different societies can agree on cosmopolitan harm conventions that prohibit genocide, torture and other assaults on human rights, as well as measures to reduce, amongst other things, the exploitation of other people and harm to the environment.<sup>58</sup> That foundation provides the basis for assessing how far institutions, policies and practices contribute to moral progress in an era of unprecedented global integration.<sup>59</sup>

### **Moral indifference and global interconnectedness**

Formidable obstacles to advances in that direction have been noted: persistent ‘insider–outsider dualisms’ and the erosion of legal and moral restraints on force when societies are anxious about their security and survival. It is useful to add the concerns that were raised by many nineteenth-century thinkers, namely the destruction of the older forms of community, and the rise of atomised individuals that were ‘shut up in the solitude’ of their own hearts, ‘ignorant of [their] ancestors, isolated from [their] contemporaries and disinterested in [their] descendants’.<sup>60</sup> Such reflections on the effects of urbanisation and industrialisation on the individual’s moral horizons raised serious doubts about the future of human solidarity. A related question was whether those who display little concern for other members of their societies should be any more troubled by the suffering of distant strangers. Adam Smith commented on the ease of sleeping soundly at night, knowing that millions face appalling conditions in China.<sup>61</sup> Kant’s question of whether the oceans make a community of nations impossible also recognised that global interconnections could continue to advance without any equivalent advances in the ethical sphere.<sup>62</sup>

By weakening customary attachments, the individuation of people may make it easier for them to support cosmopolitan political initiatives; they are perhaps less inclined to be unconditionally loyal to the nation or state.<sup>63</sup> But individuation can just as easily lead to widespread indifference to the plight of distant others. The question is what, apart from material entanglements, can bind strangers together in longer webs of interdependence. The argument here is that there is no satisfactory alternative to Kant’s defence of the Stoic-influenced universal obligation to freely enter into a civil constitution with those one can harm, and be harmed by – and there is no clear alternative to the conviction (which transnational organisations often try to foster) that stronger cosmopolitan bonds ultimately depend on a desire to avoid collective or individual self-reproach for harming others. An insightful commentary on the ethic of care and responsibility captures the essential point by noting that those who are closest to us emotionally (family members, friends, and so forth) are especially vulnerable to our actions, but distant strangers can be as profoundly affected by what we do and do not do.<sup>64</sup> That engagement with the social consequences of interconnectedness can check the tendency to privilege the interests of one’s ‘survival unit’, or to withdraw into one’s own ‘solitude’.



## New principles of cosmopolitan legitimacy

Such sensibilities are central to ‘transnational advocacy networks’ which may enjoy most success when they can link concrete efforts to publicise what is generally regarded as senseless harm with a cogent explanation of how it has occurred and who is responsible for it.<sup>65</sup> Such networks advance specific harm narratives to promote a global civilising process that responds to the ambiguities of interconnectedness. There is a link to be made with the earlier argument that human interdependence requires greater attunement to the needs and interests of distant others. That theme has arisen in many different settings such as in discussions about how the nuclear revolution urged foresight and restraint, about the need to think from the standpoint of others to preserve the first universal society of states, and about the importance of curbing aggressive impulses under conditions of economic interdependence.<sup>66</sup> Of special note is the progress that has occurred in agreeing on certain cosmopolitan principles of legitimacy that underpin contemporary international legal conventions that prohibit serious mental and bodily harm.<sup>67</sup>

The modern states-system may be slowly turning the corner at least in devising cosmopolitan principles that address the harmful effects of human interconnectedness. Major tensions between principle and practice remain, but counter-hegemonic forces can harness the former to protect against current arrangements and to envisage more just arrangements. Some comfort can be drawn from the observation that the modern society of states has already outlived the past twenty-eight states-systems in world history as well as all twenty-three universal empires.<sup>68</sup> It may yet survive long enough for cosmopolitan harm conventions to become more powerful influences on the future ‘scaling up’ of social and political organisation. The larger point is that modern societies live in what is probably still an early stage in the development of global interconnectedness, or in ‘humanity’s prehistory’.<sup>69</sup> There may be ample time for humans to learn how ‘to muddle their way out of several blind alleys and to learn how to make their life together more pleasant, more meaningful and worthwhile’.<sup>70</sup> That is reason enough for wishing to place International Relations at the heart of a grand narrative that tries to understand the history of human ingenuity in multiplying the ways of causing harm, and to comprehend the slower evolution of ‘civilising’ measures to eradicate violent and non-violent harm from relations between social groups.

## Notes

- 1 This chapter began as the keynote lecture delivered at the Third Oceanic International Studies Association Conference which was held at the University of Queensland in July 2008. An earlier version was published under the title, ‘Grand Narratives in International Relations’, in *Global Development, Peace and Security*, 21 (1) 2009, pp. 3–17.
- 2 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1979), p. 10.
- 3 Waltz, *Theory*, pp. 8 and 66.
- 4 Process sociology supports the recovery of the analysis of the growth of human interdependencies over many centuries and millennia – in opposition to ‘the retreat of

sociologists into the present'. Elias (2000: postscript) was hostile to efforts to explain long-term processes in terms of immutable forces such as the supposed logic of social systems. The point was that the compulsions of anarchy are evident in many different eras, but their influence on human development cannot be understood by calculating their effects on 'rational agents' that have exactly the same motives everywhere. The constraints of anarchy are always experienced through social lenses that are the result of diverse material, ideational and emotional influences. In his study of the European civilising process, Elias argued for 'process concepts' to understand the relations between state-building and internal pacification, marketisation and monetarisation, attitudes to the body, changing emotional responses to violence and cruelty, and altered conceptions of shame and embarrassment in the period between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries.

- 5 See Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning, *The Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process*, (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2008), pp. 90–91.
- 6 See Norbert Elias, *An Essay on Time* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2007), pp. 142, 152ff. for a defence of high-level synthesis that checks the tendency towards increased specialisation in the human sciences. Elias made it clear that high-level synthesis depends on breakthroughs that can only come from specialised knowledge, while lamenting the extent to which synthesis lags behind analysis.
- 7 Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (Glasgow: Hamish Hamilton, 1992). For further discussion, see J. Bentley 'World history and grand narratives', in B. Stuchey and E. Fuchs (eds) *Writing World History: 1800–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
- 8 Stephen Mennell, 'The globalization of human society as a very long-term social process: Elias's theory'. *Theory, Culture and Society*, 7 (2), 1990, pp. 359–71; Patrick Manning, *Navigating World History: Historians Create Global Past* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).
- 9 John Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
- 10 John R. McNeill and William H. McNeill, *The Human Web: A Bird's-Eye View of World History* (London: Norton, 2003).
- 11 Andrew Sherratt, 'Reviving the grand narrative: archaeology and long term change', *Journal of European Archaeology*, 3 (1) 1995, pp. 15ff.
- 12 Chris Scarre, (ed.), *The Human Past: World Prehistory and the Development of Human Societies*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005), ch. 5.
- 13 Arnold Toynbee, *Mankind and Mother Earth* (London: Paladin, 1978), p. 590.
- 14 At least four principal overviews of the human past exist at the present time. First, the study of world history that is now well established in the US, largely because of the influence of William McNeill, *A World History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979). Second, the related sub-field of 'new global history', as developed by Bruce Mazlish, *The New Global History* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006) where the focus is on the long-term trend towards globalisation. Third, the 'Big History' movement initiated by David Christian, *Maps of Time: An Introduction to Big History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) which analyses the evolution of greater complexity in the physical, natural and social worlds from the origins of the universe to present levels of global integration. Fourth, various macro-sociological approaches including, most influentially, Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power: From the Beginning to 1760AD* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). Accounts of long-term trajectories in process sociology bridge the last two categories by seeking to integrate studies of biological and cultural evolution.
- 15 Again, at least four approaches exist. First, the analysis of the 'pendulum effect' (the rise and fall of international monopolies of power) from the Sumerian city-state system to the current era, as set out in Adam Watson, *The Evolution of International Society* (London: Routledge, 1992). Second, the investigation of the shifting structures of human loyalty and their effects on political associations within the same time-span in Richard Mansbach

- and Yale Ferguson, *Politics: Authorities, Identities and Change* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1996). Third, the examination of the effects of different types of 'sector integration' on the growth of interconnectedness over the last forty millennia in Barry Buzan and Richard Little, *International Systems in World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Fourth, the focus on the interplay between modes of foreign relations and systems of production since nomadic times in Kees van der Pijl, *Nomads, Empires, States: Modes of Foreign Relations and Political Economy* (London: Pluto Press, 2007).
- 16 One of the main objections to grand narratives is that they are derivative and prone to stray too far from reliable sources of historical evidence. On that argument, world history is not necessarily without value, but it is essential to be vigilant in avoiding sweeping generalisations that are not supported by evidence, and to be alert to the danger of selecting data that validates pre-established conceptions of the overall course of development (see John Goldthorpe, 'The uses of history in sociology: reflections on some recent tendencies', *British Journal of Sociology*, 42 (2), 1991, pp. 211–30). The points are well made. Grand narratives are bound to be limited, making it essential to shuttle back and forth between the sweeping account and more specialist historical works in an unfinishable quest for accuracy. Alternative positions are not exactly inviting. Commenting on 'the retreat of sociologists into the present', Elias argued that the focus on short-term horizons has fragmented knowledge, making longer-term historical tendencies harder to understand and control. On that basis, 'higher-level synthesis' provides a counterweight to the dominant forms of intellectual fragmentation and their often overlooked political consequence of impeding the development of grand narratives that are needed if people are to control the processes that have forced them together in lengthening chains of interdependence.
  - 17 Norbert Elias, *Involvement and Detachment* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2007), p. 141.
  - 18 *Ibid.* On continuity and change in world politics, Elias (*Time*, pp. 128–9) maintained that what changes 'in the way in which people maim, kill and torture each other in the course of their power struggles' are 'the techniques used and the numbers' involved (also Elias, *Involvement*, p. 175). There is a parallel between the argument about the stabilising role of nuclear weapons in Kenneth N. Waltz, 'The spread of nuclear weapons: more may be better', Adelphi Paper 171 (1981), and the process-sociological claim that nuclear bipolarity led to the 'functional equivalent' of a monopoly of power that created the need for restraint and foresight that is rare in anarchic systems (see Godfried van Benthem van den Bergh, *The Nuclear Revolution and the End of the Cold War: Forced Restraint* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992)).
  - 19 Barry Buzan and Richard Little, 'Why International Relations has failed as an intellectual project and what to do about it', *Millennium*, 30 (1), 2001, pp. 19–39.
  - 20 Mennell, *Globalisation*.
  - 21 William H. McNeill, *Keeping Together in Time: Dance and Drill in Human History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995) stresses the importance of the biological qualities that gave the species a unique capacity for forming longer chains of interdependence. Linguistic and symbolic inventiveness made such networks possible, and gave humans an evolutionary advantage over other species that has led to their dominance of the planet (see also Elias, *Involvement*).
  - 22 Robert L. Carneiro, 'political expansion as an expression of the principle of competitive exclusion', in Ronald Cohen and Elman R. Service (eds) *Origins of the State: The Anthropology of Political Evolution* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Institutions, 1978) italics in original.
  - 23 S.K. Sanderson, *Macrosociology: An Introduction to Human Societies* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988).
  - 24 Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 268ff.
  - 25 The 'monopoly mechanism' also included the male monopolisation of the instruments

- of violence. Destructive masculinities gained the historical initiative as a result of the tensions between 'tributary states' and nomadic societies that shaped world history for around five millennia prior to the rise of modern capitalism. On those tensions, see L.S. Stavrianos, *Lifelines from Our Past: A New World History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1990), p. 185, and McNeill, *World History*, pp. 84ff.
- 26 See also Elias, *Civilizing Process*, pp. 218ff.
  - 27 Justin Rosenberg, *The Empire of Civil Society: A Critique of the Realist Theory of International Relations* (London: Verso, 1994).
  - 28 Philip D. Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) and McNeill (1995).
  - 29 Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism: Fifteenth to Eighteenth Century* (London: William Collins, 1982), pp. 555ff.
  - 30 Mann, *Sources*.
  - 31 Sherratt, *Revival*, p. 15.
  - 32 Elias, *Civilizing Process*, pp. 379ff. and Thomas Scheff, *Bloody Revenge: Emotions, Nationalism and War* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994).
  - 33 Elias, *Civilizing Process*, pp. 406ff.
  - 34 See Elias, *Civilizing Process*, part 3, section 1 on how feudalisation prevented the centralisation of political power in early modern Europe and elsewhere.
  - 35 Elias, *Time*, pp. 146ff.
  - 36 The study of the civilising process was designed to explain how, particularly between the fifteenth and twentieth centuries, Europeans came to regard themselves as highly civilised. It was not an endorsement of European self-images. Elias maintained that all societies have civilising processes in the sense of arrangements that are designed to control the capacity to kill, injure and in other ways harm members of the in-group. See Norbert Elias, *The Germans* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1996), p. 31.
  - 37 Elias, *The Germans*, pp. 154ff.
  - 38 David Deudney, 'Regrounding realism: anarchy, security and changing material contexts', *Security Studies*, 10 (1), 2000, pp. 1–45.
  - 39 Norbert Elias, *The Symbol Theory* (London: Sage, 1991), p. 203.
  - 40 Andrew Linklater, 'Torture and civilization', *International Relations*, 24 (4), 2007, pp. 119–30.
  - 41 Stephen Mennell, *The American Civilizing Process* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).
  - 42 Elias (2000: 314) argued that the lengthening of the chains of interdependence within modern European states created the impetus for enlarging the regulative scope of centralised institutions. Exactly the same pressures exist in world politics today, but with the difference that emotional ties to nation-states continue to lag behind advances in interconnectedness with potentially disastrous consequences as far as coping with climate change is concerned.
  - 43 John Boli and G. Thomas (eds), *Constructing World Culture: International Non-Governmental Organisations since 1875* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).
  - 44 Andrew Linklater, *Critical Theory and World Politics: Citizenship, Sovereignty and Humanity* (London: Routledge, 2007), introduction.
  - 45 Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928) accounted for the long-term development of a Hellenic civilising process that had pacified territories and outlawed piracy as part of a wider project of restraining inter-city violence. However, the rise of urban monopolies of power that could project power well beyond their borders led to wars of unprecedented destructiveness. As a result of the influence of Kant and Marx, cosmopolitan variants on the idea of the ambiguities of human interconnectedness have proliferated since the Enlightenment.
  - 46 Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysical Principles of Virtue* (New York: Bobbs-Merill 1965), p. 126, and 'Perpetual peace', in M. Forsyth, H.M.A. Keens-Soper and P. Savigear (eds), *The Theory of International Relations: Selected Texts from Gentili to Treitschke* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1970), pp. 215–16.
  - 47 Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs and Steel: A Short History of Everybody for the Last 13000*

- Years* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1997) and *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Survive* (London: Allen & Unwin, 2005).
- 48 A longer account of the emergence of a global harm narrative with cosmopolitan potentials would need to stress the impact of earlier concerns about the possible effects of nuclear war on human society and the biosphere.
- 49 Michel Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment?' in P. Rabinow (ed.) *The Foucault Reader* (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1986).
- 50 Ruth Macklin, 'Moral progress', *Ethics* 87 (4), 1977, pp. 370–82, and Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
- 51 Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (London: Sage, 1992) and Hans Jonas, *Mortality and Morality: A Search for the Good after Auschwitz* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1996).
- 52 Immanuel Kant, 'Perpetual peace', in Forsyth, Keens-Soper and Savigear, *Theory of International Relations*.
- 53 Immanuel Kant, 'Idea for a universal history with a cosmopolitan purpose', in H.S. Reiss (ed.), *Kant: Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 42.
- 54 William H. McNeill, *Mythistory and other Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 16.
- 55 Kant, *Universal History*, p 191.
- 56 Kant, 'Perpetual peace', p. 206.
- 57 Linklater, *Critical Theory*, part three.
- 58 For further discussion, see my 'Citizenship, humanity and cosmopolitan harm conventions', *International Political Science Review*, 22 (3), 2001, pp. 261–77.
- 59 Just as Kant stressed the importance of benevolence as well as avoiding harm, recent Kantians defend 'positive' duties to ensure that the vulnerable have rights of representation in decision-making processes that affect them adversely (in addition to 'negative' obligations to avoid causing injury).
- 60 Tocqueville, quoted in Bruce Mazlish, *The New Science: The Breakdown of Connections and the Birth of Sociology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).
- 61 Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982), pp. 136–37.
- 62 Kant, *Metaphysical Principles*.
- 63 I am grateful to Johan Goudsblom for this point.
- 64 Grace Clement, *Care, Autonomy and Justice: Feminism and the Ethic of Care* (London: Westview Press, 1996).
- 65 Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1999).
- 66 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Nuclear Weapons*; van den Bergh, *Nuclear Revolution*; and Hedley Bull and Adam Watson (eds) *The Expansion of International Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).
- 67 Linklater, *Critical Theory*, introduction.
- 68 David Wilkinson, 'Civilizations, world systems and hegemonies', in R.A. Denemark, J. Friedman, B.K. Gills and G. Modelski (eds), *World System Theory: the Social Science of Long-Term Change* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 60.
- 69 Elias, *Involvement*, p. 128.
- 70 Elias, *Symbol Theory*, p. 146.

## **PART VI**

# Conclusion



# 19

## INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

### The inconvenient truth

*Ken Booth*

When, towards the end of the last century, many students of International Politics stopped believing in realism, a number came to think that they could believe in anything. As a result, theoretical pluralism – something surely to be welcomed, in order to keep us all honest – was gained at the expense, oft-times, of scholarly engagement with both the established great thinkers in our discipline and the great issues of peace and war being played out in the arena of world politics: the daily and historic drama of who gets what, when, and how across the globe.

#### **Theory, the discipline, and Waltz**

Against this background of IR's notably indisciplined (inter)discipline through the past twenty years, I identified three themes in Chapter 1: an appreciation of Kenneth N. Waltz as a truly indispensable theorist in the study of International Politics; an understanding of structural realism as a powerful picture of the international system with which, or against which, any serious student must engage; and the claim that realism (in its different guises) is not enough for those wanting to make sense of world politics.

The need for a continuing and thoughtful engagement with realism was explained in Chapter 1 in relation to the critical academic duty of holding up a mirror to contemporary realities. This means, above all, exposing the ideas that have made us – that have constructed and continue to sustain the structures of a world that does not work for countless millions of people, and is inhospitable to the natural environment on which all ultimately depend. The double anniversary for Waltz's classic books presents an opportune moment to examine aspects of the particular version of realism which he developed, and at the same time consider realism in general, as human society comes face-to-face this century with the costs of its traditional ideas about living globally.



In this concluding chapter I want to make two strong claims: first, I will suggest that Waltz's theorising in international politics can be compared in interesting ways with that of Charles Darwin in Biology; and second, I will argue that *the international* represents a distinctive level of *world* politics that has been badly – indeed dangerously – neglected in the anything-goes theorising of recent years. These claims are a call to action on the part of two groups in particular: to critical theorists of all stripes it is a call to level with Waltz, by recognising the salience of the agenda his theorising insists upon; and to all those working in relevant parts of the Social Sciences and Humanities, it is a call to level with International Politics as a branch of learning. I will begin with the Darwin claim.

The year 2009 was not only a double anniversary for Waltz's classic books; it was also a double anniversary for one of the world's greatest scientists, Charles Darwin. In that year we celebrated the 200th anniversary of Darwin's birth, and the 150th anniversary of the publication of *On the Origin of Species*. Darwin and Waltz, I contend, have each contributed to the rethinking of our basic metaphysics, though of course with less than universal acceptance. Their theories, when first elaborated, provided original pictures of how the world works, and explicitly about aspects of human survival.

Readers will recall from earlier chapters (especially that of Ole Wæver) that Waltz conceives theory as picture-making: early in *Theory of International Politics* he wrote, 'A theory is a picture, mentally formed, of a bounded realm or dominant activity.'<sup>1</sup> I will use this idea to suggest four areas of comparison between the work of Waltz and Darwin.<sup>2</sup>

### ***Pictures of species and systems***

The evolutionary biologist Theodosius Dobzhansky 'famously remarked', according to John Dupré, 'that nothing in biology makes sense apart from the theory of evolution'.<sup>3</sup> Dupré, a philosopher of science, then added an important rider – a vital addition to this fundamental proposition – to the effect that 'much in biology, especially human biology, needs a good deal more than evolution if it is to make sense'.<sup>4</sup> Together, Dobzhansky's proposition and Dupré's rider offer a sound perspective on how to think about Darwin's main ideas. Such a perspective is directly applicable to Waltz: *Nothing in international politics makes sense apart from the theory of structural realism, but much in international politics, especially world politics, needs a good deal more than structural realism if it is to make sense*. Let me begin to justify this proposition with a real picture.

Immediately to the north of the coastal town where I live, and jutting into the sea, stands Constitution Hill. From its top, looking downwards and to the south, it is possible to take in a live panorama of Dobzhansky's proposition. The view from the hill is the picture Darwin gave us of all species having a common animal ancestry. It is a panorama of humans acting in groups like other animals. Humans along the beach are individually unrecognisable, but one can make out a general pattern of (largely) couples and family groups. From this level, it is clear what is doing the

work. Human biology begins with the fact that species members have stomachs and genitals; they have to eat to survive (individually) and they survive (as a species) through sex. Survival is the instinct, and sexual reproduction is the modality. So much can be read into the panorama from the hilltop. But if what is happening on the beach is to ‘make sense’ we need ‘a good deal more’.

Back at the beach level, it is possible to distinguish actual persons as opposed simply to humans. But to make sense of what is going on at this level we need to understand much more than features shared with other animals. We need to know why some couples and family groups are speaking Welsh, others English, and yet others Portuguese: why are there so many different types of linguistic communication among the same species in such a small area? And what might explain why these actual people have different types of clothes, and display different degrees of personal affection? To make sense of what is happening at the beach level we need to know more than natural selection. We need to understand cultural norms, patterns of colonisation and globalisation, economic factors – as well as idiosyncratic variables such as the health of the people on the beach (their ability to clamber down steep steps) and their inclination to play. And this is just a start, for what can be seen on one afternoon is merely a holiday snapshot in the archive of human anthropology. To know ‘a good deal more’ about what we take to be today’s realities, we also need to know about the area’s political, economic, and social history. The picture from the hill therefore reveals ‘a few big and important things’ (to use Waltzian terminology) related to human evolution, but a ‘good deal more’ (to use Dupré’s words) is needed to make overall sense of it all.

Darwin and Waltz are big-picture theorists. Darwin of course worked on the largest canvas imaginable, seeking to explain the origin of species. Waltz has sought to explain one aspect of that panorama, the dynamics of the international system in which certain units of human group survival have interacted. Big pictures can be powerful, but they are unlikely to deliver as much detail as some observers demand. Dupré commented on this in relation to Darwin: ‘Many scientists’, he wrote, ‘rightly impressed by one of the most significant advances ever made in our understanding of the world we live in, try to get more out of Darwin’s theory than it can provide.’<sup>15</sup> He went on:

Evolution can’t give us detailed explanations for the countless features of organisms. One important reason for this is that these features are truly countless: there is no limit to the number of features we can distinguish because in nature organisms are unified wholes. There is no history of the giraffe’s neck or the elephant’s trunk independent of the history of the giraffe or the elephant. Sometimes it is useful to use models that abstract a tiny part of this totality, but we must always remember that these are only models, and that they only tell a partially true part of the truth.

As with Darwin, so with Waltz. By analogy, a ‘few big and important things’ are revealed by Waltz’s panoramic (view from the hill) picture of international politics

based on the interplay of anarchy, the statist survival ‘instinct’, and power distribution, but a ‘good deal more’ is needed if world politics is to make sense in relation to helping our fullest possible understanding of who gets what, when, and how across the globe.

As was explained in Chapter 1, some scholars, impressed by structural realism as the state system’s big picture, have wanted to get more out of it than it could provide (hence their addiction to additives to the theory). They should have known better, it was pointed out, given Waltz’s insistence that he was offering a *systemic* theory of international politics, not a *unit-level* theory of foreign policy. Remembering the different perspectives from the top and bottom of Constitution Hill, then, we could say that Waltzian realism does not seek to explain *both* the prevalence of couples and families on the beach, *and* the fact that some may be speaking Portuguese and hugging. The latter needs a reductionist theory; it cannot be explained by the big picture from the hill. ‘I essayed an international–political theory and not a domestic one’, Waltz has written in his defence: ‘Students of international politics will do well to concentrate on separate theories of internal and external politics until someone figures out a way to unite them.’<sup>6</sup>

Waltz’s theory therefore does not tell us all we want to know about international politics, nor did he intend it to; nor did he claim it to be timeless (‘A theory applies only so long as the conditions it contemplates endure in their essentials’).<sup>7</sup> In other words, his theorising has not been that of a structural determinist, but Waltz has remained impressed by the ‘causal weight’ of structure and the longevity of the theory’s usefulness. But structure cannot provide a determinist explanation of why France and Germany were at peace in 1910 yet at war in 1914 – or why they established the European Coal and Steel Community in 1950. Waltz’s general position is clear: ‘Theory, as a general explanatory system, cannot account for particularities’.<sup>8</sup> Systemic theory can offer some pointers to reductionist explanations (by identifying permissive factors and generally successful policies) but the relevant French and German decision-makers could have made different choices to the ones they actually made or the ones different types of realists might have recommended.<sup>9</sup> A full account of what happened in 1910, 1914, and 1950 requires unit-level explanations in the context of the anarchical state system, but Waltzian realism does not attempt to provide this, any more than Darwinian evolutionary theory offers a developmental history of the world.

So, just as there is no history of the elephant’s trunk independent of the history of the elephant, there can be no history of French and German foreign policy decisions independent of the histories of France and Germany, and no history of France and Germany independent of the history of the state system; and, one must add, there can be no history of the state system independent of the history of world politics.

### *Pictures normatively informed*

In one of the most quoted and controversial lines in the discipline, Robert Cox in the early 1980s wrote that ‘theory is always *for* someone and *for* some purpose’.<sup>10</sup> He was able to capture, in a few words, the epistemological claim of critical theory that knowledge is socially situated, historically produced, and normatively pregnant (whether intended or not). Coxian theory here combined with the traditions of Gramscian and Frankfurt School thinking to challenge hubristic social science claims about ‘objectivity’ and ‘neutrality’ in the study of human society. Cox also made the distinction (discussed in Chapter 1) between ‘problem-solving’ and ‘critical theory’ – a ‘nice distinction’ in Waltz’s view, it may be recalled. For critical theorists, interested in meta-problem-solving (seeking to transcend the problems *in* the status quo by dealing with the problems *of* the status quo) theory is *for* the potential community of humankind and *for* the purpose of emancipation.<sup>11</sup>

A standard assault against critical theorists by traditional social scientists, pregnant as they are with normativity, is that they are misguided; the claim is that the academic goal must be to seek objectivity in the study of humans, eschewing work of a ‘political’ or ‘normative’ character. Critical theory is seen from this traditional viewpoint to be rejection of theorising in ‘purely academic terms’, which in turn leaves ‘no neutral way to decide which theory is the best’.<sup>12</sup> In reply, critical theorists counter that while scholarship in any discipline requires the pursuit of certain academic norms (logical argument, concern for concepts, respect for evidence, the achievement of some critical distance from whatever is being analysed, etc.) these norms must also include some recognition that when humans study humans there can be no ‘purely academic terms’ nor ‘neutral’ standpoints. Observer and observed do not live in a value-free environment. There is no real outside where the observer can stand. Neutral ground does not exist. History cannot be escaped. ‘Truth is born of the times’.<sup>13</sup>

As much as Darwin may have thought differently when he studied worms and vegetable mould, his thoughts were shaped by more than purely scientific terms. We now understand Darwin much more as a person than simply as a remarkable scientist; and this includes interpretations of the science being normatively embedded. According to Adrian Desmond and James Moore, ‘Darwin’s *human* project . . . is foundational, and without understanding it, we cannot understand why Darwin came to evolution at all.’<sup>14</sup> This argument is that Darwin’s revolutionary theory was inseparable from his ‘Sacred Cause’: his commitment to the abolition of slavery. And the theory he developed opened up not only recognition of the equality of the ‘races’, but even more importantly, it showed that we – the *global-we* of humankind – share common roots. It is difficult to imagine that Darwin’s picture of the ‘unity of humankind’, all descended from common organisms, could have been ‘mentally formed’ by a Nazi biologist, raised in a racist family embedded in a society infused by ideas of racial superiority. Our pictures of the social world do not come from nowhere, as ‘neutral’ observations, the creations of ‘purely academic’ spirit. Our pictures are ‘mentally formed’ by social situation, by historical

moment, by normative impulses, and – yes – by individual genius and hard work. Darwin's biologising, whether he recognised it fully or not, was *for* someone and *for* some purpose – though ultimately the uses to which his theory were sometimes put were not under his control, and would not have been to his liking.

Attempting to rescue Darwin from one particular negative reputation, that of being the ('Social Darwinian') theorist of 'dog eat dog', George Levine has argued that Darwin's theorising, above all, can 'put us in touch with the possibility of the blending of reason and feeling, the potential humanity of science and [it] can put us in touch as well with the wonders of the ordinary movements of nature'.<sup>15</sup> Through Darwin, Levine finds inspiration in 'the value of the natural world and the human striving to understand it'. Levine believes that Darwin created 'a sublime of the ordinary that evoked awe and wonder and a sense of mystery', through his language, his 'imaginative sympathy', and his humility.<sup>16</sup> And here he was not discussing Darwin and humans, but Darwin and 'barnacles, sea-slugs, ants, worms and vegetable mould'. What then, in this respect, was the 'some purpose' that Darwin's theory was *for*? To Levine, it was to provide the resources for 'an enchanted secularism – a commitment to the value of the natural world and the human striving to understand it'. Despite Darwin's 'quite touching efforts to remain the dispassionate observer', in Levine's opinion he could not divorce himself from his passion for 'the creatures whose history he was trying to understand'.<sup>17</sup> For Darwin, even though he was not aware of it, science embraced the political (his 'Sacred Cause') and the natural (the 'sublime of the ordinary').

Turning to the international, Cynthia Enloe's influential observations for feminist theorising at the end of the 1980s come to mind: 'the personal is international' and '*the international is personal*'.<sup>18</sup> This way of thinking resonates with Cox's earlier point about the normative interests of theory. Are we now then ready to contemplate a normative Waltz? Is Waltzian theorising about international politics *for* someone and *for* some purpose? The image of Waltz as a positivist social scientist continues to dominate the discipline, but several earlier chapters detected in Waltz's work more than a suggestion of the interplay of the personal and the international.<sup>19</sup>

Michael Foley's account of the political context in which Waltz wrote *Man, the State and War* pointed to the significance of the 'misgivings' in US society at the time of the Cold War's 'emergent dynamics', and in particular the crisis in liberalism. In the book that emerged, Foley claims, Waltz offered ideas that 'implicitly addressed' the issue of US engagement in the new bipolar international system, and in ways that helped assuage the US 'liberal predicament'. Michael Williams' account also interpreted Waltz's writing from the 1950s through to the 1970s as engaging with ongoing political issues in ways that have invariably been unappreciated by students of IR. For Williams, Waltz's work can be understood in part as a contribution to a 'highly charged' debate in the United States about democracy and foreign policy, the fate of modern societies, the future of Western civilisation, and the survival of liberal democracy. He consequently interpreted Waltz's classic books, together with his lesser known *Democracy and Foreign Policy* (published in 1967), as a 'triptych defending democratic foreign policy-making' and working through a

structural theory that did not, in effect, ignore domestic politics, but constructed a framework in which 'a relatively comfortable domestic liberalism could coexist with an international realism'. In these two interpretations, Waltz's normative drive was related to helping democracy and liberalism in the United States. For John Mearsheimer, what came to be called Waltz's 'defensive realism' embodies a normative drive against war. In his chapter he declared that he found no evidence of Waltz 'endorsing the initiation of any past war', and concluded that Waltz (like Adam Smith) 'opted' to develop a normative theory; that is, a theory 'not designed to explain how the world worked in his day, but instead was prescribing a smarter way for states to do business with each other, and ultimately make a better world'. The discussion of Waltz's argument that more nuclear weapons 'may be better' (see the chapters by Daniel Deudney and Nicholas Wheeler) can be understood as extensions of that point. Embracing military technology that promotes confidence in war being 'impossible' between states that possess it appears to be more important for Waltz than the purity of his long-held view about the warlike permissiveness of anarchy.

When we think of Darwin's work, we think of a life of intense observation and the theory of evolution. The emancipation of slaves, enchantment, and love of the world's differences have not traditionally been at the forefront of our thoughts. Likewise, when we think of Waltz's work, we think of social science rigour and the theory of structural realism; again, the saving of liberalism, honouring democracy, and the elimination of war have not traditionally been at the forefront of our thoughts. In each case, behind the mask of scientific intentions, as critical theory has long claimed, we are always likely to find theorists activated (even if they do not appreciate it themselves) by normative motivations. In Chapter 1 it was suggested that leading figures in IR classical realism (notably Carr, Morgenthau, and Herz), sought to escape from the dogmas of realism in the age of total war and totalitarianism by exploring 'utopian realist' reforms. In comparison, Waltz has been more consistent in his realism, by not looking beyond its tool-box; he has concentrated on the modalities of the balance of power, the idea of order based on fear.

This picture of a normative Waltz suggests a radically different understanding of his work than has been projected by both his social science supporters and various critics. Particularly prominent among the latter was Richard Ashley, with his attack on the 'poverty of neorealism':<sup>20</sup>

What emerges is a positivist structuralism that treats the given order as the natural order, limits rather than expands political discourse, negates or trivializes the significance of variety across time and place, subordinates all practice to an interest in control, bows to the ideal of a social power beyond responsibility, and thereby deprives political interaction of those practical capacities which make social learning and creative change possible. What emerges is an ideology that anticipates, legitimizes, and orients a totalitarian project of global proportions: the rationalization of global politics.

Such descriptions might fit some versions of 'neorealism', pumped up with rational choice certitude, but they do not capture the richness of Waltz's own theorising, with its nuance, sophistication, and acceptance of explanatory limitations. He has been open-minded about the possible variety of unit-level behaviour; and has not sought to limit political discourse if one takes seriously the idea that his theory is interested in democracy, liberalism, and the avoidance of war. If critical theorists are to hold up a mirror to contemporary realities, including powerful ideas, it is best if the mirror does not distort.

To see theory in human society as normatively pregnant does not imply, as the proponents of objectivity insist, that a theorist thereby ceases to be 'academic'. The critical theory position is that there is a spectrum: at one end is the chimera of being objective, and at the other the possibility of being 'political' in a narrow partisan sense. Through 'critical distance', the theorist seeks to move far from the latter but without ever being able to reach the former. Being academic requires self-awareness, but theorists are as susceptible to false consciousness as the next person; and in this regard the least objective are those who believe they are. What is more, theories once made public do not exist in a politics-free zone. Once unveiled, a theory may be interpreted quite differently from the intentions of its creator. In this sense, theorists cannot be held responsible for what others make of their ideas. When their words go into print, control is lost. Darwin cannot therefore be called to account for the excesses of the 'survival of the fittest' prejudices of 'Social Darwinianism' (the popular idea giving a pseudo-biological justification for Great Power rivalry, imperialism, and elements of Naziism). Likewise, Waltz cannot be called to account for what some have seen as the 'poverty of neorealism' or structural determinism. To counter negative stereotypes of Darwin some years ago, a bumper-sticker was made saying 'Darwin Loves You'.<sup>21</sup> If students of International Politics move from the impoverished image of Waltz as a structural determinist to that of a theorist motivated by democracy, liberalism, and opposition to war, can it be long before we see a similar bumper-sticker in his name?

### *Pictures of continuity and change*

An old adage has it that 'change is the only evidence of life'. But what constitutes a change? When do a few bricks thrown on top of each other *change* into a pile? When does a succession of small physical adaptations *change* an animal into a new species? When does one type of international system *change* into a different one? For Darwin, '*Natura non facit saltum*' ('Nature does not make a leap').<sup>22</sup> In contemplating the continuities of international history, Waltz would broadly agree, believing in the 'perennial forces of politics'.<sup>23</sup>

Issues of continuity and change are at the heart of the major theoretical works of both Darwin and Waltz. Darwin taught us to think about physical change in the human species in the context of millennia, whereas Waltz emphasised continuity in international politics in the context of centuries. Darwin asked his (Christian) contemporaries to revise their beliefs about the essential continuity of human (and

other) species ever since they were created by God. Waltz asks students of International Politics to revise their tendency to exaggerate change. Adaptation for Darwin promoted diversity: adaptation for Waltz promoted 'like units'. Darwin's work offers a lesson in how ideas can change reality: Waltz's work is a warning that reality cages ideas.

Natural selection for Darwin, and state survival for Waltz, invite us to historicise our pictures of the development of both the species and the state system if we want to know more. Such an approach is basic in Cultural Anthropology. As one of its leading proponents, Michael Carrithers, has emphasised, humans are 'animals with history'.<sup>24</sup> The history of human sociality – the 'capacity for complex social behaviour' – offers evidence in human affairs, as certain as fossil evidence, that radical change has taken place in human society. Before Darwin the world appeared timeless and unchanging; but this appearance was only the result of a set of dominant ideas. His theory offered better ones, and so changed the appearance – at least for many people. (One day, of course, the theory of evolution may itself be superseded.) Ideas have always changed human realities, as certainly as physical evolution has changed human bodies.

Through time, incrementally, ideas and their structures have interacted and constructed the phenomenon we today understand as 'international politics'. Human agency includes the ability over social time to reorder global realities by changing our common sense about global realities. We can intervene to bring about change in politics more easily than in evolution, but neither is easy, though both are certain. Looking to the future, we can no more guess when 'international politics' as now understood will become extinct or be replaced than we can we guess what evolution will do to us. We only know that the latter is not at an end and is unpredictable over hundreds, never mind millions, of years. Such is particularly now the case in the context of developments in biotechnology and genetic research – when we 'play God' as it is sometimes put, by intruding ever more into biological evolution. Important questions confront the idea of natural selection in a species that can increasingly control its fertility and health: 'Has cultural evolution replaced biological evolution?' is the most important.<sup>25</sup> IR must be considered a part of that cultural evolution, and as such will have a role, remotely and more directly, in human biological evolution.

To the extent that dominant ideas about International Relations contribute to the collective consciousness about living globally – and I do not want to exaggerate the direct impact of academic work in the corridors of power – it is imperative to understand influential theories such as structural realism. If the structure of anarchy, the survival of states, and the distribution of capabilities have persistent causal weight in shaping who gets what, when, and how across the globe, then they must remain central to the agenda of all students of IR. But that engagement must be informed by the meta-theoretical understanding that anarchy, states, and capabilities are ideas, and that ideas can change radically; we can give different meanings to international anarchy,<sup>26</sup> just as many gave a radically different meaning to the phrase 'the origin of species' after 1859. Cultural Anthropology shows, across space and time, that 'We



Have Worlds Inside Us'.<sup>27</sup> Looking back, humans are relative newcomers in the history of the planet; looking forward, we presumably must share the fate of every species over the longest run by becoming extinct or being replaced.<sup>28</sup> How the human collective conceives international politics, as one of the expressions of how we live globally, will have a part in how that story eventually plays out.

### *Pictures diagrammatically expressed*

Darwin theorised in pictures. It is difficult to think, anywhere, of a more powerful theory-as-picture to compare with Darwin's tree-of-life image, with the words 'I think' written just above it. Desmond and Moore commented as follows on the drawing:

Given his heritage of anti-slavery and human brotherhood, and his shock at seeing slavery in the raw during the *Beagle* voyage, it is no surprise that Darwin, on arriving home, used the human genealogical image to model the 'common descent' of all life.<sup>29</sup>

The tree-of-life diagram was already 'firmly lodged in his mind' by the time of his first evolution notebook (July 1837). This diagram has proved to be a remarkable theory-as-picture, representing a family tree of the actual if not actualised brotherhood of all living things.

Waltz too thinks in pictures, though he has not written books with diagrams. *Man, the State and War* was famously organised around three 'images'. These became (usually renamed 'levels of analysis') a notably influential picture of reality for subsequent International Relations theory. This leads to my final set of arguments.

### **Levelling with the international**

The level-of-analysis image in International Politics is the idea that we can conceive different sites of explanation, where we ask good questions and find plausible answers. The upper level is the 'system', and below it are various 'unit' levels (such as states or individuals). A key response to Waltz's original 'images' in *Man, the State and War* was J. David Singer's seminal 1960 review of the book, followed by an influential article a year later.<sup>30</sup> The level-of-analysis framework became part of the language of international politics. For some it became difficult to think of the field apart from some notion of 'levels', though for others it has remained contentious.<sup>31</sup>

The disagreements about level-of-analysis thinking have taken various forms: over what is a 'level'; over the number of relevant levels in international politics; over the most influential level for explaining particular phenomena; and over the separateness of the levels and how they fit together. Some reject thinking in these terms at all, though other branches of the Social Sciences – Sociology and Economics – have found such frameworks helpful. Used carefully, the framework

can be an insightful way of approaching problems, focusing questions, introducing structural explanations, and sorting out complex answers. It can open eyes. Over the years, before tackling Waltz in the seminar room, I have found it interesting to ask students: 'How do you explain your presence on this course this morning?' Invariably, answers are at the individual student level: 'I am here because I was interested in this course'. Most are then surprised by how much more complex it becomes when one starts setting such voluntaristic (agential) explanations within causal (structural) explanations in terms of departmental timetables, faculty standard operating systems, parental background/class structure, national educational priorities, gender, and so on. One can then add the international level and a historical developmental model, showing that if they (at least the young men in the class) had been born in a different era, then as 19-year-olds they may well have been conscripted to fight wars rather than cajoled into read *Man, the State and War*.

In that book, Waltz influentially identified three distinct sites (images/levels) of theorising about 'the major causes of war'.<sup>32</sup> While locating the 'nexus of important causes . . . within man, within the structure of the separate states, [and] within the state system', he importantly emphasised the 'bewildering . . . variety' and 'contradictory qualities' of the various explanations of the causes of war. By the time he published *Theory of International Politics*, Waltz had moved beyond the causes of war to a 'systemic' theory, emphasising the causal power of the anarchical structure of the international system. He now collapsed his earlier 'man' and 'states' levels into one, and called such unit-level explanations 'reductionist'; he warned about the variety and contradictory character of theories; he drew attention to the difficulty of keeping 'the levels of a system consistently distinct and separate'; he often reminded readers that his picture of a bounded international realm was never as rigid as it has invariably been portrayed; and he pointed to the different 'causal weights' of unit- and system-levels in different systems.<sup>33</sup> His work has often been much less dogmatic than his critics have claimed, but he has never ceased to emphasise the causal power of the international. In a key passage in *Theory of International Politics* he emphasised the causal weight of the international as follows:

In the history of international relations . . . results achieved seldom correspond to the intentions of actors. Why are they repeatedly thwarted? The apparent answer is that causes not found in their *individual* characters and motives do operate among the actors collectively . . . the situation in which they act and interact constrains them from some actions, disposes them towards others, and affects the outcomes of their interactions.<sup>34</sup>

In the same spirit, in calling this final section 'levelling with the international', I mean very much more than reaffirming the value of a level of analysis framework to thinking about some of the things that puzzle us. We need to *level* with the international – being *frank* about the world by being *realistic* about international politics – because human society faces a global crisis.<sup>35</sup> In academic practice, *levelling with the international* involves recognising International Politics as *the inconvenient truth*

in the Social Sciences, according International Politics *an architectonic role*, and reviving *grand international theorising* for history's 'Great Reckoning'.

### **1. Recognising International Politics as the inconvenient truth in the Social Sciences**

The term 'inconvenient truth', used in the title of this chapter, is of course a deliberate borrowing of the title of Al Gore's popular book on climate change. The former Vice-President of the United States, a missionary of environmentalism, published *An Inconvenient Truth: The Planetary Emergency of Global Warming and What We can Do about It* <sup>36</sup> just at the time when recognition of global warming was becoming almost everybody's common sense. However, *the* inconvenient truth about *The Planetary Emergency* – ignored in the book – is no longer ignorance about the human impact on the climate, but rather the enormous obstacles to changing collective human behaviour as a result of the structures and dynamics of actually existing international politics and global capitalism. Here I want only to highlight international politics.

The dynamics and structures of international politics are the inconvenient truth of world politics because they confront political and social theorists and theory with their hardest test. Perhaps this is why only a relatively small number of political and social theorists have ventured into the 'international'. Movement in a 'resistant medium' was how Karl von Clausewitz described war; the phrase perfectly captures the challenge of transferring ideas from the domestic to the international level. It is difficult enough to develop ethical systems, social models, and theories for political change in the context of domestic politics, settled communities, and national cultures: it is radically more difficult to take such ideas to the next – international – level and make headway. Similarly, basic notions in politics such as citizenship, democracy and order can provoke controversy in relation to a specific polity: but how much more difficult is it once one prefaces them with adjectives beyond borders: *world* citizenship, *cosmopolitan* democracy and *universal* order? When it comes to spreading good ideas, international politics offers the level of maximum resistance: here are focused the dynamics of a multi-national, multi-cultural, multi-religious, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-class, multi-racial, unevenly endowed, unevenly developed world, all organised (or disorganised) in the form of multi-state international anarchy.

'International politics' is the hardest test for political theory. This is the problem, not any shortage of theories. Changing the realities of world politics by changing the ideas that made us would be so much simpler without the games of nations that have been learned through history. Any number of illustrations of the drag of the resistant medium are possible. Most people declare their intention to be 'green' these days, but the Copenhagen summit in 2009 ended in failure. Most people profess to want to prevent nuclear weapons proliferation, but the five-yearly Review Conferences of the Non-Proliferation Treaty have become sites where collective interests hit the buffers of national priorities. All claim to want to reduce global

poverty, but relevant UN and NGO bodies remain underfunded, so that any progress is slow and haphazard. And so it goes. Change is possible in world affairs, even progressive change, but the international level must always have its say.

Waltz has often been criticised for his commitment to his picture of this anarchic international level as ‘enduring’, but enduring is not synonymous with ‘for all time’. While emphasising the causal weight of the international system, he has shown some openness to the idea that anarchy can have different meanings. He wrote in 1986 that ‘states affect the system’s structure even as it affects them’,<sup>37</sup> and his belief in order based on bipolarity (‘A system of two has many virtues’)<sup>38</sup> is testimony to an assumption that anarchy is what the distribution of state capabilities makes it. Such hints of anarchical variety are invariably contrasted sharply with the developed notion of ‘cultures of anarchy’ associated with the distinctive constructivist position of Alexander Wendt,<sup>39</sup> but the differences may not be as wide as they seem. Few in either camp would disagree with the proposition that multiple causes operate at every level, and that different combinations of factors have different weight on different issues. Disagreements are about emphasis not principle, and my guess is that they derive, ultimately, not from thinking theory but from living life.

In the ‘Great Reckoning’ we face this century, the ideas informing the international level are obsolete; future challenges are unlikely to be overcome by the ideas that helped bring human society to this situation in the first place. This is why those who claim to have anything to say about who gets what, when, and how must level with the international. To try to escape into a ‘World Politics’/‘Global Politics’ approach that shows any disdain for ‘IR’ is to opt out of dealing with one of the world’s inconvenient truths. Waltz understood this over three decades ago: ‘It is not possible to understand world politics simply by looking inside of states . . . We can say what we see, but we cannot know what it may mean.’<sup>40</sup> That meaning, deriving from the international level, resists change. He wrote: ‘The texture of international politics remains highly constant, patterns recur, and events repeat themselves endlessly . . . The enduring anarchic character of international politics accounts for the striking sameness in the quality of international life through the millennia.’<sup>41</sup> The hardest test for all political and social theory is also one of the most long-lasting.

## ***2. According International Politics an architectonic role in the Social Sciences***

This book has been premised on the view that one cannot believe in just anything when it comes to theorising international politics. In the first chapter I emphasised that a good foundation for learning and teaching is a thorough understanding of the classic literature. This has been part of the justification for celebrating Waltz’s work, while simultaneously thinking that one needs to know much more than structural realism in order to make sense of the world.

Levelling with Waltz is part of levelling with the international, but International Politics as a discipline struggles in the resistant medium of the academy. Andrew

Linklater has reminded us that Stanley Hoffman many years ago proposed that the 'architectonic role that Aristotle assigned to the study of politics should be assigned to International Relations'.<sup>42</sup> (In Philosophy 'architectonic' refers to the systematization of knowledge, and more generally it means 'directive' and 'controlling'.) Linklater went on: 'This reallocation of architectonic status warrants support on the grounds that IR is the social science which is most concerned with understanding long-term processes of change that affect humanity as a whole.' I agree, but want to make the case even more strongly.

International Politics/IR deserve special architectonic recognition because they represent the branch of learning that asks the biggest questions in Politics (What is real? What can we know? How might we act?) in the biggest political arena of all. This is not to claim that the International Politics/IR discipline is necessarily in good shape, but it is to suggest that it is important that it be in better shape. Within the academy, what I am urging is greater recognition for the discipline because of the world-historical-rationality of focusing social and political theorising at the international level. At that level good ideas always bump up against an obstinate political reality that so far has, as Waltz said earlier, a 'texture' that is 'enduring'.

The standing of International Politics/IR demands reappraisal. Generally, those who call themselves political scientists tend to look down upon 'IR' (when they do not ignore it), as is evidenced by according it in their timetables the status of Public Administration or US Politics. This is a historically sanctioned organisational nonsense. Meanwhile, despite the interdisciplinary character of International Politics from the very beginning,<sup>43</sup> there is a constant refrain that ours is a 'backward discipline', and that we must 'catch up' with trends in the other Social Sciences.<sup>44</sup> The charge of backwardness is simply wrong: it is the rest of the Social Sciences that are backward and need to catch up. Until they level with the international they will have only limited things to say about human society globally. One looks in vain in the works of most leading figures in other Social Sciences for evidence that they have got inside the dynamics of the international. My claim is that political theory in the absence of an international dimension may be interesting or even important as far as it goes, but that if it only goes as far as the waterfront it is not very interesting or important in today's globalised world. The planet has shrunk, and its problems demand good ideas that have universal reach through the resistant medium. I call Kant in my defence. He recognised the limits of the inside/outside distinction, characterised by the traditional view of the inside being about the search for the good life, with the outside being about the search for survival. His view was that the search for the good life should be universal (the 'categorical imperative') and that the search for the good life within one's own boundaries could not be successful without the universal project being completed.<sup>45</sup>

In short, if we are to level with the international as scholars, we need to promote the architectonic position of International Politics. This requires the academy to recognise the unique feature of this branch of learning: it is the inconvenient truth and hardest test for political and social theories. At its grandest, the discipline has the potential to contribute something to changing global realities by changing ideas

about those realities through offering feasible alternatives about living globally, and in ways that work for greater portions of humanity.

### **3. Reviving grand international theory for the 'Great Reckoning'**

As it was in the beginning, theorists of International Politics today face a *Twenty Years' Crisis*. Realism helps us understand part of why we are where we are, historically, because it helped to constitute today's world affairs by reifying, above all, statism and its historical adjunct nationalism. These ideas have contributed to the growth of the most powerful structures through recent centuries, shaping the collective human consciousness about living globally. Humankind will not cope well with its 'Great Reckoning', however, if political outlooks remain rooted in the business-as-usual attitudes, structures, and behaviour that got us here in the first place. Yesterday's common sense can be tomorrow's irrationality. 'Blood and Belonging' still simmer in the pots of statism and nationalism, and can easily boil over in crises; they are certainly not calculated to lead common humanity through our uncommon collective challenges this century. If this proves to be the case, then the middle decades of this century are set to be a potential turning point in world history comparable to the Thirty Years' War. That period of widespread conflict and disorder tested the era of religious war to the limit, and led to a different conception of living globally. The dynamics of statism and nationalism face a similar test. How the 'Great Reckoning' plays out, and its aftermath, will depend greatly on how the most powerful agents in world politics collectively think about living globally over the next few decades.

Confronted by the existential reality of living on a smaller and more crowded planet at a time of old problems and new challenges, with the uneven distribution of basics such as food, energy and water, students of International Politics have a special responsibility in contributing to how the world thinks about the world. This calls for big-picture thinking and grand theorising: an era of question marks about our planetary future requires more than reductionism, micro-narratives, cultural relativism, anti-metanarrative metanarratives, ethnocentric worldviews, middle-range theorising, and the rest. We need a global brainstorm to think how the levels and pieces of world politics fit together, re-exploring under new conditions the relationships between units and systems, agents and structures, parsimony and holism, reductionism and systemic approaches, material and ideational considerations, international and global systems, and national and world histories.

I offer five brief pointers towards this re-exploration. First: pluralism. We cannot allow the discipline to be captured by one definition of 'science' or of 'theory': to do so would be to concede the field to whatever becomes the champion; pluralism helps sharpen everybody's thinking. Second: history. As has been suggested in this and the opening chapter, remaking world affairs begins by rethinking the ideas that made us. Three: wholes and parts. While abstracting issues for scrutiny, we must recognise that multiple causes operate at every level, with different causal weight. And we can learn from Kant about the unity of opposites, when it comes to wholes

and parts. Four: change. Theories of International Politics need a comprehensive theory of change. There may be things to learn from developmental systems theory (DST) in Biology, which seeks to integrate processes that some want to separate by rejecting the idea of evolution as ‘merely a sequence of genomes, without worrying about the messy processes that led from one genome in one generation to another in the next . . . these must be brought together’.<sup>46</sup> So, for example, ‘genocentrism’ is rejected in favour of a comprehensive explanation that would include both evolution and development. In the same way, a developmental theory of international politics requires a comprehensive picture integrating world history, Economics, and Sociology with International Politics.<sup>47</sup> Finally: reflexivity (the ‘strategic monitoring’ of our ideas). Students of International Politics – without exaggerating our influence – have a role in shaping the collective consciousness about living globally. The strategic monitoring of the discipline, and of the state of the world, cannot but lead to the conclusion that global business-as-usual will simply perpetuate a world that is not working for many fellow humans and for much of the natural world on which all depend.

I hope the contributions to this book will help in a small way to rekindle a pluralistic community of scholars with a shared sense of a world *out there* needing urgent practical help, and a world *in here* searching for better theory-building for political guidance. In Chapter 1 I argued that realism in IR has the function of being nonsense-challenging, that its various agendas must have their say, and that its ideas should be engaged with by serious students. But to recognise realism’s roles in these ways is certainly not the same as endorsing its assumptions, explanations, and prescriptions. Various chapters have revealed key elements of realism to be at the wrong end of the discipline’s great debates. In particular: realism privileges abstraction and efficiency of explanation at the cost of insights from a broader developmental perspective on world affairs; it prioritises the structure of anarchy while sidelining ‘cultures of anarchy’ and technological revolutions (notably nuclear weapons); it maintains traditional assumptions about the separateness of theory and practice, with the result that the constitutive role of theory and the normative interests of theory are overlooked; it overemphasises continuity arising from structure or human nature while downplaying change arising from ideas; and while realism is not ‘amoral’ in the sense usually implied, it does reify the ethics of statism and nationalism – ideas which are hostile to solving the problems of the global neighbourhood.

To argue that realism has been at the wrong end of key debates in IR is not the same as saying that ideas at the other end are always right. For critical theorists there is work to do, but jointly. Realism and critical theory are inseparable. The work to be done involves re-examining powerful realist ideas purporting to explain the world ‘as it is’; as well as developing ideas (such as critical theory’s ‘possible futures’) seeking to contribute to long-term human survival. The insider problem-solving perspective of realism constitutes part of critical theory’s meta-problem.

In conclusion: the disciplinary pre-eminence of realism has been that it offers a widely plausible explanation of how the international world works; its weakness is

that it does not provide us with a promising guide for navigating human society globally through the converging challenges of the decades ahead. Without knowing realism, therefore, nothing much in world politics will make much sense, but we need to know a good deal more than realism to picture more secure ways of living globally. As human society globally comes face-to-face with this century's concatenation of predictable crises, Waltz's theorising tells us with extraordinary clarity about the international constraints confronting the construction of a more harmonious world – a world *for* common humanity and *for* Nature. Structural realism does not – cannot – tell us how to construct that better world; it can only advise political elites how to practise 'the logic of anarchy' in this one. We do indeed have worlds inside us, but nobody will be able to construct a world politics where the collective good triumphs over the bad and the ugly unless they conscientiously engage with, challenge, and transcend the resistant 'texture' and inconvenient truth of international politics.

## Notes

- 1 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: Random House, 1979) p. 8.
- 2 The comparison below focuses on theorising not theories; this is not the place to discuss whether structural realism is a 'Darwinian' theory of international politics, as for example in Bradley A. Thayer, 'Bringing in Darwin: evolutionary theory, realism, and international politics', *International Security*, Vol.25 (2), 2000, pp. 124–51.
- 3 John Dupré, *Darwin's Legacy: What Evolution Means Today* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) p. 16.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 119.
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 Kenneth N. Waltz, 'Reflections on *Theory of International Politics*: A response to my critics, 1986', in Kenneth N. Waltz, *Realism and International Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2008) p. 51.
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 118.
- 9 A sustained argument showing the contingency of international history is Richard Ned Lebow, *Forbidden Fruit: Counterfactuals and International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).
- 10 Robert W. Cox, 'Social forces, states, and world orders: beyond international relations theory', *Millennium*, Vol.10 (2), 1981, pp. 126–55 (quotation at p. 128).
- 11 I have tried to explain this at length in Ken Booth, *Theory of World Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
- 12 This particular criticism is by Robert Jackson and Georg Sørensen, *Introduction to International Relations: Theories and Approaches* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Fourth edition, 2010) p. 288.
- 13 The phrase was given by Bertolt Brecht to Galileo in *Life of Galileo*, ed. John Willett and Ralph Manheim (London: Methuen, 2001) p. 42.
- 14 Adrian Desmond and James Moore in *Darwin's Sacred Cause: Race, Slavery and the Quest for Human Origins* (London: Penguin Books, 2010) p. xvii.
- 15 George Levine, *Darwin Loves You: Natural Selection and the Re-enchantment of the World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006) p. xviii.
- 16 *Ibid.* pp. 273–74.
- 17 *Ibid.* p. 272.



- 18 Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000 [1989]) pp. 195–96.
- 19 Another picture of the normative Waltz is that of Campbell Craig, *Glimmer of a New Leviathan: Total War in the Realism of Niebuhr, Morgenthau, and Waltz* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003) pp. 148–50, 153–56, 162–65, 170.
- 20 Richard Ashley, 'The poverty of neorealism', *International Organization*, Vol. 38, 1984, pp. 225–86 (quotation at p. 258).
- 21 Levine, *Darwin Loves You*, p. ix.
- 22 Charles Darwin, *Evolutionary Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) p. 442 (n.188).
- 23 Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 173.
- 24 Michael Carrithers, *Why Humans Have Cultures: Explaining Anthropology and Social Diversity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 10–13, 32–33.
- 25 Jonathan Silvertown (ed.), *99% Ape: How Evolution Adds Up* (London: Natural History Museum, 2008) p. 201.
- 26 See Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), esp. pp. 246–312.
- 27 Booth, *Theory of World Security*, pp. 427–70.
- 28 Silvertown, *99% Ape*, p. 201.
- 29 Desmond and Moore, *Darwin's Sacred Cause*, p. 113.
- 30 J. David Singer, 'International conflict: three levels of analysis', *World Politics*, Vol.12 (3), 1960, pp. 453–61, and 'The level of analysis problem in International Relations' in Klaus Knorr and Stanley Verba, *The International System: Theoretical Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961).
- 31 See Barry Buzan, 'The level of analysis problem in International Relations reconsidered', pp. 198–216 in Ken Booth and Steve Smith (eds), *International Relations Theory Today* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).
- 32 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959) p. 12.
- 33 See, in particular, Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, pp. 38–78, and Waltz, 'Reflections'.
- 34 Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 65.
- 35 Being 'realistic' for me involves taking structural realism seriously, while choosing a different conception of theory than Waltz's, and a different tradition of thought than realism: see Booth, *Theory of World Security*, esp. pp. 37–91 on 'Thinking theory critically'.
- 36 Al Gore, *An Inconvenient Truth: The Planetary Emergency of Global Warming and What We can Do About It* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006).
- 37 Waltz, 'Reflections', p. 44.
- 38 Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 176.
- 39 Wendt, *Social Theory*, pp. 246–312.
- 40 Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 65.
- 41 *Ibid.*, p. 66.
- 42 Andrew Linklater, 'World history and International Relations', *International Relations*, Vol.21 (3), 2007, p. 355.
- 43 See Chapter 1, note 4.
- 44 See Jill Steans, Lloyd Pettiford, Thomas Diez and Imad El-Anis, *An Introduction to International Relations Theory: Perspectives and Themes* (Harlow: Longman, 2010, Third edition) p. 246.
- 45 Howard Williams and Ken Booth, 'Kant: theorist beyond limits' in Ian Clark and Iver B. Neumann (eds), *Classical Theories of International Relations* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1996) p. 75.
- 46 Dupré, *Darwin's Legacy*, p. 86.
- 47 *Ibid.*, pp. 23, 86–87.

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